CRY THE BELOVED COUNTRY CHAPTER SEVEN

### Summary — Chapter 7

Kumalo sits in his lodgings, writing a letter to his wife and listening to Gertrude sing as she helps Mrs. Lithebe around the house while her son plays in the garden. Msimangu arrives and brings Kumalo to the shop of his brother, John. Although John does not recognize Kumalo at first, he seems pleasantly surprised to see him. Kumalo learns that John’s wife, Esther, has left him, and that John has since acquired a mistress.

John tries to explain why he stopped writing home and then asks Kumalo if he may speak in English. In a strange voice, he relates that he has been seized by “an experience” in Johannesburg that has made him see things differently. In the village, John says, he was a nobody and had to obey the chief, whom he calls ignorant and a tool of the white man. In Johannesburg, he says, he is free from the chief, although he adds that the church serves a similar function in keeping black South Africans down. Things are changing in Johannesburg, John proclaims, and his voice deepens with emotion as he decries the wealth and power of the mine’s owners and the poverty of the miners. Although the bishop condemns this economic discrepancy, he lives in a fancy house, which embitters John toward the church.

Msimangu questions John’s fidelity to his former wife. Before John can respond, Kumalo intervenes and John’s mistress silently serves tea. Kumalo confesses that listening to John is painful for him, both because of John’s manner of speaking and because much of what he says is true. He tells John he has found Gertrude and asks about Absalom. John says he does not know where either Absalom or his own son are, then remembers that they were working in a textile factory in Alexandra. Msimangu and Kumalo take their leave.

As they head to the textile factory, Msimangu explains to Kumalo that much of what John said is true, and that John is one of the three most important black men in Johannesburg. Msimangu also suggests, however, that if John were as courageous as he maintains, he would be in prison, and Msimangu observes that power can corrupt even the most dedicated politician.

At the textile factory, the white men who manage the plant are helpful, stating that Absalom has not worked there for twelve months. Kumalo and Msimangu meet a friend of Absalom’s who says that Absalom used to live with a Mrs. Ndlela in Sophiatown. The two priests find Mrs. Ndlela, who tells them that Absalom has moved to Alexandra. After Kumalo steps outside, Msimangu asks Mrs. Ndlela why she seems so sorry for Kumalo, and she reveals that both she and her husband felt that Absalom kept bad company.

**What happens in Chapter 7 and who is involved?**

• Kumalo buys clean clothes for Gertrude and her child.

• Msimangu takes Kumalo to his brother John.

• John welcomes Stephen with a big smile, but he does not answer Kumalo’s questions truthfully.

• His first wife, Esther, left John ten years before. He now lives with a new woman, even though they are not officially married.

• John lives happily in Johannesburg without the moral judgement of the people back home in Ndotsheni.

• Kumalo asks John if he knows where Absalom is.

• John gives Kumalo the address of a fabric factory where he thinks that Absalom and John’s own son, Matthew are both working.

• Kumalo and Msimangu could not find Absalom, he hasn’t worked there in a year.