The Lonely Londoners

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAM SELVON

Born in Trinidad in 1923 to Indian parents, Sam Selvon was the sixth of seven children. After attending school in his hometown of San Fernando, he started working for the Royal Naval Reserve when he was only fifteen. After five years as a radio operator for the Reserve, he relocated to Port of Spain, where he was a reporter and occasional literary writer for the *Trinidad Guardian*. It was during his time as a newspaperman that he started writing seriously, though he often used pseudonyms. Moving to London in the 1950s, he took a job as a clerk at the Indian Embassy and wrote during his time off, which he used to pen poems and short stories that eventually went on to be published in various British journals. He also published his first novel, *A Brighter Sun*, in 1952, shortly after arriving in England, but his most widely-known work, *The Lonely Londoners*, came out four years later. Throughout his career, he wrote thirteen books and two collections of plays. He also married twice and had four children between both marriages. In the 1970s he moved to Canada, where he remained until dying at the age of 70 during a visit to Trinidad.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reading *The Lonely Londoners*, it's helpful to have some familiarity with the history of West Indian immigration into England. Above all, two historical factors are worth keeping in mind when considering the book's engagement with the history of immigration. First, many West Indians came to England during World War II to either serve in the military or to work as weapons-makers. Second, in 1948—three years after the war's end—the country passed the British Nationality Act of 1948, an act that officially granted citizenship to anybody born in "the United Kingdom and Colonies." As such, people from places like Trinidad and Jamaica—areas colonized by the British—were permitted unrestrained entry into the United Kingdom for the first time. Because there were more economic opportunities in London than in the West Indies, West Indians began immigrating in large numbers virtually overnight.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* exists in the tradition of Caribbean Migrant Literature, a genre interested in ideas of migration, integration, and postcolonialism. One lesser-known predecessor of *The Lonely Londoners* is George Lamming's *The Emigrants*, a book about Caribbean migration to London and the various trials and tribulations that people face when trying to acclimate to new cultures. Another—more famous—related literary work is Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which examines the flipside of integration, focusing on what happens to a culture when its colonizers suddenly leave. Lastly, Frantz Fanon's work of postcolonial theory *Black Skin, White Masks* is worth mentioning, as it interrogates the psychological effects of racism on formerly colonized people, and examines interracial sexual dynamics in depth—a major theme in *The Lonely Londoners*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Lonely Londoners
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1956
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Migrant Literature, Caribbean Literature
- **Setting:** London in the 1950s
- **Climax:** Because *The Lonely Londoners* is an episodic novel that focuses on character sketches and anecdotes instead of a straightforward plotline, it is impossible to pinpoint a climax in the text. However, the book's most climactic moments usually come when the characters navigate the many obstacles inherent to the immigrant experience, like grappling with London's entrenched racism or trying to attain upward mobility.
- **Antagonist:** The subtle racism (referred to in the book as "the old English diplomacy") that interferes with Moses and his friends' ability to prosper in London.
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Finding the Voice. When he first started writing *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon used plain, straightforward English to tell his tale. Before long, though, he realized that this style of narration was unfit for the subject matter, so he changed his authorial tone, employing instead the creolized English that so perfectly captures the nuanced vernacular of his characters.

Pressure. In 1976, twenty years after he wrote *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon co-wrote *Pressure*, a movie about a black boy born in Britain to Trinidadian parents. Forty-one years later, *The Telegraph* declared the film the forty-second best British film in history.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Lonely Londoners doesn't follow a straightforward plotline—instead, it describes the experiences of a group of West Indian immigrants living in London in the 1950s through a series of loosely connected vignettes. In an episodic style, the unnamed narrator focuses primarily on Moses, an immigrant from Trinidad who has lived in London for roughly six years. A night laborer, he goes to Waterloo Station to greet Galahad, a young Trinidadian man arriving in London for the first time. Although the two men have never met, a mutual friend has asked Moses to help Galahad get settled.

While Moses waits for Galahad to arrive, he runs into a Jamaican friend named Tolroy, who's at the station to pick up his mother. Apparently, Tolroy has saved up enough money to bring her over from Jamaica, a fact that astounds Moses, who can't fathom being able to save so much money from his meager paychecks. As they wait, a British reporter approaches and mistakenly assumes Moses is Jamaican, asking him why so many people from Jamaica come to England. As Moses answers, though, the reporter turns to interview Tolroy's family, all of whom are suddenly barreling out of the train. This surprises Tolroy because he only expected his mother. Instead, though, Tanty—his aunt—has come too, along with his relatives Lewis and Agnes and their two children. He laments this fact, asking his mother why she brought so many people with her, but she and his aunt scold him for not embracing his family and they choose to ignore his protests that there isn't enough money and lodging to accommodate the entire family.

When Galahad finally appears on the platform, Moses is shocked to see that he's wearing nothing but "an old grey tropical suit." What's more, he doesn't even have any luggage. When Moses asks if he's cold, Galahad insists he doesn't think the weather is particularly chilly, and adds that he decided to not bring any luggage because he'll simply buy new belongings once he starts working. Because of Galahad's optimism, Moses views the young man as headstrong and naïve, frequently intoning, "Take it easy" when Galahad asks eager questions about life in London. In this manner, the two men get to know one another on their way from Waterloo to Moses's small apartment, where they have dinner and Moses finally relaxes, allowing himself to reminisce about life in Trinidad.

The next morning, Galahad tells Moses that, although he appreciates his advice, he'd prefer to discover things on his own. Galahad sets off into London on his own, determined to make his way to the employment office to secure a job. On his way, though, he becomes suddenly disoriented and begins to doubt himself, worrying that he won't remember how to get back to Moses's. Having predicted this outcome, though, Moses follows Galahad and appears just when the young man begins to fret. Thankful for his new friend's guidance, Galahad admits to needing Moses's assistance, and the men go together to the employment office, which the narrator describes as "a place where a lot of men get together to look for work and draw money from the Welfare State while they ain't working." As Moses and Galahad wait in line, Moses explains that many immigrants choose to draw on government assistance as their only income—something he himself scorns because he believes it "mudd[ies] the water" for other immigrants who merely want to support themselves with honest jobs. Galahad agrees with this outlook, and decides to not subsist solely on welfare.

At this point, the narrator describes a Nigerian immigrant called Captain, a man Moses has known since his first days in London. Captain—known as Cap—originally came to England to study law, but soon became consumed by life in the city, spending all his father's money on "woman and cigarette." As a result, his father eventually stopped sending money, and so Cap started borrowing from his friends and lovers. When Cap doesn't have anywhere to stay, he endears himself to white women, moves in with them, and spends their money—all the while courting other women. To illustrate Cap's tendency to take advantage of people's kindness, the narrator tells a story about a time when he simultaneously dated an Austrian woman and a German woman, both of whom helped him stay afloat financially. At one point, Cap borrowed eight pounds from the German woman, and when she finally came after him to recoup the money, he stole a watch from his English girlfriend, took it to the pawn shop, and sold it for money.

Having provided a brief character study of the wily Cap, the narrator explains that Galahad meets many interesting people during his first days in London. One such person is Bart, a light-skinned black immigrant who tries to convince people he's Latino and avoids lending money to friends at all costs. Bart works in a "clerical job" and holds onto it as if it were gold, not wanting to have to work in a factory. He also worries about the fact that so many new immigrants are coming to London, fearing they'll "make things hard in Brit'n" for him. In keeping with this fear, he also doesn't like to be seen with people who look "too black." When he falls in love with a white woman named Beatrice, he decides to ask for her hand in marriage, but is shouted out of the house upon meeting her father. Nonetheless, they keep dating until one day Beatrice disappears. Worried he'll never be able to date a white woman again, Bart scours the city looking for her, always asking his friends if they've seen her, and even deciding to work as a doorman at a nightclub she frequents in the hopes of spotting her.

One night, while working with Lewis—Tolroy's relative—Moses decides to have a little fun with him, telling him that women often sleep with other men while their husbands are off working the nightshift. Deeply worried, Lewis tells his boss he has a headache and rushes home, where he beats Agnes even though she's alone. Unfortunately, this doesn't settle the matter, and he continues to physically abuse her and accuse her

of adultery until she finally leaves him, and even Tanty won't tell him where she's gone.

Continuing in this episodic, character-oriented manner of storytelling, the narrator considers the ways in which London has accommodated immigrants, noting that racism exists alongside a certain sense of entrepreneurship and tokenization, which is made evident by the white people who open businesses that cater directly to the immigrant population. One such establishment is a suit store that treats the black community with particular kindness, encouraging each customer to tell his friends to frequent the shop, where they'll be offered complimentary cigars. Similarly, a certain grocer stocks his store with the staples of West Indian cuisine, which are otherwise impossible to find in London. Tanty greatly appreciates this and she visits the shop on a regular basis. Indeed, the grocery store falls within the small boundaries of the city in which Tanty feels comfortable. The narrator notes that the old woman lives a small-town life in the enormous city, never venturing beyond her immediate neighborhood. Nonetheless, she has learned the ins and outs of public transportation and speaks knowledgably with her visitors about which line they took to reach her home. One day, she finally journeys outside the small radius of her neighborhood when Tolory's mother accidentally takes the cupboard key with her to work, forcing Tanty to take not only the underground train, but also a double-decker bus. "Now nobody could tell she that she ain't travel by bus or tube in London," the narrator remarks.

As Galahad spends more time in London, he becomes enamored of the city's beauty and its intoxicating, addictive qualities. He loves going to Piccadilly Circus and looking at the lights. While walking the streets dressed in his finest clothes one day—enjoying the city and the feeling of existing within it—he says "good evening" to a white woman and her child, and the child yells, "Mummy, look at that black man!" The mother quickly replies, "You mustn't say that, dear!" Nonetheless, Galahad stoops and gives the child a kindhearted pat on the cheek, but the child shrinks away and cries. "What a sweet child!" he continues. "What's your name?" Uncomfortable with his closeness, the mother slowly backs away. The next day, Galahad looks at his own hand and reflects that the color of his skin causes all his troubles.

In the last third of the novel, Selvon explores further the ways in which black and white people interact in London. This dynamic often manifests itself in the romantic and sexual relationships the narrator describes. In a stream-of-consciousness sentence that runs for nine pages, the narrator gives an account of **Hyde Park** in the summertime, where white and black people alike congregate to find sexual partners. One summer day, Moses is approached by a white man in the park. "You are just the man I am looking for," the stranger says, and takes Moses to a blonde woman and offers Moses money to "go with the woman" while he watches—a proposition to which Moses agrees. This kind of rendezvous often take place in the park during the summer, and it is perhaps for this reason that the narrator—along with Moses—romanticizes summertime in London. In fact, the summertime is so appealing, it seems, that people like Moses are willing to endure grueling winters with almost no heat and very little food, constantly questioning whether they should return to their home countries, where life is warmer and easier. The narrator concludes the text reflecting that people put up with the difficulties of life in London for its fleeting joys, and to be able to say that they lived at the center of the world.

CHARACTERS

Moses – The protagonist, a Trinidadian man living in London. At the outset of *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses has been in England for roughly ten years, making him somewhat of a mentor and role model to many newly-arrived immigrants. A manual laborer who works nights, he spends his days fraternizing with other immigrants, many of whom he judges even though he counts them among his friends. Indeed, Moses is a man of principal, somebody who resents the fact that some of his fellow immigrants take advantage of the Welfare State by taking unemployment money without even trying to secure steady jobs. To Moses, this kind of behavior only elicits criticism and prejudice from the many white Londoners who already think black immigrants are a scourge, flooding the city and draining its resources. When Moses meets Galahad at Waterloo Station and shows the young immigrant the ins and outs of life in England, he counsels his new friend by emphasizing that immigrants who don't work ultimately "muddy the water" for other black people who are trying to make their way in a racist, unforgiving city. Despite his strong views about this topic, though, Moses is friends with people who fully embody this kind of complacency, frequently spending time with wily characters like Cap, a man who goes from person to person borrowing money and refusing to get a job. Unfortunately, Moses feels discouraged by the idea that people like Cap lead seemingly prosperous lives even though they never work, especially since he himself has dedicated the better part of a decade to toiling away in the hopes of climbing the socioeconomic ladder. By the end of the novel, Moses finds himself experiencing a stasis, and feeling that he'll never make enough money to become upwardly mobile. Although this thought encourages him to return to Trinidad, he also can't quite bring himself to leave London, a city he has come to love—at least in the summertime. As such, he finds himself caught in limbo, unwilling to abandon his dreams of upward mobility but also sorely missing his homeland.

Galahad (Henry Oliver) – A high-spirited Trinidadian man who comes to London seeking economic opportunity. Having heard

about the financial prosperity England can offer, Galahad is eager to start his new life when he hops off the train at Waterloo Station, where Moses meets him. Although the two men are strangers, they have a mutual friend who has put them in touch, and Moses agrees to show Galahad what it's like to live in London. At first, Galahad's optimism and naivety when it comes to living in this foreign city agitate Moses, who periodically tells the young man to "take it easy." Nonetheless, Galahad is determined to find his own way, informing Moses that he doesn't need advice. "It has a kind of fellar who does never like people to think that they unaccustomed to anything, or that they are strangers in a place, or that they don't know where they are going," the narrator notes, asserting that this is the mentality Galahad adopts when he arrives in London. However, when Galahad ventures outside on his own, he's struck by the overwhelming enormity of the city and finally relents, allowing himself to ask Moses for guidance. Like Moses, he wants to work hard for his money rather than living solely off welfare checks. He retains this attitude throughout the novel, holding onto his optimism and strong work ethic four years later when even Moses begins to doubt the idea that an immigrant in London can attain upward mobility or financial stability by working hard in respectable jobs. Despite the fact that Galahad is often desperate and poor (he even kills a pigeon at one point in order to eat), he refuses to believe that returning to Trinidad will help his situation, explaining to Moses that he has "no prospects back home."

Cap (Captain) – A Nigerian man living in London. The son of a wealthy family, Cap originally came to the city for law school, but he soon dropped out and spent the majority of his father's money on cigarettes and women, so that eventually his family stopped sending him an allowance. Always wearing the same outfit (a "greenstripe suit and a pair of suede shoes"), Cap is a true schmoozer and a mooch, a man constantly asking his friends if he can borrow money. Moses knows this all too well, since Cap used to stay in his room at the hostel until the landlord finally kicked him out. Deeply averse to holding down a steady job, Cap leverages his romantic relationships for money and lodgings, often becoming involved with wealthy white women in order to sustain himself financially. At one point, he even becomes romantically involved with two women at once, and when he can't repay the money one of them lends him, he steals the other's watch and pawns it in order to settle his debt. When he's not manipulating women, he has to get creative; much like Galahad, Cap resorts to eating pigeons, devising an elaborate technique of catching them from where they dwell just outside his window. Above all, this strange industriousness illustrates Cap's commitment to avoiding steady work, as he'd clearly rather cheat his friends and resort to unconventional hunting methods than accept a job as a laborer like Moses or Galahad.

Tolroy – One of Moses's friends. Originally from Jamaica, Tolroy first appears in the opening scene of *The Lonely Londoners*, when Moses is waiting to meet Galahad at Waterloo Station. Tolroy impresses Moses by explaining that he has saved up enough money to bring his mother to London from Jamaica. "I can't save a cent out of my pay," Moses confesses, and the two men talk about how Moses helped Tolroy find a factory job when the young Jamaican first came to London. Much to Tolroy's surprise, when the train pulls into Waterloo Station, his mother isn't his only family member to descend onto the platform. In fact, it seems the majority of his relatives have also come to London, including his elderly aunt Tanty Bessy, and his relatives Lewis and Agnes, along with their two children. Unfortunately, Tolroy barely has enough space—let alone money—to support this many people, but Ma insists that he mustn't complain about his family's arrival, or else he'll appear "ungrateful."

Tanty Bessy – Tolroy's elderly aunt, who surprises him by unexpectedly accompanying his mother to London. A woman who has spent her life in Jamaica, she is unaccustomed to life in the big city. As such, she tends to stay within her own neighbrohood, making frequent trips to a grocery store that stocks Jamaican products. She constantly reminds Tolroy that she was an instrumental caregiver to him when he was growing up, and she is fiercely protective of her family. When Agnes finally runs away from her abusive husband, Lewis, Tanty refuses to tell Tolroy where the young woman has gone, knowing that Tolroy will pass the information along to Lewis. Despite her old-fashioned ways, Tanty is also often adventurous and fun, as is the case when she finally ventures outside her small neighborhood anrides the metro and a double-decker bus, or when she embarrasses the demure Harris at one of his swanky parties by forcing him to dance with her in front of the high-society white people he wants so badly to impress.

Lewis – One of Tolroy's Jamaican relatives, and Agnes's husband. Like Tanty, Lewis arrives in London unannounced, having accompanied Tolroy's mother. One time during a nightshift, he asks Moses if it's true that women sleep with other men while their husbands are working at night. Because Lewis asks so many stupid questions, Moses decides to have a little fun with him by lying and saying that this is indeed a regular occurrence. A gullible man with a history of having been cheated on, Lewis is immediately perturbed, rushing to the boss and insisting that he must go home because he doesn't feel well. When he arrives, he finds that Agnes is alone, but he beats her anyway, accusing her of infidelity. Because his suspicions continue, he goes on abusing Agnes on a regular basis until, finally, she leaves him for good and presses charges against him, though nothing ever comes of the lawsuit. Although at first Lewis is distraught to have lost his wife, he quickly moves on by starting a romantic relationship with another woman.

Bart (Bartholomew) – One of Moses's Trinidadian friends. After meeting for the first time in a hostel, Moses quickly learns that Bart is a peculiar man when it comes to money, often pretending to be poor so that his friends won't ask him to help them financially. This sometimes means skipping meals to fully cultivate his image as a hungry, broke person. A light-skinned black man, Bart tries to convince people that he's Latin American. The narrator notes that he also is "always talking about this party and that meeting that he attend[ed] in the West End or in Park Lane." As such, readers see that Bart is highly concerned with his public image (the West End and Park Lane being two places where people go to see and be seen, as the expression goes). Unlike many immigrants in *The Lonely Londoners*, Bart manages to secure a clerical job, most likely because of his light complexion. As a result, though, he constantly worries about the influx of black immigrants in London, fretting that these newcomers are going to "make things hard in Brit'n." He even has "an embarrass[ed] air" when he walks with his darker-skinned friends on the street. When he falls in love with a white woman (Beatrice) and wants to marry her, he's finally forced to confront his own blackness, as her father chases him out of the house when she brings him to meet her family. Before long, Beatrice stops seeing Bart, prompting him to scour the city in search of her. Sadly enough, he's so concentrated on finding her that he gives up his clerical job in order to take a position as a doorman at one of her favorite clubs, hoping all the while to spot her on her way inside.

Daniel – One of Moses's friends. Daniel takes great delight in dating white women and paying for them to do extravagant things like go to ballets or fancy destinations throughout London. The narrator notes that "it give [Daniel] a big kick to know that one of the boys could take white girls to them places to listen to classics and see artistic ballet," even if Moses insists to him that this is an ill-advised use of his money. Unfortunately, Cap takes advantage of Daniel's desire to impress white women; more than once, he manipulates Daniel into getting involved with women he himself has wronged, doing so with the hopes that Daniel will take the women (and the debts Cap owes them) off his hands.

Big City – One of Moses's friends in London. Big City grew up in an orphanage in Trinidad before joining the army, where he earned the name "Big City" because of how much he talked about wanting to explore the world's various large-scale metropolises. The only time Big City is pleasant and happy is when it's payday—otherwise, he's "grumpy" and mean, telling friends to leave him alone. Come payday, though, he hangs out in the local bars, buying drinks for friends and strangers alike. Although he claims to have quit gambling, he always finds himself betting whatever's left of his paycheck, so that the following Monday he's already grumpy and upset about not having money. Having finished his stint in the military, Big City now lives in London with his British wife and drives his car throughout the city, though none of his friends know how he obtained this car in the first place. To occupy himself, he places bets on soccer matches, a practice Moses criticizes. Nonetheless, Big City is set on someday winning a large amount of cash, which he plans to use to visit the world's major cities. While passing time one summer in **Hyde Park**, Big City encourages the naïve Galahad to stand up and make a speech about the unfair treatment of black immigrants. Forcing the young man in front of everybody, he laughs as Galahad scrambles to collect himself. Ever since then, Galahad swears he's going to beat Big City up, but every time he gets a chance he backs down.

Five Past Twelve – One of Moses's friends. Five is a Barbadian immigrant who is so dark-skinned that he earned the nickname "Five Past Midnight" because when a person looks at him, he or she says, "Boy, you black like midnight," before adding, "No, you more like Five Past Twelve." Before moving to London, Five traveled to Trinidad, where he dated a woman many of the local men thought was too light-skinned for him. As a result, they chased him away with "a tin of pitch oil" and a "box of matches," threatening to burn him alive. After World War II, Five came to England and was in the Royal Air Force for three years before working as a truck driver making deliveries throughout England. Like many of the immigrants Moses knows, Five is somebody who, "from the time he see[s] you," is "out to borrow money." Similar to Cap, he's also quite promiscuous when it comes to his love affairs, though he doesn't leverage his relationships for money like Cap does. Instead, he eagerly seeks out parties, wanting only to have a good time when he's in the city and not driving the delivery truck. He especially seems to enjoy giving his friend Harris—who throws upscale parties for high-society white people—a hard time, showing up at his "fetes" and turning them into raucous nights of dancing, drinking, and marijuana smoking.

Harris – One of Moses's friends. A black immigrant like Moses, Harris likes to try to present himself as an Englishman, dressing in the style of a distinguished white gentleman and throwing "fetes" for high-society white people. The narrator writes, "Harris is a fellar who like to play ladeda, and he like English customs and thing, he does be polite and say thank you and he does get up in the bus and the tube to let woman sit down, which is a thing even them Englishmen don't do." Whereas Harris's fellow immigrants speak creolized English, he himself makes an effort to speak as if he were born in London. When he hosts a large party, he's distraught that his black friends show up at the door, fearing they'll ruin the atmosphere by behaving inappropriately in front of the white guests. Five Past Twelve takes special pleasure in provoking Harris, disingenuously promising to not disrupt the party but clearly intending to do just that. Interestingly enough, the more distracted and flustered Harris grows during the course of the party, the more

he forgets to maintain his British way of speaking, suddenly slipping into creolized English for a moment before catching himself.

Agnes – Lewis's wife, whom he beats because he believes she's cheating on him while he works the nightshift with Moses. After putting up with Lewis's abuse, Agnes finally leaves him, running away without telling him where she's gone. She then presses charges against him, but nothing ever comes of the lawsuit. When Tolroy tries to help Lewis track Agnes down, Tanty refuses to disclose the young woman's whereabouts.

Beatrice – A white woman who dates Bart. When Beatrice takes Bart home to introduce him to her family, her father chases him out of the house because he's black. In the aftermath of this tumultuous event, Beatrice slowly distances herself from Bart until, eventually, she moves to a different apartment without telling him. This leaves him distraught, and he searches for her throughout the city, constantly asking his friends if they've seen her.

Ma (Tolroy's Mother) – Tolroy's mother, who comes to London from Jamaica. When she arrives, she surprises Tolroy because she has brought Tanty, Lewis, Agnes, and two children with her even though the arrangement she originally made with him was that she would be the only family member coming to London. When Tolroy protests, she merely tells him to stop acting ungrateful by disrespecting his family members.

The Reporter – A newspaper reporter Moses talks to at Waterloo Station who asks why so many Jamaicans are coming to London. Later, when Tanty Bessy arrives, he asks her the same question, eventually taking her photograph and using it in an article with the headline "Now, Jamaican Families Come to Britain" which runs the following day.

THEMES

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

RACISM

The West Indian immigrants in *The Lonely Londoners* suffer not from overt racism, but rather from a more subtle type of bigotry which is quite harmful to their lives and wellbeing. Even as Londoners refrain from broadcasting their prejudices or expressing them directly, racism repeatedly shows itself to be deeply ingrained in their society. As a result, the bigotry facing black immigrants is essentially just as disempowering as the unconcealed racial hatred that runs rampant throughout the United States during the same period (the 1950s). By showcasing the ways in which his characters' lives are complicated and inhibited by England's subtle racism, Selvon demonstrates that it is perhaps even more difficult for people to thrive when the discrimination they face is understated.

Throughout *The Lonely Londoners*, white Britons are reluctant to come out and say they don't truly accept black people. This is made overwhelmingly evident by the fact that black immigrants find it so hard to secure a good job. While instructing Galahad about how to navigate the ins and outs of finding employment in London, Moses explains, "They don't tell you outright that they don't want coloured fellars, they just say sorry the vacancy get filled." Because of white Londoners' reticence to fully admit their own racism, black immigrants have to figure out for themselves that they're being held back by the color of their skin. When Galahad asks if the racism in London is worse than in America, Moses says, "The thing is, in America they don't like you, and they tell you so straight, so that you know how you stand. Over here is the old English diplomacy: 'thank you sir,' and 'how do you do' and that sort of thing." The fact that Moses refers to this kind of treatment as "the old English diplomacy" is worth considering. The word "diplomacy" can be defined as "the art of dealing with people in a sensitive and effective way," but it can also be understood in more specific terms as the "skill of managing international relations" (Merriam Webster's Dictionary). As such, when white Londoners couch their racism toward immigrants in "polite" words, they act as if they're "managing international relations" in a "sensitive" manner. In reality, of course, they're simply entrenching racial inequality. By employing "the old English diplomacy," they're able to oppress black people without ever stopping to feel guilty about it, which makes subtle forms of racism just as disempowering and pervasive as overt bigotry.

While most white Londoners hide their bigotry, some try to compensate for it by fetishizing blackness. As the narrator notes, some white Britons "feel they can't get big thrills" at a party "unless they have a black man in the company." Moses himself has experienced this dynamic, and when he leaves a party, white people often "push five pounds in his hand and pat him on the back and say that was a jolly good show." Although this might seem like an acceptance of Moses's blackness, such patronizing actions only further emphasize the unspoken rift between black and white people in London. By going out of their way to be extra polite to Moses, these white partygoers take the "old English diplomacy" to new heights, further undermining Moses, since their supposed kindness leads them to treat him not as an equal, but as a spectacle—an entertainer.

Unfortunately, the black immigrant community itself internalizes London's muted but still prominent racial prejudice. Characters like Harris—whom the narrator describes as somebody who dresses and behaves like white Englishmen—try to erase their own blackness, investing themselves in colorism, a kind of discrimination that prizes

lighter skin over darker skin (even among people of the same race). A very dark-skinned man nicknamed Five Past Midnight feels the brunt of this kind of discrimination when he tries to date a light-skinned Trinidadian woman; upset by this mixture of light and dark complexions, a group of Trinidadians chases him off and tries to set him on fire. By showcasing such incidents, Selvon illustrates just how deeply the black community has internalized England's bigotry.

Not only do the West Indian immigrants in *The Lonely Londoners* apply colorist prejudices to one another, they also unfortunately turn similar detrimental judgments onto themselves. For example, Galahad looks at his hand and starts speaking to it, saying, "Colour, [it] is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue or green, if you can't be white? You know [it] is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. [It] is not me, you know, [it] is you!" In this moment, Galahad marvels at the fact that skin color is capable of inviting so much discrimination despite the fact that it is, ultimately, completely arbitrary and has nothing to do with his personality or behavior. Indeed, his skin might as well be "blue or green," since any color that isn't white has been deemed inferior. Tracking these thoughts, Selvon proves that England's subtle bigotry has forced Galahad into a struggle against his own racial identity, ultimately illustrating that even understated racism is corrosive to a person's sense of self. Moreover, Selvon repeatedly shows that the guise of "diplomacy" under which British racism operates makes that racism all the more difficult to address—ultimately making it all the more powerful and corrosive of goodwill among white and black Londoners.

ROMANCE AND SEX

In *The Lonely Londoners*, romantic relationships are rarely simplistic or straightforward, as the characters often engage in sexual or romantic acts in order to gain access to other cultures and classes. On the one hand, black immigrants like Galahad covet the chance to sleep with white women because it seemingly enables them to further integrate themselves into English society. Conversely, many white women covet the chance to sleep with black men because they've fetishized the experience, seeking thrills by crossing into the socially-forbidden realm of interracial love—or at least sex. And although white and black people are often drawn to one another in *The Lonely Londoners* by self-interest and ulterior motives, romantic and sexual attraction is ultimately one of the only things shared between West Indian immigrants and native Britons alike. As such, Selvon showcases the unexpected ways in which even socially fraught sexual relationships can unite two seemingly disparate populations, even if only in a limited way.

Selvon makes it clear that, despite British society's discrimination against black immigrants (or perhaps *because* of it), there are certain white people who are attracted to the idea of sleeping with a black man. For example, one day Moses is in the **park** when a white man approaches him, leads him to a blonde woman standing under a tree, and pays Moses to "go with the woman" while he watches (the implication being that Moses and the white women have sex while the man observes). Although Moses doesn't know these people, the English man tells him that he's "just the man" he's looking for, and since Moses is a stranger to him, it's clear that the only thing the man is interested in is the color of his skin. As such, Moses is used as a prop in this white duo's racialized sexual fantasy. This kind of tokenization and fetishization of black men also comes to the fore when an unnamed Jamaican character has sex with a white woman; "in the heat of emotion," the narrator writes, "she call[ed] the Jamaican a black bastard though she didn't mean it as an insult but as a compliment under the circumstances." It's clear in this moment that this woman derives sexual pleasure from the idea that she's transgressing social norms by sleeping with a disreputable man—a notion she tries to emphasize for herself by calling him a "black bastard." To make things worse, she seems to think of this as a compliment, as if reminding the Jamaican that he's a black man sleeping with a white women should lift his spirits and make him feel proud or lucky. In turn, Selvon illustrates the ways in which a black man's personality and emotions are often ignored by the white Londoners who objectify them in the process of conscripting them to play a role in their sexual fantasies.

Many immigrants of color in *The Lonely Londoners* derive excitement from their sexual encounters with white women. While white women in the book frequently have sex with black men in order to indulge a fantasy, black men often sleep with white women because they're interested in getting a glimpse of these women's wealth and power. New immigrants like Galahad are especially thrilled by the idea of having sex with white women, a fact Moses addresses by saying, "But [it] is no use talking to fellars like you. You hit two-three white women and [it's] like you gone mad." By saying this, he frames sexual conquest with white women as intoxicating, as if almost all immigrants are obsessed with pursuing such sexual encounters upon first arriving in London. Black men stand to gain more than a mere rush of excitement when they engage sexually or romantically with white women. Indeed, characters like Cap view sex and romance as a way of reaping tangible rewards. Unfortunately, this usually means taking advantage of an unsuspecting woman's goodwill, as is the case when Cap gets kicked out of his hostel and immediately gets together with a good-looking Austrian woman who—although she discovers he's been lying to her about trying to find a job—makes financial sacrifices to sustain him. Despite this woman's kindness, though, it's clear that Cap isn't truly committed to their relationship. After all, he's "one of them fellars who would do anything to get a woman"—or, in other words, he's a player. Over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Cap's relationships with white women are about more than the thrill

of dating outside his own race. Rather, his involvement with women literally helps him sustain himself, as he leverages sex and romance, manipulating his relationships so that he can achieve something like financial stability.

Sexual relationships that are based upon the tokenization or fetishization of another culture, while very common and far from unnatural, are nevertheless treated in this book as disingenuous, since sleeping with somebody because of what he or she represents fails to take into account his or her individuality. Although the relationships that arise from the sexual intrigue that exists between white women and black men are still fraught with racial tensions, this sexual tension is portrayed as one of the only things these two communities *do* share. In a city so stratified by racism and socioeconomic disparity, the fact that a black man can go to the park and find some form of relation with a white woman from an entirely different walk of life is quite significant. The communal aspect of Hyde Park is at odds with the otherwise quite segregated living conditions of the rest of the city—so much so that the narrator even refers to the park as a "happy hunting ground," a place where men and women can come together looking for sexual pleasure regardless of race and class.

IMMIGRATION AND COMMUNITY

In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon brings to light the emotional toll the process of immigration can take on a person. In particular, he examines the vulnerabilities characters like Moses experience even after they've lived in England for many years. Although Moses has acclimated to life in London, he remains deeply affected by memories of Trinidad, even fantasizing about returning one day. And even though Moses often avoids reminiscing about Trinidad with his friends—a defensive tactic he employs so that he can better focus on the present—he still allows a small community of expatriates to gather in his apartment every Sunday "for a oldtalk." In this way, Selvon emphasizes the sustaining qualities of tight-knit immigrant communities, advocating for the necessity of cohesive groups in otherwise isolating environments like London in the 1950s.

At the beginning of the book, a strong and disarming sense of nostalgia comes over Moses when he visits Waterloo Station to meet Galahad for the first time and is overwhelmed by memories of his own arrival in the very same station. In this moment, Waterloo's embodiment of "arrival and departure" causes him to experience a swell of emotion so intense that he has to sit down. Spotlighting the extent to which Moses is deeply affected by watching "people crying goodbye and kissing welcome," Selvon shows that the idea of transition invites strong emotions for even the most seasoned immigrant, emotions that Moses has clearly repressed until this moment. To get by in London, it seems, he has ignored—or has tried to forget—the memory of home, and of what it felt like to first come to England.

Unlike many of his fellow immigrants, Moses often tries to fight off the nostalgia he feels for his home country and its way of life. He seems to think that full integration into English life means rejecting nostalgia, instead concentrating on the present circumstances even if doing so means acknowledging the harsh realities of immigrant life in London. The narrator takes note of this mentality during a conversation between Moses and Galahad in which, having eaten a good meal of pigeon and rice, the two men speak nostalgically about Trinidad, sharing funny stories about people they both know. After some time, while Galahad is in the middle of a hearty laugh, Moses suddenly becomes sober, feeling guilty and thinking "it not right" to be enjoying himself so much "in these hard times." In this moment, Moses becomes hyperaware of the juxtaposition between his happy memories and his currently dismal circumstances. To go on laughing with Galahad about stories from their old lives in Trinidad would be to irresponsibly ignore the dire and depressing situation they're both in. After all, they've just cooked a pigeon Galahad caught in the park because they're so hungry. The fact that Moses feels "guilty" about indulging fond memories indicates that he feels a responsibility to be fully present in his life and striving to make it better.

Despite Moses' aversion to nostalgia, he ultimately allows himself to accept that sometimes nostalgia—especially when it's shared with others—has the power to help him thrive in London. In a conversation with Galahad, he remarks, "This is a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn't get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell." Sharing good memories with friends, then, can make London feel less lonely and make its brutal realities easier to bear. Although Moses is often hesitant to speak "oldtalk" with his friends because he feels that nostalgia doesn't do anything to make his life better, he also relies on the camaraderie these conversations provide, as made clear by his assertion that he would "suffer like hell" if he didn't "get together now and then to talk about things back home" with his friends. In this way, Selvon underlines the value of maintaining tight-knit immigrant communities, groups of fellow countrymen who can help sustain each other in a country that otherwise lacks a sense of community and support. Indeed, in response to the lonely isolation of immigrant life, Moses comes together with his friends and listens to their stories, "and he feel[s] a great compassion for every one of them, as if he[has] live[d] each of their lives."

UPWARD MOBILITY

Many of the immigrants in *The Lonely Londoners* are eager to climb London's socioeconomic ladder. However, they're rarely given the chance to do so, since the best job opportunities go to white Londoners rather than to West Indian workers. Moses points out that all of the

city's "soft clerical jobs" are given to white people, leaving only blue-collar jobs for black people. This harsh reality creates little incentive for black immigrants to look for work, since it's just as easy to subsist solely on welfare checks, abusing the government's assistance and, as Moses puts it, "muddy[ing] the water" for fellow immigrants who are otherwise working hard to establish themselves in England as respectable workers. Perhaps most disheartening is the fact that toiling as an honest laborer doesn't seem to guarantee that an immigrant will become upwardly mobile. Indeed, after ten years of hard work, Moses has little to show for his time in England, whereas others (including those who draw their entire income from government assistance) have saved up large amounts of money. In this way, British society underhandedly communicates to immigrants that the only way they can survive in London is by accepting aid, essentially suggesting that genuine socioeconomic advancement is impossible and thus not even worth pursuing.

Moses and Galahad are determined to earn money by committing themselves to whatever jobs they can secure—not by accepting government handouts. This is because they're afraid, as black people and as immigrants, to be tarnished by racist stereotypes about lazy immigrants and people of color. When Galahad first arrives in London, he remarks to Moses that he's heard several other immigrants talking about the possibility of living solely off of government assistance. When Moses asks if Galahad plans to do this himself, the young man replies, "Boy, I don't know about you, but I new in this country and I don't want to start antsing on the State unless I have to." By saying this, Galahad indicates that he wants to establish himself in this foreign environment as a respectable worker with integrity, not as somebody who will immediately "ant[s] on the State" just because it's an option. In other words, he wants to prove that he belongs in England, that he's a hard worker and not somebody hoping to scam white society into supporting him financially—a fear white Britons are known to harbor, and one that leads them to dismiss or undermine black immigrants for even the smallest perceived failing. Moses is glad to hear that Galahad feels this way, saying, "I wish it had plenty other fellars like you, […] but a lot of parasites muddy the water for the boys, and these days when one [black man] do something wrong, they crying down the lot." Although this statement correctly acknowledges the unfortunate fact that white Britons make broad generalizations about the entire immigrant community based on a handful of people setting bad examples, Moses's comments also seem to indicate a belief that an immigrant can move up in society by working hard and beating other people's low expectations—a sentiment that is, depressingly, not often true.

Despite Moses's dignity in his resolve to work instead of "liv[ing] on the dole," he finds himself discouraged by London's bleak economic prospects. After a decade of working hard, he hasn't attained anything close to upward mobility, and yet he can't bring himself to leave London to return to Trinidad, where life is easier but there are even fewer economic opportunities. "But it reach a stage," the narrator remarks, "and [Moses] know it reach that stage, where he get so accustom to the pattern that he can't do anything about it. Sure, I could do something about it, he tell himself, but he never do anything." What's keeping Moses from going back to Trinidad, then, is the mere *idea* of upward mobility, even as it continually proves unattainable. Although he's not having any success in London, to leave England would be to admit defeat, forever giving up the promise of advancement. As such, Moses's belief in the promise of upward mobility, paradoxically, leads to stasis, as Moses finds himself trapped in a perpetual cycle of hope and disappointment.

Despite not following this path himself, Moses advises the young Galahad to return to Trinidad immediately upon his arrival in London, since he knows the truth that upward mobility is bound to remain a dream for the vast majority of West Indian immigrants. Looking back at his own experience, Moses feels confident that it would have been better to have simply stayed in Trinidad rather than trying futilely for years to succeed in London. Of course, he notes that Galahad will never heed this advice, and he's right—especially considering the fact that Galahad is named after Sir Galahad, a figure in Arthurian legend whose life was defined by a long quest to find the Holy Grail. In this way, Selvon implies that Galahad is a man determined to find something elusive that will provide happiness and sustenance (two things the Holy Grail represents in Arthurian literature). Of course, the jaded Moses knows that this eager mentality won't help his friend succeed, a notion made depressingly clear by the fact that even people living on welfare seem to lead more prosperous lives than people trying to make an honest living, about which the narrator writes: "It have some men in this world, they don't do nothing at all, and you feel that they would dead from starvation, but day after day you meeting them and they looking hale, they laughing and they talking as if they have a million dollars, and in truth it look as if they would not only live longer than you but they would dead happier." Thus, the great irony of the life of Galahad—and even the more jaded Moses—is that their optimism as seekers of a better lot keeps them trapped in a contest for upward mobility that they are likely never to achieve.

SYMBOLS

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

HYDE PARK

During the summer, the West Indian immigrants of *The Lonely Londoners* go to Hyde Park to fraternize with white women, often pairing off with them to have sex. Because the park is charged with so much sexual intrigue, it comes to symbolize a sense of freedom and lack of inhibition that is otherwise considered taboo in British society. For example, after describing an encounter Moses has with a white woman one night in the park, the narrator declares, "the things that does happen in this London people wouldn't believe when you tell them," eventually calling the park itself a "happy hunting ground" where things take place that are "hard to believe." In addition to this atmosphere of sexual excess, though, the park also becomes perhaps the only place where black Londoners like Moses enjoy something approaching racial equality, since in all other contexts of British life white women and black men are separated by racism and general prejudice. Although both white women and black men fetishize one another during their sexual encounters—often objectifying one another and reducing each other to stereotypes—the mere fact that they are able to have this one form of intimacy across societal boundaries makes Hyde Park a noteworthy symbol of a certain type of freedom for the "lonely Londoners" of the novel.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Longman edition of *The Lonely Londoners* published in 1989.

Section 1 Quotes

❝ And this sort of thing was happening at a time when the English people starting to make rab about how too much West Indians coming to the country: this was a time, when any corner you turn, is ten to one you bound to bounce up a spade. In fact, the boys all over London, it ain't have a place where you wouldn't find them, and big discussion going on in Parliament about the situation, though the old Brit'n too diplomatic to clamp down on the boys or to do anything drastic like stop them from coming to the Mother Country. But big headlines in the papers every day, and whatever the newspaper and the radio say in this country, that is the people Bible. Like one time when newspapers say that the West Indians think that the streets of London paved with gold a Jamaican fellar went to the income tax office to find out something and first thing the clerk tell him is, "You people think the streets of London are paved with gold?"

Related Characters: Moses

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator remarks upon the number of immigrants coming to London, explaining that white Britons are hesitant to welcome these new arrivals. Despite the fact that England is engaging in "big discussion[s]" about the effect of mass immigration, the country itself is too "diplomatic" to actually "do anything drastic like stop [West Indians] from coming to the Mother Country." Instead, white Londoners obfuscate their racism and xenophobia, acting "diplomatically" rather than blatantly expressing their bigoted feelings. When the clerk at the income tax office so easily believes what he has read about immigrants, readers see that white Britons are quick to latch onto any kind of negative idea that can be attached to people like Moses and his friends. Furthermore, this misunderstanding also denotes how little the white population knows about London's black citizens—a divide that surfaces many times throughout *The Lonely Londoners*, as Selvon underlines the fact that the city's upper class cordons itself off from the working class.

❝ For the old Waterloo is a place of arrival and departure, is a place where you see people crying goodbye and kissing welcome, and he hardly have time to sit down on a bench before this feeling of nostalgia hit him and he was surprise. It have some fellars who in Brit'n long, and yet they can't get away from the habit of going Waterloo whenever a boat-train coming in with passengers from the West Indies. They like to see the familiar faces, they like to watch their countrymen coming off the train, and sometimes they might spot somebody they know[…].

But Moses, he never in this sort of slackness: the thought never occur to him to go to Waterloo just to see who coming up from the West Indies. Still, the station is that sort of place where you have a soft feeling. It was here that Moses did land when he come to London[…]. Perhaps he was thinking is time to go back to the tropics, that's why he feeling sort of lonely and miserable.

Related Characters: Galahad (Henry Oliver), Moses

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes Waterloo Station as a "place of arrival and departure" as Moses waits for Galahad to descend onto the platform from the train. The fact that Moses is caught off-guard by a sudden wave of nostalgia suggests that he doesn't often feel this kind of emotion—instead, he focuses on other things, deciding not to be like some of his friends, who go to Waterloo "whenever a boat-train coming in with passengers from the West Indies" just to see if they might encounter some "familiar faces." The narrator characterizes this behavior as a form of "slackness," insinuating that such nostalgia is something that a person ought to refrain from indulging. The word "slackness" denotes laziness and a lack of rigor, as if a certain irresponsibility comes along with allowing oneself to embrace the "soft feeling" of homesickness. It's important to note, though, that although Moses is supposedly averse to any kind of reminiscence, in this moment he's unable to ward off such feelings—a fact the narrator attributes to the idea that Moses perhaps wants to "go back to the tropics." As such, readers see that Moses is conflicted: on the one hand, he doesn't want to think about home; on the other, he can't help but think that it might be time to return to Trinidad. This conflict ultimately afflicts Moses throughout the novel.

Section 2 Quotes

❝ It ain't have no s— over here like "both of we is Trinidadians and we must help out one another." You going to meet a lot of fellars from home who don't even want to talk to you, because they have matters on the mind. So the sooner you get settled the better for you. London not like Port of Spain. Don't ask plenty questions, and you will find out a lot. I don't usually talk to fellars like this, but I take a fancy for you, my blood take you.

Related Characters: Moses (speaker), Galahad (Henry Oliver)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Moses speaks these harsh but well-meaning words to Galahad on the young man's first night in London. First and foremost, he disabuses Galahad of the notion that fellow expatriates will always help one another. This ultimately enables him to stress the point that it's important for a new immigrant to "find out a lot" on his own. Of course, it's not necessarily true that all expatriates will avoid talking to Galahad "because they have matters on the mind." In fact, readers later discover that there's a very vibrant, tight-knit immigrant community that meets every weekend in Moses's apartment to share stories and tell each other about job opportunities or available apartments. Nonetheless, Moses clearly wants to communicate to Galahad that he can't simply rely upon his friends to keep him afloat in London, where it's difficult to survive. This makes sense, considering that so many of Moses's friends—like Cap, for instance—*do* actually leech off of him by asking to borrow money or by eating his food. In setting strict ground rules, then, Moses gives Galahad the impression that he's not a pushover who can be taken advantage of. Luckily for him, Galahad isn't the kind of person who would abuse his kindness anyway, but he doesn't know this yet.

❝ It have a kind of fellar who does never like people to think that they unaccustomed to anything, or that they are strangers in a place, or that they don't know where they going. They would never ask you how to get to Linden Gardens or if number 49 does go down High Street Ken. From the very beginning they out to give you the impression that they hep, that they on the ball, that nobody could tie them up.

Related Characters: Moses, Galahad (Henry Oliver)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Moses is trying to give Galahad advice about how best to survive in London as a newcomer, and after hearing a few of these suggestions, Galahad tells Moses that he'd rather find things out for himself and that he doesn't need any help navigating his way through his new life in the city. Galahad is precisely the kind of person the narrator describes in this passage, a man who doesn't want anybody to think he's "unaccustomed to anything, or that [he is a] stranger" to London. This kind of independence is both ill-advised and admirable. On the one hand, Galahad's confidence is completely unfounded, since he has never lived anywhere even remotely similar to London, a place about which he knows virtually nothing. On the other hand, though, Moses *has* already told him that it's better to refrain from asking too many questions, and that if he goes along on his own he will "find out a lot."

It ain't have no place in the world that exactly like a place where a lot of men get together to look for work and draw money from the Welfare State while they ain't working. Is a kind of place where hate and disgust and avarice and malice and sympathy and sorrow and pity all mix up. Is a place where everyone is your enemy and your friend. Even when you go to draw a little national assistance it don't be so bad, because when you reach that stage is because you touch bottom. But in the world today, a job is all the security a man have. A job mean place to sleep, food to eat, cigarette to smoke. And even though it have the Welfare State in the background, when a man out of work he like a fish out of water gasping for breath. It have some men, if they lose their job it like the world end, and when two-three weeks go by and they still ain't working, they get so desperate they would do anything.

Related Characters: Moses, Galahad (Henry Oliver)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears when Galahad and Moses go to the employment office to find a job for Galahad. As Galahad slowly learns about the various ways of navigating life in London, he now is faced with a visceral representation of the two primary modes of survival in the city, symbolized by the two kinds of people he sees when he enters the employment office: people lining up to get a job placement, and people lining up to collect government assistance, which enables them to survive without having to work. The contrast between these two choices—between working and not working—is what the narrator identifies by remarking that the employment office is a place where "hate and disgust and avarice and malice and sympathy and sorrow and pity all mix up." Indeed, the "hate and disgust and avarice and malice" are the result of the fact that people like Moses resent fellow immigrants for "antsing off the State" (to borrow a line he uses earlier in the novel) and tarnishing the reputation of immigrants in London. At the same time, though, Moses knows how hard it is to achieve financial stability by working, so he naturally feels a certain amount of "sympathy and sorrow and pity" for his unemployed peers. This "pity" might also have to do with the fact that he knows that "in the world today, a job is all the security a man have." In this moment, the narrator—who seems aligned with Moses's thoughts—emphasizes the importance of having a job, framing employment as vital to a person's happiness. This is most likely because working is the only way for an immigrant to gain a sense of self-sufficiency, which ultimately leads to individual freedom. Without a job, then, immigrants are merely stranded in a foreign city without the ability to empower themselves.

Section 3 Quotes

It have some men in this world, they don't do nothing at all, and you feel that they would dead from starvation, but day after day you meeting them and they looking hale, they laughing and they talking as if they have a million dollars, and in truth it look as if they would not only live longer than you but they would dead happier.

Related Characters: Moses, Cap (Captain)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator makes this assertion while describing Cap, a man who somehow thrives in London even though he never works and doesn't have any money of his own, instead borrowing from friends and tricking his romantic partners into supporting him. Although the narrator has previously suggested that the best way for an immigrant to survive in London is by working hard at an honest job—and thereby achieving self-sufficiency—in this moment the narrator acknowledges that people like Cap often prosper against all odds, managing to look "hale" and content. This, of course, is somewhat of a slap in the face for Moses, who toils every night as a manual laborer just to find himself barely able to pay his rent. This anomaly follows Moses throughout *The Lonely Londoners*, as he constantly wonders if choosing what he sees as the high road is worth all the turmoil and stress it causes, while many of his friends coast along leading happier, more fulfilling lives.

Section 4 Quotes

❝ When Bart leave the hostel he get a clerical job and he hold on to it like if is gold, for he frighten if he have to go and work in factory—that is not for him at all. Many nights he think about how so many West Indians coming, and it give him more fear than it give the Englishman, for Bart frighten if they make things hard in Brit'n. If a fellar too black, Bart not companying him much, and he don't like to be found in the company of the boys, he always have an embarrass air when he with them in public, he does look around as much as to say: "I here with these boys, but I not one of them, look at the colour of my skin."

But a few door slam in Bart face, a few English people give him the old diplomacy, and Bart boil down and come like one of the boys.

Related Characters: Bart (Bartholomew)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

This description of Bart demonstrates the ways in which some people in the immigrant community internalize the racism directed at them by white British society. Indeed, Bart's refusal to be seen in the company of friends that are "too black" reflects a racist mentality, one in which the color of somebody's skin dictates whether or not he or she is deemed a respectable person. What's more, when he tries to compose himself in a way that says, "I here with these boys, but I not one of them," he manifests a deeply patronizing attitude that is insulting and pompous, not to mention bigoted. To make matters worse, Bart's attitude doesn't even seem to gain him any social currency, as he himself still gets doors slammed in his face and must contend with the "old diplomacy" (that is, the underhanded way white Britons communicate that black immigrants are unwelcome in England). Unfortunately, he appears to internalize this racism, exhibiting the same bigoted attitude in his dealings with his own friends.

Section 6 Quotes

❝ It have people living in London who don't know what happening in the room next to them, far more the street, or how other people living. London is a place like that. It divide up in little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don't know anything about what happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers. Them rich people who does live in Belgravia and Knightsbridge and up in Hampstead and them other plush places, they would never believe what it like in a grim place like Harrow Road or Notting Hill. Them people who have car, who going to theatre and ballet in the West End, who attending premiere with the royal family, they don't know nothing about hustling two pound of brussel sprout and half-pound potato, or queuing up for fish and chips in the smog. People don't talk about things like that again, they come to kind of accept that is so the world is, that it bound to have rich and poor.

Related Characters: Tolroy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after the narrator describes where Tolroy lives in the Working Class area of London. By meditating on the fact that London is "divide[d] up in little worlds," the narrator is able to emphasize the city's deep socioeconomic gaps. Indeed, race is far from the only thing that "divide[s]" people like Moses from people who go to the "theatre" or the "ballet"—wealth also keeps these groups apart, though of course income disparity is certainly linked to race. Regardless, the fact that people "don't know anything about what [is] happening in the other" parts of the city makes it all the more important that immigrants come together to create communities of their own. Although most Londoners might "accept" that the world is "bound to have rich and poor" and that these groups exist separately from one another, Moses and his friends can't afford to apply the same kind of isolating mindset to their own lives, since doing so would cut them off from their own community, which is the only tangible support system available to them.

Section 7 Quotes

Jesus Christ, when he say "Charing Cross," when he realize that is he, Sir Galahad, who going there, near that place that everybody in the world know about (it even have the name in the dictionary) he feel like a new man. It didn't matter about the woman he going to meet, just to say he was going there made him feel big and important, and even if he was just going to coast a lime, to stand up and watch the white people, still, it would have been something.

Related Characters: Galahad (Henry Oliver)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

This is an explanation of Galahad's excitement to be living in London. Absolutely charmed by the mere idea of living in the city, Galahad takes delight in simply saying that he's going to "Charing Cross," savoring the words and feeling "big and important" regardless of the reasons *why* he's going to these places. This giddy romanticization of famous British landmarks suggests that Galahad has built up an idea in his head of what it means to be a Londoner. Speaking as if he's familiar with the city gives him a great thrill, letting him feel "like a new man." This kind of unabashed excitement is the sort of exuberance Moses frequently responds to by saying, "Take it easy," as if Galahad is going to wear himself down too quickly. Of course, Moses himself has been in London for so long that *nothing* seems to impress him, and the excitement of new places no longer moves him. As such, readers see that these two characters are experiencing vastly different stages of the long processes of immigration and integration. Whereas Galahad is still awed by the simple fact that he lives in the great city of London, Moses has grown used to his environment.

Though it used to have times when he lay down there on the bed in the basement room in the Water, and all the experiences like that come to him, and he say "Lord, what it is we people do in this world that we have to suffer so? What it is we want that the white people and them find it so hard to give? A little work, a little food, a little place to sleep. We not asking for the sun, or the moon. We only want to get by, we don't even want to get on." And Galahad would take his hand from under the blanket […]. And Galahad watch the colour of his hand, and talk to it, saying, "Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you! I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you! Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world!"

Related Characters: Galahad (Henry Oliver)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Galahad grapples with the fact that the color of his skin has subjected him to so much injustice and poor treatment. This thoughtful rumination regarding the arbitrariness of race comes right after he has just been slighted by a white woman and her daughter on the street. After being made to feel by them like some kind of monster unworthy of human interaction, he now wonders why white people "find it so hard to give" black people even the most basic of common courtesies. "We not asking for the sun, or the moon," he notes. "We only want to get by." This calls attention to the fact that black people in London just want to lead normal lives—lives untouched by constant exposure to racism and bigotry. This, it seems, is what baffles Galahad the most: how is it the case that so much "misery" has been dealt out based on a mere difference in skin pigmentation?

Section 9 Quotes

The cruder you are the more the girls like you you can't put on any English accent for them or play ladeda or tell them you studying medicine in Oxford or try to be polite and civilize they don't want that sort of thing at all they want you to live up to the films and stories they hear about black people living primitive in the jungles of the world that is why you will see so many of them African fellars in the city with their hair high up on the head like they ain't had a trim for years and with scar on their face and a ferocious expression going about with some real sharp chicks the cruder you are the more they like you[…].

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears in the long stream-of-consciousness section of *The Lonely Londoners*, in which the narrator contemplates sexuality and the ways in which black men interact with white women in Hyde Park during the summertime. In this moment, it becomes clear that many of the white women who sleep with Moses and his friends do so because they have fetishized the idea of having sex with black immigrants. This is why the narrator upholds that a man who wants to have sex with one of these women shouldn't "put on any English accent" or pretend to be a distinguished English gentleman, for this would ruin the woman's illusion that all black people are "primitive" and that they "live in the jungle"—two notions that add to the woman's feeling of sexual transgression. "The cruder you are the more the girls like you," the narrator states, ultimately implying that many of the immigrants in *The Lonely Londoners* are willing to be the subjects of stereotypical generalizations as long as it means they can sleep with a white woman. This is perhaps because having sex with a white woman represents, for the men, a certain kind of upward mobility—since in seemingly all other contexts white women separate themselves from black immigrants. As such, the characters in *The Lonely Londoners* put up with racism and tokenization in order to come together—however briefly—with women who hail from a part of society that is otherwise off-limits to them. In a way, then, both the white women and the black men fetishize one another by coveting the idea of having sexual intercourse with a person beyond the confines of their own everyday lives.

Section 11 Quotes

❝ Sometimes I look back on all the years I spend in Brit'n, [...] and I surprise that so many years gone by. Looking at things in general life really hard for the boys in London. This is a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn't get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell. Here is not like home where you have friends all about. In the beginning you would think that is a good thing, that nobody minding your business, but after a while you want to get in company, you want to go to somebody house and eat a meal, you want to go on excursion to the sea, you want to go and play football and cricket. Nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you, yes, but you can't go in their house and eat or sit down and talk. It ain't have no sort of family life for us here.

Related Characters: Moses (speaker), Galahad (Henry Oliver)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

Moses says this to Galahad after the two friends have just finished eating a pigeon Galahad caught in the park. Feeling good after a full meal, they pass the time by reminiscing about Trinidad until suddenly Moses's mood deteriorates, at which point he considers the lonely nature of life in London as an immigrant. "If it was that we didn't get together now and then to talk about things back home," he says, "we would suffer like hell." This is an interesting statement, considering that he has just *interrupted* a conversation about "things back home" to lament the state of his life in London. This interaction shows that Moses is a man who can't focus solely on laughing about old times with a friend without also acknowledging the fact that he's currently miserable. His feeling of loneliness might have to do in part with the fact that he is the leader of his group of friends, meaning that, although he provides a place for his fellow immigrants to congregate—he himself can't "go to somebody house and eat a meal." Indeed, the responsibility of bringing people together falls to him, leaving him exhausted and yearning for a community in which it would be easier to simply exist. Rather than forging a cohesive group of his own, he wants to already be *part* of a group. By showcasing Moses's discontent in this moment, Selvon demonstrates the ways in which an immigrant's sense of isolation can take a serious toll on his quality of life.

Section 13 Quotes

In the grimness of the winter, with your hand plying space like a blind man's stick in the yellow fog, with ice on the ground and a coldness defying all effort to keep warm, the boys coming and going, working, eating, sleeping, going about the vast metropolis like veteran Londoners.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

This is a fragmentary description of what it feels like to live in London. The explanation itself is part of the novel's concluding section, which provides a mosaic of life in London, one that combines Moses's loneliness with his appreciation of the city. When the narrator describes the "grimness of winter" and the hustle-bustle of "the boys," the reader understands that life goes on in London even when times are tough, even when the activities of "working," "eating," and "sleeping" are suffused with the cold loneliness that settles over the city during wintertime. This passage also references T.S. Eliot's well-known poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," a poem that focuses (in several stanzas) on "the yellow fog that rubs its back" along the "window-panes" of the houses lining London's streets. Selvon's line about "the boys coming and going, working, eating, sleeping" recalls the refrain of "Prufrock:" "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo." These parallels with "Prufrock" evoke a certain kind of melancholy that the poem puts on display, as J. Alfred Prufrock—the poem's speaker—is, above all, a lonely man lurking through London. Similarly, Moses makes his way through the city in the winter, his hand "plying the space like a blind man's stick in the yellow fog," all the while feeling isolated and wondering whether or not he should leave the country altogether. More than anything, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is about a man who is an outsider in his own city, a sentiment that aligns with Selvon's interest in exploring Moses's feelings of estrangement regarding both his home culture and his expatriate community.

Sometimes he think he see some sort of profound realization in his life, as if all that happen to him was experience that make him a better man, as if now he could draw apart from any hustling and just sit down and watch other people fight to live. Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what-happening, the summer-is-hearts, he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same spot. As if a forlorn shadow of doom fall on all the spades in the country. As if he could see the black faces bobbing up and down in the millions of white, strained faces, everybody hustling along the Strand, the spades jostling in the crowd, bewildered, hopeless. As if, on the surface, things don't look so bad, but when you go down a little, you bounce up a kind of misery and pathos and a frightening—what? He don't know the right word, but he have the right feeling in his heart. As if the boys laughing, but they only laughing because they fraid to cry, they only laughing because to think so much about everything would be a big calamity—like how he here now, the thoughts so heavy like he unable to move his body.

Related Characters: Moses

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is drawn from a moment in *The Lonely Londoners* when Moses contemplates his life in London, examining it and looking for meaning in the time he's spent in England since leaving Trinidad. To understand this section, it helps to track the phrase "as if," since these two words repeat throughout the passage, stitching together the ideas. Indeed, every sentence beginning with "as if" can be read as a continuation of the passage's first clause, which reads: "Sometimes he think he see some sort of profound realization in his life, as if [...]." From here, Selvon provides various figurative interpretations of Moses's "profound realization" about his life, including the thought that "on the surface, things don't look so bad, but when you go down a little, you bounce up a kind of misery and pathos and a frightening—what?" This sentence suggests that Moses has just had the "profound realization" that there is always a sense of "misery and pathos" lurking in his life. And although the narrator—who by this point seems to have slipped deep into Moses's psyche—can't quite articulate what it is that scares him about this "misery and pathos," he *is* able to make the observation that his friends only "laugh because they fraid to cry." This idea helps make sense of the fact that Moses rarely allows himself to reminisce about old times with his friends for too long, for he knows that if he keeps thinking about his old life, there will be "a big calamity," an existential crisis of sorts that will threaten to make his

"thoughts so heavy" that he's "unable to move his body."

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.

SECTION 1

On a cold London evening in the middle of winter, Moses Aloetta takes a bus to Waterloo Station and waits to meet a man arriving from Trinidad. Moving through the foggy city, he cusses and laments the fact that he had to get out of bed and leave his warm apartment to meet Henry Oliver, a man who isn't even a family member or friend, but rather somebody a mutual friend asked Moses to show around. Knowing what it feels like to arrive in an unknown city, Moses agreed to help Henry, but now he resents himself for having a "heart so soft that he always doing something for somebody and nobody ever doing anything for him."

This book's opening passage immediately establishes Moses as a role model and mentor to newly-arrived immigrants. The fact that Moses is "always doing something for somebody" tells readers that, whether he likes it or not, he has a soft spot for the immigrant community. And although he curses his friend for asking him to help Henry Oliver, it's obvious that this isn't the first time he has agreed to go out of his way to help a fellow expatriate.

Moses feels that he has hardly had any time to settle into his new life in Britain with all the people "coming straight to his room" upon arriving in London from the West Indies. These new arrivals claim that "so and so" has encouraged them to contact Moses, who helps them find jobs and places to live. To make matters worse, white Britons are beginning to complain about the steady influx of black immigrants, though the British are "too diplomatic to clamp down on the boys or to do anything drastic like stop them from coming to the Mother Country." Each day, the newspapers run articles about the new arrivals, including one especially absurd piece claiming that West Indians think streets in London are paved in gold—a story many white people actually believed.

Once again, Moses is presented as a character upon whom other immigrants depend, a central figure in a rotating cast of new arrivals, all of whom need guidance. That he hardly has time to settle into his own life before he's required to help others is an indication of how much people rely on one another in the immigrant community. Unfortunately, he himself doesn't seem to have anybody to turn to, and his commitment to helping others is further complicated by the fact that England is becoming increasingly reluctant to welcome immigrants with open arms. As such, Moses not only has to struggle to help his new friends as he works to establish his own life, but he also has to contend with the ignorant and racist society in which he lives—a society that hides its bigotry under a guise of diplomacy.

The current immigration situation in London makes Moses nervous because most of the people coming over from the West Indies are, "real hustlers, desperate," and when they show up needing his help, he finds himself unable to refuse. Although he himself struggles financially, Moses does what he can to help fellow immigrants, sending them to other helpful people throughout the city. As such, he becomes something of an unofficial "welfare officer," "scattering the boys around the London" (not wanting a particular concentration of West Indians in "the Water," which is his neighborhood).

In this moment, it becomes even more evident that Moses is worried about how the steady stream of immigrants into London will influence his own life—a life he's built without the kind of guidance he's now providing the next generation of immigrants. As such, his attitude toward helping his new peers is rather conflicted. On the one hand, he recognizes that their presence runs the risk of making his life harder in a city that is already rather unaccommodating to black immigrants. On the other hand, he perhaps feels a sense of duty to aid these "desperate" newcomers, since he knows what it's like to be in their position. As a result, he helps them in a way that also benefits him, "scattering" them throughout the city so that they don't encroach upon his life too much.

While waiting for Henry on the platform, Moses experiences a strange feeling of nostalgia and homesickness, one he's never felt in the ten years he's been living in London. "For the old Waterloo is a place of arrival and departure," the narrator writes, "a place where you see people crying goodbye and kissing welcome, and he hardly have time to sit down on a bench before this feeling of nostalgia hit him and he was surprise." Apparently, some immigrants living in London come to Waterloo on a regular basis just to reminisce about their own arrivals and see "familiar faces" descend from the train. Moses, though, never does this, not wanting to indulge this kind of nostalgia. Nonetheless, the station makes him feel "soft," maybe because he's "thinking [it] is time to go back to the tropics."

This is an informative moment, as it shows readers how Moses handles nostalgia. That watching people "crying goodbye and kissing welcome" forces Moses to sit down suggests that something about the arrivals and departures makes him uneasy. Unlike so many other immigrants, who make frequent pilgrimages to the station, Moses tries to ward off this kind of nostalgia. In this moment, though, he's unable to do so, a fact he attributes to the possibility that he wants to "go back to the tropics." That he sees this desire as "soft" indicates that he normally tries to harden himself to the world, striving to live uninfluenced by the nostalgia he feels for his homeland.

Sitting on a bench in the station, Moses comes across Tolroy, a Jamaican friend who has sent for his mother to join him in London. Tolroy explains that he's saved up money to bring his mother over and that he's expecting her on the incoming train. "Ah," Moses says, "I wish I was like allyou Jamaican. Allyou could live on two-three pound a week, and save up money in a suitcase under the bed, then when you have enough you sending for the family." He says he's unable to save any of the money he earns. The narrator describes another Jamaican man who, when he first came to London, opened a "club," saved money, and bought a house. Before long, he had enough money to buy multiple houses, which he rented to newly arrived immigrants. And although many of these immigrants were his fellow countrymen, he made them pay full price.

When Moses expresses his jealousy of Tolroy's frugality, readers begin to understand that he's having trouble achieving financial stability, or at least upward mobility. Although Moses has been in London for a decade, he still barely makes enough money to cover the bare necessities of his life. The anecdote the narrator provides about the Jamaican contrasts starkly with Moses's inability to save any money, but there's a notable difference between Moses and this man: whereas Moses is willing (albeit begrudgingly) to help his fellow immigrants, this Jamaican man knowingly exploits his countrymen's desperation, forcing them to pay full price on their apartments. In this way, Selvon suggests that achieving upward mobility in London requires a cold disposition, an attitude that enables a person to turn his back on those in need.


As Moses waits for the train, a reporter approaches and asks him if he's just arrived from Jamaica. Lying, Moses says that he has indeed, and the reporter asks what the conditions are like there. Although he doesn't know "a damn thing about Jamaica," Moses—a Trinidadian man—says, "The situation is desperate," referencing a (most likely fake) hurricane that the reporter claims to already know about. Switching gears, the reporter asks why so many Jamaicans are coming to London, and Moses assures him it's because people can't get good jobs in the West Indies. "Let me give you my view of the situation in this country," he continues. "We can't get no place to live, and we only getting the worse jobs it have—" but at this point, the reporter loses interest and turns away.

The reporter's question in this scene reinforces the notion that white Britons are growing weary of the influx of black immigrants in the city. However, the reporter doesn't actually *care what Moses has to say, making it obvious that the question itself is more important than the answer. Indeed, simply by asking this question, the reporter turns the idea of immigration into a sensational headline, framing it as a problem without interrogating its nuances or origins. Uninterested in what Moses has to say, he dismisses him as soon as he begins talking about the unfair treatment of black immigrants in the city.*


Moses is disappointed to lose the reporter's interest, since he rarely gets the opportunity to express his ideas. Once, though, a reporter came to the railway yard while he was at work and took his picture because the other white employees were all threatening to quit unless the boss fired him (he was the only black worker). The article that ran said that the "colour bar was causing trouble again." In response to this headline, Moses's boss let him go, saying that he had to "cut down" the staff, though he didn't fire anybody else.

Moses's boss refuses to admit that he's firing him because he's black. This is a perfect example of the narrator's previous assertion that Britons are too "diplomatic" to reveal their racism outright. Rather than leveling with Moses, the railway boss acts like he's treating him as an equal. This ultimately makes things even more complicated for Moses, who's forced to figure out for himself why he's being let go. Of course, this "diplomatic" tactic does little to obscure the boss's racism, but it does protect the boss from having to explain that he is a bigot, thereby enabling him to continue mistreating people like Moses without having to confront himself and his own unethical behavior.

Suddenly, Tolroy sees his mother coming off the train. To his surprise, she's followed by his aunt, Tanty Bessy, and his relatives Lewis and Agnes, along with their two children. His mother explains that when he wrote to her saying how much money he makes each week, nobody in the family wanted to be left behind in Jamaica. "Oh God ma, why you bring all these people with you?" Tolroy complains, but Tanty immediately calls him "ungrateful," and his mother reminds him that Tanty helped raise him as a child. "But ma you don't know what you put yourself in," Tolroy says. Just then, the reporter returns and starts talking to Tanty about why so many Jamaicans are coming to England.

Tolroy's frustration with his mother is understandable in this moment, as it's clear from Moses's financial situation that surviving in London is quite difficult. Although Tolroy has somehow found a way to save money to support his mother, it's unlikely he'll be able to successfully provide for Tanty Bessy and the rest of the family. What's more, the fact that Tanty and Ma refuse to listen to him illustrates the extent to which life in London appeals to people unfamiliar with the reality of living abroad. Indeed, Tanty and Ma have clearly underestimated how difficult it is to stay afloat in England, which is why they so eagerly throw themselves into Tolroy's life without considering the possible negative consequences of abandoning Jamaica.

Tanty tells the reporter that Jamaicans come to London because there are more employment opportunities in England than in the West Indies. When he asks what *she* will do in the city, she says she came to look after her family. At this point, the reporter asks to take her picture, and Tanty tries to gather the family for a portrait, though the reporter tells her that just one of them will suffice. Still, she insists that the entire family pose, pulling out a straw hat and donning it for the photo. The next day, this photograph appears in the paper with the caption: "Now, Jamaican Families Come to Britain."

Tanty's notion that her family needs her to take care of them illustrates the extent to which she is unfamiliar with life in the city, where people like Moses and Tolroy spend very little time in their apartments to begin with, instead focusing on their jobs and surviving financially in the city. Indeed, life in Jamaica is much different from life in London, and Tanty's rather off-base conviction that the family needs *her only further reinforces Tolroy's fear that his family members are perhaps unprepared for what life is really like in the city.*

While Tolroy's family poses for the photograph, Moses waits for Henry. When the young man finally appears on the platform, he's wearing nothing but an "old grey tropical suit" with no "overcoat or muffler or gloves or anything for the cold." He good-naturedly approaches Moses, greeting him warmly. When Moses asks if he's cold, Henry says he isn't, and expresses surprise that this is what the winter weather feels like—he's even a bit warm. Moses doesn't believe this, guessing that Henry must be wearing wool beneath his clothes, but Henry insists this isn't the case. Moving on, Moses suggests they get his luggage and leave, but Henry tells him that he doesn't *have* any luggage. He says he didn't want to load up [himself] with a set of things," he says.

Henry's shocking unpreparedness builds upon the same kind of naivety that Tolroy's family members—especially Tanty—exhibit upon arriving in London. To veteran immigrants like Moses and Tolroy, such behavior is outrageously out of touch with the harsh realities of living in London, a cold city where it's difficult to survive. Ultimately, Henry's lack of foresight and outlandishly high spirits only reinforce the importance of Moses's position as the young man's cultural guide and role model. After all, if Henry didn't have Moses to rely upon, it seems he'd freeze to death before even finding a place to spend the night.

Moses can't fathom the fact that Henry hasn't packed anything except a toothbrush, and he's even more astounded to learn that the young man didn't even bring the full amount of money each immigrant is allowed to bring into the country. As the two men walk out of the station, Moses tells Henry that London will surely catch him by surprise. "Thus it was that Henry Oliver Esquire," the narrator writes, "alias Sir Galahad, descend on London to swell the population by one."

It's worth noting here the significance of Henry's alias, Galahad. A character from Arthurian legend, Sir Galahad is a knight of the round table who sets out to search for the Holy Grail, a meaningful object in Arthurian literature that represents—among other things—happiness, youth, and sustenance. As such, when Galahad "descend[s] on London to swell the population by one," Selvon is suggesting that he is a seeker, a man looking for happiness and prosperity in a new city. At the same time, Selvon emphasizes that Galahad's presence in the city is inconsequential—a single drop in a vast bucket.

SECTION 2

On the underground train, Galahad pesters Moses with questions about London. "Take it easy," Moses says. "You can't learn everything the first day you land." When they reach Moses's apartment, Galahad comments on its small size and suggests that, instead of putting a shilling into the gas stove for heat, Moses should put a piece of lead into the little slot—a trick he learned from a friend who used to live in London. "Take it easy," Moses says again, "all these questions you asking is good questions, but you will find out for yourself before long." He then speaks straightforwardly to Galahad, telling him that the next day he'll have to find his own place to live and also secure a steady job. He makes it clear that Galahad won't be able to rely on other Trinidadians just because they're from the same country.

Moses's assertion that Galahad can't rely on other Trinidadians for help recalls the story of the Jamaican landlord who rents rooms to fellow expatriates but charges them the full price. It seems, then, that immigrants in London not only have to advocate for themselves in the face of racism and bigotry, but also have to compete with one another. At the same time, there's no denying that Moses has already gone out of his way to help Galahad, which suggests that the immigrant community does indeed help itself by way of mutual support and camaraderie.

"I don't usually talk to fellars like this," Moses says, "but I take a fancy for you." Before going to bed, Moses finally lets himself speak nostalgically, reminiscing with Galahad about people they both know in Trinidad. When Galahad falls asleep in the chair, Moses places a blanket over him, but the young man quickly throws it off, saying it's too hot to sleep with a blanket. Once again, Moses can't fathom how Galahad isn't cold, but before long Galahad is loudly snoring, comfortable in the chilled room. The next morning, Moses finds him still asleep with a smile on his face. Shaking him awake, he tells him it's time to go look for work. As Moses stands by the fire, Galahad says, "What you bending down so near the fire for and shivering like that?"

Galahad's strange relationship to cold temperature seems at first like a ruse, an act he's staging in order to convince Moses that he's tough. However, when he throws the blanket off and goes happily to sleep, it becomes clear that he truly doesn't get cold. This kind of relaxed attitude regarding London's intense winter denotes Galahad's unflinching optimism and serves as an indication that—unlike Moses, who after many years is still not used to England's frigid winters—he is perhaps well-suited to life in London.

Galahad gets ready for the day, combing his hair in the mirror and stretching his limbs. There is "a kind of fellar who does never like people to think that they unaccustomed to anything," the narrator writes, "or that they are strangers in a place, or that they don't know where they are going." Galahad, the narrator continues, is like this—somebody who wants to give the impression that he can "take care of himself, that he don't want help for anything." As such, when Moses offers to go to the employment office with him that morning, he declines, saying he'll go by himself. Nonetheless, Moses tries to give him some advice, until Galahad finally relents and asks what Moses would do in his shoes. "I would advice you to hustle a passage back home to Trinidad today," Moses says.

In this moment, Moses's pessimism comes to the forefront of the novel. When he advises Galahad to return immediately to Trinidad, he reveals his belief that his years in London have been wasted. Because he himself has invested so much time into living in England, though, it's harder for him to "hustle a passage back home." Galahad, on the other hand, has very little to lose, since he hasn't yet truly begun to build his life in the city. As such, Moses thinks it would be best if the young man turned around, for he himself knows that the prospects London offers aren't as lucrative as one might hope, and he also understands that the longer a person stays in the city, the more difficult it is to leave.

Moses knows Galahad will never heed his advice to return to Trinidad, so he gives him practical suggestions about securing a job, explaining that white Londoners are weary of black workers, frightened that they'll lose their jobs to immigrants. Hearing this, Galahad asks if London is as racist as America. "The thing is," Moses says, "in America they don't like you, and they tell you so straight, so that you know how you stand. Over here is the old English diplomacy: 'thank you sir,' and 'how do you do' and that sort of thing."

Once again, the word "diplomacy" surfaces in a conversation about British racism. The word bears connotations not only of politeness, but of deftness in handling international relations. Taking these definitions into account, readers begin to understand that white Britons mask their bigotry in a guise of generosity and good will, as if by saying "Thank you sir" and "How do you do" they can erase the fact that they don't actually want to welcome black immigrants into their country. While understated bigotry may seem preferable to America's outright racism, Moses indicates to Galahad that entrenched malice is perhaps equally as harmful as undisguised hatred.

Before Galahad makes his way to the employment office, he mentions that he heard some men talking the day before about welfare—"about how you could go on the dole if you ain't working." Moses confirms that this is indeed the case, asking Galahad if he wants to "be like that." Galahad says no, but Moses pushes him in order to discern the nature of his integrity, emphasizing the fact that the government will pay people even when they're not working. After a short back-and-forth, Galahad says, "Boy, I don't know about you, but I new in this country and I don't want to start antsing on the State unless I have to. Me, I am a born hustler."

When Galahad declares that he doesn't want to "start antsing on the State unless" he has to, he effectively acknowledges the fact that, as a black immigrant, he has a very small margin for error. Stating that he's a "born hustler," he essentially announces his determination to work hard as a way of proving himself in a context in which he's already put at a disadvantage, since white Britons are eager to discredit black immigrants based on even the smallest perceived failures. What this attitude incorrectly assumes, though, is that hard work necessarily leads to upward mobility. Unfortunately, this isn't the case, as is made clear by the fact that Moses has been diligently laboring for ten years and still can't seem to save any money.

Moses tells Galahad he's happy to hear that the young man won't "ants on the State," saying, "I wish it had plenty other fellars like you, but a lot of parasites muddy the water for the boys." He says these days "when one [black person] do something wrong," people pass judgement on all black people for it. Galahad tells Moses, "I know you mean well telling me all these things, but papa, I want to find out for myself." Acquiescing, Moses agrees and says they'll see one another that evening before he (Moses) goes to his nightshift. When Galahad finally leaves, he stands in the road and watches people frantically passing him in all directions.

Moses's notion that immigrants who draw money from the government "muddy the water for the boys" supports the idea that white Londoners are quick to make broad generalizations about the immigrant community based on only one or two negative examples. And although Galahad would be wise to listen to Moses's theories and learn from his wisdom as a fellow immigrant, he decides to forge onward independently, wanting to "find out for [him]self" how to survive in London. This is an unfortunate mindset, considering that London is so clearly unaccommodating of black immigrants. Galahad would be wise to band together with the immigrant community, leveraging whatever knowledge he can glean as a way of counteracting the disadvantages he already faces.

Slowly making his way through the mayhem, Galahad feels a burst of loneliness and fear, forgetting "all the brave words" he uttered to Moses. He suddenly realizes that he's in a foreign city with no money, job, or friends. Before long, he realizes he may not be able to find his way back to Moses's apartment, worrying that he's wandered too far. Just as he begins to panic, a police officer puts his hand on his shoulder and says, "Move along now, don't block the pavement." Luckily, Moses has been following, and Galahad rejoices upon seeing him, finally confessing that he needs help navigating through London. After Moses gets Galahad to agree to stop acting like he knows everything, the two men make their way to the employment office.

It's no surprise that Galahad immediately feels remorse at having turned down Moses's offer of help. When the police officer tells him to "move along," readers witness a tangible example of the government being unwilling to help black immigrants. Indeed, whereas a police officer might offer to help *a confused person standing in the middle of the street, this officer orders Galahad to keep moving. This interaction provides a glimpse at the "diplomatic" guise bigotry takes in London, because although the officer gently urges Galahad onward by kindly placing his hand on his shoulder, he sends a different kind of message, suggesting that Galahad is nothing but a nuisance that ought to be removed.*

At the employment office, Galahad is struck by the number of available jobs, but he's also immediately taken aback by the vast amount of people waiting to either fill a vacant position or receive welfare checks. This is "a place where a lot of men get together to look for work and draw money from the Welfare State while they ain't working," the narrator notes—"a kind of place where hate and disgust and avarice and malice and sympathy and sorrow and pity all mix up [...] a place where everyone is your enemy and your friend." Standing in line, Moses points out a man who comes to the employment offices to collect welfare checks on a regular basis.

In this scene, Galahad—along with readers—sees a miniature representation of immigrant life in London. The welfare office is representative of the wide-ranging and dynamic makeup of the immigrant community, a community plagued by "hate and disgust and avarice and malice" but also touched by "sympathy and sorrow and pity." When the narrator notes that this is a place "where everyone is your enemy and your friend," he recalls the competitive nature of the immigrant community while also evoking the beautiful support that people like Moses lend to their fellow expatriates.

Moses teaches Galahad how to fill out the necessary forms, explaining that the top of his paper will read "J—A, Col." "That mean you from Jamaica and you black," Moses says. It's important, he says, that the employment officers know a person is black. Apparently, the employment office used to send black workers to jobsites without informing employers of a candidate's race. Then, not wanting to hire a black person, the employer would often lie to the worker, saying that the job had suddenly been filled. "They don't tell you outright that they don't want coloured fellars, they just say sorry the vacancy get filled," Moses says.

That the employment forms assume a worker is Jamaican if he's black is evidence of the fact that white Britons have no problem making broad generalizations about black people. This, it's worth noting, is how bigoted stereotypes are often born: people embrace ignorance as a way of avoiding the mental work empathy requires. It is exactly this kind of avoidance that white Britons are seemingly all too willing to adopt, as they cling to the idea of "diplomacy," lying about their "vacanc[ies]" instead of being forthright about their racism. After all, to admit their own bigotry would require a certain kind of self-awareness that would, in turn, force them to actually think about the implications of their biases.

SECTION 3

The narrator circles back to tell the story of Moses's arrival in London many years ago. When he first comes ashore, Moses looks for a cheap place to live, somewhere he can eat and "meet the boys and coast a old talk to pass the time away—for this city powerfully lonely when you on your own." Luckily, he finds a hostel where many immigrants first stay before "branch[ing] off on their own." While living here, Moses meets a Nigerian transplant named Captain, or Cap for short. To this day, Cap wears a greenstripe suit and suede shoes—his only outfit. Originally, Cap comes to London for law school, but he soon spends all his money on women and cigarettes, and his father stops sending him allowance. Swept up in the fast city life, Cap becomes a schmoozer, leeching off his friends and dating white women to access their money.

Because Moses is such an admirable advocate for newly arrived immigrants like Galahad (despite his occasional grumblings about always having to show people around), it's no surprise that he himself yearned for a community of immigrants when he first arrived in London. He immediately sought out a place where he could talk to other transplants, a place where he could combat the feelings of solitude and estrangement that come with uprooting oneself from home. Knowing what it's like to feel "powerfully lonely" in a new city, he understands the importance of welcoming people like Galahad to London, helping the young man acclimate to London as best he can.

"The old Cap have the sort of voice that would melt butter in the winter," writes the narrator. Although he never works, he successfully borrows money from friends and lives a lavish life. The narrator notes that there are men in the world who "don't do nothing at all, and you feel that they would dead from starvation, but day after day you meeting them and they looking hale, [...] and in truth it look as if they would not only live longer than you but they would dead happier." Whenever Cap *does* get a job, he only remains for several days before quitting. After some time, the landlord at his and Moses's hostel kicks him out for not paying rent. Luckily, Cap is staying in Moses's room, where he secretly remains even after the landlord evicts him.

Cap is the ultimate manifestation of the kind of person who Moses says "muddies the water" for other black immigrants by refusing to work an honest job, instead "antsing on the State" and borrowing money from friends and lovers alike. What's interesting, though, is that this lifestyle seemingly puts Cap ahead *of Moses. Cap is one of those people who never works but somehow still looks "hale," managing to live a "happier" life than his fellow immigrants who work hard to earn money in an honest manner. It's not hard to see that this would be quite disheartening to somebody like Moses, who only wants to attain upward mobility by laboring in whatever job he can secure.*

One day, the landlord knocks on Moses's door, wanting to check if Cap is inside. While Cap hides in the closet, Moses covers for him. Afterward, he tells Cap he's going to have to leave. Nonetheless, Cap stays on, straining Moses with his presence. Eventually, Cap starts seeing "a white pigeon flying over his bed" in the middle of the night, jumping up and swatting at it. Finally, Cap leaves the hostel, going to a hotel and telling the front desk that he's a student and that he'll be receiving money from his father very soon. A confident liar, he convinces the clerk to give him a fancy room, where he sleeps late everyday and entertains women each night.

It's worth noting that, although Moses thinks people like Cap "muddy the water" for other immigrants, he can't seem to keep himself from helping him. In fact, he even puts himself at risk by lodging Cap behind the landlord's back, putting his own housing situation in jeopardy. This is yet another example of Moses's soft heart and his willingness to aid fellow immigrants despite the strain it puts on his own life. This is why he is the unofficial leader of the immigrant community: his capacity for kindness outweighs his self-interest. Always making sacrifices for his friends, he finds himself unable to focus on his own ascent up the socioeconomic ladder.

Before long, the hotel staff grows suspicious about Cap's financial situation and tells him to leave. As such, Cap simply goes to a new hotel, beginning a long succession of temporary lodgings, all of which he obtains by lying about his nonexistent allowance. In a conversation with Galahad about Cap, Moses says, "Is fellars like that who muddy the water for a lot of us." Not only does Cap deceive hotel workers, but he also misleads the women he dates. For example, one of his lovers—a well-dressed Austrian woman—urges him to get a job, so he goes out during the day and pretends to work when, in reality, he passes the hours flirting with other women before returning home.

The narrator's description of Cap's dishonesty provides readers with the first glimpse of how some characters in The Lonely Londoners *leverage romantic and sexual relationships to reap various social and economic rewards. Hopping from lover to lover, Cap benefits in a very tangible way from his romantic encounters, which is most likely why he seems to especially gravitate toward affluent white women. Unwilling to work for himself and disenfranchised by white society, Cap achieves something like upward mobility by parlaying his love life into economic prosperity.*

After several weeks of deceiving his Austrian girlfriend, Cap tells her he's left because the job is too difficult. How is it, the narrator asks, that "no matter how bad a man is, [women] would still hold on to him and love him?" In keeping with this sentiment, the Austrian woman remains with Cap despite his deception, even pawning her jewelry to help him stay financially afloat. When this isn't enough, Cap sends her to his friend Daniel to borrow money, encouraging her to cry hard in front of him because he "can't bear to see a woman cry."

Cap exploits Daniel's kindness by sending his Austrian girlfriend to borrow money from him. Cap, it seems, is the exact opposite of somebody like Moses, who does whatever he can do uplift his fellow immigrants. In contrast, Cap abuses the kindness of his friends, taking advantage of the immigrant community's tight-knit bond.

One time, Cap becomes involved with a German woman and an English woman at the same time. After borrowing eight pounds from the German woman, he finds himself unable to repay her, so she threatens to call the police. Afraid of the "law," he steals the English woman's watch, which he pawns. Using the earnings from the wristwatch, he repays the German woman. Later, understanding that he can't possibly keep seeing the English woman—who is rich and has expensive taste—he brings her to Daniel, who courts her by taking her to ballets and other fancy events. The English woman eventually tells Daniel that Cap stole her watch, and Daniel confronts him about it. Unable to make an excuse, Cap calls the English woman a whore and prostitute, accusing her of abandoning him for Daniel. He then storms out and avoids Daniel until the matter has been forgotten.

Once again, Cap's exploitation of his romantic and sexual relationships comes to the forefront of The Lonely Londoners, *although this time he finds himself trapped by his own promiscuity, unable to keep up his constant scheming. When he takes his English girlfriend to Daniel, though, he leverages sexuality in a different manner, counting on the fact that Daniel will fall for her and thus ease his own burden of having to repay her. In this way, he essentially* trades *his girlfriend as if she herself has a monetary value, though in the end this fails because Daniel doesn't view women in the same misogynistic and opportunistic manner.*

On another occasion, Cap meets a French woman and pretends to be a part-owner of his friend's car garage. Lying through his teeth, he tells her he'll soon be leaving Britain to accept a better job with the Nigerian Government. The woman believes him so wholeheartedly that she agrees to marry him, thinking they'll soon be leaving for Nigeria. As such, the two near strangers get married, but because he has nowhere to live, Cap gives his wife Daniel's address, claiming it's his own home. When she arrives at the apartment, Daniel is deeply confused, but Cap plays off his friend's magnanimity, eventually asking to borrow eight pounds. Because Daniel wants to impress Cap's new French wife, he relents, parting with the money even though giving away eight pounds puts a significant financial strain on him.

Once again, Cap takes advantage of one of his friends, banking on Daniel's kindness and his soft spot for white women, in front of whom he doesn't want to look poor or stingy. When Daniel gives Cap eight pounds, readers see yet again how Cap manipulates his kind-hearted immigrant community. In order to continue reaping the benefits of being married to a high-society white woman, Cap first takes advantage of Daniel, thereby entering into a seemingly never-ending cycle of dependency and deception.

Taking Daniel's money, Cap and his wife rent a hotel room for seven-guinea per night. Luckily, the French woman receives money each week, and so when the couple runs out of Daniel's cash, they simply move to a new hotel and live off of this steady income. When his wife asks when they're going to move to Nigeria, he simply tells her that he's "waiting on some papers" from the embassy. Despite being newly married, Cap carries on with his promiscuous love life, sleeping through the day while his wife works in a store, and going out to party at night with other women. "Day after day," the narrator writes, Cap lived, "defying all logic and reason and convention, living without working, smoking the best cigarettes, never without women."

When the narrator writes that Cap "def[ies] all logic and reason and convention," readers recall the notion that people like Cap somehow manage to look "hale" and lead prosperous lives even though they don't work steady jobs. Indeed, while Moses toils away each night as a manual laborer, Cap does nothing but lounge around, lie to his wife, and manipulate everybody around him—and yet, he *is the one who smokes "the best cigarettes" and leads a contented life. Attaining upward mobility as an immigrant seems to require that a person give up notions about hard work and commitment, instead living in a manner that will seemingly (and most unfortunately) confirm white Britons' stereotypical belief that immigrants are lazy and detrimental to British society.*

SECTION 4

Another interesting person Moses encounters in his hostel is Bartholomew. The narrator explains that Bart is the type of person who will hide the fact that he has money, just so nobody will ask to borrow anything. Indeed, he'll go to great lengths to convince his friends that he's broke, even skipping meals to give them the impression that he doesn't even have enough money to eat. Another of Bart's noteworthy traits is that he's very light-skinned. "When he first hit Brit'n," the narrator writes, "like a lot of other brown-skin fellars who frighten for the lash, he go around telling everybody that he come from South America." A partier and a dreamer, Bart's always talking about some decadent late night he's recently had—experiences he's able to afford because he is one of the few West Indian immigrants in London to have landed a well-paid clerical job.

Unlike Moses, who lets fellow immigrants stay in his apartment and generally helps his friends when they're in need of assistance, Bart actively avoids contributing to the immigrant community. Instead, he pretends to be incapable of helping his friends, even though he actually has a comfortable job—a rare thing for a black person in London in the 1950s. Rather than embracing his friends, he not only refuses to lend them money, but also tries to set himself apart from them by claiming that he's Latino, thereby committing himself to colorism, a form of racism that prizes lighter complexions. As such, readers see that Bart is something of a lone ranger, a person concerned first and foremost with his own prosperity.

Not only is Bart eager to convince people he's not black, but he also frequently worries about the influx of immigrants in London. "Many nights he think about how so many West Indians coming," the narrator explains, "and it give him more fear than it give the Englishman, for Bart frighten if they make things hard in Brit'n." Furthermore, he is outwardly embarrassed to be seen walking in the streets with friends if they're "too black." Nonetheless, these attitudes don't spare him from experiencing racism himself, as "a few English people give him the old diplomacy," making him no different from "one of the boys."

Even though Bart himself exhibits a form of internalized racism by trying to distance himself from his black friends, he still has to face the harsh reality of London's bigotry. When white Britons "give him the old diplomacy" and he finds that he has become "one of the boys," his devotion to colorism suddenly melts away, and he's forced to reckon with the fact that, no matter how hard he tries to ingratiate himself with white society, the country he's living in is unavoidably bigoted.

Even though Bart is well-off financially, he constantly comes to Moses's apartment in search of free food, which Moses begrudgingly provides until one night, when he finally says, "Listen man, you only coming here and eating my food all the time." Bart says he's only coming around to see Moses and talk to him. Although Moses sees through this weak lie, he still comes looking for Bart when Bart falls seriously ill, checking in on his friend to make sure he's alright.

Yet again, Moses's kindness is apparent, as are the ways in which his friends unselfconsciously take advantage of his generosity. When Bart claims that he comes to Moses's apartment to "talk," he exploits the fact that the immigrant community values camaraderie. Pretending to gravitate toward the kind of "old talk" that often takes place in Moses's apartment, Bart plays on his friend's commitment to fostering a cohesive and mutually supportive group of expatriates.

Bart is rather unsuccessful when it comes to courting women, but he quickly falls in love with a white woman named Beatrice, who dates him for a short period of time. Before long, he resolves to marry her, so Beatrice takes him home to meet her parents. At first, things go well—Beatrice's mother lets them in and seats Bart in the drawing room. Suddenly, though, her father bounds into the room with his finger pointed at Bart. "You!" he screams. "What are you doing in my house? Get out! Get out this minute!" In response, Bart stammers that he's Latin-American, but Beatrice's father ignores him, wanting to throw him out "because he don't want no curly-hair children in the family."

This is one of the few times in The Lonely Londoners *when racism rears its head in a manner that is direct and overt. As both the narrator and Moses have pointed out, bigotry in London is normally expressed as the "old English diplomacy," understated and implied rather than forthright and pronounced. In this moment, though, Bart must suddenly face blatant racism, as Beatrice's father runs him out of the house, making it all too clear that the reason he isn't welcome is that he's not white.*

Despite his failure to impress Beatrice's parents, Bart continues seeing her, terrified he'll never be able to date another white woman. However, she begins to fade away, distancing herself from him little by little until, finally, she moves to a new apartment without telling him. Desperate to find her, he goes throughout London, looking in crowded streets and buses for her face. After a while, he quits his clerical job in order to work as a doorman at her favorite nightclub, where he stands each night hoping she'll appear before him. Ending this description of Bart and his various quirks, the narrator writes: "It have men like that in the world, too."

Whereas Cap manages to benefit from his romantic and sexual relationships, Bart essentially loses everything due to his obsession with Beatrice. Unable to marry her because of her racist father, he gives up his clerical job, the most valuable asset he has when it comes to attaining upward mobility. In this way, he sacrifices his financial stability. This is a stark reversal of how most romantic relationships play out in The Lonely Londoners, *a novel in which men frequently get women to make sacrifices in the name of love. As such, the fact that Bart (and not Beatrice) ends up disempowered explains the narrator's remark that "it have men like that in the world, too."*

SECTION 5

Before long, Tolroy helps his family settle in London, managing to secure rooms for them in the same boarding house in which he himself lives. While Tanty and Ma get situated, Agnes and Lewis decide to live in a nearby house, and Tolroy aids Lewis in securing a job in the same factory as Moses. The narrator notes that Lewis is a curious and highly gullible person, somebody who asks constant questions. This temperament soon annoys Moses, who has to work with Lewis during the nightshift. When Lewis asks, "Moses, you think is true that it have fellars does go round by you when you out working and –– your wife?", Moses decides to mess with him, saying that this is indeed "a regular thing in London." This cuts straight to Lewis's core, since the woman he dated before Agnes apparently cheated on him.

Moses's interaction with Lewis during the nightshift—in which he tricks Lewis—shows a different side of his personality, as he takes delight in messing around with a friend. This stands in contrast to his otherwise generous and thoughtful disposition, but it's worth noting that his lie grows out of annoyance at Lewis's incessant need to constantly ask questions about life in London. In the same way that Moses tells Galahad to "take it easy" when the young man first arrives and wants to know everything about the city, Moses clearly wants Lewis to ease up a bit, resolving to teach him a lesson about believing everything he hears about life in London.

When Moses tricks Lewis into thinking that wives frequently sleep with other men while their husbands are on the nightshift, Lewis goes to the foreman and tells him he doesn't feel well and that he needs to go home. Upon reaching his apartment, he immediately beats Agnes, even though she's alone and doesn't know why he's suddenly abusing her. From this point on, Lewis spends his nights worrying and analyzing his situation, telling Moses, "I know who it is, you know. Is a fellar who does pass round by the house with a motorcycle." He also continues to beat Agnes, who sometimes flees to Tolroy's house to take shelter with Tanty and Ma, though she always comes back the next day. "Why don't you leave that man for good?" Tanty asks, but Agnes continually returns to Lewis.

Having traveled from Jamaica to seek out prosperity in London, Lewis and Agnes's marriage undergoes a significant strain, as Lewis seemingly channels his feelings of insecurity into his relationship with Agnes, taking out on her his own discomfort with existing in an unfamiliar environment. Indeed, what seems to torment him the most is the idea that he has no way of knowing whether or not Agnes is remaining faithful to him in this new context. This uncertainty drives him mad, and he unfortunately lashes out at Agnes as a result.

Lewis finally beats Agnes so hard that she leaves him for good. Suddenly full of remorse, he rushes to Tolroy's apartment and asks Tanty where his wife is, but the old woman refuses to tell him. Not long thereafter, Lewis learns that Agnes has pressed charges against him. At this point, Moses advises him to refrain from going to see Agnes in person after obtaining her address from the court summons. Instead, he suggests that Lewis write a letter of apology—a letter to which Agnes never responds. Despite his initial sadness, though, it's only about a month before Lewis acclimates to his new life as an unmarried man, taking up with a new woman and forgetting his old wife.

It is perhaps because he feels sorry for having tricked Lewis that Moses tries to help him by offering advice regarding how best to respond to Agnes's court summons. This is in line with how he usually operates within his group of friends, as he once again becomes the voice of reason and a guide. On another note, the fact that Lewis quickly moves on after Agnes leaves him is yet another example of how the men in The Lonely Londoners *are—for the most part—rather unfeeling when it comes to romance.*

SECTION 6

The narrator explains that Tanty lives in an area known as the Working Class, where the streets are packed and the houses huddle tightly together. Constantly hustling and working hard, the residents "don't know what happening in the room next to them, far more the street, or how other people living." The narrator notes that the entire city divides itself into "little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don't know anything about what happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers." And despite the stark division between the rich and poor, there is a "communal feeling with the Working Class and the spades, because when you poor things does level out, it don't have much up and down."

In this section, the narrator takes a moment to meditate on London's layout and the various socioeconomic considerations that come along with living in the Working Class. The fact that everybody leads highly independent lives without knowing "how other people" are living contradicts the notion that there is a tight-knit immigrant community. However, poverty is cast as a unifying quality, something that inspires a "communal feeling" amongst the people of London's Working Class neighborhood, suggesting that much of the camaraderie in which Moses and his friends partake has to do with the fact that they are all, for the most part, leading similar lives and struggling against the same obstacles.

Waxing poetic about the interactions between London's rich and poor, the narrator explains that sometimes "old fellars" walk the streets singing in "high falsetto[s]," and now and again a window will open and coins will drop. The narrator envisions the lush apartments from which this money falls, saying, "it must be have some woman that sleep late after a night at the Savoy or Dorchester, and she was laying under the warm quilt on the Simmons mattress, and she hear the test singing." The narrator muses about why such a person would be moved to throw money down, eventually concluding that "if she have a thought at all [about the singer], it never go further than to cause the window to open and the [sixpence] to fall down."

This image of a wealthy woman dropping money from her window without even looking at the person below is a perfect encapsulation of the separation between London's rich and poor (and, for that matter, the separation between blacks and whites, too). This kind of exchange requires almost no actual human interaction, supporting the narrator's previous assertion that people in London "don't know what happening in the room next to them, far more the street, or how other people living." This is an important dynamic to keep in mind when considering the various romantic and sexual escapades the black immigrants in The Lonely Londoners *have with wealthy white women, as sexual activity emerges as one of the only things that stands to break down racial barriers.*

The narrator describes a grocery store in the Working Class that stocks West Indian goods, a shop owned by a white man who quickly found out "what sort of things" his immigrant customers wanted and immediately changed his inventory to include these items. Similarly, there is a tailor shop owned by a Jewish man who treats black men very kindly, offering them free cigars on Saturdays and decorating the store with photographs of famous black people. He even tells his West Indian customers, "Ah! Yes, I do a lot of business with you boys, and guarantee complete satisfaction."

By showcasing the stores that cater specifically to West Indian immigrants, the narrator shows readers that not all Londoners are averse to these newcomers—in fact, some of them have even recognized that immigration might even bolster the city's economy, thereby adapting to the changing landscape of their clientele. In this way, it becomes evident that the West Indian presence in London is quite strong—strong enough to change the city itself.

Tanty shops every Saturday at the grocery store that stocks West Indian delicacies, where she consorts with other housewives, "getting on just as if they in the market-place back home." And although the owner of the store originally bars anybody from opening a line of credit—which is, according to Tanty, a common practice in the West Indies—Tanty manages to convince him otherwise. Slowly but surely, the entire neighborhood gets to know Tanty, who isn't afraid to haggle with vendors or tell Britons how things are done in Jamaica. In this way, she ingrains herself in the community, treating her close surroundings like a small village instead of just one section of a large city.

Tanty's established routine in the Working Class illustrates just how quickly a person can acclimate to a new environment. Indeed, she wastes no time becoming familiar with her immediate surroundings. At the same time, though, it's worth noting that the process of acclimatization is seemingly a two-way street, meaning that London doesn't only change Tanty, but Tanty changes London. This is made clear by the fact that she's able to convince the grocer to accept credit, a practice that reflects the way business is handled in Tanty's native Jamaica. In this way, Selvon illustrates the kind of growth a community undergoes when it accepts newcomers with open arms.

Tanty is comfortable existing in London's Working Class, but she never ventures beyond its small boundaries to travel deeper into the city. Nonetheless, she learns the particularities of public transportation, committing the system to memory so she can ask visitors where they transferred on the train or which line they took to reach her. One day, though, Ma accidentally takes the cupboard key with her to work, and so Tanty has to journey forth into the city, navigating the "tube" and asking a police officer for help. Once underground, she feels overwhelmed, "but the thought that she would never be able to say she went [into the city] made her carry on." On her way back, she takes a double-decker bus, and though she's too scared to look out the window, she's proud that "now nobody [can] tell she that she ain't travel by bus and tube in London."

Although The Lonely Londoners *is a novel that examines a group of immigrants and their lives in a foreign city, there aren't many scenes in which a character is forced to step outside of her comfort zone. When Tanty has to make her way to Ma—taking the tube and a double-decker bus—readers witness the ways in which being an immigrant tests a person's limits. Above all, this scene allows Selvon to demonstrate the fact that integrating into a new environment requires great tests of courage, even when the task at hand might seem harmless and ordinary to a native citizen.*

SECTION 7

When summer arrives, Galahad is cold. "I don't know why I hot in the winter and cold in the summer," he says to Moses, who pokes fun at his friend. Nonetheless, things are going well for Galahad, who takes great delight in living in London and "using the names of the places like they mean big romance, as if to say 'I was in Oxford Street' have more prestige than if he just say 'I was up the road.'" Indeed, when he says something like, "She waiting for me by Charing Cross Station," he "feel like a new man." Likewise, he loves going to the Piccadilly Tube Station to marvel at its large clock and to watch the people passing through the station. Moses says he was like that when he first came to London, but all those places mean nothing to him now.

The difference between Moses and Galahad is apparent in this moment, especially when Moses says that the places that so entice Galahad mean nothing to him now that he's been in London for so long. Galahad, on the other hand, finds "big romance" in merely uttering the names of well-known landmarks, as if these words are majestic in and of themselves. Indeed, the thrill he derives from existing in London makes him feel "like a new man," a fact that illustrates just how much immigration can impact a person's sense of self.

Because Galahad works the nightshift, he walks through the streets tired and dirty every morning, passing people he's barely able to greet due to his intense fatigue. In the evenings, though, he puts on his best clothes and strolls around, saying hello to everybody and thinking, "This is London, this is life oh lord, to walk like a king with money in your pocket, not a worry in the world." While walking like this one evening, he passes a white woman and her daughter, who says, "Mummy, look at that black man!" Instantly, the mother says, "You mustn't say that, dear!" but Galahad stoops and gives the child an affectionate pat on the cheek, saying, "What a sweet child!" as the youngster begins to cry. "What's your name?" he asks, but the mother quickly becomes uncomfortable and backs away, leaving Galahad alone on the sidewalk.

By telling her daughter to not remark upon Galahad's race, this mother tacitly frames blackness as something to be ashamed of, acting like her daughter has just insulted Galahad when, in reality, all she's done is notice the color of his skin. This is most likely why Galahad is unperturbed by the comment, though when he pats the little girl on the cheek, she backs away, solidifying the idea that her remark was, in fact, an expression of fear, as it becomes obvious that blackness bears negative connotations for her.

Regarding Galahad's interaction with the white woman and her child on the sidewalk, the narrator writes: "If that episode did happen around the first time when he land up in London, oh Lord! he would have run to the boys, telling them he have a big ballad." Now, though, Galahad simply smiles at the racist mother as she inches away. Nonetheless, he sometimes lies on his bed and thinks, "What it is we want that the white people and them find it so hard to give?" Looking at his hand, he says, "Colour is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. [...] I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you!"

Galahad's thoughts about color underline just how arbitrary racism is. Stepping back to think about it, he's confounded that people treat him so badly simply because of the color of his skin, which has nothing to do with who he is or how he behaves. This understanding of the utter stupidity of racism is perhaps what helps him cope with his unfortunate interaction with this mother and her daughter—knowing that such discrimination is petty and ridiculous, he doesn't feel the need to run to his friends and tell them this story (and after all, this tale wouldn't strike them as noteworthy, as they've all been through similar instances).

SECTION 8

Another immigrant in Moses's circle of friends is a man named Big City, a nickname he earned in the army because he always talked about traveling and living in the world's largest metropolises. Big City is grumpy and mean until payday, when he buys friends drinks and bets his new money. Indeed, Big City is a gambling man, and he asks Moses to help him fill out his forms to bet on soccer matches. He also tries to convince Moses to gamble, too, emphasizing how much a person can do with 75,000 pounds. Moses replies htat he only earns money "by the sweat of the brow, and not through winning anything." He then posits, "I sure if you win all that money you head straight back for Trinidad," to which Big City says, "Who, me? No boy. [...W]herever I roam, I will land back in the old Brit'n."

Big City is the opposite of Moses. Whereas Moses works hard and tries—albeit unsuccessfully—to save his money, all the while helping friends even when doing so puts a strain on him, Big City irresponsibly spends all his cash and treats his friends poorly, except when he's in a good mood. Furthermore, his grand ambition to travel the world is very much at odds with Moses's own outlook, as Moses dreams of one day returning home to Trinidad. This, however, is an uncommon outlook, for most of the immigrants in The Lonely Londoners *have wildly ambitious plans, wanting to climb as high as they can on the socioeconomic ladder. Moses, on the other hand, wants to make just enough money to lead a modest life, but even this is seemingly a herculean feat in London's tough economy.*

After his conversation with Big City about gambling, Moses starts thinking about how nice it would be to have such a large sum of money, realizing that it would "solve all the problems in the world." Indeed, the narrator notes: "He used to see all his years in London pile up one on top of the other, and he getting no place in a hurry, and the years going by, and the thought make him frighten sometimes."

When Moses feels fear at watching "all his years in London pile up one on top of the other," he experiences a disconcerting feeling of stasis and a sense that he hasn't made any progress even after having spent over ten years away from home. This is especially troubling to him because the whole reason most West Indians leave their countries in the first place is to attain upward mobility. The thought that his work in London has done nothing but enable him to go on living in London casts his life abroad as futile and void of advancement.

More than anything, Big City savors the summertime, when he can walk through **the park** and join groups of people congregated around a soapbox, where various speakers stand up and critique the government. Galahad is also impressed by this spectacle—so impressed that he can't believe the police don't do anything to stop the people making anti-government speeches. Seeing the young man's incredulity, Big City encourages Galahad to go up there himself, an idea Moses endorses as a way of "pok[ing] the fire." "I know the fellar who talking on the colour problem," Big City says, "I will tell him that you can give the people the real dope on the question." He then quickly brings Galahad to the soapbox, where the young immigrant stammers while Big City laughs and says, "Talk louder man," making fun of him from the audience.

In this moment, the immigrant community unites to share their thoughts with one another regarding the British government and the treatment of black people in London. Unfortunately for Galahad, though, Moses and Big City see this as an opportunity to make a fool of him, taking advantage of the young man's eagerness by giving him false encouragement. Of course, this is the second time in the novel that Moses has tricked one of his friends, and readers begin to understand that he's a man who likes to have a good laugh. Although humiliating Galahad is Big City's idea, Moses quickly jumps on board, making it obvious that, despite his normally serious demeanor, he enjoys joking around with his friends.

Ever since Big City tricked Galahad into going onto the soapbox, Galahad claims he'll beat him up the next time their paths cross. As such, whenever Moses sees Big City approaching, he goads Galahad by saying, "Ah, look Big City coming, Galahad. Now is the time to beat him." One night, Big City comes straight up and says, "I hear you looking for me, Galahad," but the young man just smiles like an idiot and says, "What happening, Big City?" As soon as Big City leaves, though, Galahad gets on his knees and swears that he'll beat him the next time they encounter one another.

When Galahad brags that he's going to beat Big City, he reveals his desire to be seen as an alpha-male in his group of friends. Indeed, it's important to him that he make a name for himself in his community, as this is part of his attempt to establish himself in London. Of course, the fact that he backs down whenever he sees Big City keeps him from ever proving himself as an alpha-male, but his desire to do so still indicates just how important it is for him to solidify himself in his new environment.

SECTION 9

"Oh what a time it is when summer come to the city and all them girls throw away heavy winter coat and wearing light summer frocks so you could see the legs and shapes that was hiding away," writes the narrator, opening a long stream-of-consciousness sentence that touches upon the sexually intoxicating qualities of summertime in London, when Moses and his friends cruise through **Hyde Park** looking to have sexual encounters. This time of year makes up for the harsh winter, when "a kind of grey nasty colour does come to the sky" and causes everybody to feel "miserable and cold." In the summer, though, there are many parties and good times, all of which keep Londoners moving through the bleak months.

This section, which focuses heavily on London's wheeling seasons, ultimately emphasizes the passage of time. The happiness that summer brings is what keeps people like Moses from leaving London in the winter, a phenomenon that explains Moses's previous feeling of stasis, and his disappointment that he's been in England for so long and has nothing to show for it. Indeed, it seems the sexual excitement that summer ushers in attracts him like a magnet, discouraging him from leaving to return to Trinidad.


One evening, Moses meets a white woman in **the park** and brings her back to his apartment, where they start having sex. Suddenly, she begins to "moan and gasp and wriggle and twist up [her] body like a piece of wire," which puts Moses on edge because he knows that "if anything happen to the woman and the police find her in his [apartment]," he wouldn't "stand a chance." At this moment, Daniel rings the doorbell and Moses tells him what's happened. He then asks Daniel to wait a moment and runs inside to tell the woman to put her clothes back on, but by the time Daniel enters, she seems completely fine, as if nothing has happened. Agreeing to take her home, Moses boards a bus with this woman, rides it for a moment, and then hops off, successfully abandoning her before making his way home.

When the woman in Moses's apartment starts having this strange reaction, a sudden element of fear enters into what was otherwise a casual and harmless sexual interaction. Faced with the prospect of a white woman dying in his apartment, Moses has to confront the dangerous implications of being a black man who engages in interracial sexual relationships. Although he can enjoy a certain sense of equality in his sexual relationships with white women, he is unfortunately still subject to society's prejudices and discriminations, which would undoubtedly hold him accountable for any trouble that befell this woman.


One night, a white man approaches Moses in **the park** and tells him that he's *just* the man he's been looking for. Confused, Moses follows him to a blonde woman standing under a tree, who looks at him and shakes her head. The man then leads Moses to another blonde woman and makes his offer, saying that he'll pay Moses to have sex with her. Moses agrees, and afterwards, the man proposes that they do the entire ordeal again sometime, a proposal Moses readily accepts. "The things that does happen in this London people wouldn't believe when you tell them," writes the narrator; "some ballad happen in the city that people would bawl if they hear."

It's important to keep in mind that this entire section is narrated as a single stream-of-consciousness sentence, one that dips in and out of dialogue and poetic observation, mingling Moses's thoughts with the narrator's words, a celebration of the sexual freedom running rampant through Hyde Park. This narrative technique itself embodies the kind of freedom and wildness represented by Hyde Park, a place where white and black people can come together in ways that would otherwise upset London's racial divide, making high society whites "bawl" upon hearing the ways in which sexual congress transcends the "old English diplomacy" that normally keeps blacks and whites separated.

The narrator continues to catalogue the myriad sexual exploits that take place in **Hyde Park** during the summer, addressing the fact that white women often derive great thrills from sleeping with black men. The narrator asserts that these kinds of English women don't want black men to put on fake British accents—instead, they want them to "live up to the films and stories they hear about black people living primitive in the jungles of the world." Even white men, it seems, take pleasure in going against their own racist society by inviting black men to parties, thinking that "they can't get big thrills unless they have a black man in the company." In keeping with this, whenever Moses attends one of these parties, somebody always presses five pounds into his hand and tells him, "That was a jolly good show."

Although the white people who populate Hyde Park in the summer are willing to interact with black people in ways that go against what's considered normal, their embrace of Moses and his friends does nothing to transcend racist stereotypes. In fact, when white women want their black lovers to "live up to the films and stories," they fetishize their partners' blackness, turning their race into a spectacle. Similarly, when Moses attends a party where white men treat him like an entertainer, his blackness is tokenized. Because fetishization and tokenization are dehumanizing, it's easy to see that the sense of freedom swirling through Hyde Park in the summertime is more complicated and fraught than it might appear at first.

One time, the narrator says, a Jamaican man goes home with a white woman who, in the throes of passion, calls him a "black bastard." Although she thinks this is a compliment, he immediately stops and beats her until she leaves. "These things happen in the blazing summer under the trees in **the park**," the narrator writes. And although there are bad experiences mixed in with the good, Galahad especially loves London in these moments, "when the sweetness of summer get in him" and he determines to never leave Britain.

After relating this troubling story about a white woman grotesquely fetishizing her lover's blackness, the narrator quickly moves on, writing off the incident by remarking that "these things happen in the blazing summer." Life in London for black immigrants is a constant combination of excitement and sorrow, of celebration and insult. Nonetheless, characters like Galahad look past such unfortunate encounters, managing to savor the "sweetness of summer."

SECTION 10

Another of Moses's friends is a man who goes by Five Past Twelve, a nickname he acquired because people look at him and say, "Boy, you black like midnight" before correcting themselves and saying, "No, you more like Five Past Twelve." Originally from Barbados, Five knows what it's like to be discriminated against based on the color of his skin: once, when dating a light-skinned woman, a group of men approached him and told him to leave her alone. When he refused, they doused him in oil and chased him with a box of matches, trying to light him on fire. Not long after WWII, Five came to England, joined the Royal Air Force, and then took a job as a truck driver—a position that requires him to travel throughout the country. Now, whenever he's in town, he wants to get drunk and party with his friends.

The fact that Five earns his nickname based on the darkness of his skin is yet another example of how colorism brings itself to bear on the immigrant community. Not only are the characters in The Lonely Londoners *constantly held accountable for their blackness by white Britons, they also judge* each other *based on their skin tones. For example, while Five is discriminated against because of how dark his skin is, Bart leads a relatively privileged life because his skin is a lighter shade. However, even Bart must contend with racism, ultimately suggesting that the idea of colorism is a petty concept, a construction that is just another facet of the broader racism applied to the entire black immigrant community by white Britons.*

A hard partier, Five is Harris's worst nightmare. Harris is a black immigrant who tries to present himself as a distinguished English gentleman. As such, he throws parties for various white socialites. Somehow, though, his black friends always hear about these parties and appear in large numbers, ready to drink and have a good time. Upon seeing Five one night at the entrance to the party, Harris says, "I want you to make an effort to behave and comport yourself properly tonight." In response, Five says, "Man, sometimes you get on like if we didn't grow up together." Five then launches into a memory about Harris having sex with a mutual acquaintance, but Harris silences him, saying, "It seems you are drunk already. I hope you haven't brought any weed here tonight."

Like Bart, Harris wants badly to distance himself from his black peers in an effort to blend into white society. While this is clear from the way he tries to bar his friends from attending his elegant parties, it's also made evident by his diction. Indeed, Harris is the only immigrant in The Lonely Londoners *who goes out of his way to avoid speaking creolized English, instead opting to talk as if he were born to a wealthy white family in England. This attitude only encourages Five to go out of* his *way to remind Harris that they come from the same place, and that he can't simply erase his cultural identity to fit into England's posh and aristocratic society.*

Before entering the party, Five slyly tells Harris to see him afterward so that the two of them can share a "puff." At this, Harris warns Five that he'll kick him out if he misbehaves, but Five brushes him off, saying, "Ah, you does say so every time I come to any of your fete." Later, he adds, "You forget I know you from back home. Is only since you hit Brit'n that you getting on so English." With this, he bounds past Harris into the ballroom, searching for the five white women he brought with him. Tracking down Moses, Harris asks him to "keep an eye on Five." At this point, Ma and Tanty arrive at the party along with Tolroy and Lewis, and Tanty starts embarrassing Harris by screaming his name and talking about how big he's grown since his days in Jamaica.

There is a clear hint of resentment detectable in Five's assertion that Harris has only started "getting on so English" since arriving in Britain. This is because Harris's desire to leave behind his cultural identity is blatant and, as such, an insult to the people like Five who have held tightly to their true selves even after moving to England. Tanty forces Harris to confront the same idea (that he has abandoned his sense of self), though it's not clear whether she actively wants to embarrass him or if she simply doesn't care that she's ruining his cover as a distinguished English gentleman.

As the dancing begins, Harris makes his way to the guest of honor's table, making small talk with one of the young white women sitting there. After a moment, he feels it's only right to ask her to dance, and so they make their way to the dance floor. After only a few moments, though, Tanty appears and puts her hand on Harris's shoulder, demanding that he dance with her. "What happening, you avoiding the old lady, eh?" she asks. "Too much young girl here to bother with Tanty, eh?" As she edges her way into dancing with Harris, Five—incredibly stoned by this point—watches from afar, swooping in and starting to dance with the young white woman, whom Harris has just unwillingly abandoned.

The fact that Harris has such a hard time maintaining the illusion that he's a distinguished English gentleman suggests that leaving behind one's cultural identity is nearly impossible. No matter how hard he tries to act like he has nothing to do with Tanty or Five, they find ways to swoop into his life and ruin his act. In this way, Selvon implies that adopting a new persona isn't an effective way to integrate oneself into a new culture or society, ultimately suggesting that such a tactic is bound to fail.

After dancing with Tanty, Harris rushes over to Moses and tells him Five is misbehaving, but Moses insists that he's simply having a good time. "The next time I have a fete," Harris says, "attendance will be by invitation only. You boys always make a disgrace of yourselves, and make me ashamed of myself." As Harris rushes away, Big City appears, and Galahad taunts him into going over and asking the young white woman's friend to dance. After a brief back-and-forth in which Moses also eggs him on, Big City finally goes over and starts dancing with the other white woman. As the party progresses, Cap goes home with two women, Bart gets drunk and pines over Beatrice, and Daniel stands at the bar buying drinks for everybody else's dates. By 10:30, a Jamaican man slams a Coke bottle over Five's head, but the party rages on.

The total disintegration of the party's veneer of elegance further reinforces the notion that Harris's posturing as a distinguished English gentleman is futile. What's more, the fact that no white partygoers seem offended by the direction of the party's antics indicates that Harris is wrong to think that he must control his friends for the sake of his white guests. As such, readers witness in this moment a breakdown of the division between London's white and black societies—a momentary, if partial, transcendence of racial boundaries.


Exhausted, Harris joins Moses and the others at the bar and orders a lemonade. Forgetting to use "proper' English, he tells his friends that they'll have to be respectful when the band plays God Save The Queen at the end of the party, pointing out that they usually keep dancing while everybody else stands respectfully and pays attention to the song. "Now it have decent people here tonight," he reiterates, "and if you don't get on respectable [...t]he English people will say we are still uncivilized and don't know how to behave properly." At this, Five starts lecturing Harris about how he ought to have a drink, but Harris slinks off to remind the others to be respectful.

Harris's momentary lapse into creolized English validates Five's feeling that he acts like a phony when he pretends to be an English gentleman. Though his speech slips into the vernacular, he retains his belief that it's important for black immigrants to comport themselves so that nobody can call them "uncivilized." Although he takes this belief to extreme heights, the idea itself is similar to Moses's thought that black immigrants who lead disreputable lives "muddy the water" for everybody else. In this way, readers see once again how much careful consideration goes into how the immigrants in The Lonely Londoners *present themselves in a society all too eager to discredit and denounce them.*


SECTION 11

One winter, Galahad—along with many other immigrant workers—loses his job. Luckily for him, he doesn't get cold and so doesn't have to worry very much about finding a way to stay warm, but he *does* need to somehow feed himself. Realizing one day that London has an excess of pigeons, he decides to catch one for dinner. After frequenting **the park** on a regular basis to examine how pigeons move, he finally captures one by luring it to him with pieces of bread and then grabbing it by its legs. Unfortunately, a white woman sees him do this and yells out across the park, saying, "You cruel monster! You killer!" Quickly, Galahad stuffs the bird into his coat while the woman tries to find a police officer.

In this scene, Galahad is scolded for simply trying to survive. Having come to London to better his financial prospects, he suddenly finds himself out of work and starving. Upward mobility, it seems in this moment, is nothing but a dream. This idea aligns with Moses's mindset regarding the actual benefits of living in London, of which there are very few. After more than ten years in the city, Moses understands that making money and climbing the socioeconomic ladder is incredibly difficult—a fact Galahad discovers as he's reprimanded for merely trying to feed himself.

Having escaped **the park** with the pigeon, Galahad goes to Moses's apartment and tells him he's bought a bird and asks him to help him cook it. Excited, Moses wonders how Galahad was able to afford this kind of food, but he pushes the matter out of his mind because he's hungry. Back in his own apartment, Galahad plucks the feathers and begins to feel guilty, but he tries to reason with himself, justifying that he only killed the pigeon because he was so hungry. "What the hell I care," he mutters, "so much damn pigeon all about the place." Still feeling guilty, though, he later tells Moses how he actually obtained the pigeon. "Boy, you take a big chance," Moses says. "You think this is Trinidad? Them pigeons there to beautify the park, not to eat. The people over here will kill you if you touch a fly."

The feelings Galahad experiences after catching the pigeon are complicated. By killing the pigeon, he has transgressed societal norms. At the same time, though, he has only done so in order to feed himself, and the fact of the matter is that it's ludicrous to see pigeons—of which there are many—as birds that simply "beautify the park." Furthermore, when Moses points out that Londoners will "kill" immigrants if they even "touch a fly," he once again evokes the idea that white Britons are eager to magnify even the smallest transgressions committed by the immigrant community.

Having eaten a good meal of pigeon and rice, Moses and Galahad speak nostalgically about Trinidad, sharing funny stories about people they both know. After some time, while Galahad is in the middle of a hearty laugh, Moses suddenly becomes sober, feeling guilty and thinking "it not right" to be enjoying himself so much "in these hard times." Vocalizing his feelings, he expresses his discontent regarding the fact that he and Galahad—along with all their immigrant friends—have come to Britain "to make a living" only to find a sore lack of opportunity.

Once again, Moses demonstrates his reticence to indulge feelings of nostalgia. For him, reminiscing about Trinidad is inappropriate because doing so doesn't acknowledge his grim present circumstances. In other words, he sees nostalgia as unproductive because it enables him to momentarily disregard his hardships rather than encouraging him to focus on what needs to be done to remedy his situation. Rather than sitting back happily with a belly full of pigeon, he determines to focus on the sad fact that Galahad and his other friends have no opportunities to climb the socioeconomic ladder.

Galahad tries to lighten the mood, but Moses rejects his optimism, saying that he sometimes wakes up in the night and can't go back to sleep because he's worried about whether or not he's making progress in London. "I just lay there on the bed thinking about my life, how after all these years I ain't get no place at all, I still the same way, neither forward nor backward," he says. He tells Galahad—who has now been in London for roughly four years—about his own experience as a new arrival, about how he used to want to go home but now can't decide whether to stay or leave. "Ten years the old man in Brit'n," he says, "and what to show for it?" He says he would save a little money and go back to Trinidad if he was Galahad.

Moses yet again experiences a feeling of stasis regarding his life in London. Burdened by his own indecision, he once more suggests that Galahad go back to Trinidad because the young man hasn't yet invested too much time in building a life in England. The idea that he has nothing to "show" for his time in London is seemingly the most frightening thing Moses can think of, an indication that what he wants most in life is to achieve a sense of progress.

Galahad insists that he doesn't want to return to Trinidad. Moses, on the other hand, confesses that if he had enough money, he'd go home immediately to "live in Paradise." In response, Galahad reminds his friend that there aren't any "prospects" in Trinidad, but Moses ignores him, saying, "This is a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn't get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell. Here is not like home where you have friends all about."

Moses evokes the novel's title in this moment, when he says, "This is a lonely miserable city." However, he also inadvertently emphasizes the importance of his own community by asserting that the nostalgic conversations he so often avoids actually make life in London bearable. In saying this, he underlines the sustaining qualities of a tight-knit immigrant community, making it clear that camaraderie is a valuable resource for a person living in a foreign city.

Continuing his critique of life in London, Moses says that—in addition to the fact that the city is "lonely" and "miserable"—white Britons don't truly embrace black people in their community. "They tolerate you, yes," he says, "but you can't go in their house and eat or sit down and talk." He then scoffs at the way English people party and celebrate holidays, and when Galahad says he likes when white women kiss him at the turn of the New Year—because they say it's good luck to kiss black men—Moses berates him, saying, "Man, you really foolish, yes." Going on, he says that he would return to Trinidad as soon as possible if he knew for sure he'd be able to get a good job. "But is no use talking to fellars like you," he adds. "You hit two-three white women and like you gone mad."

Moses makes an important distinction here between being accepted by white people and being tolerated by them. He upholds that although white Britons rarely express their racist views outright, they also don't embrace the idea of a fully biracial or multicultural London. Even when white women shower black men with attention—kissing them on New Year's—they aren't actually cultivating a culture of equality. Rather, they're tokenizing black immigrants in a way that—according to Moses—blinds newcomers like Galahad, who get overexcited by the idea of entering into sexual relationships with white women.

SECTION 12

The narrator assures readers that Galahad isn't the only immigrant to have captured and eaten a pigeon in London. In fact, Cap used to live in a second-floor apartment where pigeons congregated on the eaves of the building, just outside the window. One evening, Cap is lying in bed, hardly able to move because he's so famished. Hearing the pigeons outside his window, he hauls himself out of bed and—after many unsuccessful attempts—catches one of the birds. From this point on, he eats heartily in his upstairs bedroom, living well and looking healthy until his landlord eventually kicks him out. Disappointed to leave behind such a good source of food, he makes sure his next apartment is also on the top floor. Unfortunately, though, no birds appear on his windowsill. Even still, he places breadcrumbs on the ledge every morning, hoping in vain to attract his next meal.

Because Cap is averse to working, he has to get creative with how he sustains himself. Interestingly enough, this pigeon operation is one of the few times he achieves something like self-sufficiency, since he otherwise leeches off of friends and lovers instead of finding ways to provide for himself. Of course, the fact that Galahad—a hard worker—also has to resort to such an unconventional method of surviving in London suggests that the city provides little in the way of opportunity, as suddenly a diligent laborer is forced to fend for himself in the same manner as a lazy conman.

SECTION 13

Creating a running list of what it's like to live in London as an immigrant, the narrator mentions that Moses's friends assemble in his apartment every Sunday morning as if they're attending church. Getting together "for a oldtalk," they enjoy themselves over lighthearted conversation, talking and laughing and telling stories, "everybody asking what happening but nobody like they know what happening." The narrator provides fragmented pieces of dialogue, the beginnings of stories like, "Boy Moses, if I tell you what happen to me last night—," and, "Boy, I pick up something by the Arch yesterday—." Mixed in with these stories are questions about employment opportunities or inquiries about whether anybody knows about an available apartment.

Once again, the vitality and cohesiveness of the immigrant community comes to the forefront of The Lonely Londoners, *as Moses hosts a congregation of friends every Sunday. By comparing these meetings to going to church, the narrator showcases the mutual support the characters lend one another when they get together to tell stories and ask questions about possible opportunities. In the same way that a church community bands together to uplift one another, the immigrants who populate Moses's apartment each Sunday not only help each other find new jobs or places to live, but also help each other shoulder the emotional burdens that come along with immigration.*


"Sometimes, listening to them," Moses "look in each face, and he feel a great compassion for every one of them, as if he live each of their lives, one by one, and all the strain and stress come to rest on his own shoulders." On some Sundays, he barely even talks, letting his friends' words wash over him as he leans back on the bed and listens to their stories and problems. When they leave, their voices continue in his head, "ringing in his ear, and sometimes tears come to his eyes and he don't know why really, if is home-sickness or if is just that life in general beginning to get too hard."

The fact that Moses feels as if he has lived each of his friends' lives emphasizes just how close this community of immigrants has become. Despite their considerable differences, these men understand what their friends are going through because they themselves are going through something quite similar. Because Moses is something of a leader or role model, he feels that his friends' burdens rest "on his own shoulders." This is perhaps because he has been in London the longest and thus takes it upon himself to guide people like Galahad through the trials and tribulations of adjusting to life abroad.


To cope with the difficulty of supporting his friends, Moses makes jokes during the week, asking them if they're coming to church on Sunday. When the day finally comes, though, he finds himself upset, wanting—for example—to kick Cap out, wanting to say, "Get to hell out, why the arse you telling me about how they call you a darkie, you think I am interested?" He wonders what he and his friends are doing in London, and each year he promises himself he'll return to Trinidad. But when winter ends, he falls in love again with the city and says, "I will wait until after the summer, the summer does really be hearts." However, he now intuits that he's gotten so accustomed "to the pattern that he can't do anything about it," and with every year that passes, he stays exactly where he is: in the heart of London.

Although Moses doesn't feel as if he has established himself successfully in London, the mere fact that he can recognize such a pattern or rhythm in his life shows that he has, in fact, settled into a new life abroad. Moses hasn't attained upward mobility, but his recurring decision to remain in London signals the fact that he has habituated to life in this foreign city. Unfortunately, though, this life leaves seemingly no room for socioeconomic advancement, and so Moses finds himself trapped in a feeling of stasis.

On summer nights, Moses stands near the River Thames, staring at the city's lights reflected upon the water, trying to decide if he should return to Trinidad. He thinks about the time he spends with friends, wondering what it's all worth. "Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode," the narrator writes, "he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same spot." Moses imagines "black faces bobbing up and down" amidst "white, strained faces," everybody "hustling along the Strand" as black immigrants try to make their way through, "bewildered" and "hopeless." And he knows that his friends' optimism only masks their sorrow, but he goes on looking at the river, listening to faint laughter in the summer air.

Even though Moses feels that he is forever "standing in the same spot" instead of climbing the socioeconomic ladder, there's no reason he can't also enjoy his existence. Indeed, upward mobility is just one facet of life, one that primarily has to do with money and wealth, and not necessarily with happiness or enjoyment. As such, even as Moses laments the fact that he and his fellow immigrant friends have unenticing prospects, he's able to appreciate the beauty around him, and so he stares into the rippling water of the Thames and listens to the joyfulness of strangers walking in the summer evening, eking out a kind of contentment that exists apart from issues of racism, class, and culture.

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