The Coloured Curtain

Oliver T. Spedding

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In the early nineteen seventies in South Africa, John Matlala, a young black man aged nineteen, leaves the citrus farm where he has spent his entire life and sets out to seek his fortune in a country where the government is determined to stifle the development of its black citizens. His journey to the city of Johannesburg is fraught with the fear of arrest for contravening the restrictive racial laws of the time and the distrust of the white population that stifles the lives of his people. These factors create many dangerous obstacles for John during his journey. By the time he reaches Johannesburg John has learnt to distrust all his fellow men both black and white although he still possesses the naivety that his farm life instilled in him. John eventually finds accommodation and work in the Johannesburg suburb of Hillbrow but as he is illegally in the city his fear of arrest persists. John meets Jimson, a streetwise petty criminal who persuades him to join him in his criminal escapades. The two young men proceed to steal and trick people out of their possessions using non-violent means but eventually violence becomes a necessity and results in the murder of a young Indian tailor. Herman Malan is a wealthy white South African who has inherited his father's engineering business but cares little for creating the income needed to support his standard of living. His only duties at the business are to wine and dine irate and dissatisfied customers and to collect the money for the factory worker's wages on a Friday afternoon. He meets Melanie, a previous lover, falls in love with her, and plans to marry her. His parents Gerry and Christine live on a country estate in retirement. John and Jimson learn about Herman's Friday afternoon routine to the bank and set out to rob him. This leads to a sequence of events that include Herman's murder, John being raped in a men's hostel in the black city of Soweto, the love that develops between John and a young Sowetan girl Susan, John's flight from Soweto leads to a coincidence that ultimately threatens the lives of Gerry, Christine and John. Woven into this tale are the ever-present shameful and disgraceful discriminatory laws of apartheid.



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