

Chapter Outline

Prologue

In the opening chapter, Neel arrives in Africa to start a new life. His boss Conrad meets him at the airport and whisks him off to a remote camp in the African bush.

Part I

1

Neel learns his way around Conrad's camp. He discovers the four cages that prop up this parallel universe: the kitchen, which safeguards material/edible goods; the monkey cage, which protects the camp's inhabitants from a ferocious animal; the zebra cage, which shelters a defenseless orphan; and the black manservant's hut, which propagates the grip of racial privilege.

2

Neel is introduced to the nature of Conrad's work as a wildlife ecologist. He learns about Conrad's fascination with parasites and his love of women. He also learns about the two women central to Conrad's life—his ex-girlfriend Jenna and his current muse Sophie.

3

Neel and Conrad get to know each other better. Over time, Neel comes to appreciate the gulf that divides the races in South Africa. He also learns about Conrad's unique place in that gulf.

4

Jenna (Conrad's ex) stops by for dinner and decides to stay the night. Later, Conrad is called in to investigate an emergency involving a suspected rhino poacher who has been spotted on the reserve grounds. On their way to the poacher, they are joined by their neighbor Karl. What starts out as an expedition to save wildlife amounts to terrible cruelty against an elderly black woman. Conrad and Karl force the woman into the trunk of their car and abandon her on a desolate highway.

5

Neel is unable to forgive himself for being a silent accomplice to the violence. He seeks out comfort in the cage of the orphaned zebra Nwana. Neel feels protective of Nwana. He is also in awe of her.

6

The bond between Conrad and Neel deepens, even as new rifts come to life. Conrad reveals intimate details about his life, including his romantic history with previous employees. Neel, in turn, comes out to Conrad as a gay man and is surprised by the warmth with which the information is received.

7

This chapter focuses on Conrad's pet monkey Obama. Neel learns more about the special bond that Conrad shares with Obama, and this sheds light on the pervasive contradictions that mark Conrad's own existence.

Part II

1

Conrad and Neel head over to their neighbor Karl's house to install a well. There, Karl's wife Shelley corners Neel and delivers a warning: Jenna thinks Conrad and Neel are sleeping together, and she wants to bring this liaison to an end at any cost. Neel disregards Shelley's warning but is nonetheless shaken by it.

2

Conrad and Neel head to Acornhoek, a black reservation, to vaccinate cattle against foot-and-mouth disease. They are joined by the employees of a Johannesburg pharmaceutical company. Over many hours, the group tethers and vaccinates nine cows. Conrad ends the day with a sermon about the importance of their particular philanthropy.

3

Conrad takes Neel along to a luxury game reserve. Neel learns more about the hypocrisies of the wildlife tourism industry in South Africa. On their way back, Conrad and Neel's relationship endures yet another test.

4

At the height of the dry season, one of Conrad's clients calls out for help: his reserve has too many animals and too little food. Conrad and Neel go out to shoot impala. They survive a terrifying encounter with wildlife in the reserve.

5

Neel shoots his first wild animals. The experience leaves him shaken. Later that night, Conrad reveals his most toxic secret to Neel: Conrad is an assassin for the South African government; he leads a squad that travels abroad undercover and kills suspected rhino poachers and their families. Conrad shows Neel a picture of the first man he killed.

6

Neel has a dream. In the morning, he goes to see Jenna. She is unstable but kind, and their conversation leaves him as befuddled as ever.

Part III

1

Camp Mopane hosts visitors for the week, and one of them becomes smitten with Neel. After dinner, they accompany Neel to Nwana's cage for a feeding. Then, a lion appears.

2

Conrad steps in to save the day. He keeps the lion at bay and protects his assistants and guests from possible harm. Later that night, Neel and Rob's romance kindles.

3

Conrad and Neel, accompanied by the Americans, return to the Martens' residence to continue their work on the well. Neel and Rob have a surprise encounter with Shelley in the forest. She seems more unstable than before, and she delivers a more dire warning: Jenna is planning to kill Neel.

4

Neel informs Conrad about Shelley's threat, and he refuses to take it seriously. Then, on his day off, Neel and the Americans head to town to get a taste of the local party scene. They meet Spoon, a charming social worker who lives in the area. Their first stop is Acornhoek, the black reservation. Things are fun for a time, and then tensions surge.

5

After Acornhoek, the party heads to a bar in Hoedspruit, a white town. A fight breaks out at the bar, and a surprising new facet of South African society is revealed: the man who breaks up the fight, a white man in a white suit, is a neo-Nazi.

6

Conrad comes to town to pick up Neel and the others. On their way back, he find out that Obama has escaped from his cage. Conrad panics. When they reach camp, the monkey is nowhere to be seen. Then, as Neel and the Americans are making their way to safety, Obama appears. Neel survives a possibly fatal encounter; in the process, he earns glimpses into surprising facets of his companions' personalities: Rob abandons Neel to save his own neck, while Conrad rushes in to save him. At the end of the chapter, Obama dies and Conrad is inconsolable.

Epilogue

Conrad informs Neel that he is fired. Neel is shocked by the news but accepts it eventually. Then, as he is returning to his hut, he finds a warning scribbled in the dust. This is the last straw, and Neel knows that it really is time to go.