The Grass is Singing

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DORIS LESSING

Doris Lessing was born in Iran to British parents; her father, Captain Alfred Tayler, was a clerk at the Imperial Bank of Persia. Shortly after her birth the family moved to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), where Lessing's father hoped to become wealthy through farming. However, he failed to succeed in this endeavor and the family remained poor. Lessing left school at 13 and home at 15, moving to the capital of Southern Rhodesia, Salisbury (now Harare), where she worked as a telephone operator, got married, and had two children. Lessing divorced her first husband and married again, having another child and then a second divorce. In 1949 moved to London with her youngest son, armed with only £20 and the manuscript of her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*. Here, Lessing became active in communist, anti-racist, and anti-nuclear activism. As a result, she was placed under surveillance by the British Intelligence Services for 20 years. *The Grass is Singing* was published in 1950. She went on to publish over 50 more novels, some under the pseudonym Jane Somers. Lessing declined an OBE and a Damehood due to their association with the British Empire. In 2007, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. She died at home in 2013, at the age of 94.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Grass is Singing takes place in Zimbabwe, which at the time the novel is set was a British colony known as Southern Rhodesia. In the pre-colonial era, Zimbabwe existed as a series of advanced trade states, including the Kingdom of Mapungubwe, the Kingdom of Zimbabwe, and the Kingdom of Mutapa. The Mutapa Kingdom was destroyed by Portuguese invaders in the early 17th century, and was succeeded by the Rozwi Empire, which expelled the Portuguese. In the early 19th century, Dutch farmers began to advance through the region, seizing land from its black owners, and in the 1880s British settlers arrived with the British South Africa Company (BSAC). The region was then named after Cecil Rhodes, the notorious imperialist and founder of the BSAC, which ruled the territory between 1889 and 1923. In 1923, the region was annexed by the United Kingdom, and during the Second World War Southern Rhodesian military units fought on the British side. Following the war, an economic boom brought 200,000 white settlers to Southern Rhodesia between 1945-1970, most of whom were working-class and immigrated directly from the United Kingdom. During the early 1950s, African colonies' demand for independence were becoming increasingly powerful, with novels such as *The Grass is Singing* helping to advance the case for decolonization. However, the region would not become independent until 1965, at which point it was subjected to sanctions imposed by the United Nations at the request of the British.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Doris Lessing is undoubtedly the most widely-read writer to have been born in the colony of Southern Rhodesia, however, a number of important Zimbabwean figures were also working during the same period, inspired by the struggle for independence and the preservation of native Zimbabwean cultures against the repressive forces of British colonial rule. These figures include the political leader Herbert Chitepo, author of the epic poem "Soko Risina Musoro" ("The Tale Without a Head"). They also include the writer and historian Stanlake Samkange, whose most famous novel, *On Trial For My Country*, imagines Cecil Rhodes and the Ndebele ruler Lobengula each being put on trial by their ancestors for their part in the British occupation of Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Charles Mungoshi, who was born in 1947 and is still alive today, has written critically-acclaimed novels in both Shona and English, including *Makunun'unu Maodzamoyo*, *Kunyarara Hakusi Kutaura*, and *Waiting for the Rain*. Lessing's exploration of the injustices of colonial society from the white settler's perspective invites comparisons to the work of the South African writers Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee. Her exploration of female subjectivity is reminiscent of another of the 20th century's most important British female authors, Iris Murdoch, who—like Lessing—often portrays marriage, the family, sexuality, and domesticity in a rather disturbing light.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Grass is Singing*
- **Where Written:** Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe), and London, England
- **When Published:** 1950
- **Literary Period:** 20th century Postcolonial Fiction
- **Genre:** Postcolonial Novel, Murder Mystery
- **Setting:** Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)
- **Climax:** Mary's dream, and her death at the hands of Moses shortly thereafter
- **Point of View:** Third-person narrator

EXTRA CREDIT

Surprise! Lessing famously learned that she had won the Nobel Prize on returning from grocery shopping to find a gaggle of

journalists outside her home. She is reported to have exclaimed: "Oh Christ!"

Maternal drama. Lessing served as a kind of mother figure to the British writer Jenny Diski, who reflected on their emotionally fraught relationship in *The London Review of Books*.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Grass is Singing is set in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) during the 1940s. Mary Turner, the wife of Dick Turner, has been murdered, and a "houseboy" has confessed to the crime. Dick and Mary are poor and do not socialize with the other white settlers in their farming district. When Mary's body is discovered, the Turners' neighbor, Charlie Slatter, sends a note to the local police sergeant, Sergeant Denham. Denham then sends six native policemen to the Turners' farm, and shortly after they arrive the houseboy, Moses, turns himself in. Charlie drives to the Turners' farm to find Moses in handcuffs, and puts Dick in the back of his car.

Inside the house, Charlie's assistant Tony Marston explains that he found Mary's body on the **veranda**. Sergeant Denham arrives, and he and Charlie question Tony. However, Tony begins to feel that they are not actually interested in his testimony, and the interview ends abruptly. The policemen take Mary's body to the car, and Tony is left wondering whether he should insist on telling Charlie and Sergeant Denham his theory about why Mary was killed. Moses will be hanged no matter what happens, but Tony wonders if by staying silent he is complicit in a "monstrous injustice." The next day, Tony packs his things and leaves the farming district. The trial takes place and it is decided that Moses murdered Mary while drunk and hoped to steal valuables from her. Tony, meanwhile, briefly takes a job in copper mining, before reluctantly ending up in an office job.

Chapter 2 begins with a description of the **stores** that are distributed throughout southern Africa. They are simple establishments that sell food, clothes, and other necessities, operate as local post offices, and usually house a bar. Mary's father, an alcoholic, would spend their family's little money on liquor at the store, a fact that always caused arguments between Mary's parents. Mary's older brother and sister died of dysentery when she was a child, and the period of grief that followed was "the happiest time of her childhood," when her parents briefly stopped squabbling. Mary was eventually sent to boarding school and decided to leave home at 16. Between the ages of 20 and 25, both Mary's parents died, and she was thrilled to be left completely alone. She lived in a club for young women and worked as a personal secretary at an office.

As the years passed, Mary's friends got married and had children, but Mary herself remained single, happy, and carefree. She was in denial about aging, and still dressed in "little-girl fashion." She felt no desire to get married, but one day overheard some married friends of hers gossiping cruelly about the fact that she was not married, and was horrified to realize that this was what people thought of her. After this point, she briefly became engaged to a 55-year-old widower, but called it off when he tried to have sex with her.

Soon after this, Mary meets Dick briefly at the cinema, during one of Dick's brief visits to town. Dick is a poor farmer whose bad luck has led his neighbors to nickname him "Jonah." He is resistant to the idea of getting married due to his poverty, but cannot stop thinking of Mary. He works to the point of exhaustion over the next few months, and eventually appears at Mary's door asking to marry her. She agrees, and they marry two weeks later.

When Mary first arrives at Dick's farm, she finds the house "shut and dark and stuffy," and is struck by the evidence of Dick's intense loneliness. They have tea and engage in a polite but awkward conversation. They have sex, which is not as terrible as Mary feared it would be, although she also feels "nothing" during it. In the morning, Dick introduces Mary to his longtime black house servant, Samson. While Dick clearly feels affection for Samson, Mary is immediately affronted by Samson's casual manner. Mary resolves to teach herself "kitchen kaffir," the simplified version of the native Shona language that white settlers use to communicate with their black workers.

Mary uses her savings to purchase fabrics and other items for the house, and spends her days sewing and painting the house. One day, she comes to believe that Samson stole raisins she was saving to make pudding and becomes hysterical; despite Dick's protests, she insists on taking the money out of Samson's wages. Samson quits, which upsets Dick. They hire another servant, but before long he quits as well. Then they find yet another servant, this time one who is accustomed to working for white women and obeys Mary's demands in a "blank, robotic" manner. However, in a fit of emotion Mary forces the servant to spend hours scrubbing the (already clean) zinc bathtub, making him work through his lunch break. Charlie and Mrs. Slatter come over to visit; Mrs. Slatter is friendly to Mary, but Mary rebuffs her coldly. The servant quits. A few days later, Charlie advises Dick to plant **tobacco**, but Dick is resistant to this idea.

One day, on a rare visit to the local train station to pick up groceries, Dick and Mary encounter a man who addresses Dick as "Jonah"; afterward, Dick bitterly admits that he borrowed money from the man and still owes him £50. During this period, Dick goes through a series of obsessions with keeping different animals on the farm; first bees, then pigs, and then turkeys. All these experiments fail, and cause heated arguments between Dick and Mary. Dick begins jokingly calling Mary "boss," which infuriates her.

Dick eventually resolves to open a "kaffir store" on the farm, even though there is a kaffir store nearby and thus it is unlikely that Dick's store will make much money. He asks Mary to run the store; at first Mary says she "would rather die," but she eventually agrees. Mary finds the native women who sit outside the store with their children disgusting and hates her time working there. She begins to fantasize about running away and returning to her old life in the town. One day, she notices that her old office has placed an ad for a shorthand typist. She packs a suitcase and leaves the next day, asking Charlie to drive her to the train station.

Back in town, Mary visits the girls' club where she used to live, but is told that they do not take married women. At her old office, she is told that the typist position has been filled. Mary returns to her hotel room and realizes she doesn't have enough money to pay the bill. At this moment, Dick arrives, and begs her to come home. Mary agrees.

At first Dick and Mary slip back into their previous routine; however, Dick soon becomes severely ill with a fever. Charlie brings over a doctor, who rudely instructs Mary that she and Dick must wire the house for mosquitoes and go on a three-month holiday to be restored back to health. During this time, Mary begins supervising the farm workers while Dick is bedridden. She takes a sambok with her, and when Moses (one of the farm workers) insists on getting a drink of water, she strikes him across the face with it. She also withholds wages from the workers who arrive late, causing some of them to quit on the spot. Back at the house, Mary urges Dick to focus on growing tobacco so they will be able to make enough money to leave the farm. Dick thinks about it for three days, before agreeing to start building tobacco barns.

Dick builds the tobacco barns, but in January there is a drought and the tobacco dies. Dick cannot cover the expenses, and is forced to take out a loan in order to avoid declaring bankruptcy. Mary's health deteriorates. She begins to beg Dick for a child, but Dick refuses, saying that they are too poor. Mary sinks further and further into misery, as does Dick, who takes up chain-smoking. After another house servant leaves, Dick is forced to move Moses from the field to the house, as no one else will agree to work for Mary. Mary develops a fascination with Moses, watching him as he completes his work and even one day staring at him while he washes himself outside. He stops what he is doing and stares back at her until she goes away. This infuriates Mary, who forces Moses to do a series of unnecessary tasks. She asks Dick if they can fire Moses, but Dick angrily refuses.

Months pass, and Mary becomes increasingly depressed. One day, Moses tells her he is quitting, and she bursts into tears, begging him to stay. Moses gives her a glass of water, tells her to lie down on the bed, and covers her with her coat. He does not mention leaving again. A new dynamic then emerges between them; Moses is much more informal and authoritative with Mary, and Mary now feels completely under his power. During this period, Mary starts having vivid nightmares, while Dick becomes ill with malaria. She dreams that Dick has died, that Moses is touching her, and that her father is making sexual advances on her. In one dream, Moses and her father morph into the same figure, and she wakes up screaming. Moses asks her why she is afraid of him, and Mary replies in a hysterical voice that she is not afraid.

Meanwhile Dick and Mary's neighbors have started spreading cruel gossip about them. One day, Charlie comes over, and urges Dick to sell his farm. Charlie stays for dinner, where he witnesses Moses and Mary's familiar, flirtatious relationship. Charlie then takes Dick to one side and sternly demands that he and Mary leave. Dick reluctantly agrees, and Charlie asks Tony to start working on Dick's farm in preparation to take over. While living on the Turners' farm, Tony comes to believe that Mary has gone mad and needs to be treated by a psychologist. One day, he catches Moses helping Mary to get dressed, and is stunned by the possibility that they are having an affair. He decides to tell Dick to fire Moses, but Moses leaves that evening and does not return.

Two nights before Dick and Mary are due to leave the farm, Mary wakes up suddenly. She walks around the house in a state of paranoid delusion, swinging wildly between different emotional states. She looks for Moses, convinced that he will "finish her" that night. Mary is supposed to spend the next day packing, but accidentally falls asleep and wakes up in the late afternoon. She suddenly feels compelled to go to the store, and finds Moses in there. She runs away screaming and bumps into Tony, who gently tells her that he has suggested that Dick take her to a doctor.

That night, Mary doesn't eat supper with Tony and Dick. In bed, Dick tells her that she is ill, and Mary responds that she has always been ill in her heart. After Dick is asleep, Mary gets up and creeps around the house, convinced that Moses is there. She goes out to the veranda, where she sees Moses in the distance. He comes toward her, puts a hand over her mouth, and stabs her to death. Moses briefly considers claiming innocence, before resolving to turn himself in. He waits outside the house until morning.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mary Turner – The novel begins with Mary Turner's death, and the plot largely revolves around her character. The daughter of white South African-born parents, Mary's childhood is blighted by her father's alcoholism and her mother's endless misery. (There is also a strong suggestion that Mary's father sexually abused her, although this is never stated explicitly; however, it *is* made clear that events from her childhood leave her repulsed

by sex.) Once Mary's parents die, she embarks on a joyful and fulfilling life in an unnamed town, working as a secretary, living in a club for single women, and attending social events every night. Mary marries Dick Turner as a result of social pressure, and it is clear almost immediately that she is ill-suited to Dick's rural life. She is a strong-willed, independent, and remarkably feminist woman who resents having to live on someone else's terms. However, the biggest source of conflict in Mary's life comes from her treatment of native people. For reasons that are never made entirely clear, Mary's racism is unusually intense and sadistic, even for a white South African. At the same time, she harbors a perverse fascination with native people, and particularly Moses, a farm worker she strikes with a sambok and with whom, two years later, she develops an intimate, possibly sexual relationship. Mary suffers several nervous breakdowns over the course of the novel and by the final chapter is severely mentally incapacitated. Despite (or perhaps because of) this, she accurately predicts the fact that Moses will murder her.

Dick Turner – Dick Turner is Mary's husband. Born in the suburbs of Johannesburg, Dick trains as a vet in his youth before using a government grant to buy a small farm. Dick is kind and principled, and described by Mary as "a good man." However, he is an extraordinarily unsuccessful farmer. Many people—including Dick himself—interpret his failures as the result of bad luck, and several of Dick's neighbors nickname him "Jonah," the name sailors give for someone who brings bad luck to a ship (after the Biblical character Jonah, who was swallowed by a whale). Over the course of the novel, however, it becomes clear that much of Dick's "bad luck" is in fact the result of irrational fantasies and poor decisions he makes about his farm. Toward the end of the novel, Dick becomes weak and is often sick, a physical manifestation of his weak will. After Mary is murdered, Dick goes mad.

Moses – Moses is a native man educated in a missionary school. He has a large, muscular physique and is employed by Dick as a farm worker. During Dick's first illness, when Mary takes over as overseer of the farm workers, she strikes Moses across the face with a sambok for what she perceives as rudeness. Although Moses is not actually rude in reality, he is not afraid of Mary and refuses to abide by the social conventions governing relationships between native people and white settlers. We learn fairly little about Moses's inner life, but it seems that, perhaps due to his education, he is especially aware of the injustices of colonialism and willing to stand up to white people. The relationship he develops with Mary toward the end of the novel appears somewhat affectionate, however it is never made clear why Moses behaves so kindly to someone who has treated him so badly. At the end of the novel, he approaches Mary on the **veranda** and stabs her to death. He waits under a nearby tree until morning, when he turns himself in; although we never learn his final fate, the other characters suggest that it is almost certain he will be hanged.

Charlie Slatter – Charlie Slatter is a neighbor of the Turners, and thinks of himself as Dick's "mentor." A working-class Englishman who previously worked as a grocer in London, he made a fortune through tobacco farming in Southern Rhodesia. He is at times a good friend to Dick, and seems to genuinely have Dick's interests at heart. However, he is also self-interested and strategic, and much of his support for Dick is secretly rooted in the fact that he wants to take over Dick's farm to increase his own profits. Furthermore, Charlie is exceptionally invested in maintaining the racial hierarchy of Southern Rhodesia, which leads him to force Dick and Mary to leave the farm after he comes to believe Mary is having an affair with Moses. After Mary is murdered, Charlie conspires with Sergeant Denham to cover up Mary's relationship with Moses in order to protect the reputation of the white race.

Tony Marston – Tony Marston is a young, well-educated Englishman who has recently moved to Southern Rhodesia after being inspired by his cousin's success in **tobacco** farming. Tony holds the racially "progressive" ideas that are popular in England, and is more sensitive than the other characters in the novel. At the same time, he is also keen to conform to the norms of the society around him, and his progressive ideas are shown to be rather flimsy, particularly after he comes to believe that Mary and Moses are having an affair. After Mary's murder, Tony abruptly leaves the farm and ends up working in an office, precisely the kind of work he moved to Southern Rhodesia to avoid.

Sergeant Denham – Sergeant Denham is the local police sergeant in the Turners' farming district. He is in charge of investigating Mary's death, although this task is made simple by the fact that Moses immediately confesses to the murder. Along with Charlie Slatter, Sergeant Denham helps to cover up the intimacy that existed between Mary and Moses in order to preserve the racial hierarchy.

Mrs. Slatter – Mrs. Slatter is Charlie's wife (we never learn her first name). At first she appears to be a kind and compassionate person, inviting Mary to social gatherings and commiserating with her over her experience of financial hardship. However, when Mary snubs her, Mrs. Slatter grows spiteful and accuses the Turners of living "like pigs."

The Servant – The unnamed servant is the third native person Dick and Mary employ to work in the house. Unlike Samson and the servant before him, this servant is accustomed to working for white women and more able to put up with Mary's abuse. However, eventually her mistreatment becomes too much and he quits.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mary's Mother – Mary's mother was an Englishwoman born in

South Africa. She personifies the archetype of the long-suffering wife, and spent her life complaining about Mary's father's drinking and the family's poverty. Two of her three children die, and she herself dies when Mary is 20.

Mary's Father – Mary's father was an Englishman also born in South Africa. An alcoholic who spent most of his income on drink, there are strong hints in the novel that he sexually abused Mary when she was a child. He dies when Mary is 25.

Samson – Samson is the house servant employed by Dick at the point that Dick and Mary get married. He and Dick are on reasonably friendly terms, but when Mary arrives on the farm she treats him so badly that he quits.

The Doctor – The Turners' local doctor comes to visit their house twice while Dick is ill. The doctor is rather rude and judgmental, and represents the strict enforcement of the social norms according to which white people in Southern Rhodesia are expected to live.

The Headboy – The headboy is the most senior worker on Dick's farm, who communicates with Mary on behalf of the other workers.

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.

INTIMACY VS. HATRED

All the characters in *The Grass is Singing* maintain complex and ambivalent relationships to one another. These relationships are invariably defined by feelings of both intimacy and hatred, which—rather than cancelling each other out—are shown to exist side by side, creating intense conflict and turmoil. The most significant example of this can be found in the relationship between Mary and Moses. Mary has a severely racist, cruel attitude toward all black people, and treats the black farm employees in a sadistic manner. She is especially antagonistic toward Moses, constantly insulting him and forcing him to perform an endless series of pointless tasks. At the same time, Mary is also fascinated by Moses, a fascination that she will not allow herself to openly acknowledge. Toward the end of the novel, it is revealed that she has been forcing Moses to help her with intimate tasks such as getting dressed, leading Tony and Charlie to believe that Mary and Moses are sleeping together. While Moses's feelings toward Mary are not stated explicitly, his hatred is made obvious by his resentful and defiant attitude toward her. At the same time, he cannot escape the intimacy of the master/servant relationship that inevitably binds him to her. Eventually, the coexistence of both this intense intimacy and hatred reaches an explosive climax in which Moses kills Mary. This suggests that while the dynamic of intimacy and hatred is inevitable in a colonial society, such a dynamic is unsustainable and will eventually erupt into violence.

The relationship between Mary and Moses is far from the only one defined by intimacy and hatred. Mary's relationship to her husband, Dick, is similarly ambivalent, and both mirrors and contrasts with her relationship with Moses. Like Moses, Dick is deferential to Mary, obeying her wishes even when they conflict with his own desires. Mary feels more affection and respect for Dick than she does for Moses, but is repulsed by him sexually and comes to regret marrying him. The early intimacy in Mary and Dick's relationship turns to hatred as Mary becomes increasingly harsh and stubborn, while Dick is weakened due to poverty and illness. Although Dick survives his illness, Mary has a dream in which he is dead, suggesting that part of her may wish this were true, and that in some sense their relationship—like Mary's relationship with Moses—is too emotionally turbulent to survive. The combination of intimacy and hatred is again shown to lead to death—first on a symbolic level, and then on a literal one.

It is not only intimacy with Dick that fills Mary with disgust. She seems to hate the idea of any physical intimacy, and the narrator points out that, up until the point at which Moses pushes her, Mary has never touched a native African. (Of course, after this point Mary does allow Moses to touch her, such as when he helps her to get dressed. Mary's willingness to consent to touching Moses in these moments is part of the mystery of their relationship.) Mary's extreme resistance to physical intimacy is partially explained by moments at which she dreams of being sexually abused by her father. When Mary dreams that Dick has died, the figure of Moses comforting her transforms into Mary's father, "menacing and horrible, who touched her with desire." This moment suggests that, due to being abused as a child, Mary cannot differentiate between affection and violation. She thus comes to hate anyone who comes into intimate contact with her, and even hates witnessing moments of intimacy between other people, such as the black mothers and babies.

In a broader sense, the colonial landscape of Southern Rhodesia is also defined by currents of intimacy and hatred that exist between the white colonizer and black indigenous populations. Although built on a strict racial hierarchy, colonial societies nonetheless depend on intimate interactions between the colonizers and the colonized. Examples of these moments of intimacy include indigenous people serving as white people's house servants, nannies, and prostitutes, as well as the high levels of sexual violence perpetrated by the settler population (a phenomenon that is briefly alluded to in the novel). All of the white characters express racist hatred to some degree; even Tony, who is the least prejudiced of the white characters, is

forced to assimilate into the racist mindset that governs the lives of white Rhodesians. After coming to suspect that Mary is having an affair with Moses, Charlie insists that Dick take Mary away in order to separate her from Moses. Although Mary is not Charlie's wife, he feels it is his personal responsibility to prevent intimacy between the races, and in doing so protect the colonial racial order.

HIERARCHY AND AUTHORITY

The Grass is Singing takes place in Zimbabwe (formerly known as Southern Rhodesia) during the time of British colonial rule, and one of the most important themes of the novel is the way in which society is organized according to hierarchies. During the time the novel is set, the British socioeconomic class system remains extremely rigid, making it impossible for most people living in the United Kingdom to move up the social ladder. However, in Rhodesia and other colonies, even the poorest whites are still further up this ladder than the entire black population. (The narrator also notes that English-speaking white Rhodesians are placed above poor Dutch-descended Afrikaners: "'Poor whites' were Afrikaners, never British.")

Living in the colonies also gave white Brits the chance to make money through exploiting natural resources and the labor of the oppressed indigenous population. Every white person in the novel is to some extent fixated on the desire to increase their standing in the socioeconomic hierarchy. When this plan fails for Dick and he and Mary end up living in poverty, he is left miserable, ashamed, and crippled by illness.

The overarching racial and socioeconomic hierarchy is not a simple system, but rather one made up of an intricate web of smaller hierarchies that determine how much authority each person is accorded and how they are supposed to behave in relation to one another. As a woman, Mary is subservient to her husband, yet as a white person, she has authority over the black workers employed on her land (and indeed over all black people). While Mary enthusiastically wields and abuses the power she has over the black population, she often fails to honor her inferior position to Dick.

Indeed, while every character in the novel is inescapably aware of the hierarchies that organize society and of their place within these hierarchies, the characters also violate these hierarchies. This happens when Mary attempts to run away from Dick in order to regain her independence, and also when Moses continues to drink water after Mary orders him to go back to work. However, arguably the most important violation of any hierarchy of power comes when Moses kills Mary. In taking the life of a white woman, Moses commits the worst possible act in the eyes of white colonizers. At the same time, when Mary's murder is discussed at the beginning of the book, the narrator notes that white people are not surprised by Moses's act. Within the white colonial mindset, black people are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy and are expected to behave in a "savage," immoral manner. Regardless of how black people actually behave, white people will treat them as if they are brutal and violent. This fact in itself invites violence against white oppressors, and is thus one of the central (and tragic) paradoxes of colonial society.

BRUTALITY VS. CIVILIZATION

The most common justification for colonialism is the argument that the colonizers are bringing "civilization" to a primitive, brutal, and savage population. In today's world, most people acknowledge that at best this kind of thinking is naïve and patronizing, and at worst it is a thinly-veiled disguise for the colonizers' desire to abuse native people while gaining wealth and power for themselves. It is certainly difficult to see how the white characters in the novel are bringing "civilization" to the black population. While some white characters claim that they are bettering native people by forcing them to work, this is not a particularly convincing excuse for the harsh labor conditions to which they subject black workers.

There is also evidence that the white characters are actually disturbed by black people who assimilate into white culture and behave in a "civilized" manner. When Charlie is saluted by two black policemen, he feels uncomfortable, and the narrator notes that he "could not bear the half-civilized native." Similarly, the narrator describes the self-assured satisfaction with which white people greet the news that Moses killed Mary. These examples suggest that even though colonizers claim that they seek to "civilize" the native population, in reality they do not truly wish to welcome native people into their vision of civilization. Instead, they would rather that natives continued to live up to the stereotype of brutality projected onto them by white people.

The white characters have different reasons for treating black people badly; for example, while Dick is motivated by paternalistic feelings, Mary is more power-hungry and sadistic. However, none of them seems to really be bringing "civilization" to the black population, even while some of them—such as Dick—are convinced that they are doing so. In fact, the white characters in the novel behave in a far more brutal manner than any of the black characters. Even Moses's murder of Mary is arguably not an act of brutality, but rather a reasonable response to the experience of colonial oppression. The question of whether all violence is immoral or whether some forms of violence can in fact be justified is not given a clear answer within the novel. The reader is encouraged to feel at least some sympathy for Moses, particularly after Mary ferociously injures him by whipping him across the face. Even if his murder of Mary is judged to be immoral, there can be no denying that Moses's act of brutality is a response to the brutality to which he is subjected as a native person living

under colonial rule.

At the same time, the murder of Mary plays into the pre-established narrative that "white civilization" is under threat in Southern Rhodesia (and the rest of the world). Many of the white characters—and in particular Charlie—justify their actions as a way of defending white civilization from the "brutality" of the natural landscape and indigenous population. Note that at the time the novel was written, the British Empire was in the latter stage of disintegration, a fact that caused great distress among white Brits living in colonized countries whose fates were thrown into question. When Tony first arrives in Southern Rhodesia—before he has become accustomed to the severe racism of the white Rhodesians—he notices that figures like Charlie insistently deny that a white person can have a "human relationship" with a black person, and that this denial is vital to ensuring the racial order keeping the colonizers in power. In this sense, "white civilization" is not under threat from any external brutality, but rather from the lie at the center of its colonial "civilizing" project.

INDEPENDENCE, ISOLATION, AND EXILE

Life for white colonizers is defined by a certain kind of independence, isolation, and self-imposed exile. The area in which Dick and Mary live is described as "a farming district, where those isolated white families met only very occasionally, hungry for contact with their own kind." Even within this sparse community, the Turners are discussed "in the hard, careless voices reserved for misfits, outlaws and the self-exiled." The narrator explains that the reason for this prejudice is simply that the Turners "kept to themselves." The farming district in which the Turners live is already isolated in the sense that the families living there are spread far apart from one another; it is also isolated from the nearby town and, in a broader sense, from the Turners' homeland of England. It is thus remarkable that in this position, the Turners choose to *further* isolate themselves by declining to interact with their neighbors. Furthermore, not only do they not socialize with other white people, but—like all colonizers—they eschew the native population, treating their employees and other local black people with cruel disdain.

There is no doubt about the fact that, at least to some degree, both Dick and Mary enjoy their isolation. Dick's antisocial tendencies mean that he hates going to the cinema, where the proximity to other audiences members makes him "uneasy." Mary has a more ambivalent relationship to isolation. At times it seems that she enjoys socializing with others and misses interactions with other white people after marrying Dick, but she also harbors an antisocial attitude that at times rivals her husband's. While Dick is on friendly terms with several of the black farm workers, Mary behaves with extreme, senseless cruelty to all black people, making it almost impossible to form a connection to most people around her. Her increasing resentment of Dick makes her wish she had never married, and she even goes so far as deciding to leave him in order to return to her state of premarital independence. Somewhat paradoxically, it was in this state of independence that Mary had a far more fulfilling social life. As a married woman, she is cut off from her previous friendships and forbidden from returning to her old job. For both Dick and Mary, marriage is lonely, and exacerbates their existing isolation as white colonizers in Southern Rhodesia.

The exile that Dick and Mary experience in relation to their white neighbors is a microcosm of the broader experience of exile that is inherent within the colonizer's experience. The theme of exiling yourself from your homeland is explored through the narrator's reflections on Mary's sense of home: "For Mary, the word "Home," spoken nostalgically, meant England, although both her parents were South Africans and had never been to England." While some characters, such as Tony, move from England to Southern Rhodesia in their adult lives, other characters like Mary are descendents of multiple generations of colonizers whose connection to their "home" country is solely emotional, abstract, and symbolic. Mary has never even been to England, and thus the country cannot really be "home" to her; at the same time, the narrator notes elsewhere that "she had never become used to the bush, never felt at home in it." In order to maintain their superior position within the racial hierarchy of colonial society, white people such as Mary must continue to insist on their disconnection from the country in which they live and cling to the fantasy of attachment to the distant "home" of England. Yet in actuality this does nothing but increase Mary and other white characters' feeling of isolation, as they are left with a sense of having no home at all.

FEMININITY, SEXUALITY, AND MATERNITY

While most of the novel's major themes relate to issues of race and class in the colonial environment, gender and sexuality also play an important role. Lessing's exploration of gender mostly centers around Mary, and the way in which (white) femininity becomes a source of conflict in the world of the novel. Before marrying Dick, Mary epitomizes a modern, cosmopolitan form of femininity; she is independent, sociable, and pretty, and is described by the narrator as "one of the girls." Indeed, in this stage of her life Mary is shown to be girlish and even rather infantile; the narrator notes that "she still wore her hair little-girl fashion on her shoulders, and wore little-girl frocks in pastel colors." Her childishness is also shown by the fact that she is resistant to marriage, a disposition that only changes when she overhears friends gossiping in a disapproving manner about the fact that she is not married. This event highlights the way in which femininity is policed in society. While in her youth Mary lives a relatively free and

independent existence, it is not considered appropriate for this state of freedom to last, and eventually she is coerced into getting married despite the fact that her impression of marriage is "poisoned" by her parents' unhappy marriage, Mary's father's alcoholism, and his sexual abuse of Mary when she was a child.

Mary's marriage to Dick turns to disaster for a number of reasons. She feels disgusted by having sex with him, while he is resistant to having a child on account of their poverty. However, arguably the biggest issue lies in the fact that Mary does not wish to conform to the obedient, subservient role of a wife that was expected in this era. She is more authoritative and stubborn than Dick, who feels emasculated by the financial failures of the farm and by his series of illnesses. Moreover, while overseeing the black farm workers Mary is far more severe and sadistic than Dick. Mary's cruelty might emerge from the fact that she fails to live up to feminine ideals of gentleness and nurture—but on the other hand, her cruelty could also be seen as coherent with the ideal of white femininity, and white colonial femininity in particular. White women occupy a perverse position of power and powerlessness within racist society. While they are oppressed on account of their gender, they are oppressors within the racial order (and particularly because racist thought puts such an emphasis on protecting white femininity from "brutal" black masculinity). The narrator makes it clear that Mary takes out her feelings of powerlessness and frustration on the black workers around her, especially Moses. In this sense, white femininity can become even more vicious than white masculinity within the context of colonial society.

The novel also portrays sexuality and maternity not as natural, pleasurable aspects of life, but as fraught experiences that create anxiety and conflict within the lives of the characters. As stated above, Dick is resistant to having a child, and views the prospect of becoming a parent as an additional economic burden that he cannot afford to bear. Meanwhile, Mary's desire to have a baby takes on a strange form. She hopes that having a child will give her a sense of purpose and fill the void of uselessness and meaninglessness that characterizes her life on the farm. However, she is disgusted by the lived reality of maternity, particularly when she witnesses the maternal attachment between black mothers and their children. The sight of black women nursing their babies makes her "blood boil," and she compares these babies to "leeches." Mary's extreme sense of disgust at breastfeeding is closely related to her racist detachment from the native people living around her. This in turn suggests that the experience of being a colonizer is so unnatural and toxic that it distorts people's relationship to their own humanity.

Repulsed by sexuality, maternity, and socialization in general, Mary becomes increasingly mentally unstable. The nightmares in which she experiences both desire for Moses and the terrifying memory of her father's sexual abuse point to the way in which she has been forced to suppress her feelings in order to conform to the ideal of white femininity. This repression ultimately cannot hold, and causes Mary both to treat people around her with extreme cruelty and to lose her grip on reality. In this sense, white femininity is presented as being a potentially poisonous and dangerous ideal.

SYMBOLS

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

THE STORE

The store does not refer to any one store in particular, but rather a type of establishment commonly found throughout Southern Africa. These stores are distributed across rural farming districts; they are where local white families purchase groceries, cosmetics, clothes, tools, and other essential items. It is also possible to pick up mail at the store, and there is usually a bar attached where men such as Mary's father spend their time drinking. Because the store contains consumer goods and mail, it serves as a symbolic connection to England, the motherland that many white South Africans (including Mary and her parents) have never seen in person. The store is thus a reminder of both home and homelessness, the exile and detachment that white settlers experience while living in a colonized country. The store also represents the capitalist ideals that influence white settler society. As the Slatters and other white characters in the novel claim, the point of life as a white settler in Southern Africa is to make and spend money. While criticizing the Turners for failing to live up to social norms, Mrs. Slatter says: "They live like pigs and they never buy anything." The store is thus a place in which white settlers fulfill the capitalist ideal of spending the money they earn on consumable goods, and also a point at which the isolated families distributed across farming districts congregate with one another.

However, there is also another particular store that is significant within the novel: the "kaffir store" that Dick decides to open on his farm. A kaffir store caters to local black people, who—due to the strict racial segregation of Southern Rhodesia—are not permitted to use the same establishment as whites. When Dick proposes opening a kaffir store of his own, Mary objects for two reasons, one practical and one emotional. From a practical perspective, Mary points out that there is another kaffir store nearby, which means that Dick's store will likely not be very profitable. The kaffir store is thus another of Dick's naïve fantasies, which, like his attempts to keep bees, pigs, and turkeys, is doomed to failure. Mary's second reason for objecting to the kaffir store is because stores in general

remind her of the misery of her childhood, when her father would spend their family's money on alcohol and Mary's mother would loudly complain to those around her. Mary spends her life desperately trying to avoid becoming like her mother, yet in her complaints to Dick ends up resembling her almost exactly. In this sense, the generic nature of the store symbolizes the way in which individual people and families may appear different from one another, yet are in fact similar in an inescapable and fundamental manner.

THE VERANDA

From the very beginning of the book it's clear that the veranda is an important part of the Turners' house, because it's the place where Mary is murdered and where her body is left until Charlie, Sergeant Denham, and Tony move it inside. Verandas are porches attached to the main part of the house, and are thus liminal (in-between) spaces bridging the threshold of outside and inside. Indeed, outside and inside represent one of the key binaries around which the novel's plot is structured (others include black/white, man/woman, and urban/rural). As a space that spans the threshold of inside and outside, the veranda symbolically undermines the seemingly rigid nature of these binaries. Moses's act of murdering Mary on the veranda confirms the idea that the veranda is a place where strict binaries are disrupted. Whereas throughout most of the book, white characters maintain an absolute power over black people, in the final chapters this dynamic is reversed through Mary and Moses's relationship—and the climax of this reversal comes in the form of Moses murdering Mary on the veranda.

It is also worth noting that verandas are a building feature closely associated with colonial architecture. The name "veranda" in fact derives from the Hindi word *varanda*, and verandas were commonly found in settler homes in places such as India, Australia, Brazil, and the colonial United States. Verandas were a way of blending the architectural style of the colonizers with that of the local culture, further evidence of the fact that verandas symbolically disrupt the binary between colonizer and colonized.

TOBACCO

Tobacco is the most profitable crop in Southern Rhodesia; after the Second World War, a tobacco boom left many white tobacco farmers (such as Charlie Slatter) suddenly very rich. In this sense, tobacco symbolizes the fulfillment of the colonial goal. Through the exploitation of indigenous land, resources, and labor, white farmers were able to make far more money in the colonies than would ever have been possible back in England.

Dick's resistance to growing tobacco then emphasizes the fact that, unlike Charlie or even Mary, he is a poor decision-maker not cut out for the life of a farmer. Furthermore, tobacco is an especially significant crop in the context of the global legacy of imperialism. Whereas livestock, maize, and cotton are used for necessary purposes (such as eating and staying warm), tobacco is a superfluous (and of course highly poisonous) product. The period in which Dick begins chain-smoking cigarettes coincides with the rapid deterioration of his mental well-being and physical health. Not only does nobody *need* to smoke cigarettes, tobacco is a major global health hazard. Tobacco thus symbolizes the needless, meaningless destruction caused by colonialism and capitalism. Dick frames his resistance to growing tobacco by calling it an "inhuman crop." Indeed, it is arguably Dick's moral nature that prevents him from growing rich off tobacco like the other farmers around him. However, his moral principles do not stop him from *smoking* tobacco and thereby jeopardizing his health. People's relationship to tobacco takes one of two forms in the novel; they either get rich from it or suffer because of it. This unjust dichotomy therefore mirrors the injustice of capitalist colonialism itself.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *The Grass is Singing* published in 2008.

Chapter 1 Quotes

> It was a farming district, where those isolated white families met only very occasionally, hungry for contact with their own kind, to talk and discuss and pull to pieces, all speaking at once, making the most of an hour or so's companionship before returning to their farms where they saw only their own faces and the faces of their black servants for weeks on end.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

The novel has opened with the news of Mary Turner's murder, which has been published in a newspaper under the headline "Murder Mystery." The narrator has noted that white settlers expect native people to commit crimes, and that the people who know the Turners do not discuss the murder. In this passage, the narrator explains that the white families in the Turners' farming district rarely see each other, and when they do, they are very eager to have

contact with other white people.

As the narrator indicates, these white settlers suffer from loneliness, yet this loneliness is not intense enough for them to breach the racial barrier dividing them from the black people they live among. Indeed, the narrator's words suggest that white settlers do not think of black people as socially relevant, and perhaps not even as really human. The isolation and loneliness of settler life is simply the price that white people pay in order to gain the financial rewards of colonialism and to maintain the colonial racial hierarchy.

> Long before the murder marked them out, people spoke of the Turners in the hard, careless voices reserved for misfits, outlaws and the self-exiled. The Turners were disliked, though few of their neighbors had ever met them, or even seen them in the distance. Yet what was there to dislike? They simply "kept themselves to themselves"; that was all.

Related Characters: Mary Turner , Dick Turner

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has explained that although the murder is something that would usually have been intensively discussed among the community in which the Turners live, for some reason their neighbors silently agreed not to talk about it. In this passage, the narrator offers an explanation why the neighbors seemed somewhat disinterested in the case. Rather than respecting the Turners' decision to keep to themselves, the neighbors are offended by the couple's self-imposed exile and condemn them for it. This conveys the strict social norms that govern white communities in Southern Rhodesia. Violating these norms—even by something as simple as declining social invitations—leads to harsh punishment, whereby the offenders are alienated from their neighbors, the only other white people in the vicinity.

> Most of these young men were brought up with vague ideas about equality. They were shocked, for the first week or so, by the way natives were treated... They had been prepared to treat them as human beings. But they could not stand out against the society they were joining. It did not take them long to change. It was hard, of course, becoming as bad oneself. But it was not very long that they thought of it as "bad." And anyway, what had one's ideas amounted to? Abstract ideas about decency and goodwill, that was all: merely abstract ideas. When it came to the point, one never had contact with natives, except in the master-servant relationship. One never knew them in their own lives, as human beings.

Related Characters: Tony Marston

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Slatter has arrived at the Turners' house following the murder of Mary, and Tony Marston has explained how he found Mary's body and added that he doesn't know anything about the murder. Tony is a well-educated young man who has recently arrived in Southern Rhodesia from England. Like other men of the same background, he shares the comparatively progressive ideas when it comes to matters of race relations. However, this attitude does not last long in Southern Rhodesia, where brutal racism is commonplace and where black people are not considered to be fully valuable or three-dimensional beings. In the face of this new status quo, most of these "progressive" young men give up their ideals and soon start acting just as the other white settlers do.

The irony of this lies in the fact that white people in Southern Rhodesia have far more contact with black people (and contact of a far more intimate nature) than most white Englishmen. White people are the minority in Southern Rhodesia, and settlers depend on native people for doing everything from working their fields to cooking their meals. Yet as this passage indicates, this intimacy does not breed affection or even tolerance. Rather, it encourages white settlers to embrace their status as natural "masters" over black people, and to see black people in a negative, stereotypical light.

To live with the color bar in all its nuances and implications means closing one's mind to many things, if one intends to remain an accepted member of society. But, in the interval, there would be a few brief moments when he would see the thing clearly, and understand that it was “white civilization” fighting to defend itself that had been implicit in the attitude of Charlie Slatter and the Sergeant, “white civilization” which will never, never admit that a white person, and most particularly, a white woman, can have a human relationship, whether for good or for evil, with a black person. For once it admits that, it crashes, and nothing can save it.

Related Characters: Sergeant Denham, Charlie Slatter, Tony Marston

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Tony has attempted to tell Slatter and Sergeant Denham about his theory of why Mary was murdered, but the two men have resisted listening to him. As the men prepare to depart for the police station, Tony begins to realize why Slatter and the Sergeant did not want to hear his story. The idea that Mary had a relationship with Moses violates the “color bar”—the racial hierarchy governing Southern Rhodesian society—in such an extreme way that it must be kept quiet at all costs. One of the most important ideas within racist logic is that white women need to be protected from the supposedly brutal lust of black men. If the men admit that Mary willingly had a relationship with Moses, they would be undermining one of the key principles behind the colonial order, and that order could then have the fragile, racist lie at its heart exposed and thus come “crashing” down.

If you must blame somebody, then blame Mrs. Turner. You can't have it both ways. Either the white people are responsible for their behavior, or they are not. It takes two to make a murder--a murder of this kind. Though, one can't really blame her either. She can't help being what she is.

Related Characters: Mary Turner , Tony Marston

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

As Moses is taken away, Tony considers whether or not he should try to be honest about what he has seen and why he thinks Mary was murdered (neither of which have been expressed in the text). He wonders whether Slatter and Denham would even be prepared to listen to him, and in this passage imagines what he would say to them given the chance. His thoughts here are rather mysterious and self-contradictory. He tells himself that Mary is to blame for her own death and suggests that white people need to be held accountable for their actions, rather than being protected by the racial hierarchy of Southern Rhodesian society. However, he then changes his mind and asserts that Mary should not be blamed, because “she can’t help being what she is.”

Yet what does Tony mean by “what she is”? Perhaps this refers to her relationship with Moses, which Tony and the other white characters might easily conceptualize as a kind of symptom or product of a mental disorder. On the other hand, perhaps Tony means that Mary couldn’t help being so cruel to the native people she lived among, since she was a white woman in a colonial society, and particularly a white woman forced to live in impoverished, isolated conditions with a husband who refused to give her any children. It is also possible that Tony means something else entirely, and that the answer will be revealed later in the novel.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"Class" is not a South African word; and its equivalent, "race," meant to her the office boy in the firm where she worked, other women's servants, and the amorphous mass of natives in the streets, whom she hardly noticed. She knew (the phrase was in the air) that the natives were getting "cheeky." But she had nothing to do with them really. They were outside her orbit.

Related Characters: Mary Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32-33

Explanation and Analysis

Mary has been living a remarkably free and independent existence in town, and she has no idea how lucky she truly is in comparison to most women in the world. In particular, she has no idea how unlikely it is that she, the daughter of “a petty railway official,” should now find herself living a comfortable, leisure-filled, and financially independent life. As this passage explains, Mary’s ignorance on this front is the result of the fact that she has spent all of her life in southern Africa. Back in England, society is strictly

delineated and determined according to class boundaries. In southern Africa, however, all white people (and especially those of English descent) occupy a position of blanket privilege above the indigenous black population.

As this passage indicates, Mary is almost as ignorant of the black population as she is of matters of class. Although there are black people all around her, it is as if they are invisible to her. The racial hierarchy is so rigid that Mary can go about her life as if black people do not exist—despite living in an African country with a majority black population.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ It meant nothing to her, nothing at all. Expecting outrage and imposition, she was relieved to find she felt nothing. She was able maternally to bestow the gift of herself on this humble stranger, and remain untouched. Women have an extraordinary ability to withdraw from the sexual relationship, to immunize themselves against it, in such a way that their men can be left feeling let down and insulted without having anything tangible to complain of.

Related Characters: Dick Turner, Mary Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

After getting married, Dick and Mary have arrived at Dick's farm. Following a brief conversation, they have sex, which is not as bad as Mary worried it would be. In this passage, Mary reflects on the experience, which she feared would be far worse than was actually the case. At the same time, Mary feels numb and disconnected from Dick; rather than bringing them together, having sex for the first time isolates them, concealing them within their own respective worlds.

The narrator suggests that this is not simply the result of Mary's personal aversion to sex, but rather symptomatic of a broader phenomenon of women cutting themselves off from their own sexual lives. Although the narrator does not say so explicitly, this seems to be a self-protective gesture, a way for women to insulate themselves from the vulnerability and violence that are bound up with sexuality in a sexist world.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ "Of course he's lying," said Dick irritably. "Of course. That is not the point. You can't keep him against his will."
"Why should I accept a lie!" said Mary. "Why should I? Why can't he say straight out that he doesn't like working for me, instead of lying about his kraal?"
Dick shrugged, looking at her with impatience; he could not understand her unreasonable insistence: he knew how to get on with natives; dealing with them was a sometimes amusing, sometimes annoying game in which both sides followed certain unwritten rules.

Related Characters: Mary Turner , Dick Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Mary has docked Samson's pay due to the fact that he stole some raisins, and shortly after this Samson hands in his notice, claiming that he is needed in his kraal. Mary protests to Dick that this is a lie, but in this passage Dick responds that it doesn't matter. As the narrator explains, Dick views his interactions with native people as a "game" with "certain unwritten rules." One of these rules is that white people do not require absolute honesty from black workers, and thus Dick does not mind that Samson lies about being needed on his kraal.

In fact, Samson's lie is preferable to him admitting the truth, which is that being employed by Mary is too unbearable for him to continue. Within the racist society in which the novel is set, black people must constantly navigate a maze of what is considered appropriate behavior by whites. Samson's lie is therefore an act of courtesy, an acknowledgment of the fact that telling the truth would be considered rude. Mary, however, does not understand this. She has not interacted with black people enough to know about this complex web of "unwritten rules." Furthermore, her demand for honesty conveys her thirst for power and a sense of absolute authority.

"If you must do these things, then you must take the consequences," said Dick wearily. "He's a human being, isn't he? He's got to eat. Why must that bath be done all at once? It can be done over several days, if it means all that to you."
"It's my house," said Mary. "He's my boy, not yours. Don't interfere."
"Listen to me," said Dick curtly, "I work hard enough, don't I? All day I am down on the lands with these lazy black savages, fighting them to get some work out of them. You know that. I won't come back home to this damned fight, fight, fight in the house. Do you understand? I will not have it. And you should learn sense. If you want to get work out of them you have to know how to manage them. You shouldn't expect too much. They are nothing but savages after all." Thus Dick, who had never stopped to reflect that these same savages had cooked for him better than his wife did, had run his house, had given him a comfortable existence, as far as his pinched life could be comfortable, for years.

Related Characters: Mary Turner , Dick Turner (speaker), The Servant

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Mary has forced her unnamed servant to spend hours cleaning the bathtub without food, and the servant has handed in his notice. Dick has told the servant that if he keeps working for them, Mary will treat him better; this then causes an explosive argument between Dick and Mary. Their argument brings up many of the key sources of conflict not only within their relationship, but within the novel as a whole. Firstly, there is the question of racial injustice. Dick urges Mary not to treat their workers with such sadistic cruelty—yet it is clear that both Dick and Mary harbor extremely racist viewpoints, conveyed by the fact that Dick calls black people "savages" and stereotypes them as lazy and difficult to work with.

While Dick's view of the "savage" indigenous population of Southern Rhodesia is a more paternalistic one, leading him to urge Mary not to be so harsh on them, it is clear he does not think of black people as full human beings. Many would argue that this kind of paternalism is thus no better than Mary's more brutal attitude, because both cases reduce people to a less-than-human status, which paves the way for exploitation and abuse. The narrator also points out the irony of Dick's insistence that black people are "lazy savages," given that black workers have been the only factor providing him with a modicum of comfort in life. The final sentence of this passage also emphasizes the intensely intimate contact between white settlers and black people—contact that does little to mitigate the settlers' racist attitudes.

Chapter 6 Quotes

If she disliked native men, she loathed the women. She hated the exposed fleshiness of them, their soft brown bodies and soft bashful faces that were also insolent and inquisitive, and their chattering voices that held a brazen fleshy undertone. She could not bear to see them sitting there on the grass, their legs tucked under them in that traditional timeless pose, as peaceful and uncaring as if it did not matter whether the store was opened, or whether it remained shut all day and they would have to return tomorrow. Above all, she hated the way they suckled their babies, with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boil. "Their babies hanging on to them like leeches," she said to herself shuddering, for she thought with horror of suckling a child. The idea of a child's lips on her breasts made her feel quite sick; at the thought of it she would involuntarily clasp her hands over her breasts, as if protecting them from a violation. And since so many white women are like her, turning with relief to the bottle, she was in good company, and did not think of herself, but rather of these black women, as strange; they were alien and primitive creatures with ugly desires she could not bear to think about.

Related Characters: Mary Turner

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Against Mary's will, Dick has opened a "kaffir store" on the farm, which Mary has agreed to run with great reluctance. Every day, a group of native women come to sit outside the store with their children, and this passage details Mary's perverse sense of disgust and hatred at the sight of these women. Clearly, Mary's views emerge not only from racist ideology, but also from internalized misogyny. She finds the women's naked bodies, including natural bodily functions such as breastfeeding, repulsive. The moment when Mary clasps her hands over her own breasts shows that she does not wish to feel personally implicated in the vision of womanhood that these women represent.

Mary's misogynistic and racist feelings about the women are thus deeply intertwined; she wishes to distance herself from the aspects of womanhood that she (and society at large) finds "disgusting," and does so by insisting on the essential difference between herself, a "civilized" white woman, and the "primitive" black women before her. Of course, in reality this distinction is meaningless. Mary's body is no less female than the bodies of the native women, and there is nothing disgusting about femininity, sexuality, or maternity. Mary has simply been conditioned—both by society at large and events in her personal life—to feel repulsed by her own body and desires. It is for this reason that she finds the "peaceful" naturalness and comfort of the native women in their own skin so offensive—because she has been denied it herself.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ For although their marriage was all wrong, and there was no real understanding between them, he had become accustomed to the double solitude that any marriage, even a bad one, becomes.

Related Characters: Mary Turner , Dick Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

After running away from the farm, Mary has come back and, in the coolness of winter, has returned almost to the level of vitality she exhibited before getting married. Dick is now gentler with her, fearing that she will run away again. At this point there can be no denying that their marriage is highly dysfunctional, and makes both of them miserable in different ways. However, the narrator suggests that this does not make their marriage exceptional, but rather fairly normal. The narrator argues that all marriages end up becoming units of "double solitude." Rather than bringing two people together into a shared experience of the world, marriage often isolates people into their own private worlds. Rather than relieving Dick's loneliness, his marriage has in fact enhanced it.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ A white person may look at a native, who is no better than a dog. Therefore she was annoyed when he stopped and stood upright, waiting for her to go, his body expressing his resentment of her presence there. She was furious that perhaps he believed she was there on purpose; this thought, of course, was not conscious; it would be too much presumption, such unspeakable cheek for him to imagine such a thing, that she would not allow it to enter her mind; but the attitude of his still body as he watched her across the bushes between them, the expression on his face, filled her with anger.

Related Characters: Moses, Mary Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Unable to find a house servant, Dick has decided to bring Moses from the field to work in the house. Mary has taken to watching Moses as he performs his housework, and one day she notices him washing himself outside. When he sees her, he pauses, waiting for her to go, which offends Mary, who believes she has a right to look at him. This passage details Mary's thoughts in this moment, which are colored by the extreme racist ideology that has led her to treat native people so badly. Furthermore, her racist mindset has also convinced her that even Moses' self-respect and modesty are a personal affront to her, because she—as a white woman—has an absolute entitlement to him, even in private moments such as when he washes himself.

Of course, there is also an important subtext to this passage regarding Mary's fascination with Moses. It is clear from the strained anger within Mary's thoughts that she wants to be able to look at Moses without him looking back at her. In this sense, she objectifies him, and is affronted when he reasserts his humanity in the face of this objectification. Although Mary will not admit it to herself, she clearly feels a kind of desire for Moses—whether sexual or otherwise. When he looks back at her and waits for her to look away, he forces her to confront the reality of this desire, which makes Mary furious.

What had happened was that the formal pattern of black-and-white, mistress-and-servant, had been broken by the personal relation; and when a white man in Africa by accident looks into the eyes of a native and sees the human being (which it is his chief preoccupation to avoid), his sense of guilt, which he denies, fumes up in resentment and he brings down the whip. She felt that she must do something, and at once, to restore her poise. Her eyes happened to fall on a candlebox under the table, where the scrubbing brushes and soap were kept, and she said to the boy: "Scrub this floor." She was shocked when she heard her own voice, for she had not known she was going to speak. As one feels when in an ordinary social conversation, kept tranquil by banalities, some person makes a remark that strikes below the surface, perhaps in error letting slip what he really thinks of you, and the shock sweeps one off one's balance, causing a nervous giggle or some stupid sentence that makes everyone present uncomfortable, so she felt: she had lost her balance; she had no control over her actions.

Related Characters: Moses, Mary Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Moses has caught Mary watching him wash. When he returns to the house, his presence flusters Mary, who is angered and embarrassed by Moses's knowledge of her interest in him. In this passage, she attempts to restore the previous dynamic of their relationship by ordering him to perform unnecessary tasks in an unduly harsh manner. This is, of course, not the first time that Mary has used this tactic as a way of (re)asserting her authority to the native workers on the farm; in fact, she has done the same thing with different workers throughout the book. However, there is now a distinctly sexual undertone to Mary's demands. The intimacy of her relationship with Moses, which always existed on some level, has reached an overwhelming intensity that clearly frightens Mary.

It is important that the narrator compares Mary's feeling of having "lost her balance" to "an ordinary social conversation." This comparison reveals the fact that Mary has breached the colonial mandate that white people not think of black people as full human beings with their own social significance. According to racist ideology, Mary should not care what Moses thinks of her. The fact that she cares deeply—so much that she feels entirely out of control of her actions—highlights the scandal of her feelings about him.

Chapter 9 Quotes

Then he carefully took the glass from her, put it on the table, and, seeing that she stood there dazed, not knowing what to do, said: "Madame lie down on the bed." She did not move. He put out his hand reluctantly, loathe to touch her, the sacrosanct white woman, and pushed her by the shoulder; she felt herself gently propelled across the room towards the bedroom. It was like a nightmare where one is powerless against horror: the touch of this black man's hand on her shoulder filled her with nausea; she had never, not once in her whole life, touched the flesh of a native. As they approached the bed, the soft touch still on her shoulder, she felt her head beginning to swim and her bones going soft. "Madame lie down," he said again, and his voice was gentle this time, almost fatherly.

Related Characters: Moses (speaker), Mary Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

Moses has told Mary that he wants to leave at the end of the month, and Mary has shocked herself by bursting into tears and begging him not to go. Moses offers her a glass of water and then tells her to go lie down, even gently pushing her toward the bed. In this passage, it is clear that their dynamic has changed in an extraordinary and fundamental manner. Moses knows that he could be killed for touching "the sacrosanct white woman," but nonetheless does so in a reluctant but fearless manner. Mary, meanwhile, has lost all trace of her brutal authority and simply obeys Moses's commands.

The fact that the narrator describes Moses speaking in a "fatherly" voice further confirms how unusual their dynamic has now become. Within colonial ideology, the relationship between white women and black men is conceptualized in only two ways: master and servant, and prey and predator. The notion that Moses could take on a kind yet authoritative role within Mary's life is, within the racist mentality of the time, totally unthinkable.

He approached slowly, obscene and powerful, and it was not only he, but her father who was threatening her. They advanced together, one person, and she could smell, not the native smell, but the unwashed smell of her father. It filled the room, must, like animals; and her knees went liquid as her nostrils distended to find clean air and her head became giddy. Half-conscious, she leaned back against the wall for support, and nearly fell through the open window. He came near and put his hand on her arm. It was the voice of the African she heard. He was comforting her because of Dick's death, consoling her protectively; but at the same time it was her father menacing and horrible, who touched her in desire.

Related Characters: Dick Turner, Mary's Father, Mary Turner , Moses

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

Dick has contracted malaria, and Moses and Mary have been sharing the task of taking care of him at night. Mary has been reluctant to fall asleep while Moses is there, and when she does she has a series of vivid, terrifying nightmares. This passage describes a moment in one of these nightmares in which Mary sees her father approaching her—and her father then transforms into Moses. Mary's visceral repulsion at the memory of her father's smell, along with her fear of him touching her "in desire," strongly suggests that Mary's father sexually abused her when she was a child. Although this is not noted explicitly in the rest of the novel, it is possible that Mary herself has suppressed the memory, and thus only experiences it in an unconscious state.

Mary's dream consciousness also makes clear for the first time that she does harbor fantasies about having a physically intimate relationship with Moses, even if these fantasies are marred by her racist dehumanization of black people, trauma, and repulsion at sexuality. Although Moses and her father are nothing alike, they morph into one figure as a result of their shared gender and authority within Mary's life. This arguably helps explain why Mary chose the weak, skinny, and passive Dick to be her husband; as a non-dominant and non-threatening man, Dick does not frighten Mary through reminding her of her father.

It's also worth noting that in the dream, Moses's "native smell," a notion often used as a racist stereotype for white people to make black people seem more animal-like, is then replaced by Mary's (white) father's smell, which is explicitly described as "must, like animals." This juxtaposition reinforces the idea that such stereotypes are not based in the reality of individuals, but rather in hierarchies of power and exploitation.

He said easily, familiarly, "Why is Madame afraid of me?" She said half-hysterically, in a high-pitched voice, laughing nervously: "Don't be ridiculous. I am not afraid of you." She spoke as she might have done to a white man, with whom she was flirting a little. As she heard the words come from her mouth, and saw the expression on the man's face, she nearly fainted. She saw him give her a long, slow, imponderable look: then turn, and walk out of the room.

Related Characters: Mary Turner , Moses (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 189-190

Explanation and Analysis

Mary has had a nightmare in which both her father and Moses, morphed into the same figure, are approaching her in a seemingly sexual manner. She wakes up screaming, and finds Moses standing over her with a tray of tea. Moses's direct question to Mary about why she is afraid of him then provides further evidence of the extent to which their relationship has changed. Moses now completely ignores the rules of propriety governing interactions between white settlers and native workers. Instead, he seems to want to understand Mary as a person. Mary, meanwhile, has also changed the way she interacts with Moses, addressing him in a coquettish way.

However, the shift in their relationship seems to be pushing Mary into a state of madness. Her "half-hysterical" disposition suggests that though she treats Moses in a familiar, flirtatious manner, she remains deeply—indeed, increasingly—afraid of him, and afraid of her own conflicting feelings about him.

Chapter 10 Quotes

He had been in the country long enough to be shocked; at the same time his "progressiveness" was deliciously flattered by this evidence of white ruling-class hypocrisy. For in a country where colored children appear plentifully among the natives wherever a lonely white man is stationed, hypocrisy, as Tony defined it, was the first thing that had struck him on his arrival. But then, he had read enough about psychology to understand the sexual aspect of the color bar, one of whose foundations is the jealousy of the white man for the superior sexual potency of the native; and he was surprised at one of the guarded, a white woman, so easily evading this barrier. Yet he had met a doctor on the boat coming out, with years of experience in a country district, who had told him he would be surprised to know the number of white women who had relations with black men. Tony felt at the time that he would be surprised; he felt it would be rather like having a relation with an animal, in spite of his "progressiveness."

Related Characters: Moses, Mary Turner , Tony Marston

Related Themes:

Page Number: 213-214

Explanation and Analysis

While getting himself water from the house, Tony has witnessed Moses helping Mary to get dressed, and has come to believe that they are having an affair. He sits down, reeling. The Southern Rhodesian/British imperialist in him is shocked that such an affair could take place; however, his more racially progressive side reminds him that it is very common for white men to have sex with black women. This passage outlines the full extent of Tony's mixed feelings and beliefs about the possibility of Mary and Moses sleeping together. Even though he understands the hypocrisy of the way in which relations between black men and white women are treated, he cannot shake the racist ideology that teaches him to regard black men as sinister, predatory, and animalistic beings from whom white women must be protected at all costs. Indeed, it is this belief that is one of the "foundations" of white supremacist society.

"It's not customary in this country, is it?" he asked slowly, out of the depths of his complete bewilderment. And he saw, as he spoke, that the phrase "this country," which is like a call to solidarity for most white people, meant nothing to her. For her, there was only the farm; not even that––there was only this house, and what was in it. And he began to understand with a horrified pity, her utter indifference to Dick; she had shut out everything that conflicted with her actions, that would revive the code she had been brought up to follow.

Related Characters: Tony Marston (speaker), Moses, Dick Turner, Mary Turner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

After witnessing Moses helping Mary to get dressed, Tony has confronted Mary about the matter. He asks her if Moses always dresses and undresses her, and when she replies that he needs the extra work, Tony goes on to note that such an arrangement is not "customary" in this country. In making this remark, Tony is made aware of just how cut off Dick and Mary are from the society around them. Their isolation—both in the sense of their physical distance from their neighbors and their self-imposed social exile—has left them with little understanding of normality. Indeed, this helps to explain the perverse dynamics that exist at the Turners' farm, including Mary's highly unusual, intimate relationship with Moses.

Chapter 11 Quotes

When the dark returned he took his hand from the wall, and walked slowly off through the rain towards the bush. Though what thoughts of regret, or pity, or perhaps even wounded human affection were compounded with the satisfaction of his completed revenge, it is impossible to say. For, when he had gone perhaps a couple of hundred yards through the soaking bush he stopped, turned aside, and leaned against a tree on an ant heap. And there he would remain, until his pursuers, in their turn, came to find him.

Related Characters: Moses

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

The night before she and Dick are due to leave the farm,

Mary wakes up and goes to stand out on the veranda. Moses approaches and kills her with a single stab wound. This passage, the final paragraph of the novel, describes Moses's feelings as he walks away from Mary's dead body. It is the only moment in the narrative that comes close to exploring Moses's subjectivity and inner life, although this remains obscured by the narrator's statement that it is "impossible to say" what he is really feeling. Moses's decision to wait nearby the house before turning himself remains similarly mysterious. Does he confess to the crime out of a sense of moral duty? Does he believe that he will be found and arrested regardless, and that he therefore might as well surrender?

Alternatively, it is possible that he turns himself in as a result of apathy in the face of the vast injustice of colonialism. Indeed, it is this final explanation that seems to fit best with Moses's behavior in the rest of the novel. Up until this point, he has always greeted Mary's abuse with a mix of fearlessness and blank acceptance. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that he should react in the same way after murdering her.

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

The chapter opens with a short newspaper article entitled "Murder Mystery," which describes the murder of Mary Turner, who is the wife of Dick Turner, a farmer. The article notes that a "houseboy" has confessed to the murder, and that it is thought he wanted to steal valuables. The narrator then explains that white people are never surprised by news of natives committing crimes. Meanwhile, the murder is not discussed among those who know the Turners personally, despite the fact that theirs is a sparse farming community in which people are usually hungry for gossip. An outsider might have assumed that Charlie Slatter told everyone not to say anything, but it was actually achieved by a kind of silent consensus. The community resented the Turners for keeping to themselves, and for living in a shabby house that was no better than the houses of some native people.

The article that opens the book contains a paradox. If Mary Turner's murderer has been captured and has confessed to the crime, then why is it described as a "murder mystery"? More intrigue emerges when the narrator (who is not a named character, but often adds commentary and explanation) says that the murder is not discussed among the local white farming community at all. The silent consensus of the community suggests an almost sinister sense of camaraderie. The fact that the Turners were disliked among their neighbors suggests that the murder may be more complex than the simple, tidy narrative that appears at the beginning of the chapter.

While gossiping about the Turners one of their neighbors refers to them as "poor whites," which causes trouble as that phrase is always used to describe Afrikaners (Dutch-descended colonists), not British people. The most important principle among white settlers in southern Africa, the narrator says, is "*esprit de corps*," meaning pride in one's group, although the Turners themselves failed to live up to this maxim. In the wake of the murder, people begin to sympathize with Dick and demonize Mary as "something unpleasant and unclean." They wonder who wrote the newspaper article, reasoning that it could have been Charlie Slatter. People have suspicions about why Mary was murdered by a native, but they do not allow themselves to voice these out loud. There is agreement that the case has been handled in a strange manner.

*A strict sense of propriety governs life among the white settlers in Southern Rhodesia. The most important principle is "*esprit de corps,*" and it is the Turners' failure to subscribe to this principle that seems to be the key reason behind their marginalization. This passage also reveals the way in which sexism turns people against Mary. The idea that she is "unclean" suggests that people's prejudice against her is related to her failure to live up to the ideal of "pure" white femininity, perhaps by some sort of sexual violation.*

Charlie Slatter lives 5 miles away from the Turners, and the farm workers go straight to him after they find Mary's body. Slatter then sends a letter to Sergeant Denham, who immediately sends six native policemen to the Turners' farm. Soon after the policemen arrive, Moses turns himself in, saying something like: "Here I am." After Moses is arrested, Dick comes up through the bush, muttering to himself crazily. The policemen leave him be, because "black men, even when policemen, do not lay hands on white flesh."

This passage further illuminates the rules of propriety that govern life in Southern Rhodesia, and points out how absurd they are. While the native policemen are given an official position of authority, the authority of white men is seen as being so inherent and absolute that the native policemen cannot even lend a hand to support Dick in his grief. This in turn highlights the extreme bias of the criminal justice system in the country; if black policemen have no authority over white people, then white people are free to commit crimes against black people with impunity.

The local settlers are curious about why Moses turned himself in, until the District Native Commissioner explains that in the Matabele culture that preexisted this wave of colonization, it was customary for wrongdoers to "submit fatalistically to punishment." The Commissioner adds that there is something "rather fine" about this custom, and the narrator explains that it is becoming increasingly acceptable to make such positive comments about native people as long as these comments describe the past, when native people were less "depraved" than they are now. In reality, Moses might not even be Matabele.

The Commissioner's comments highlight the moral hypocrisy of colonial society. The Commissioner assumes that Moses' reasons for turning himself in are culturally inspired, but isn't even certain to which culture Moses belongs. Furthermore, the prevailing narrative regarding the native people (that they are now more "depraved" than before) is clearly fabricated, and also seems to contradict the supposed moral aspect of colonialism—the duty to spread "civilization."

Slatter drives to the Turners' farm in his "fat American car." He had been a grocer's assistant in London, and likes his telling children that if not for his "energy and enterprise" he would still be living in a slum. He is a "proper cockney" who is "brutal" and "ruthless," yet also kind in a way, and very talented at making money. He was cruel to his wife and children before becoming rich. He is fond of using the sambok (heavy leather whip) and once killed a native person, for which he was fined £30. Slatter looks like a "convict," with beady eyes he keeps permanently narrowed against the sun. Slatter wonders why Tony Marston, his assistant, did not come to him about the murder. He resents Marston for being "soft" and a gentleman. Slatter feels that Marston could (and should) have prevented the murder somehow.

Understanding Charlie Slatter and Tony Marston's relationship requires an understanding of the rigidity of the English class system during this era, and the unique way in which boundaries of class were subverted in the colonies. As Slatter boasts, as a working-class cockney man in London he would certainly have remained poor and could easily have ended up in a slum. Tony, on the other hand, would be guaranteed a comfortable life due to his upper-class background. Yet in Southern Rhodesia, none of this applies, and this creates tension between the characters.

When Slatter arrives at the house, he sees Moses standing in handcuffs. The policemen salute Slatter, yet he feels uncomfortable around them, as he cannot "bear the half-civilized native." Slatter puts Dick in the back of his car. Inside the house, Tony explains how he found Mary's body on the **veranda**. He says that the dogs were licking her, so he lifted her into the house and onto the bed. Slatter asks him what he knows about the murder, and Tony replies that he doesn't know much, and that "it is all so difficult."

Slatter's discomfort around what he perceives as the "half-civilized native" (essentially, native people conforming to the colonists' rules, traditions, and hierarchies) undercuts the supposed goal of European imperialism and colonialism—bringing "civilization" to "savage" peoples. Slatter's perception betrays the truth—that colonialism is really about power and exploitation.

Tony is one of the many young, privately-educated Englishmen who come to Southern Rhodesia to learn farming. These young men are sensitive and very adaptable. At first they are shocked by the way native people are treated, but eventually they adopt the same cruel behavior themselves. Slatter asks Tony what he means by "difficult," and Tony knows that he is being warned, yet he is confused about what. He does not know why Slatter has assumed a role of authority in the murder case when he is seemingly just a random neighbor.

The description of Tony as both sensitive and adaptable is significant. When Tony first arrives in Southern Rhodesia, his sensitivity and adaptability are in conflict with one another. His sensitivity means he is upset by the brutally racist treatment of native people, but his adaptability means he wishes to conform to the norms of white society. The narrator suggests that other young men like Toby eventually given in to their desire to adapt, which overpowers their horror at racist injustice. This could be seen as a failure of sensitivity, but it also demonstrates the success of a selective *form of sensitivity. Tony remains sensitive to the feelings and customs of white people, but becomes insensitive to black people's suffering.*

Slatter asks Tony if he knows why Moses murdered Mary, but when Tony replies he has "a sort of idea," Slatter rudely replies that they ought to wait for Sergeant Denham to figure it out. Denham arrives and feels vengeful anger toward the murderer and sympathy for the Turners. He feels the same anger he would toward "any social irregularity."

Slatter and Denham's attitude toward Tony—and the murder case in general—is contradictory and strange. Denham has a strong emotional reaction to viewing the body, but the narrator adds that this is the same feeling he would have about "any social irregularity." This is odd, as the murder of a woman is surely a worse crime than an ordinary social violation—but it also highlights how Mary's murder is seen as a challenge to the status quo, rather than simply an individual crime.

Denham and Slatter stand "like two judges," and Denham asks Tony some questions. Tony explains that he has been staying in a hut nearby for three weeks, and that he was planning on running the Turners' farm for six months while they went away, after which he would go onto a **tobacco** farm. He tells Denham that he found Mary's body, and begins to feel defensive and angry. Tony says that he had meals with the Turners but did not socialize with them outside of this, and that Dick seemed reluctant to leave his work on the farm. Denham expresses sympathy for Dick, and Tony puzzles at the way both Denham and Slatter seem to feel personally implicated in the murder.

Both Denham and Slatter seem to be simultaneously interested and uninterested in Tony's testimony and theory about the murder, and there is lots of tension present in their interview. They seem to care more about Tony's relationship with the Turners before Mary's death than the details of what he knows about the murder. Denham and Slatter seem to feel that preserving the status quo and prevailing narrative of racial hierarchy is more important than the individual facts of this particular case.

Sergeant Denham asks Tony if he saw anything unusual while working for the Turners, and Tony replies that he did. Denham says that after spending a while in the country, Tony will realize that "we don't like niggers murdering white women." Denham asks if Tony knows why Mary was murdered, but when Tony replies that he has a theory, Denham responds that he doesn't want "theories," but "facts." He urges Tony to "remember Dick," which strikes Tony as an absurd and meaningless statement.

The interview is conducted in an unconventional and unprofessional manner, and at times it seems as if Denham and Slatter are deliberately antagonizing Tony. It is also clear how much their bias as racist white colonizers is affecting their understanding of the case. Denham's statement that "we don't like niggers murdering white women" confirms the notion that Mary's death is particularly charged in terms of sexual and racial relations.

Tony insists that the murder cannot be explained in simple terms, at which point Denham asks if Mary treated "her boys well." Tony responds that Mary treated the houseboy cruelly, and both Denham and Slatter concur that women do not know how to deal with black people. Tony is then shocked to realize that his interview seems to be over, and begins to say something else before changing his mind. Slatter says that they had better get Mary's body out before it gets too hot, and Tony notices that this is the only time she has been mentioned directly.

The men often speak about people as if they are property; as a white woman, Mary belongs to them, while her "boys" belong to her. (Although note that Tony's perception that Mary has not been referred to directly is actually false, as she is discussed directly in the passage above.) The claim that white women especially don't treat black people well seems to insinuate that Mary could have had some responsibility in her own death, but this point is not then pursued by the men.

The policemen take Mary's body to the car, but a problem arises because Moses cannot ride in a car next to a white woman (even a dead one). It is decided that he must walk to the police station. Moses obeys the policemen's orders without resistance, and shows no sign of regret or fear. Slatter asks about Dick, and the Sergeant replies that Dick "won't be good for much." Tony feels conflicted; he wants to conform in this new country, but wonders if staying silent would amount to a "monstrous injustice." Moses will certainly be hanged no matter what. Even if Tony does insist on telling the truth, he thinks, what difference will it make? He imagines himself saying that Mary is somewhat at fault, but also that it's impossible to decide who is overall to blame. He suspects Sergeant Denham would say that blame is irrelevant, and what matters is that Moses killed Mary. Tony says nothing, and is left alone at the Turners' house while everyone else drives away.

At this point in the novel, Tony represents the moral conscience of white society. The dilemma of whether or not to silence himself in order to conform to the expectations of Denham and Slatter is also a dilemma between loyalty to or betrayal of the racist structure of power that shapes the colonial world. As Tony acknowledges, there is likely nothing he can do to change Moses's fate—he will be hanged regardless. On a broader scale, there is also nothing Tony as an individual can do to change the institutionalized racism and brutality of the colonial world. However, does this mean it is morally acceptable to remain silent?

Tony cannot stop thinking about the expressions of Slatter and Denham as they looked at Mary's body; their faces were frozen in "a hysterical look of hate and fear." Tony drinks a little brandy, looks around the Turners' house, and puzzles over how they could have tolerated living there. He wonders what Dick and Mary were like before they lived there and if their pasts could help explain why the murder took place. Dizzy from the brandy and heat, Tony walks out to the **veranda**, where he can still see pink smears of blood, and resolves to "get out of this place."

In the end, Tony chooses to flee from the moral dilemma facing him through his involvement in Mary's death. Rather than choosing whether or not to speak up, he simply runs away from the farming community altogether.

The next day, Tony packs up his things and tells Slatter he is leaving. Soon Slatter's cows overrun the Turners' farmland, and the Turners' house falls down shortly after. Meanwhile, Tony is offered positions on other farms, but turns them down, as farming has now been poisoned for him. The trial takes place, and it is concluded that Moses murdered Mary while drunk, hoping to steal valuables. Tony travels to North Rhodesia to work in copper mining, but is put off by the difficulty of the work and the heavy drinking of his peers. He ends up taking an office job, exactly what he had come to Africa to avoid. People gossip that he did not have "the guts" for farming.

The final claim that Tony did not have the "guts" for farming has a double meaning. On one level, the other farmers seem to be accusing Tony of being too sensitive and blue-blooded for the physical experience of farm work. However, this statement also evokes the fact that Tony is too morally sensitive to handle the social world of rural South Rhodesia. As an office worker, he is able to distance himself from the brutal reality of colonial life. However, he is no less complicit in this brutality working in an office than he was on the farm—and he also didn't have the "guts" to speak up about Mary's death.

CHAPTER 2

The narrator explains that as the railway expanded across southern Africa, little clusters of buildings appeared, "the centers of farming districts." They sometimes include a post office or a hotel, but always a **store**. These stores are the symbol of southern Africa and can be found everywhere. They are small, single-story buildings divided into a grocery, a butcher, and a liquor store. However, they can also sell everything from clothes to cosmetics. For people who grew up in southern Africa, many of their childhood memories center around the store, where their parents might stop for a drink or collect their mail. The store would temporarily transport them back to England, the distant home for which they felt a persistent longing.

The store is a symbol of connection between the isolated white families distributed across southern Africa. It is a reminder of England and the "civilized," comfortable, consumer-based lifestyle that is a marked contrast from rural life in Africa.

This chapter jumps back in time to Mary's childhood. Mary thinks of England as "home" even though she has never seen it—even her parents were born in South Africa. The store is an especially important part of Mary's childhood. She would spend hours there, although Mary's mother banned her from playing with the daughter of the store owner because the family was Greek.

The narrator points out that there is something false about this connection to England, though. While white settlers have a sentimental attachment to their country of origin, many—like Mary and her parents—have never even seen it. There is thus a lack of authenticity to their connection to England just as there is a lack of authenticity to the store itself. The store is a reminder that white people are a forced, artificial presence in Africa.

The **store** is also where Mary's father buys alcohol. Mary's mother makes a big show of complaining that her husband spends all their money on drink, leaving her to raise three children on nothing. Mary's father does not drink himself to "brutality," but is a rather happy drunk. He is a railway worker who is deferential to petty officials and rude to native people. Every month, Mary's parents fight over the bills. Her older brother and sister die of dysentery in the same year, and this briefly brings her parents together; Mary thinks of this period of grief as "the happiest time of her childhood." The family moves three times, but in Mary's memory each place is exactly the same. Mary is sent to boarding school, where she's happy to be away from her family, and eventually decides to leave home at 16. She finds a job as a typist in a small town, and by 20 has made a close group of friends and "a niche in the life of the town."

Mary's childhood, and particularly the joy she feels in the period following the deaths of her siblings, highlights the perversion that characterizes her life and personality. While family is usually associated with intimacy, comfort, and happiness, Mary's family is a source of misery, and she only finds happiness once she has achieved independence from her parents. This perverse sense of happiness is also significant due to the way in which it challenges gender norms. As a woman, Mary is expected to find fulfillment in domesticity, nurture, and care; instead, she is only happy when she breaks free of her family and lives an independent life.

Shortly after Mary leaves home, Mary's mother dies and Mary's father is transferred 500 miles away. Mary feels relief and no sympathy for her father, who she imagines cannot suffer because he is a man. She continues to enjoy her "comfortable, carefree existence as a single woman," unaware of how unusual and privileged a position this is in comparison to the experiences of women all over the world. When Mary is 25, her father dies, leaving her with no connection to her childhood and a sense of total happiness and freedom. Mary's happiness is the most extraordinary thing about her; she is somewhat pretty, though rather thin and plain.

This passage emphasizes the extent to which Mary defies gender norms. In opposition to the expectations of how women should feel and behave, Mary seems to have little sympathy for others and finds happiness only in independence and freedom. While on the one hand her reaction to her mother's death may appear cold, can we blame Mary for wanting the life of independence that is bestowed on men but withheld from women in this era?

By 30 little in Mary's life has changed, and she feels no older than 16. She works as her employer's personal secretary and earns enough money to get her own apartment. However, she chooses to remain living in a girls' club designed for women who make little money, because it reminds her of boarding school and because she is respected there. Mary is older than the other women, and stays at an aloof distance from their "intimacies" and dramas. She holds a similar position of authority in her office, simply because she's been there so long. Looking back, this period of time can be seen as a "Golden Age" for women that has now disappeared. Each day, Mary arrives at the office on time, goes home to the club for lunch, and works for two hours in the afternoon before being taken out by various male friends for tennis, hockey, or a swim. At night she goes to dance at parties or to the movies.

Mary's time living at the club and working at the office is presented as a kind of paradise. She has few serious obligations and the freedom to live her life on her own terms. Note that this contrasts to how society expects women to view this period of their lives. During this era, the time before a woman gets married is generally seen as a kind of purgatory; although she might find some degree of happiness through her youth, beauty, and friendships, this is merely a precursor to the true happiness and fulfillment supposed to be found in marriage and child-raising. Mary's desire to linger in this period of purgatory thus challenges the logic of the society in which she lives.

As the years pass, Mary's friends get married and their children grow older. Mary remains single, healthy, happy, and carefree. She continues to dress in "little-girl fashion." Other people think she is missing the most important aspects of life, but the narrator notes that some people simply do not want these things. Mary's impression of marriage and childbearing is poisoned by her own unhappy family, and she is repulsed by sex as a result of unspecified incidents that took place in her childhood home. Occasionally Mary wonders if there will ever be more to her life, and she craves this greater sense of meaning, but these moments always pass. She is not sensitive to "atmosphere" and thus does not notice the general pressure that compels all women to marry—until one day it's shoved rudely in her face.

The narrator presents two different ways in which to interpret Mary's resistance to marriage. On one hand, Mary is happy and healthy; she enjoys her life and has no desire to share it with someone else, and is particularly resistant to sex. Why would it make sense, then, for her to get married? On the other hand, Mary's insistence on dressing in "little-girl fashion" suggests there may be something pathological (unhealthy) about her apparent refusal to move on to the next stage of her life. Is she in denial about the passage of time, and, if so, does this mean her happiness is doomed to end regardless?

One day Mary is sitting alone on the veranda of her married friend's home when she overhears two of her friends gossiping disapprovingly about her girlish lifestyle and the fact that she isn't married. They insult her appearance and suggest that she will never marry. Mary is horrified; she did not know her friends thought this, and did not recognize herself in their description.

This passage shows that Mary's supposed friends are not compassionate and supportive, but rather judgmental and malicious. This highlights Mary's isolation and suggests that her existence as a single, independent woman cannot last forever. Without the support of her group of friends, Mary will be truly alone.

Mary immediately begins to dress differently and feels newly "unconformable" around men. She begins looking for a husband, and finds a possible candidate in a 55-year-old widower. They get engaged, but when he attempts to have sex with her, Mary is overcome by a "violent revulsion" and runs home to the girls' club. She begins to avoid men over 30; although she is also older than 30, she still thinks of herself as a little girl. News of how she ran away from her fiancée spreads among Mary's social group, who laugh scornfully at her behavior. They gossip about how bad she looked and muse that she must be having a nervous breakdown.

The fact that Mary is over 30 but still thinks of herself as a little girl is evidence that she suffers from a sense of dysphoria and alienation from herself. This passage thus explores the question of whether Mary's embrace of singlehood is perfectly understandable, or whether it in fact speaks to hidden trauma lying beneath the surface of her carefree existence.

Mary is crushed by the way her image of herself has been destroyed, and she feels conscious that people look at her pityingly. It's at this time that she meets Dick. He "might have been anybody," or at least anyone who would treat her as if she was "wonderful and unique." Dick is visiting town from his farm; a friend persuaded him to stay the night and go to the cinema. Dick dislikes being in town and longs to be back on the farm. He especially hates the cinema, and the feeling of being squished into the auditorium with so many other people.

From the start, it's clear that Dick and Mary's relationship is not one of great romance or passion. It's also worth noting that Dick dislikes urban life and feels uncomfortable in crowds, whereas this is the setting in which Mary usually thrives.

At the cinema that night, Dick looks down the row of seats, notices Mary, and asks who she is. After his friend replies simply with "Mary," Dick forgets about her, until later on that night when he dreams about her, the first time in years he has dreamed about a woman. Since starting work on the farm 5 years ago, Dick has given up drinking, cigars, and all luxuries. He hopes to get married and have children, but feels it would be impossible to ask a woman to share his frugal, isolated life. He dreams of being able to "spoil" a wife with a large, elegant house. However, he has been unlucky in farming, so much so that other farmers nickname him "Jonah."

The description of Dick and Mary's initial meeting highlights points of similarity between their characters, as well as some stark differences. Both Dick and Mary crave independence—Dick through his isolated life on the farm, and Mary through her life as a single woman in the town. Yet Dick dreams of having children and being able to "spoil" his wife, while Mary prefers to have a relatively simple existence and one that is not encumbered by familial attachment or responsibility. Mary's adulthood also has been characterized by good fortune and happiness, whereas Dick is so unlucky he is nicknamed "Jonah," a sailors' term for someone who brings bad luck to a ship.

Dick is wary of thinking about women, but cannot get Mary out of his mind. A month after the cinema trip, he comes back to town and sets off in search of her. When he arrives at her building, he doesn't recognize her; she's wearing trousers, which in Dick's eyes eradicate any femaleness about her. Mary asks him if he's looking for her, and Dick is overcome with embarrassment. He manages to ask her if she wants to go for a drive, and as they drive along he realizes that he really does like her. Back on the farm, however, Dick worries about the prospect of getting married, which he cannot afford. Over the next few months, he labors so strenuously that he grows exhausted and thin. He resolves to return to town with a "defeated little smile."

Both Dick and Mary are suspicious of romance and sexuality. To some extent, this reflects the conservative values of the era, which held sexual desire to be destructive and dangerous. However, both Dick and Mary's aversion to sex goes beyond the norms of the society in which they live (and also in neither of them is it rooted in conservatism or religiosity). Dick and Mary also find comfort and stability in their independence. For Dick, this is due to his poverty, and for Mary, it is due to the freedom she is afforded as a single woman, which will be taken away once she marries.

Meanwhile, Mary has been tormented by Dick's apparent lack of interest in her, thinking it proves that the cruel rumors about her are correct. She stays awake all night waiting for him to call, and one morning her boss tells her to take time off until she's feeling better. Mary goes home glumly, trying unsuccessfully to convince herself that she was not actually interested in Dick. Eventually she gives up hope and goes to the doctor, who tells her she must take a holiday immediately to avoid having a total nervous breakdown. A few weeks after this, Dick appears at Mary's door. She forces herself to restrain her emotions and behave in a "calm, maternal" way. He proposes to her in an adoring, bashful fashion, and they get married two weeks later. Dick confesses that he's too poor to give them a honeymoon, but this doesn't upset Mary—secretly, she's relieved.

Mary's hope of marrying Dick does not emerge from attraction to Dick, but rather paranoia resulting from the cruel rumors spread about her. In fact, Mary's desire to marry Dick seems to have almost nothing to do with Dick himself. She does not feel especially drawn to him as a person nor to the lifestyle of a married woman, a fact demonstrated by her relief at not having a honeymoon. From the very beginning of their marriage, Mary knows she must play the role of a "calm, maternal" woman, a performance that masks her true feelings and obscures her actual personality.

CHAPTER 3

Mary and Dick arrive at the farm the night after their wedding. Mary has told herself that she will "get close to nature," although she actually far prefers the city to the countryside. However, she is looking forward to married life, and is not worried about her and Dick's poverty, which does not seem real to her. When they arrive at the farm, Mary stares at the house in the moonlight; it looks "shut and dark and stuffy." She begins to walk away from the house and toward a group of trees, before a bird's squawk frightens her and she runs back.

From the first moment Mary steps on the farm, it is clear that she does not belong there. She feigns an interest in nature, yet her reaction to the bird's squawk shows that she actually finds the natural world repugnant and frightening. Furthermore, while she supposedly does not care about Dick's poverty, as soon as she confronts evidence of this poverty in the form of the small, stuffy house, she is repelled by it.

Inside the house, Dick refills a lamp with paraffin, and Mary feels sick from the smell. She knows Dick is worried that she'll be disappointed, so she smiles at him, and he says he'll make them some tea. While he is gone, Mary looks at two pictures on Dick's wall: one of a woman (taken from a chocolate box) and the other of a child (ripped from a calendar). Dick returns and takes the pictures down, claiming he hasn't looked at them in years. Mary is newly aware of Dick's intense loneliness, but feels that she won't be able to be what he wants.

As with her previous existence in town, Mary is living in a state of denial about the reality around her. At the same time, Dick engages in a false pretense of happiness and ease, pretending that he isn't nervous about Mary's arrival and that he wasn't lonely in the years before they got married.

The pictures lie on the floor until Dick crumples them up and throws them into the corner; there doesn't appear to be a trash can in the room. Dick shyly suggests that they can put up new pictures, and Mary feels protective of him. He tells her that it is her "job now" to pour the tea, which she does. Dick explains that he built the house himself. There is no door between the rooms, only a curtain that had been embroidered by Mrs. Slatter. As Dick is talking, Mary suddenly feels that she has been transported back to her childhood home, and in a panic she suggests that they go into the bedroom. Dick has bought a large, "proper old-fashioned bed," which he equates with "happiness itself."

Mary and Dick cautiously move into their new roles (in which Mary, as the woman, is supposed to attend to domestic duties like pouring tea), and they seem hopeful despite the sparse setting. However, Mary's sudden memory of her childhood connects her marriage to the misery of her past, marring the sense of a new beginning that comes with her new life with Dick.

Seeing Mary's look of unhappiness, Dick leaves her to undress, and as he is undressing himself he feels ashamed and guilty for having married her. They have sex, and afterward Mary thinks that it wasn't so bad, although it also "meant nothing" to her. Dick, meanwhile, continues to feel guilty about marrying her—yet perhaps this in fact makes him a good match for her. Mary falls asleep holding Dick's hand.

Dick and Mary's first night together is rather moving; it reveals the vulnerability of both characters, and suggests that there may be a way in which this vulnerability will provide them with the capacity to care for one another. Both Dick and Mary are imperfect people who have suffered from isolation and loneliness, yet now have a chance to overcome this through building a life together. At the same time, Dick's ongoing guilt foreshadows the fact that Mary's contentment in their marriage will not last.

CHAPTER 4

In the morning Mary wakes up alone. Dick comes into the bedroom in his pajamas shortly after, and they have a "polite and awkward" conversation. An elderly native man enters, and Dick introduces him as Samson. Dick explains that Samson is "not a bad old swine," but Mary is indignant about Samson's casual manner. Dick drinks two cups of tea and goes out to work.

Dick and Mary's different reactions to Samson highlight the perverse and complex relationship between white settlers and native people in Southern Rhodesia. Dick clearly feels a sense of intimacy with Samson, yet expresses that intimacy by saying that Samson is "not a bad old swine"—hardly a real expression of kindness or affection.

Mary walks past Samson, who is cleaning the living room, and goes out onto the **veranda**. Mary then walks around the house, circling back to find Samson making the beds. As a child, she was forbidden from talking to native people; like "every woman in South Africa," she was taught to be afraid of them. Samson offers to show Mary the kitchen, where Dick keeps the food under lock and key but silently permits Samson to take a small portion for himself. Samson also shows Mary the plow disc, which is banged in the morning to wake up the workers and again in the middle of the day for the dinner break. Mary goes back inside while Samson prepares breakfast.

Mary, in contrast to Dick, is immediately disdainful of Samson's informal manner, even though she harbors such intense racist feelings that for most of her life she hasn't even spoken to native people. This emphasizes the profound hypocrisy and lack of reciprocity that defines the relationship between white settlers and native Africans.

Half an hour later Dick returns and begins to shout at Samson in "kitchen kaffir," the nickname for the language white settlers use to communicate with their black servants. Dick explains to Mary that Samson let the dogs go out into the bush, supposedly because Samson is too lazy to feed them. There are other problems on the farm as well, and Dick is clearly stressed. He leaves straight after breakfast, and before long the dogs come back. Mary attempts some cooking, before sitting down with a handbook of kitchen kaffir in order to make herself comprehensible to Samson.

One of the major racist stereotypes invented by white settlers is that native people are lazy. This is of course a deeply ironic concept, considering that the entire process of colonization is constructed around the exploitation of indigenous people's labor for the profit of white settlers. However, like all the white characters in the book, Dick is committed to upholding this racist fantasy, even in the case of his relatively genial relationship with Samson.

CHAPTER 5

Using her savings, Mary purchases fabrics and other items to make the house look nicer. After a month, she has settled into a routine that makes her feel like a new person. In the morning she drinks tea with Dick. She leaves the cooking to Samson, although she no longer allows him to take a portion of food for himself. She spends all day sewing and sleeps well at night. She enjoys pleasing Dick with her work on the house, although Dick still treats her somewhat "like a brother." After she has embroidered everything around her, she rigorously washes and paints the walls of the house. Following this project, she spends time reading, and one day Dick picks up a copy of *The Fair Lady* that Mary had left lying around. He reads a passage about the Dutch-descended trekkers in South Africa, and while he is reading Mary asks him if they can have ceilings. Dick is hesitant about the cost, saying they can have them if they "do well" next year.

Mary's happiness in this early stage of marriage emerges from the fact that she has an obvious and necessary role in the house. She gains a sense of authority through overseeing Samson's housework, and is able to independently take charge of redecorating the house. At the same time, she cannot escape the reality of being financially dependent on Dick. This not only means that she has to live within the means of Dick's very small income, but that she cannot make any financial decisions herself, such as whether to invest in ceilings.

Soon after, Mary puts the books away and returns to learning kitchen kaffir, which she practices by scolding Samson. Samson is deeply unhappy, and one day Dick finds Mary crying and claiming that Samson had stolen raisins she'd been saving for pudding. Dick comments that this is not so serious, and that Samson is "a good old swine on the whole." However, Mary furiously insists that she will take it out of Samson's wages—two shillings out of the one pound he earns per month. After learning this, Samson gives his notice, which upsets Dick, even though he figures he should have changed servants anyway when Mary arrived. Mary is horrified by Dick's affectionate farewell to Samson. In the days that follow, she struggles with the burden of taking care of the house herself, although she also enjoys it.

This passage emphasizes the question of why Mary and Dick have such different relationships to Samson, and the etiquette surrounding white interactions with native people in general. Dick seems to understand the need to have an element of fairness in his treatment of native workers, and does not take Samson's behavior too seriously (yet he still dehumanizes him by calling him a "swine" even in his supposed compliments). Mary, meanwhile, tends to overreact to the actions of native people. Her cruel treatment of Samson is seemingly a way of securing the authority that she is denied as a woman, yet simultaneously permitted as a white *woman interacting with black people.*

Mary begins to find the heat "intolerable." She wanders around the house, looking for something to do. At that moment, a young native man arrives at the house, asking for work. He asks for 17 shillings a month, and Mary barters down to 15. He is nervous and cannot understand her, even though Mary is now "fluent" in kitchen kaffir. Mary shows him around, already irritated by his presence, and at dinner she yells at him. This causes an argument between her and Dick, who insists that she will drive herself crazy by keeping her standards so high. Dick angrily leaves to smoke a cigarette outside. The next day, the new servant drops a plate out of nervousness, and Mary fires him immediately. Afterward she cleans furiously, "as if she were scrubbing the skin off a black face." The next servant has years of experience working for white women and behaves in a blank, robotic manner. This irritates Mary, but she decides to have him stay.

Dick's fears about disappointing Mary due to his poverty do not emerge from the shabbiness of the house or the lack of money for luxury expenses, as Dick originally thought. Rather, Mary's disappointment and resentment takes the form of her perennial dissatisfaction with—and cruel treatment of—native workers. While Mary is apparently satisfied living in a simple, run-down house, she has unreasonably high expectations for the behavior of servants. The severity of Mary's racism is somewhat mysterious. However, it seems clear that she channels a range of unrelated repressed feelings and desires through the "legitimate" channel of racist cruelty.

Disturbed by the way Mary treats native people, Dick asks her to come to the land with him so he can show her how he works. Mary agrees reluctantly, and spends the whole time thinking about the new servant at home, imagining that he is going through her belongings and stealing. When Dick asks if she'd like to come again the next day, she refuses, saying it's too hot. Mary becomes more and more obsessed with the heat, and asks Dick when it will rain. Dick is surprised that she does not know this herself, seeing as she has lived in South Rhodesia her entire life.

Mary's extreme aversion to the heat and lack of knowledge about the seasons in South Rhodesia again points to a sense of artifice in her relationship to the country in which she lives. The fact that Mary finds the heat so unbearable emphasizes the fact that she does not belong in this part of the world.

One day, Dick remarks that they have been running out of water very quickly, and he accuses Mary of wasting it. Mary responds that she uses it to cool herself, to which Dick replies that she is throwing money away. Mary is infuriated, even though Dick quickly apologizes. She goes into the bathroom and stares at the bathtub, which is covered in grease and dirt and scratches. She orders the servant to scrub it until it shines.

It is at this point, still at the beginning stages of Dick and Mary's marriage, that Dick first begins to see Mary as a liability—a superfluous addition to his life that only adds to his burden. In the same way that Mary does not belong in South Rhodesia, she also does not really belong in Dick's life, which is oriented around independence, isolation, and the struggle of survival.

At lunchtime, Dick is surprised to find Mary cooking, and asks where the servant is. Mary says that he is cleaning the bath. After going to the bathroom Dick informs her that it is natural for zinc to look like that, and the bath is not actually dirty. Dick doesn't want to be around Mary, and leaves without eating. Mary doesn't eat either, and after clearing lunch away spends two hours listening to the servant clean the bath. After this time, the servant returns and says that he is going to his hut for food, and that he will return to the bath later. Mary feels guilty for a moment, but then tells herself: "It's his fault for not keeping it properly clean in the first place." The week before a fire had swept through the farmland, leaving the landscape barren and charred. Suddenly, Mary sees a car approaching, and she runs inside to tell the servant to make tea; however, he is still gone on his break.

This passage further confirms Mary's incompatibility with her surroundings. She forces the servant to scrub the bath even though its "dirty" appearance is simply a result of the fact that it is made from zinc. This confirms that Mary cannot accept the natural facts around her as reality, but is constantly trying to change the world around her to suit how she wants it to be. This drives her to an extreme lack of compassion, exhibited when she feels no guilt about forcing the servant to work through his lunch break. The people around Mary do not feel real to her; rather, they are simply factors she wants to control.

Mary begins to panic; there is nothing to eat and she is not dressed for visitors. However, it is too late to do anything about this. The car stops and Charlie and Mrs. Slatter get out. Mary is relieved to see Dick's car following closely behind. The four of them sit inside, and Mrs. Slatter expresses sympathy for Mary, recalling the time when she also suffered through poverty. However, despite Mrs. Slatter's friendliness, Mary is "stiff with resentment." Mary mistakes Mrs. Slatter's genuine kindness for patronizing judgment, and struggles to think of a topic of conversation.

At this point in her life, Mary no longer seems able to engage with other people on normal terms. Her resistance to Mrs. Slatter's friendliness and sympathy indicate that she has become profoundly disconnected from other people and even frightened of social interaction in general.

Meanwhile Charlie and Dick are in the midst of an intense discussion about farming and the burden of dealing with native people. Mrs. Slatter is hurt by Mary's lack of engagement, and when the Slatters leave, Dick is sad but Mary is relieved. Dick says that Mary must be lonely, and Mary responds that she isn't, simply because she doesn't crave other people's company. Dick nonetheless suggests that Mary go to visit Mrs. Slatter, a proposal that Mary flatly rejects.

The conversation about dealing with native people highlights a connection between Mary's social alienation and the broader social alienation experienced by white settlers living in colonized countries. Through their perverse and brutal relationship with the indigenous majority of the country, the white characters in the novel lose their sense of what normal socialization looks like, and become alienated from each other as well as from the black people they live among.

At this moment, the servant comes out to the **veranda** and hands Dick and Mary his notice, explaining that he is needed in his kraal (his village). Mary is furious, and Dick breaks an unwritten rule by explaining to the servant that Mary is still learning how to run a household and that he will not be forced to work so hard in the future. Dick and Mary have a fierce argument, during which Mary feels a desire to hurt Dick. She begins to yell at him in a voice "taken directly from her mother," the voice of a "suffering female." Dick in turn speaks to her in a newly harsh way, saying that they will keep the servant and that she will have to learn to treat him correctly. Mary makes supper herself and Dick goes to bed early, leaving her alone. Mary goes outside and paces up and down the path, thinking about her old life in town. She cries for hours, and only goes to bed when she cannot walk anymore.

This passage emphasizes the way in which preexisting social scripts dictate the characters' lives, even as they try to resist them. For example, Dick rebels against the script of how white employers are supposed to communicate with native people when he speaks in an apologetic manner to the servant. However, the norms of white cruelty and miscommunication with native people are so powerful that Dick's explanation does not actually improve the situation. Mary then finds herself speaking in the same voice of female complaint that her mother used. Mary has resisted becoming like her mother for her whole life, but it seems that this fate is inescapable.

A few days later, Mrs. Slatter invites them to an evening party, which Dick reluctantly agrees to attend for Mary's sake; however, Mary does not want to go, and sends a formal note declining the invite. This offends Mrs. Slatter, and causes Charlie to remark that the Turners need to be brought to their senses. Soon after, Charlie goes to visit Dick and advises him to stop planting crops that aren't **tobacco**; however, Dick is resistant to this idea. Charlie asks Dick what he will do when he has children, and warns him not to ask for money when that time comes. Dick responds that he has never asked Charlie for anything, and the men feel both hatred and respect for one another.

Mr. and Mrs. Slatter embody the model of normal and appropriate behavior for white farmers in South Rhodesia. Charlie is rich, Mrs. Slatter is generous and sociable, and both of them have a strong sense of social propriety. This makes them foils (contrasting characters) to Dick and Mary, who both fail to live up to the ideal of white settler identity. Mary, especially, is strange, haughty, and stiff; she treats the one offer of friendship she receives with haughty disdain, highlighting her failure to embody feminine ideals of kindness and compassion.

After Charlie leaves, Dick is overcome by anxiety. He tells Mary that they may have to wait to have children, and Mary greets this news with relief. Meanwhile, Mary continues to have trouble dealing with native people, and isn't able to keep a servant for more than a month. Dick wonders if this is his fault, thinking that Mary simply needs a way to keep busy.

Dick's poverty and difficulty farming may be the result of bad luck, yet they also emerge from his own decisions such as his resistance to planting tobacco, the country's most profitable crop.

CHAPTER 6

Dick and Mary rarely visit the local train station, which is 7 miles away, instead sending a native worker to pick up their post and groceries twice a week. Once a month, they go by car in order to get heavier goods such as bags of flour. During one such trip, Mary sees a man (who she doesn't know) call Dick "Jonah" and note that his farms have flooded. When Mary asks who the man is, Dick irritably explains that he borrowed £200 from the man before they married, and that he has paid it all back except the last £50.

There have been many examples thus far of the way in which Mary struggles with societal expectations about femininity. This passage shows that Dick is also under pressure to conform to norms of masculinity, and that his failure to do so becomes a burdensome point of conflict. The debt Dick owes to the stranger they meet at the station is clearly a source of humiliation, and something that Dick wanted to keep secret from Mary.

They go about the rest of their tasks at the station awkwardly; when Dick accidentally bangs his leg against a bicycle, he begins to curse in a surprisingly violent manner. At the **store**, Mary picks up a pamphlet about beekeeping, although it is written for the English climate and is thus not very useful in Southern Rhodesia. She fans herself with it, and scrutinizes her memory of the man's tone during his brief exchange with Dick. She has begun to notice things about Dick that she hadn't previously, signs of "weakness," such as the tremor of his hands.

Witnessing the exchange between the two men leads Mary to notice other signs of "weakness" in Dick. Although she resents and defies gender norms herself, Mary still wants Dick to live up to a traditional image of masculinity.

Back at home, Mary finds Dick intensely absorbed in the pamphlet. After supper, he begins to make calculations, and eventually asks her with boyish happiness what she thinks about the prospect of getting bees. He resolves to go see Charlie about the matter the next morning. When Dick returns, he is whistling in a false pretence of happiness. He explains that Charlie shut down the beekeeping idea because his brother-in-law failed at it, but adds that this doesn't mean *they* will fail. Dick then goes out to his tree plantation; while Charlie disproves of it, this is Dick's favorite part of his farm. He stands here for hours, thinking about bees, before realizing that he is neglecting his work and reluctantly going to join the laborers. At lunchtime, he tells Mary that the bees could make them £200 a year; this surprises her, but she does not argue with him.

While Charlie may play an overly-authoritative and patronizing role in Dick's life, it is also clear that Dick is unwise to ignore Charlie's advice. Charlie runs a prosperous, highly profitable farm, while Dick is steeped in debt and still makes decisions in an emotional rather than practical manner. In this sense, Dick is again presented as being more feminine than masculine. He defies the advice of the successful, hyper-masculine figure of Charlie, instead daydreaming about bees and keeping his grove of trees simply because he has an emotional attachment to it.

Dick spends the next month in a reverie of devotion to the beekeeping project. He builds 20 hives himself and plants special grass, but he is not able to draw the bees over to the hives, and gets badly stung. Mary is relieved when Dick forgets about the whole thing, until six months later when he goes through the same process with pigs. This time, Mary warns him about "castles in the air," but to no avail. Dick builds the pigsties in the rocks behind the house and shows them to Mary, who notes that the structure is unbearably hot. Dick is defensive of his tactic, and Mary doesn't push it.

It is clear from the beginning of Dick's experiments that they are not going to succeed; however, Dick is happier during this time of experimentation than at any other point in the novel. This suggests that happiness is not always linked to profit, success, or even stability. Dick's joy comes from his independent pursuit of a project that he fantasizes will make his and Mary's lives better.

Before the pigs arrive, Dick reads that curdled milk produces better bacon than fresh, so he leaves milk out, where it soon begins to gather flies and make the house smell. Then the pigs die almost immediately after arriving. Dick says they must have been diseased, but Mary responds that they simply "disliked being roasted before their time." Dick is grateful for the chance to laugh at this joke.

Dick seems less motivated by the reality of financial gains than he does the fantasy that the farming experiments represent. As long as Dick pursues these projects, he is conducting his life on his own terms, rather than under the authoritative influence of Charlie, Mary, or anyone else.

Mary, on the other hand, is far from amused. She has realized that two options lie before her: drive herself crazy with anger at Dick, or repress this anger and silently "grow bitter." Mary chooses the latter option, although she at times struggles to control her emotions. A few months after the pigs, Mary sees Dick standing on the **veranda** with the same look of boyish enthusiasm on his face. She tries to reassure herself that the season has been good so far, but her heart sinks when Dick begins talking about buying turkeys.

Although they are married and share the same isolated existence together, Dick and Mary live in two separate psychological realities. Dick is too caught up in the fantasy of his various farming experiments to see the obvious truth that they are misguided and doomed to fail. Mary, on the other hand, feels completely trapped in the marriage.

During Dick's "turkey obsession," he hardly goes to the fields at all, instead staying near the house building brick enclosures for the birds and arranging the purchase of the expensive equipment needed to raise them. However, just after buying the turkeys he changes his mind and decides to use the enclosures for rabbits, even though people in South Africa do not eat rabbit meat. At this point, Mary loses her temper and exhausts herself in a fit of rage, to which Dick sarcastically responds, "Ok, boss."

Although she tries to repress her feelings of anger toward Dick, Mary cannot help but fall into the same pattern of vicious resentment that her mother felt for her father. Dick and Mary have theoretically overcome the periods of loneliness that characterized the earlier part of their lives, but in reality they are now more alone than ever.

Mary sells the turkeys and buys chickens for the enclosures, telling Dick she will use whatever chicken money she can get to buy herself some new clothes. Dick ignores this statement, and soon flatly tells her that he plans to open a "kaffir **store**" on the farm. He argues that kaffir stores are "gold mines of profit." Mary quietly points out that there is a kaffir store nearby—how will Dick attract customers?—but Dick is defiant. He acquires a trading license and builds the store, the sight of which Mary resents, viewing it as a bad omen.

The climax of Dick's failed experiments comes in the form of the store. As has been previously established, Mary resents rural stores due to their association with her unhappy childhood and her father's drinking. For Mary, the "kaffir store" is even worse, as it caters specifically to the black people for whom she harbors intense feelings of racial hatred.

Mary sinks into a depression, thinking about the fact that the bee, turkey, rabbit, and **store** money could have bought them more rooms for the house, ceilings, and furniture. Once the store is finished, Dick is so happy that he buys 20 bicycles to sell, a risky move, as rubber rots easily. Dick then begins discussing hiring a shopkeeper for £30 a month. When Mary protests, Dick notes that he had assumed she would run the store, but Mary replies that she would rather die. Dick thinks this is because she does not want to interact with black people, but in fact it is because the store brings back too many miserable memories from her childhood.

Dick is too steeped in delusional thinking to properly consider that Mary's extreme repulsion to stores along with her hysterical racial prejudice make her a rather inauspicious candidate for the shop keeping role. There is a symbolic connection between the rot-prone bike rubber and the pigs that died from the heat; both represent failure, toxicity, and decay, and in that sense are diametrically opposed to the image of a healthy, fertile, and prosperous farm.

Eventually Mary agrees to work in the **store**. In the morning, groups of native women and their children sit calmly outside the store, and Mary watches them with rage and disgust. Mary serves them irritably, shouting at them to hurry up as they look through the store's goods. The final straw comes when the bicycles do not sell and all rot, costing them another £50. Overall, the store does not bring in much money. In the afternoons, Mary sleeps for hours, dreaming about her life before she was "forced" to get married. In this midst of this period, she begins thinking of running away. Although she worries about hurting Dick, she comes to disregard this, believing that if she only gets on the train and returns to town her life will be restored to its previous state. One day, reading the newspaper, she notices that her old firm has placed an ad for a shorthand typist. The next day she packs a suitcase and leaves Dick a note saying she has gone back to her old job.

In the midst of Dick's farming fantasies, Mary gets caught up in a fantasy of her own. She feels so hopeless about life on the farm that her only hope of finding happiness in the future is to return to the past. Just as Dick lives in a state of denial about the failures of his farming experiments, Mary denies the reality of her life on the farm by sleeping during the day and dreaming about her previous life in town. The suddenness and seeming ease with which Mary packs up and leaves shows that she has no real attachment to Dick or to the farm. Whether consciously or unconsciously, she has spent the entirety of her married life dreaming of her past and of the possibility of escape.

Mary carries her suitcase to the Slatters' farm and asks Charlie to drive her to the station, explaining that Dick can't do it because he is working. Charlie is suspicious, but agrees. Back in town, Mary is thrilled to be back in "her world." She returns to the girls' club, where she is reminded that they do not house married women. She then goes to a hotel before returning to her office, which has new furniture and a new crop of women working there. There she is told that the typist position has already been filled. Seeing her appearance, one of the office workers asks if she has been ill, to which she replies: "No."

During this era, it is still conventionally assumed that marriage fundamentally changes a woman in a irreversible way; even women who get divorced or widowed can never return to the same status they had before they married. Furthermore, there are strict rules that delineate appropriate behavior for married women. Mary is not allowed to live at the girls' club, and—although her old office claims that the position is filled—it's possible that she doesn't get her old job back because it's not considered appropriate for a married woman to perform this kind of work.

Back at the hotel, Mary tips out the coins in her purse and realizes that she does not have enough money to pay the bill. Soon after, Dick knocks on the door. He takes her hands and says: "Mary, don't leave me." They eat at a restaurant and return home, where Mary slips miserably back into her old routine, without even the dream of escape to comfort her. If Dick had not gotten ill a few months after this point, the narrator says, perhaps Mary herself would have died, unable to go on.

As Mary soon realizes, it is impossible to turn back time. Her life in town no longer exists, and in the eyes of the people there she has become a different person. She is well and fully trapped, and depends entirely on Dick now without even the pleasure of fantasizing about freedom.

CHAPTER 7

It is June, Mary's favorite time of year. In the early mornings, Mary walks out onto the soil in front of the house, which is still cool from the night. In the coolness of winter, Mary is almost restored to her previous vitality. Dick is more gentle with her, fearing that she will run away again. Mary usually refuses to go down to the lands with him, but on one occasion accepts, and is delighted by the sight of frost.

Mary's preference for the cold and hatred of the heat emphasizes how this country—the only country she's ever lived in—still feels entirely foreign to her. Furthermore, as a settler clinging to ideals of a distant European "civilization," part of her doesn't even want *to feel at home in Africa.*

Just as it seems that the dynamic of their marriage is transforming into something new and better, Dick becomes ill. At first he insists on still going to work, but within a few hours he develops a burning fever and rushes home to bed. Mary reluctantly writes to Mrs. Slatter and later that day Charlie brings a doctor to the Turners' farm. After examining Dick, the doctor informs Mary that the house is dangerous, that it must be wired for mosquitoes, and that Mary herself is anemic and should go on a three-month holiday to the coast.

Like Charlie, the doctor is another authority figure who treats Dick and Mary in a rather demeaning manner. In different ways, both Charlie and the doctor represent the norms of society and the disciplinary processes by which these norms are upheld. Charlie symbolizes the norms that emerge from capitalism, including strict adherence to the racial hierarchy that governs South Rhodesia. The doctor, on the other hand, might be presumed to be a more benevolent and helpful figure, but he is judgmental and rather insulting to Mary, suggesting that she and Dick are responsible for their own misfortune by failing to play by the rules.

Mary stands on the **veranda** watching the doctor leave, her mind filled with enraged resentment. Mrs. Slatter drops off a bag of citrus, for which Mary writes a "dry little note" of thanks. Seeing Dick in his state of incapacitation, Mary thinks: "Just like a nigger!", as she has only seen black people lying ill like that. Mary reluctantly goes out to deal with the farm laborers, stopping to take the sambok (whip), which gives her more confidence. She lets the dogs out and walks down to the field, where the workers' huts lie, some newly built and some falling down. She walks past thin black children, women, and a handful of men. She finds the "headboy" and tells him in kitchen kaffir to get the men out to work in ten minutes, and that she will deduct the pay of anyone who is late. Some of the women laugh, and Mary thinks: "Filthy savages!"

Although not unusual for a white woman living in a highly racist society, Mary's treatment of native people is unusually severe. Furthermore, she is especially prone to directing her anger at those people who are in a state of weakness, such as women, children, and even Dick himself, who in his illness Mary associates with a black person. Mary constructs an identity for herself based on an absolute denial of this weakness. By taking the sambok to the fields and issuing needlessly strict demands, Mary presents herself in a brutal, dictatorial manner.

Mary waits in the car. After half an hour, a few men gather, and by the end of an hour only half of the farm workers have appeared. Mary takes the names of the men who are missing and spends the rest of the morning silently watching them work. At lunchtime she goes back to tell Dick what has happened, and then returns to the land, where she begins to walk through the field, watching over the men as they work. If someone pauses for more than a minute, she yells at him to get back to work. She is unaware that Dick lets the men rest for five minutes every hour. Over the course of the day, Mary grows increasingly "exhilarated," swinging the sambok from her wrist. Dick is concerned about Mary taking on this role, which is not meant for a woman, but is relieved that work is continuing. Mary, meanwhile, is thrilled by her new position of authority.

Once again, the novel forces us to ask whether Mary's sadistic behavior is a rejection of the norms of white femininity or a fulfillment of them. On one hand, it is clear that Mary enjoys rebelling against the expectation that she be gentle, passive, and nurturing. Mary seems to associate these qualities with weakness, and even expresses repulsion at seeing native women embodying maternal characteristics in front of her. At the same time, her cruelty toward native people fits in a perverse tradition of white colonial femininity: through abusing black people, Mary emphasizes her own difference from and "superiority" over them.

When Mary gives out the men's wages, she deducts money from those who did not arrive on time, which causes discontent. The headboy explains that the men want the full amount they are owed, but Mary refuses. Some of the men tell the headboy that they want to leave, and some simply walk off. This worries Mary, as she knows that Dick is constantly concerned about losing laborers, but she remains steadfast. She tells the remaining men that those who are contracted may not leave. Being "contracted" involves being rounded up by white men, often by force, and sold to farmers for one-year "contracts." She addresses them directly, lecturing righteously about the importance of work. Mary had heard her father give the same speech countless times. As she walks away, she can hear them shouting, and she burns with hatred for all of them, even the little child laborers who are no more than eight years old.

Just as Dick maintained a sense of denial about the failure of his farming experiments, Mary refuses to acknowledge the way in which her cruel treatment of the workers jeopardizes the success of the farm. Dick has already warned her that her incessant mistreatment of their house servants is dangerous, as it could mean that they are left without workers entirely. However, during her exchange with the farm workers Mary is clearly preoccupied by something greater than the success of the farm. She feels an urgent need to prove her own strictness and authority to the workers, even if that means losing their (perhaps irreplaceable) labor.

Back at the house, Mary complains to Dick about how the natives "stink," and Dick replies with a laugh that they think white people stink. She doesn't tell him about what happened, but even so Dick warns her not to be too hard on them. As Mary spends more time overseeing the farm workers, she grows more and more resentful of Dick, who she comes to realize did not suffer from bad luck but rather incompetence. Mary plans to have a conversation with Dick after he gets better, which she predicts will be in only a few days.

Once again Dick proves himself at least somewhat capable of empathizing with the native people he employs (though this doesn't stop him from participating in the generally racist colonial society). Mary, on the other hand, can only see them as subhuman. Once again she notices Dick's weakness and hates him for it, just as she hates the native people partly because of their powerlessness in this society.

Mary goes back down to the land, and while watching the laborers work she notices one of them (Moses) stop and stand still, breathing heavily. She times him on her watch, and after three minutes pass she tells him to get back to work, repeating the instruction when he does nothing. He tells her in his own language that he wants to drink, and Mary scolds him for speaking "gibberish." Moses says "I… want… water" in English, smiling and making the other workers laugh. Mary tells him not to speak English to her; white settlers consider this disrespectful.

The rules governing communication between native people and white settlers highlight the absurdity of life under a racist colonial regime. It is considered rude for black people to speak to whites in their own native language, yet also rude for black people to use English. The only acceptable mode of communication is "kitchen kaffir," a language invented in the context—and for the purpose—of the exploitation of black people's labor by white settlers. Of course, it is highly significant that Moses breaks these rules of communication when he tells Mary he wants water. Unlike the other native characters in the book, Moses seems to be unafraid of Mary. Moreover, he knows how to antagonize her, and does so.

Without thinking, Mary then raises the sambok and strikes it across Moses's face. An enormous weal emerges on his skin, and Mary stands still, shocked and frightened. Moses wipes the blood away, and eventually Mary tells the other laborers to get back to work. Mary worries that Moses will complain to the police about her, as white farmers are not allowed to physically harm their workers. She feels angered that this law exists, but knows that she remains in a position of safety and power. Even as she feels angry and frightened, she also experiences a sense of satisfaction at having "won in this battle of the wills." At night, she feels even more victorious; unlike Dick, she has proven that she knows how to deal with native people. Yet she begins to dread the conversation she has been planning to have with her husband about how the farm is run.

Mary's sudden and extreme act of violence against Moses is an important turning point in the novel. While prior to this point Mary preserved an idea of her own innocence—particularly during the period before her marriage to Dick, when she clung to the identity of a "little girl"—at this point it is impossible to say she is innocent any longer. Furthermore, striking Moses across the face brings the two of them into a relationship of violent intimacy. This intimacy is drained of any affection or compassion, but it nonetheless creates a radical intensity to their relationship that can never be undone.

After a few days, when Dick is looking a little better, Mary goes over calculations she has made with him, becoming increasingly harsh and insistent while he listens in silence. Dick knows that much of what Mary is saying is reasonable, but feels she is being unduly hard on him. When she is finished, Dick smiles slightly and asks what they should do. Mary tells him they should focus on growing **tobacco**, pay off their debts, and then leave the farm as soon as possible. However, when Dick asks what they will do then, she hesitates. She wants to leave behind their impoverished existence and return to "civilization." Yet the truth is that when Mary imagines a happy future for herself, she is back in town living at the club—Dick is not involved.

Mary's tyrannical presence on the farmland has given her an increased sense of ruthless authority that she now transposes into her relationship with Dick. From this point onward, Mary begins to exhibit a kind of fearlessness. She no longer seems to really care about making Dick happy or fulfilling the role of a pleasant, passive wife. This in turn dooms her hope of returning to her previous life in "civilization" to inevitable failure. If Mary was ever "civilized," she is certainly not now; she has internalized the extreme racism of colonial society and exercised it in a hideously brutal manner.

Mary says that they "can't go on like this," which angers Dick. He knows he does not want to leave the farm, and is horrified to realize that Mary imagines herself leaving. He thinks that he will have to make her view the farm as he does, and that once this happens they will be able to have children and be happy. Dick jokes: "Well boss, can I think it over for a few days?", but this fails to dissolve the tension between them. Three days later he tells her he will build two **tobacco** barns, and on seeing her look of hope, feels terrified of disappointing her yet again.

At the same time, Mary is correct in her prediction that she and Dick "can't go on like this." For multiple reasons, their situation is precarious and untenable and at this point seems destined to end in tragedy. Dick referring to Mary as "boss" again highlights the reversal of authority taking place in their marriage.

CHAPTER 8

After making her case about the future of the farm, Mary withdraws, knowing that the more she nags Dick the more she hates him. She needs to feel that he is strong and decisive, and even when she notices that he is again spending money in an unwise manner, she forces herself to ignore it. Mary busies herself with the chickens and her "ceaseless struggle with the servants," all the while daydreaming about a life in the city, back at the club and working in her old office. She sleeps for hours every day, purposefully wasting time. She asks after the **tobacco**, feigning nonchalance but unable to hide her excitement.

At the beginning of this chapter, Mary is sinking further and further into delusion. Instead of revealing her true feelings to Dick, she takes out her frustration on the servants, who she is able to manipulate, exploit, and abuse without consequence. This allows her to preserve the idea that Dick is strong-willed and masculine, another fantasy that does not correspond to real life. Furthermore, by spending as much time as possible sleep and dreaming about a life back in town that she knows is realistically unavailable to her, Mary insists on denying the reality of the world around her. It does not seem to matter that she is sleeping her life away, as she is in a state of denial that this life is even real.

The rains come as usual in December, but in January there is a drought, and the **tobacco** plants wither and die. They will not be able to make enough money to cover expenses, and Dick applies for a loan in order to avoid declaring bankruptcy. Mary pleads with him to build another 12 barns, arguing that other farms have far larger debts than they. However, Dick refuses to borrow any more money.

For once Dick's failure actually seems to come from bad luck, rather than his own incompetency or delusion. This natural disaster has devastating consequences for the couple's rapidly dwindling hopes.

It takes time for Mary to realize what this means; they will not be able to leave the farm for years, if ever. She grimly forces herself to stop daydreaming, and she considers taking up more sewing or getting more chickens, but cannot find the motivation to do so. She begins to suffer from headaches and looks "really very unhealthy." Dick suggests that since they cannot afford to send her on holiday, perhaps she can go and visit friends in town—however, the idea of her friends seeing her in this state fills her with horror.

Mary's life grows ever more depressing and constrictive, but she only reacts by further withdrawing into herself and isolating herself from others (as well as, of course, lashing out at the native people and Dick).

One day, Mary asks Dick when they can have children, but Dick sadly responds that they are too poor. He points out that Charlie's assistant is raising 13 children on £12 a month, and that the family is miserable; Mary nonetheless pleads just for one child. Even though she hates the idea of a baby depending on her, she is desperate to have something to do. The thought of a baby is awful, but she wouldn't mind having a "little girl companion." She and Dick argue about school fees, and Mary points out that she is almost 40 and soon won't be able to have a child at all. Yet Dick maintains that they cannot have one.

There is a distinct contrast between Mary's real age—and with it her sudden maternal ambitions—and the way she behaves, often acting like a stubborn child. Even Mary's desire to become a mother is laced with delusion. She dreams of having a little girl companion, ignoring the possibility that she might have a boy or the certainty that she would have to take care of it as a baby, a prospect she finds repulsive. On the other hand, Dick's refusal to have a child also seems somewhat unfair. As Mary points out, there is a very limited number of years in which it would be possible for her to get pregnant. Thus a surprising point of similarity between Mary and Dick is the extent to which they live in denial of the passage of time.

This period of time is miserable for Mary. She marvels at Dick's niceness and his utter lack of force, and wonders how he came to be that way. He'd been raised in the suburbs of Johannesburg by parents who are now both dead. He had worked in an office for a while and briefly trained to be a vet, before ending up in Southern Rhodesia. Mary cannot believe that "such a good man should be a failure," and one day suggests that next year he plant mealies (another name for maize) everywhere he can, rather than the small patches he currently uses. Dick explodes with frustration, asking how he can pull it off when labor is so hard to come by, particularly after Mary's treatment of the workers. He then begins to rage against the government, which is full of "nigger-lovers," and the native people themselves, who he claims are disrespectful and lazy.

In a scenario typical of a dysfunctional marriage, both Dick and Mary have come to blame each other for the problems in their life together. Mary believes that Dick's personality makes him ill-suited to farming, and tries to help with the decision-making in order to improve the chances of success on the farm. Dick, meanwhile, blames Mary's mistreatment of their native employees for the farm's failures. In reality, both of them are right. Yet due to their lack of cooperation, there is no chance of any of their issues being resolved.

Mary starts to worry about Dick. He chain-smokes, buying "native **cigarettes**" because they are cheaper. He treats native people worse and worse, and this irritates Mary even though she is guilty of it too. She feels that Dick is "growing into a native himself." During this time, two more house servants quit in succession, leaving Mary without help at home. Mary's reputation as an employer is so bad that no one else comes, forcing Dick to move one of the farm laborers to the house. The man he chooses is Moses, whom Mary whipped two years before.

Dick and Mary are now not only isolated from the other white settlers in the farming district, but also from the local native workforce, who refuse to work for a boss as notoriously cruel as Mary. It is significant that it is into this dynamic that Moses arrives.

Mary asks Dick if he can bring someone else instead, but Dick insists that Moses is the best man available. Mary reluctantly relents, and takes to watching Moses as he works, gazing at his tall figure and powerful muscles. At first she tries to find faults in his work, but is unable to do so. One morning, while collecting eggs from the chickens, she notices Moses washing himself and is irritated when he stops and stands up, waiting for her to leave. She turns away and walks back inside, feeling newly aware of the world around her.

No longer on good terms with Dick, Mary finds herself in a place of intense loneliness. Although she will not admit it to herself, it is clear she is fascinated by and attracted to Moses. The description of his large, muscular body is a notable contrast to Dick's body, which is depicted as thin, rough, and unappealing. Yet Mary's racism and sexual disgust prevent her from acknowledging her feelings for Moses as sexual desire. As a result of this denial (and her general dehumanization of all black people) she doesn't think twice about gawking at him.

When Mary sees Moses inside the house again, she is furious, and forces him to scrub the floor, even though he is already done so that day. She collapses on the sofa, shaking. She then instructs him to set the table, criticizing each thing he does. She stalks around the house, looking for more tasks to assign him, but cannot find any. In the bedroom, the sight of the bed disturbs her, reminding her of the unpleasant nights of sex with Dick. She then catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror and begins to cry. That night, she and Dick eat together in silence. After supper, Dick says that they must keep Moses, as he is "the best we ever had." Dick says he is sick of Mary's behavior and their constant need to change servants. Mary quietly agrees to keep Moses, and goes to sleep for four hours.

There is an obvious sexual undertone to every part of this passage, from the sadistic series of tasks and criticisms to which Mary subjects Moses to her memories of having sex with Dick to Dick's almost humorously ironic comment that Moses is "the best we've ever had." It is also ironic that Dick chooses to put his foot down in the case of Moses, rather than any of the other house servants. Although Dick doesn't know it, Moses poses the greatest threat to his life with Mary of any character in the book.

CHAPTER 9

Months pass. Mary goes about her work wearily, and when she is not working sits still, thinking about nothing. Dick has become increasingly irritated with her nagging of Moses. The chickens begin to die, and Mary cannot bring herself to care. The only part of her that remains active and alert lies in her relationship with Moses. Then, one day, Moses hesitantly announces that he wants to leave at the end of the month. Mary is left speechless, and—to her horror—begins to cry in front of him. Eventually, she exclaims: "You mustn't go!.... You must stay!" Moses gets a glass of water, hands it to Mary, and tells her to drink. He then tells her to lie on the bed, even gently pushing her toward it with his hand—and Mary notes that this is the first time she has ever "touched the flesh of a native." He then covers her feet with her coat and leaves. Mary sleeps until the late afternoon. When Dick comes home, he asks if she is ill, and Mary replies that she is just tired. As usual, he acts as if she is "not really there, a machine without a soul."

Mary is described as treating Dick like a machine in this passage, yet the person whose subjectivity is really not explored is Moses. Why does he choose to leave, and why does Mary's outburst compel him to stay? Why is he kind to her, considering the abuse he has suffered at her hands? Does he notice and/or understand Mary's feelings for him? Lessing's decision not to include Moses's thoughts in the book arguably perpetuates the racism of the white colonial perspective, which reduces black people to animals without complex internal lives. On the other hand, the mystery of Moses's subjectivity helps illustrate the extent to which all the white characters are absolutely ignorant about the lives of native people.

A week passes, and Moses does not mention leaving again. Eventually, he turns to Mary at a random moment and says: "Madame asked me to stay. I stay to help Madame. If Madame cross, I go." He asks her if he works well, and she says yes, which leads him to ask why she is then "always cross." Mary feels the same anger rise up inside her, but says nothing.

Moses is the only person seemingly willing to confront Mary directly about her irrational anger and hatred of those she perceives as weak. Yet Mary is, as ever, unwilling to look inward and wrestle with her complex feelings, and so represses them once again.

A few months later, when Mary refuses lunch, Moses makes it for her anyway, telling her she must eat. There is a new dynamic between them; Mary feels "helplessly in his power." Moses begins asking her questions in a new, familiar tone, such as when she thinks the war will be over or if Jesus would approve of people killing each other. Mary bristles at the "implied criticism" of this second question, and says that Jesus is "on the side of good people." Later, she asks Dick where Moses comes from, and Dick explains that he is a "mission boy," a group of people Dick disapproves of because he believes native people should not be taught to read and write.

The relationship between Mary and Moses is now an important foil (contrast) to the relationship between Mary and Dick. Within the social hierarchy of Southern Rhodesia, Dick occupies a powerful position; although he is not rich, he is a landowning white man of English descent, placing him above Mary and the native people with whom he interacts every day. Moses, meanwhile, is at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Despite this, Moses exudes a power that Dick cannot. Where Dick is sickly, indecisive, and seemingly frightened of Mary, Moses is physically powerful, strong-willed, and fearless. Moses exercises a power over Mary that Mary always craved from Dick, and this is undoubtedly part of why she is attracted to him.

Mary has started having nightmares during her long sleeps. She dreams that Moses forces her to touch him, and during the days she feels wary of his kindness to her. In February, Dick becomes ill with malaria. The doctor comes back and scolds Mary for not having mosquito-proofed their house as he advised. Charlie Slatter is also present, and silently daydreams about what he will do when he takes over Dick's farm. This time Mary does not take over the supervision of the farm workers while Dick is ill. Mary instead stays up tending to Dick at night, and one day Moses asks if she's been staying up every night, before offering to take over and look after Dick himself. At first Mary refuses, but Moses insists.

Dream sequences are an important way in which novelists explore the internal lives of their characters, particularly when it comes to repressed memories and desires. Here, for example, is the first time that Mary expresses sexual feelings for Moses, even if these feelings are ones of disgust and fear (and even if they are unconscious).

Mary lies tensely on the sofa, listening for sounds from the bedroom. When she eventually falls asleep, she dreams that she is a child again. She sees her mother and her father in a moment of physical affection and runs away in disgust. Next she dreams that her father is forcefully holding her head in his lap. She then believes that she has woken up, and is in the house on Dick's farm—yet Dick is dead. She sees that Moses has opened the window, and blames the cold for Dick's death. She then feels Moses coming toward her, and as he gets nearer he fuses with the figure of her father. Mary screams and wakes up.

This is the first time it becomes relatively clear that Mary's father sexually abused her as a child. (Lessing never makes this point entirely explicit, which could be for stylistic, moral, or political reasons, or due to the more conservative standards for literary fiction that were in place at the time the novel was published.) The glimpse of Mary's subjectivity provided through her dream raises a host of further questions. Is she afraid of sex due to childhood trauma? Does she want to have sex with Moses? Is she afraid of her desire for Moses because of what it would mean for Dick?

Moses is standing sleepily next to Mary, holding a tray of tea. He puts the tray down and assures her that Dick is asleep. Moses asks Mary why she is afraid of him, and she unconvincingly assures him she is not. That day, Dick gets steadily better, and within a week he is back at work. However, Mary hardly notices her husband; she feels "possessed" by Moses's presence and the power he exudes over her. Mary can only relax when Moses has left the house; she longs to ask Dick if they can fire Moses, but says nothing. She senses that Moses, with his "easy," nonchalant attitude, is also waiting for something to happen. They are two "antagonists," but he has the upper hand.

Again, the portrayal of Moses in this passage may lead some to accuse Lessing of reinforcing racist stereotypes about black people. For example, the word "possessed" suggests that Moses is a magical, demonic figure. On the other hand, perhaps Lessing is simply depicting the version of Moses that exists in Mary's mind. This is markedly different from Moses's true self, which the reader only captures in glimpses—such as the emotive moment when he asks Mary why she is afraid of him.

CHAPTER 10

Dick and Mary would be shocked to learn that they have been the subject of gossip in the "district" for many years. This is all the fault of the Slatters, the narrator says. Mrs. Slatter was stung by having been snubbed by Mary so many times and the strangely formal manner in which Mary refused her invitations. Charlie, meanwhile, told his wife about the time Mary ran away from Dick, when he drove her to the train station. The story of Mary's escape has then become much more dramatic through having been circulated as gossip.

As the narrator zooms out from the Turners' constrictive world, we see just how isolated they really are even within the isolated communities of the other white settlers. It's clear that part of the Slatters disapproval comes from a sense of moral judgment—the fact that the Turners have such an unhappy marriage, and especially a publically *unhappy marriage, makes the other settlers scorn and distance themselves from them.*

Charlie remains fixated on the Turners because he hopes to acquire Dick's farm for himself. Before the First World War, Charlie had been poor, but—like many maize farmers—the war made him rich almost overnight. Charlie's farm remains profitable, but he needs to expand in order to keep getting richer. For years Charlie has been expecting Dick to go bankrupt, and one day he asks aloud how the Turners manage to stay afloat. Mrs. Slatter replies: "Because they live like pigs and never buy anything."

This passage then makes clear the connection between social propriety and capitalism within white settler culture in Southern Rhodesia. Dick and Mary are excluded in part due to their unfriendliness and desire to "keep to themselves," but as Mrs. Slatter's final comment makes clear, their main offence is their poverty, which their neighbors likely believe lowers the status of the white race as a whole. Furthermore, Mrs. Slatter's words suggest that Dick and Mary's greatest crime may not even be their poverty itself, but their lack of desire to both make and spend money. By living "like pigs" with little interest in consumption, Dick and Mary defy the capitalist logic of the colonial world.

Two years pass when Charlie does not see the Turners, and when Charlie realizes this he goes to their farm immediately. He feels guilty, as he had always considered himself a "mentor" to Dick. Driving up, Charlie notes that the farm is in a bad state. He approaches Dick, who is very thin and clearly ill. Dick explains that he gets a fever twice a year, and that although Mary is not ill herself she is "nervy" and "run down." They get into Charlie's car, and Dick notes that he sold his own car. They discuss one of Dick's failed farming experiments, and then Charlie asks again about Mary. Dick says that he doesn't know what's wrong, but that she doesn't care about anything anymore, just "sits and does nothing," and that she no longer even nags Moses as she used to. Charlie gently suggests that Dick and Mary sell the farm to him and leave, but Dick refuses.

Charlie's mixed attributes highlight the way in which people are rarely either straightforwardly good or bad. At certain points in the novel, Charlie is a threatening, antagonistic presence who actively works against the interests of Dick while pretending to be his friend. At other times, Charlie is generous and kind, and seems to want to truly help Dick. Yet even at these moments, is Charlie supporting Dick out of compassion, or because he does not want to demean and humiliate the white race as he sees it? As with all of the characters in the novel, Charlie defies easy moral categorization.

At the house they greet Mary, who has changed dresses and is putting on a false show of cheerful hospitality. Charlie agrees to stay for dinner, and Mary goes to find Moses. The dinner is unappetizing, and afterward Mary asks Moses to fetch some oranges for dessert with the same "flirtatiousness and coyness" with which she speaks to Charlie. Moses replies that the oranges are gone, his tone surprisingly informal. Charlie is speechless; he looks at Dick, who cannot meet his eyes, and then at Mary, who seems to realize that Charlie has "noticed something."

Some characters in the novel (including Mary herself) treat the notion of a white woman feeling sexual desire for a black man as an impossibility. However, after observing just one brief exchange between Mary and Moses, Charlie immediately assumes that they have a sexual relationship. This is never confirmed or denied within the narrative, but to some extent the reality matters less than the social consequences of other white people assuming it is the case.

Charlie then asks about Moses and suggests that they fire him, but Dick replies: "Mary likes him." Hearing this, Charlie insists that he and Dick speak outside, alone. Charlie tells Dick that he "must" take Mary away, and even offers to let Dick stay on as manager of the farm. The narrator says that Charlie's insistence emerges from the social demand that white South Africans don't let other whites "sink below a certain point" in order to maintain the racial hierarchy. Dick understands this, yet fights with Charlie for four hours before agreeing to give up the farm.

The urgency with which Charlie pleads with Dick to leave the farm illustrates the extent to which a sexual relationship between Mary and Moses would be seen as an unforgiveable, irredeemable transgression. Furthermore, it wouldn't just shame Dick and Mary, but in Charlie's eyes it would threaten the entire racial hierarchy of their society—white people as a whole are always supposed to be "superior" to native people.

Dick returns to the house feeling broken, and finds Mary curled up in a "lump" on the sofa. Mary barely speaks to Dick at this point; she only seems "alive" when Moses is in the room. Charlie immediately starts looking for someone to take over Dick's farm, and finds a candidate in the form of a well-educated young man freshly arrived from England (Tony). However, when Charlie and Tony go to the farm, Dick is resistant to leave so soon. Charlie offers Dick the chance to come back and run the farm once he's had a holiday, a proposal that Dick rejects as "charity." However, what Charlie is offering is not really charity, but rather "self-preservation"—a defense of "white standards" against black people. After a long argument, Dick agrees to leave at the end of the month.

For Charlie, defending the racial order is more important than the needs or preferences of any individual person. He feels that he (and all other white people) are personally implicated in Mary's inappropriate behavior. At the same time, Mary's (perceived) transgression is so scandalous that Charlie cannot even explicitly point it out to Dick, and the thought of confronting Mary (or Moses) about it directly is unthinkable. In this sense, the laws of propriety and racial hierarchy act in an invisible—yet nonetheless extraordinarily powerful—manner.

Tony, meanwhile, is thrilled to have found a job so soon after moving to Southern Rhodesia. He is 20 years old and has a cousin who made a fortune in **tobacco** farming, which inspired him to move as well. Tony pities Dick but also somewhat romanticizes his struggle. Tony has "progressive" ideas about race, and has brought a large number of books with him—however, the narrator notes that he will never read them.

Tony's presence in the narrative is significant because of the way he represents the English culture and ideals from which the settler characters have become detached. Tony is depicted as progressive yet naïve, still unaccustomed to the brutal reality of life in Southern Rhodesia.

Tony eats meals with the Turners, but Dick is so morose that they barely communicate. Tony rarely sees Mary, but when he does he is shocked by the strange bursts of energy that puncture her otherwise flat, defeated behavior. He reasons that Mary is mentally unstable. One day, Tony suggests that Mary should start packing for the holiday, and Dick concurs; however, she does nothing, leaving Dick to do it instead, and Tony concludes that she must have had a "complete nervous breakdown." Tony thinks that both Dick and Mary ought to see a psychologist.

Tony understands Mary's mental instability in purely medical terms, rather than something that has come about as a result of the brutal, isolated, and perverse world in which she has been forced to live. Furthermore, Tony assumes that once Mary and Dick go on holiday everything will be resolved; however, given what we know about Mary's history and relationship to Dick, this does not seem likely.

Three days before Dick and Mary's departure, Tony suffers from heatstroke and takes the afternoon off from work. He is lying in his hut when he realizes that he doesn't have any water. Tony walks into the house quietly, not wanting to disturb Mary from a nap. After he has finished drinking, he spots Moses helping Mary to get dressed, pulling her dress over her head and doing it up from behind. Mary thanks him and tells him he better go because Dick will be back soon. As Moses leaves, he catches Tony's eye but says nothing. Tony is so shocked that he must sit down. He reflects on the racial order that governs life in Southern Rhodesia, and the way in which this is inflected by sexual anxiety. Although Tony is a supposedly progressive person, he imagines a white woman having sex with a black man as akin to her having sex with an animal.

As for many of the other characters in the novel, Tony finds the notion of a white woman and black man having a sexual relationship practically unthinkable. It is worth noting at this point that the reverse situation—white men having sex with indigenous women—is a central part of the colonial project. Sexual violence is one of the key ways in which colonizers overpower and exploit indigenous populations. However, the idea of Mary desiring Moses is a stark violation of the colonial ideal of white femininity.

When Tony sees Mary, he asks if Moses always dresses her; she replies that he has little money and needs the work. Mary then begins to speak nonsensically, but Tony tells himself that she is not "mad," but rather simply living in her own world. Mary becomes increasingly upset and moans about wanting "him" to "go away," yet it is not clear who she is talking about. Moses arrives in the doorway, and Tony shouts at him to leave. Moses asks Mary if she is going away and if Tony is coming too, and Tony gets increasingly infuriated. He feels ready to kill Moses, and just at that moment Moses leaves. This causes Mary to become hysterical and accuse Tony of ruining everything. Tony comforts her, and resolves to tell Dick to fire Moses. However, Moses does not return.

This is the first time in which Mary expresses her feelings about Moses out loud; however, the nature of their relationship remains just as mysterious as before. Mary's erratic behavior and nonsensical statements could be taken as an indication of her mental incapacitation. On the other hand, perhaps her contradictory words speak to the inexpressibility of her true feelings. Because Mary's desire for Moses defies colonial logic to such an extreme degree, she is not able to understand or express these feelings, and is thus reduced to incomprehensible hysteria.

CHAPTER 11

Mary wakes up suddenly in the middle of the night. At first she feels comfortable and rested, but before long she bursts into tears. Dick wakes and asks her if she's sad that they are leaving, but Mary doesn't answer—she finds the question ridiculous and feels resentful of Dick's presence. Mary gets out of bed, looks through the window, and sees the beginning of sunrise. She wonders why she didn't have any nightmares that night, but instead woke peacefully, feeling well-rested. She feels joyful; however, as the sun rises higher, this joy turns to pain and dread.

There is an important shift that takes place in this final chapter regarding the way Mary's thoughts are presented on the page. Up until this point, the narrator illustrates the ways in which Mary's behavior is inspired by her thoughts and feelings, thus highlighting the internal logic of her mind. At this point, however, the narrator's description of Mary's existence matches the erratic state of her subjectivity.

Dick gets dressed and urges Mary to do the same. Mary almost calls for Moses, but stops herself. She stacks plates in the kitchen and thinks about Moses, imagining he is outside in the bush waiting for her. She becomes convinced that night will "finish her" and that she deserves this, even though she is not sure what sin she has committed. She imagines the house rotting after she leaves, being subsumed by plants and animals. People will walk past the remains and casually note the fact that it was once the Turners' house.

Visions, thoughts, and emotions start to occur to Mary almost at random, and she oscillates between different mental and emotional states at breathless speed. Furthermore, Mary now seems to be aware of the future in an almost mystical manner, shown by the fact that she predicts that Moses will kill her and that the farm will be abandoned and overgrown.

Suddenly, Mary cannot bear to be in the house any longer. She runs out, hoping she meets "*him*" in the bush, and imagining that it will then "all be over." She looks closely at a sapling with beetles crawling all over its knotted trunk, and realizes that she has never really looked at the trees before. Feeling panicked, Mary runs back to the house, where a native man is holding a note from Dick saying he is too busy to come back for lunch and asking Mary to send some tea and sandwiches. After Mary sends off this man, she thinks about Tony, suddenly convinced that he will "save her."

Mary's state of mind in this passage shows that she no longer experiences the world rationally, but rather symbolically. When she runs outside, the tree she encounters seems to be a reflection of herself; although it is only a sapling, it has a knotted trunk like an old tree and is crawling with beetles, evoking the poisonous, parasitical force that has seemingly taken over Mary's mind.

Mary sits down on the **veranda** and closes her eyes; she opens them to find that she has slept through her last day on the farm, and that it is now late afternoon. She frantically searches the house for signs that Moses came while she was asleep. She comes across a big suitcase full of books about Cecil Rhodes (the Englishman who led the conquest of southern Africa in the late 19th century), but does not read them.

The suitcase full of books about Cecil Rhodes at first seems to be an odd detail that jars with the rest of the narrative. Yet by encountering and then ignoring the books, Mary symbolically betrays the colonial project Rhodes advocated. She no longer feels a sense of loyalty to other white settlers; the only person who matters to her (whether as enemy or beloved) is Moses.

Mary suddenly realizes that she needs to go to the **store**. When she enters, she finds Moses waiting there, and she stumbles back out again with a cry. As she runs away from the store, she notices Tony, but now realizes that he will not "save" her after all. She is convinced that she will live on the farm until she dies. Tony speaks to her gently, telling her that he suggested Dick take her to the doctor the next day. Mary's response is erratic; she tells Tony she has been ill for years, before whispering: "*He* is in there" while pointing to the store.

In this passage, Moses's presence is most obviously comparable to that of a ghost—a specter that is either haunting Mary alone, or is a figment of Mary's imagination. In Victorian literature, there exists a trope of ghosts haunting women, and this narrative is often linked to explorations of repressed sexuality. In this sense, Moses is both a ghost haunting Mary and a figment of her imagination.

Mary goes back into the house, where Dick is sitting at the table and waiting for her. He asks if she's finished packing, but she simply cackles with laughter. Tony and Dick eat supper, but Mary refuses food. Eventually Mary hears Dick calling for her to come to bed, but she is standing at the back door, staring at Moses. She tells Dick: "He's outside," but when Dick comes out he finds no one there.

Moses clearly has a special relationship with Mary and little interest in the other characters; at the same time, Mary's fear of Moses is seemingly irrational and baseless, the product of her own mind.

Eventually Mary gets into bed. Dick tells her that she is ill and that they must see the doctor. Mary responds that she has always been ill, and that it is an illness inside her heart. In the darkness, Mary thinks she sees Moses in the bedroom, but realizes there is nothing there. Mary gets up and creeps through the house, feeling that the sensation of the carpet and curtains on her skin is like being touched by animal fur. She goes out onto the **veranda**, where she finally feels safe.

As Mary descends further into delusion and paranoia, she seems to sense the house already being subsumed by the wilderness. Her acceptance of her "illness" appears to be more than just an acknowledgment of her mental state—the fact that she says she's "always" been ill suggests that she sees some fundamental flaw in herself, or perhaps a fundamental disconnect between her "heart" and the world she has been forced to live in.

Suddenly, Mary sees Moses emerging from the darkness, and she is overwhelmed by a feeling of guilt. She is about to speak to him when he raises something above her head and puts his hand over her mouth. In one move, Moses kills her, and her body drops to the floor. It begins to rain, and the raindrops mix with Mary's blood dripping across the **veranda**. Moses drops his weapon, before picking it up again. He considers proclaiming his innocence, but changes his mind again and drops the weapon next to Mary's body once more. He ignores Dick, who is sleeping and who he "defeated long ago." Moses then walks to Tony's hut and listens to Tony breathing, before walking back to the house. A flash of lightning briefly illuminates Mary's body on the veranda. Finally, Moses walks into the bush and leans against a tree, where he remains until he turns himself in the next morning.

The final passage of the novel proves that Mary's premonition that Moses would kill her was correct. This provokes the question of how she knew this would happen, and the question of whether Mary's death at Moses's hand was inevitable. Under one interpretation, the transgression of a white woman sexually desiring a black man in the colonial context is so great that it can only end in violence and death. Throughout colonial and postcolonial history, black men have been killed even for the suspicion of desiring white women, and—as is revealed at the beginning of the book—this will be Moses's final fate. Another interpretation might suggest that Moses's murder of Mary represents the struggle of all colonized people to overthrow their oppressors, and in doing so to reject false notions of white innocence and racial hierarchies. Perhaps Moses then hands himself in because this struggle is not truly a sin or crime, but a symbolic restoration of justice.

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