

July's People

Summary

July's People is a 1981 novel by the South African writer Nadine Gordimer.

The novel is set during a fictional civil war in which black South Africans have violently overturned the system of apartheid. The story follows the Smales, a liberal White South African family who were forced to flee Johannesburg to the native village of their black servant, July.

Bamford and Maureen Smales, a liberal, white couple, flee with their three children from their home in a comfortable residential district of Johannesburg and find refuge in the mud and thatched hut village that contains the extended family of their black servant, July.

July then becomes their protector. He quarters them in one of the dwellings that had been occupied by his wife. She resents the eviction, thinking that the whites should seek help from other whites, but defers to the authority of her husband. The lives of the white visitors are transformed beyond their imagination. In the bush they have none of the amenities of their former existence: no electricity, no running water, no modern sanitation. Time, as the family once knew it, begins to lose meaning. Desperate for outside news, the adults practically worship their radio, fearful that its batteries might give out. Yet the garbled transmissions they receive do not tell them the fate of their society and its chances of survival...

Extracts

1) *"- And soap? – She was cherishing a big cake of toilet soap, carefully drying it after each use... Soap he had remembered to take from her store-cupboard? His clean clothes smelled of Lifebuoy she bought for them – the servants. He didn't say; perhaps merely not to boasts his foresight. She was going to ask- and quite saw that she could not."*

2) *"But the transport of a novel, the false awareness of being within another time, place and life that was the pleasure of reading for her, was not possible. She was in another*

time, place, consciousness; it pressed in upon her and filled her as someone's breath fills a balloon's shape. She was already not what she was. No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination.

They had nothing."

- 3) *She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything: what he had had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him. But for himself—to be intelligent, honest, dignified for her was nothing; his measure as a man was taken elsewhere and by others. She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people.*