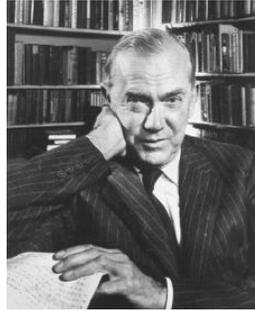


# THE HEART OF THE MATTER

by Graham Greene



## THE AUTHOR

Graham Greene (1904-1991) was born in Berkhamsted, England. He had a very troubled childhood, was bullied in school, on several occasions attempted suicide by playing Russian roulette, and eventually was referred for psychiatric help. Writing became an important outlet for his painful inner life. He took a degree in History at Oxford, then began work as a journalist. His conversion to Catholicism at the age of 22 was due largely to the influence of his wife-to-be, though he later became a devout follower of his chosen faith. His writing career included novels, short stories, and plays. Some of his novels dealt openly with Catholic themes, including *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), and *The End of the Affair* (1951), though the Vatican strongly disapproved of his portrayal of the dark side of man and the corruption in the Church and in the world. Others were based on his travel experiences, often to troubled parts of the world, including Mexico during a time of religious persecution, which produced *The Lawless Roads* (1939) as well as *The Power and the Glory*, *The Quiet American* (1955) about Vietnam, *Our Man in Havana* (1958) about Cuba, *The Comedians* (1966) about Haiti, *The Honorary Consul* (1973) about Paraguay, and *The Human Factor* (1978) about South Africa. Many of his novels were later made into films. Greene was also considered one of the finest film critics of his day, though one particularly sharp review attracted a libel suit from the studio producing Shirley Temple films when he suggested that the sexualization of children was likely to appeal to pedophiles. He even wrote film screenplays, the most successful of which was Orson Welles' award-winning version of *The Third Man* (1949). Despite his profound Catholic faith, his own life was marred by bouts of despair and moral inconsistencies – struggles with alcohol and drugs, sexual dalliances of all sorts, and eventual separation from his wife after almost twenty years of marriage. He died in Switzerland at the age of 87.

*The Heart of the Matter* (1948) reflects the author's experience working with British Intelligence in Africa during World War II. The novel won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction in the year of its publication, and later was included on several lists of the best English novels of the twentieth century. The book deals with the moral downfall and eventual suicide of a devout Catholic police inspector as a result of his affair with a young widow while his wife is away. Like most of Greene's novels, it is dark and focuses its attention on human weaknesses and failures, especially in man's pursuit of God.

## **PLOT SUMMARY**

### BOOK I, PART ONE

#### Chapter 1

The story begins on a hot, lazy Sunday in an unnamed British colony in West Africa [the actual location is Sierra Leone, where Greene worked with British Intelligence during World War II]. Wilson, a newly arrived accountant, sits on the balcony of his hotel observing the people and activities in the street below. He is approached by Harris, who has been in the colony for eighteen months and hates it. As they talk, he points out Scobie, a policeman walking across the square beneath them.

Scobie walks past government buildings to the police station, then up to his office. He has been in the colony for fifteen years, joined by his wife in the early years of World War II. Now she cannot leave because of the danger posed by German submarines. He is summoned by the Commissioner, who announces his retirement and regretfully informs Scobie that he will not be taking his place. Scobie wants to remain in the colony anyway, despite the fact that his wife is anxious to go home.

When he gets back to his office, a native named Miss Wilberforce is waiting to see him, complaining that her landlady broke up her apartment, which she has been subletting to three other lodgers, and stole her possessions. When he asks why she didn't take the matter to the local police, she explains that the policeman is her landlady's brother. He knows that the case is insoluble, hidden behind a web of lies and bribes that can never be untangled. After taking notice of the girl's beauty, he sends her to his sergeant to deal with the matter.

When Scobie goes home for lunch, he finds his wife Louise asleep in bed. His faithful steward Ali has prepared his lunch. When Louise wakes up, she expresses her disappointment that he has been passed over for the Commissioner's post. She urges him to retire in protest, but he can't imagine doing anything other than what he is doing now. He finally convinces her to come downstairs and have some lunch.

That night they go to the Cape Station Club for dinner, and Louise is afraid that everyone will look down on them because Scobie has been passed over. The issue never surfaces, however, and the two part company. Scobie finds the men discussing the Club rules; one argues that it ought to be more exclusive. Not only had a private been invited as a guest earlier, but now a civilian named Wilson actually wants to join. Scobie is introduced to Wilson, and in turn introduces her to Louise, who gives him the cold shoulder until she discovers that he likes books, especially poetry, which is her favorite.

Soon Scobie leaves to make his rounds, which take longer than usual because he gives a ride to Yusef, a rich and corrupt Syrian shopkeeper whose car broke down. Yusef tries to bribe him with goods or information, but Scobie refuses to be bought. After dropping Yusef off, he checks the docks before returning to the police station and informing the officer on duty that he planned to examine the newly-arrived Portuguese tanker personally the next morning to look for smuggled diamonds. When he arrives home, he finds Louise reading poetry to Wilson. After he tends to a wound he received from a splinter in the doorway, he drives Wilson back to his hotel and invites him to return again soon, knowing that this would make Louise happy. In the middle of the night, he is awakened by the pain in his hand and finds his wife crying; she is miserable and wants to move to South Africa. He promises to see if something can be done.

## Chapter 2

On the way to the wharf the following morning, Scobie stops at the bank and asks for a loan so he can send his wife to South Africa. Robinson, the bank manager, refuses because he has no security. Scobie, as with so much else in his life, feels like a failure because he can't give Louise what she wants. When he gets to the ship he is to search, the *Esperanca*, he has drinks with the captain to ease the awkwardness of having to search the vessel. When he searches the captain's quarters, he finds a letter to his daughter, who is married to a German and living in Leipzig. Regretfully, he informs the captain that he will have to turn the letter over to the authorities and turns down the offer of a bribe.

When he gets back to the police station, he begins to write his report to the Commissioner. He is very reluctant, however, to get the captain in trouble for a simple letter to his daughter, so, contrary to all regulations, he opens the letter and reads it. He finds it completely innocent and decides to tear it up rather than report it. He then burns the scraps and heads for home, dreading having to tell his wife that he failed to arrange for her promised trip. When he gets home, Louise quickly realizes that he is the bearer of bad news, though he tries to reassure her that she will be able to go sometime soon. She breaks down in tears and insists that he doesn't love her anymore, but he assures her that is not the case despite the fact that she is right and knows it. They quarrel, she insists that he will only find peace if she goes away, but he knows he has no idea how peace may be found as much as he longs for it.

## BOOK I, PART TWO

### Chapter 1

Wilson is in his hotel room, struggling to get his cummerbund properly adjusted. His friend Harris assures him that he need not wear it to dine with a Syrian, which relieves him considerably. The Indian who lives across the hall keeps badgering him to let him tell his fortune, and Wilson finally relents. He reads Wilson's palm, spouting mostly nonsense about future success, but in the process tells him that he will win the lady of his dreams. Harris then takes Wilson into his room and shows him figures on the wall - his record of cockroach kills - then challenges Wilson to a competition.

When Wilson arrives at the home of Tallit, the Syrian, he finds that only one other guest has been invited - Father Rank, the Catholic priest - and that they are surrounded by various and sundry relatives of the Syrian. Wilson doesn't like the priest, who has a loud mouth and is a notorious gossip. When he returns to the hotel, Harris immediately corners him to begin the cockroach hunt. They both get so involved in it that they lose their tempers. When Wilson goes to apologize in the morning, he finds Harris sick in bed. Wilson then goes to the police station and meets Scobie, who invites him to take Louise for a walk and stay for dinner.

### Chapter 2

When Wilson and Louise get back from their walk, they find Ali hastily packing Scobie's things. He has to take an emergency trip to Bamba because Pemberton, the police officer there, has hanged himself; he expects to be gone for two days. Scobie leaves after asking Wilson to look after

Louise, but he is unaware that the two, while on their walk, had sheltered in an abandoned station to get out of the rain and found themselves kissing.

## BOOK I, PART THREE

The trip to Bamba is an uncomfortable one, with long waits for the ferries in the steaming heat of the night. When he arrives, he speaks first to the priest, Father Clay, because he knows he will get little useful information from the native sergeant. The priest, who seems quite unsuited to the work in which he is engaged, can say little except that the policeman spent his time drinking and gambling, and that he somehow hopes Pemberton's death was murder rather than suicide so that he is not eternally damned. Scobie then goes to the police station, finds it in disarray, and examines the body. He orders the sergeant to arrange for the burial, then goes to Clay's house to take a nap, hoping to relieve his headache and fever. When he wakes up, Yusef is there. Pemberton owes him money, but he is willing to forgive the debt, though Scobie suspects he and Pemberton had some kind of arrangement related to smuggling. Yusef professes to be Scobie's friend and warns him that the government in London has sent a special agent whose identity is known only to the Commissioner to investigate diamond smuggling. Yusef knows, however, that the man is none other than Wilson.

Because of the fever, Scobie is away from home for a week rather than the anticipated two days. When he returns, Louise is waiting for him with a late dinner. He tells her about his time in Bamba, and she tells him that Wilson has been very attentive in his absence. She then asks if he has arranged for her trip to South Africa yet, and of course he has not. As he lies in bed, he realizes that only one person exists from whom he could possibly borrow the required sum, and he dare not borrow money from such a corrupt man as Yusef. When he thinks of his wife's happiness, however, he knows he must do it anyway. Two weeks later, Louise's ship arrives. The task of packing seems like a divorce, but they promise to write one another every week. Wilson comes to say goodbye, but Louise warns Scobie not to trust him. She has seen him meeting with the Commissioner and is convinced that he is hiding something.

After he finishes his rounds for the day, Scobie goes home to a quiet house. Now, he thinks, both he and Louise have what they want - she is happy and he has peace. No sooner does he settle down in his favorite chair than Yusef arrives. Scobie asks him in for a drink. Yusef wants to help Scobie - he offers to lend him a refrigerator to replace his broken one - but Scobie wants no relationship beyond repaying his debt with four percent interest. In fact, he intends to write a report to the Commissioner detailing his financial dealings with the Syrian trader. Yusef wants to talk about diamonds, however. He warns Scobie that Tallit's cousin is smuggling industrial diamonds through Portugal to the Nazis in the crop of his pet parrot.

## BOOK II, PART ONE

### Chapter 1

Scobie and other British officials are on the border near the French colony to the south to meet survivors from a ship that had been sunk by enemy fire. Yusef's tip about the diamonds had proved correct - the parrot's crop contained a hundred pounds' worth of them. They had been unable to arrest anyone, however, since Tallit's cousin claimed the bird was not his but had been exchanged for his parrot by Yusef to frame him. The next morning the survivors of the sinking, who had been

adrift in lifeboats for forty days, arrived on shore. One of the survivors was a six-year-old girl whose parents had died and who was unlikely to live long. Another was a nineteen-year-old newlywed whose husband had died in the sinking; all Scobie could remember about her was that she clutched a stamp album in her emaciated hands.

The next day he visited the building where the survivors were housed and cared for by the local missionary's wife. He is escorted into the room where the child and young woman lay, and while he is there, the child dies. They bury her the next day, but Scobie doesn't attend the funeral. That afternoon he reads to a young boy who has recovered enough that he is bored. The book he chooses is a missionary story, but the boy wants an adventure, so Scobie makes it up as he goes along, being sure to include bloodthirsty pirates. In the next bed, Helen Rolt, the young widow, listens intently and asks him to come back the next day. Later Wilson tells Scobie that the local storekeeper has been dealing in smuggled goods, and rumor has it that Yusef is behind it. When Scobie argues that nothing can be proved against him, Wilson angrily blurts out that rumor also indicates that Yusef is being protected by the police. As the two quarrel, Wilson accuses Scobie of sending Louise away to get her away from him. He says that Scobie doesn't appreciate his wife, and even admits that the two kissed the evening they were out together. He wants to know where Scobie got the money to send Louise to South Africa, and even accuses him of having designs on Helen Rolt. Scobie is shocked by the virulence of Wilson's hatred, but tries to excuse it because of the heat of the sun.

## Chapter 2

The blackout sirens sound in the pouring rain, though Scobie cannot imagine the dispirited French colony to the south mounting an attack. He makes his rounds looking for lights shining through the darkness. In the distance, he sees one hut, previously unoccupied, with its light still on. When he goes to the door, he finds Helen Rolt inside; she did not know what the siren meant. He introduces himself and fixes her curtains to block the light, then tells her that, if she should need help with anything, he lives right down the road. She asks him to stay until the rain stops, but he says that is not likely to happen for months. She offers him a drink, then suddenly pours out her life story. By the end of the evening, they are friends, safe and comfortable because they can never be anything more. When he leaves, he promises to bring her some stamps for her album the next day.

Scobie spends the next morning dealing with a case of petty theft. He can't solve the case because everyone involved lies habitually, but this doesn't bother him. Later he is summoned to the Commissioner's office, where he is introduced to Colonel Wright from MI-5. Wright has come to look into the affair of the diamonds, and questions whether matters were handled properly. Wright is more inclined to trust Tallit than Yusef, but Scobie warns him that he shouldn't draw conclusions when he knows neither man. Wright asks him if he is in the pay of Yusef, which he denies.

He next heads for Yusef's house, but meets Harris on the way. Harris babbles on about finding a new place to live and discovering that he and Wilson attended the same boarding school. He finds Yusef napping, but when he wakes up, Scobie asks him about the Tallit case. He admits that the diamonds were his, that he framed Tallit, and argues that it would be best for everyone if only one Syrian faction remained in the colony. He claims that makes very little money from diamond smuggling because of the outrageous bribes required. Scobie breaks off their relationship, refuses to accept any more information from Yusef, and will no longer stop by his house to chat. Yusef tells him that eventually Scobie will have need of him. On the way home he stops at the

church to confess to the priest and shares his doubts about his faith. Father Rank tells him that he is simply tired and needs six months' leave more than anything else.

### Chapter 3

Scobie brings Helen a pile of stamps he gathered from people on the base. They talk about stamp collecting, then about the deaths of her husband and his young daughter, who died many years before. Helen's father is trying to arrange for her passage back to England, but she doesn't want to go, and Scobie thinks she can get a job as a secretary in the colonial office. Bagster, one of the airmen, comes to the door, but Helen tells Scobie not to answer it. When the man goes away, the two, much to their surprise, kiss, then go to bed together. He returns home before dawn, but leaves his umbrella in her hut. When he gets back, he worries about the contradictory responsibilities he has taken on and the lies he will have to tell to sustain them.

## BOOK II, PART TWO

When Wilson gets back from a trip to Lagos, Harris proudly shows off their new hut; it's not much, but it's better than living in a hotel, though Harris laments the absence of cockroaches. When Harris reads their school magazine, he finds a poem by E.W. dedicated to L.S. and quickly discerns both the author and its subject. Later Wilson curses himself for his carelessness; he intended to send the poem to Louise, but never expected that anyone on the base would actually read it. He steps outside to get some air in the stifling heat of the night and sees Scobie, who claims he is out for a late-night walk, striding away from the huts. The next day Wilson meets Yusef's steward and enlists him as an informant, especially asking him for details about Scobie's visits to the Syrian merchant. That night he visits the local brothel and partakes of its wares.

## BOOK II, PART THREE

### Chapter 1

One night Scobie and Helen are quarreling. She is upset because he is always so cautious, trying to keep anyone from finding out about their affair. He knows that if anyone did, it would bring their joy to an end. He is honest with her when he tells her that they can never marry - not only because he is married already, but also because he is Catholic and can never divorce his wife. She bitterly reminds him that his religion hasn't prevented him from sleeping with her, but still can prevent their marriage. He says that all he wants is to make her happy and that he would do almost anything to bring that about, even to the point of leaving her if that is what she wants. She screams at him to get out, and he muses about how much easier his life would be, living alone again and not fighting the constant guilt that nags at his conscience. When he gets home, he writes her a letter professing his love and tells her to keep it as evidence. Later Father Rank comes to visit him, but all the priest does is speak about his own failure and misery, and Scobie can't bring himself to confess his sin to such a man.

The next day, as he prepares to visit the Commissioner, he sees a note from Wilson on his desk indicating that he had stopped by to see him. He later asks the Commissioner why he doesn't trust him enough to tell him the truth about Wilson. Though Wilson's role is supposedly secret, the Commissioner is glad that Scobie has figured it out. Scobie then tells him about the money

borrowed from Yusef to send Louise to South Africa. The Commissioner tells him that Wilson suspected blackmail, but he knew better than to think Scobie would get himself into that kind of mess. Scobie offers to resign, but the Commissioner wants him to stay on because he is the only man he can really trust. They discuss the thefts; neither man is sure who is responsible, though Scobie suspects Tallit and Wilson suspects Yusef - and Scobie.

As he walks past the Nissen huts that night, he thinks that, if he takes Helen at her word and never goes back, he could write to Louise, go to Confession, receive absolution, and see God return to his life. He can't help himself, though; he goes in and Helen welcomes him with open arms, making him promise never to listen to her when she tells him to leave. He realizes that she never got his letter, and both fear it was taken by someone who wishes Scobie ill. She sends him home, and when he gets there he finds a telegram from Louise saying that she is coming home. He remembers his promise never to leave Helen and feels nothing but despair. He tries to pray, but can only long for death rather than that he should bring unhappiness to those who depend on him. After all, Christ brought about His own death - why shouldn't he?

## Chapter 2

All during the next day, he thinks about the telegram, even at one point considering the possibility that Louise's ship might never arrive. And how can he break the news to Helen? That night he is invited to dinner and is surprised to find Helen there. Soon Wilson arrives, and things immediately get uncomfortable. During dinner, the guests discuss Pemberton's suicide and debate about the best way to take one's life. When they get the chance, Scobie and Helen step outside for some air and he tells her about the telegram from Louise. She thinks their affair is at an end, but he assures her it is not. They are interrupted, and Helen asks Wilson to drive her home. When Scobie arrives home a little later, he finds Yusef waiting for him. Before he talks to Yusef, he reads a note from Helen in which she releases him from his promises and tells him that he is free never to see her again, to see her occasionally, or to keep her as his mistress - whatever he wants. When he turns his attention to Yusef, the Syrian asks him to deliver a package to the captain of the *Esperanca* for him, assuring him that it contains nothing that will damage his country. Scobie, of course, refuses, but then Yusef tells him that he has the letter he wrote to Helen; her houseboy is in Yusef's employ and has been spying on them. Yusef tells Scobie that, if he doesn't do what he asks, he will give the note to Louise when she lands. Despite his reluctance, he does what Yusef asks with the promise that the compromising letter will be returned.

## BOOK III, PART ONE

### Chapter 1

When the rainy season ends, the harbor is opened and Louise's ship lands. Scobie is there to greet her, though he feels very uncomfortable about the entire situation. She apologizes for going away and getting all upset about his failure to gain the commissioner's post. She insists that now everything will be different, and as a sign of their new beginning, she wants them to go to Mass the next day. To do so, they must go to Confession first, which Scobie is reluctant to do for obvious reasons. After lunch he heads for the church, but stops first at Wilson's to invite him to dinner, then goes to Helen's to tell her about his dilemma with regard to Confession. If he takes Communion without confessing his sin, he will go to hell; if he confesses his sin with no intention of stopping,

he will go to hell. But he has no intention of giving up Helen. She is an unbeliever and understands none of this; in fact, she asks him why, if he believes in hell, is he committing the sin of adultery in the first place. His answer is that love deserves some kind of mercy from God. He never goes to Confession, and the next day he claims to feel ill and drinks some brandy, which he uses as an excuse not to take Communion.

## Chapter 2

When Scobie leaves for the police station, Wilson goes to see Louise, taking the poem he wrote for her with him. He shows her the poem, but she is not terribly impressed. Then, in desperation, he professes his love for her, which she rejects, insisting that he really isn't in love at all. She doesn't even believe that romantic love exists. In anger at her rejection, he tells her about her husband's affair with Helen Rolt, and she slaps him, bloodying his nose in the process. At that point Scobie arrives, stops the bleeding in Wilson's nose, and sees him off to his Nissen hut.

After Wilson leaves, Scobie asks what he wanted and Louise tells him that he wanted to make love to her. She warns him that Wilson is spying on him, which Scobie already knows. She wants them to go to Communion the next day, and Scobie knows he has only put off the inevitable. He knows that the right thing to do is to confess to the priest, promise never to see Helen again, do his penance, and take Communion with his wife. The other alternative is unthinkable - to leave Louise, resign his job, renounce his faith, and marry Helen. He agonizes over the fact that to preserve his own soul, he must inevitably hurt someone he loves. When he confesses to Father Rank, the priest, as expected, tells him never to see Helen alone again, but Scobie realizes he cannot keep such a promise. The priest tells him that he cannot be forgiven if he has no intention of amending his life. Scobie leaves without absolution and feels nothing but utter despair. The next day he goes to Mass and, in an agony of guilt, takes Communion with Louise.

## Chapter 3

For three weeks Scobie walks on eggshells, expecting the judgment of God to fall upon him at any moment. Much to his disappointment, everything goes better than usual. He visits the bank manager in order to borrow his medical encyclopedia, then looks up *angina*, which he suspects he has, or at least wants the bank manager to think he does. The Commissioner asks to meet with him and tells him that he has been named as his successor after all. Scobie realizes that if he had gotten the appointment originally, none of his troubles would have happened - Louise wouldn't have gone to South Africa, he wouldn't have had to borrow money from Yusef and subject himself to blackmail, he never would have met and fallen in love with Helen, and his conscience would be clear before God and man. He tries to refuse the position, but the Commissioner will hear none of it. He goes home and finds Louise gone, then takes some furniture that they don't need to Helen's hut. The two have a scene, he again professes his love, but his servant Ali overhears their words; Scobie knows he has been reporting to Wilson.

Late on Halloween night Yusef's boy sneaks into Scobie's house and gives him a crumpled paper containing a diamond, which he promptly sends back, telling the boy that he will catch Yusef stealing and smuggling eventually. After the boy leaves, Louise reminds him that they are going to Mass the next day. In agony he sees a future in which he repeats his damnation week after week, year after year, until his death.

## Chapter 4

While making his night rounds, Scobie is confronted by Wilson. The younger man tells him that he loves Louise, that she would be better off with him than with her husband, and that he can ruin Scobie any time he chooses. Scobie tells Wilson to stop spying on him, then goes, in full sight of Wilson, to Yusef's office. He tells Yusef about his problems with Louise and Helen, his concern with Wilson, and his growing mistrust of his servant Ali. Yusef tells him to summon Ali by sending something as a token, since Ali cannot read, and Scobie sends a broken rosary he has in his pocket. While they wait for Ali, Yusef assures Scobie that he will not make trouble for him once he becomes the Commissioner. Then they hear a loud cry, and go outside to find Ali's dead body on the wharf.

## BOOK III, PART TWO

### Chapter 1

Shocked by the death of Ali, Scobie is determined to end his affair with Helen the next morning. He never gets the chance, as she speaks first, telling him that she is going away and refusing to say where. Scobie thinks to himself how much easier it would be for her if he were dead. By the time they finish their painful conversation, however, they have lost their resolve and decided to continue as they are, catching illicit hours together whenever they can. When he returns home, he worries about his angina, muses about the nature of love, and makes plans for his final act.

### Chapter 2

When Scobie goes to the doctor, he learns that his angina is not likely to kill him, but may force him to retire from the police force. The doctor gives him some drugs to help him sleep. This is exactly what Scobie wants, but he has another purpose in mind for them. He intends to commit the worst crime possible for a Catholic - taking his own life. He even sets the date - November 12<sup>th</sup>, when he plans to take ten times the prescribed number of pills; he calculates that, if he takes less than what is prescribed each day until then, no one will know he has killed himself. He is firmly convinced that Louise, Helen, and God will all be better off without him. Then he hears the voice of God within him, telling him to confess his sin, break off the affair, and return to a life of grace, or even to leave Louise, live with Helen, and reject the church. God assures him that the pain he causes one of the women will eventually subside, and in any case cannot possibly be worse than the pain he will give to his Savior if he rejects him forever. Scobie, in his own mind, responds that he cannot bear to be responsible for causing even temporary pain to Louise or Helen, nor can he continue to insult God by coming to His altar when he not in a state of grace.

### Chapter 3

Scobie is determined to live a normal life so no one is able to discern his secret plan. In the week that follows, his angina worsens and the medication does less each day to relieve the pain. He tells the Commissioner and Louise that he will have to retire. On the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup>, he decides to visit Helen before killing himself. She is not home, but he leaves her a note - the words "I love you" written under one of the stamps in her album that he gave her. At dinner with Louise, he talks

of plans for the next week, as if everything is normal. Before she goes to bed, he kisses her and tells her he loves her, then gulps down the overdose of sleeping pills he has saved for the occasion.

### BOOK III, PART THREE

Within days of Scobie's death, Helen is spending time with Bagster, the airman who had pursued her earlier, and Wilson is trying to convince Louise to marry him. She has read her husband's diary and now knows the truth about everything except his suicide. Wilson suggests that his diary contains hints of his plans to kill himself, but Louise refuses to believe it. Helen, meanwhile, is despondent as a result of Scobie's death. Bagster coerces her into having sex and she passively allows it, but her mind is elsewhere; she is convinced she will now always be alone. Louise asks Father Rank if there is any hope for her husband if he did indeed commit suicide, but the priest has no answers for her.

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Major Henry "Ticki" Scobie - The Deputy Commissioner in an unnamed British colony in West Africa who is no longer in love with his wife, he falls in love with and has an affair with a young survivor from a shipwreck, then, overcome with guilt, commits suicide.
- Louise Scobie - His wife, she hates the colony and wants to move to South Africa, but returns when she regrets walking out on her husband.
- Ali - Scobie's African manservant, he is murdered on the docks by a gang of "wharf rats." Scobie suspects that Yusef is behind the murder.
- Edward Wilson - An accountant newly arrived in the colony, he shares Louise's love of poetry and falls in love with her. He is in reality an agent of the British government looking into diamond smuggling.
- Yusef - A corrupt Syrian shopkeeper and smuggler who blackmails Scobie after finding his letter to Helen.
- Father Rank - The local Catholic priest.
- Helen Rolt - A nineteen-year-old whose husband was killed in a shipwreck; Scobie falls in love with her and has an affair while Louise is away in South Africa.

### NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"He wanted passionately to be indistinguishable on the surface from other men; he wore his moustache like a club tie - it was his highest common factor: but his eyes betrayed him - brown dog's eyes, a setter's eyes, pointed mournfully toward Bond Street." (Book I, Part One, ch.1, sec.1)

"Nothing was ever lost by delay. He had a dim idea that perhaps if one delayed long enough, things were taken out of one's hands altogether by death." (Book I, Part One, ch.1, sec.3)

“It had always been his responsibility to maintain happiness in those he loved. One was safe now, for ever, and the other was going to eat her lunch.” (Book I, Part One, ch.1, sec.3)

“Why . . . do I love this place so much? Is it because here human nature hasn’t had time to disguise itself? Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meannesses, that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up. Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst: you didn’t love a pose, a pretty dress, a sentiment artfully assumed.” (Scobie, Book I, Part One, ch.1, sec.5)

“The truth, he thought, has never been of any real value to any human being - it is a symbol for mathematicians and philosophers to pursue. In human relations kindness and lies are worth a thousand truths.” (Book I, Part One, ch.2, sec.4)

“Peace seemed to him the most beautiful word in the language.” (Book I, Part One, ch.2, sec.4)

“Despair is the price one pays for setting oneself an impossible aim. It is, one is told, the unforgivable sin, but it is a sin the corrupt or evil man never practices. He always has hope. He never reaches the freezing point of knowing absolute failure. Only the man of good will carries always in his heart this capacity for damnation.” (Book I, Part One, ch.2, sec.4)

“In the confusing night he forgot for a while what experience had taught him - that no human being can really understand another and no one can arrange another’s happiness.” (Book I, Part Three, sec.1)

“It would need all Father Brule’s ingenuity to explain that. Not that the child would die: that needed no explanation. Even the pagans realized that the love of God might mean an early death, though the reason they ascribed was different; but that the child should have been allowed to survive the forty days and nights in the open boat - that was the mystery, to reconcile that with the love of God.” (Book II, Part One, ch.1, sec.2)

“Point me out a happy man and I will point you out either egotism, selfishness, evil - or else absolute ignorance.” (Scobie, Book II, Part One, ch.1, sec.3)

“If one knew the facts, would one have to feel pity even for the planets? if one reached what they called the heart of the matter?” (Scobie, Book II, Part One, ch.1, sec.3)

“To be a human being one had to drink the cup.” (Scobie, Book II, Part One, ch.1, sec.3)

“I don’t know how to put it Father, but I feel - tired of my religion. It seems to mean nothing to me. I’ve tried to love God, but - I’m not sure that I even believe.” (Scobie, Book II, Part One, ch.2, sec.5)

“What they had both thought was safety proved to have been the camouflage of an enemy who works in terms of friendship, trust, and pity.” (Book II, Part One, ch.3, sec.1)

“I would never go back there, to the Nissen hut, if it meant that she were happy and I suffered. But if I were happy and she suffered . . . That was what he could not face.” (Scobie, Book II, Part Three, ch.1, sec.1)

“O God, I have deserted you. Do not desert me.” (Scobie, Book II, Part Three, ch.1, sec.1)

“Virtue, the good life, tempted him in the dark like a sin.” (Book II, Part Three, ch.1, sec.3)

“God can wait, he thought: how can one love God at the expense of one of his creatures? Would a woman accept a love for which a child had to be sacrificed?” (Book II, Part Three, ch.1, sec.3)

“Missing Mass on Sunday’s a mortal sin, just as much as adultery.” (Louise, Book III, Part One, ch.1, sec.1)

“The priest had reached Louise in his slow interrupted patrol, and suddenly Scobie was aware of the sense of exile. Over there, where all these people knelt, was a country to which he would never return. The sense of love stirred in him, the love one always feels for what one has lost, whether a child, a woman, or even pain.” (Book III, Part One, ch.1, sec.2)

“But she’s not a Catholic. She’s lucky. She’s free, Wilson.” (Louise, Book III, Part One, ch.2, sec.1)

“In human love there is never such a thing as victory: only a few minor tactical successes before the final defeat of death or indifference.” (Book III, Part One, ch.2, sec.1)

“Make me put my own soul first. Give me trust in your mercy to the one I abandon. . . . O God, if ,instead, I should abandon you, punish me, but let the others get some happiness.” (Scobie, Book III, Part One, ch.2, sec.2)

“O God, I offer up my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for them.” (Scobie, Book III, Part One, ch.2, sec.2)

“‘O God, I’ve killed you: you’ve served me all these years and I’ve killed you at the end of them.’ God lay there under the petrol drums and Scobie felt the tears in his mouth, salt in the cracks of his lips. ‘You served me and I did this to you. You were faithful to me, and I wouldn’t trust you.’” (Book III, Part One, ch.4)

“When he was young, he had thought love had something to do with understanding, but with age he knew that no human being understood another. Love was the wish to understand, and presently with constant failure the wish died, and love died too perhaps or changed into this painful affection, loyalty, pity.” (Book III, Part Two, ch.1, sec.2)

“The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn’t know what goes on in a single human heart.” (Father Rank, Book III, Part Three, sec.3)

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Discuss the significance of the title of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*. To what heart, and what matter, does the author refer? Is he concerned with the state of the human heart or the heart of reality? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
2. Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* is a novel steeped in Catholicism. How would the story be different had the author and the protagonist been Protestant? Discuss how Catholic teachings play a central role in the destruction of Henry Scobie and how he might have addressed his dilemma had those teachings not been burned so strongly into his consciousness.
3. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, the protagonist longs for peace. What does he mean by that word? What kind of peace does he really want? Why is he unable to find it? In your analysis, consider what the Bible says about genuine peace and the way it must be obtained.
4. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, why does Henry Scobie, the protagonist, commit suicide? In answering the question, be sure to consider all of his principal relationships - to his wife, his mistress, and God. What does he believe will be the consequences of his action, both for himself and for those he loves?
5. Graham Greene, the author of *The Heart of the Matter*, argued that he intended his protagonist to illustrate the fact that pity is really the result of "an almost monstrous pride." Describe the ways in which Henry Scobie is controlled by pride and how this leads to his ultimate destruction. Be sure to use specific examples in your analysis.
6. While Graham Greene described his protagonist in *The Heart of the Matter* as possessing "an almost monstrous pride," critic Roger Sarroock argued, "if he is a monster it is not through monstrous pride but on account of his absurd attempt at pure moral action in a fallen world." Does the latter's bleak view of the possibility of righteous living in a sinful world cohere with the Bible's teaching on the subject of the human condition? Why or why not? Support your analysis both with details from the novel and with appropriate passages of Scripture.
7. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, the protagonist is obsessed with failure and convinced that he has brought harm to everyone his life has touched. Would you consider him to be a failure? Why or why not? Include specifics from the novel in your answer to the question.
8. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Henry Scobie convinces himself that his suicide will be the best thing he can do for his wife, his mistress, and even God. Are his expectations fulfilled? Why or why not? What does this imply about our ability to predict the consequences of our actions? Why should we determine our actions by God's Word rather than by anticipated consequences?

9. In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus told His disciples that the two great commandments are to love God and love your neighbor. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Henry Scobie is convinced that the two responsibilities conflict with one another. Which does he choose, and why? Why does he consider his choice an act of self-sacrifice? Is he right about that?
10. The protagonist in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Henry Scobie, is largely passive throughout the story. Most of his problems arise because he fails to act rather than as the result of decisive action on his part. What about his personality renders him incapable of taking the steps needed to achieve professional advancement, deal with corruption in the town where he lives, fix his marriage, or even repair his relationship with God?
11. Graham Greene once described the protagonist of his novel *The Heart of the Matter* as "a weak man with good intentions doomed by his big sense of pity." Does this sense of pity - his notion that he is responsible for the welfare of both Louise and Helen despite the personal sacrifices involved - qualify him as a tragic hero? Why or why not?
12. Though the British colony in the novel is never named, Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* is set in Sierra Leone in West Africa. To what extent does the setting serve as a character in the story? How does it influence the plot and the characters? Is its influence helpful or harmful?
13. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Henry Scobie is a fundamentally moral character who increasingly gets caught up in immorality, while the black marketeer Yusef would best be characterized as amoral - possessing no moral standards whatsoever. According to the author, which is worse, immorality or amorality? Do you agree? Why or why not?
14. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, no one forces the protagonist to engage in an extramarital affair, yet both his wife Louise and his mistress Helen contribute to his downfall. How do they do this, and to what extent do they share responsibility for his actions?
15. Discuss the way in which the Catholic Church is portrayed in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*. The author himself was a devout Catholic, yet, like the protagonist, struggled mightily with sexual temptation. To what extent does the church provide help to a struggling sinner in the book, and in what ways is it a barrier to restoration?
16. At the end of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Father Rank and Louise are discussing the deceased protagonist. The priest insists that Scobie loved God, and his wife bitterly says that he didn't love anyone else. Are they right in their analysis? Did Scobie truly love God? Did he not really love either his wife or his mistress? Support your conclusions with specifics from the novel.

17. At the end of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Henry Scobie faces three choices - to break off his affair and return to his wife and his church, to leave his wife and live with his mistress, or to continue as things are and make everybody miserable. He decides to do none of these things, but to commit suicide instead, which he believed to be the most honorable decision for the sake of both Louise and Helen. What should he have done? Did he have any other alternatives besides the ones he considered?
18. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, the two major male characters, Scobie and Wilson, may be seen as foils. How does each of their personalities serve to bring out the salient characteristics of the other by contrast? What are those qualities, and how do they affect the plot of the novel?
19. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, the author often contrasts the formal Catholicism of rules and doctrines with the religion of the heart, man's personal relationship with God. Which does Greene consider most important? Does he believe that the two sometimes conflict? What are the consequences of these conflicts? How should they be resolved?
20. Alienation is a significant theme in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*. All of the main characters suffer alienation in some form, whether from one another or from God. What does the author view as the cause of this alienation? What is its cure? As you answer the question, consider not only what the book has to say on the subject, but also what Scripture teaches about this aspect of human and divine relationships.
21. Sin is not only self-revealing, it is also self-propagating. Not only may you be sure that your sin will find you out, but also that sin will lead to more sin, especially if you try to cover it up. How are these basic biblical truths illustrated in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*? Use specific examples from the novel to support your arguments.
22. In Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, above Major Henry Scobie's desk at the police station hangs a pair of rusty handcuffs. Discuss the symbolism of these frequently-mentioned adornments. What is the author saying about the human condition in the novel that prompts him to make use of this imagery?
23. Critics have noted that many similarities exist between Graham Greene and the protagonist of *The Heart of the Matter*, yet once, while discussing the book, the author confessed that he did not believe in eternal punishment. How does this insight affect the way in which you read his novel and your evaluation of its protagonist?
24. The relationship between the protagonist and his mistress in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* provides an opportunity for the author to contrast faith and atheism. Examine the dialogues between the two on the subject of religion and discuss what these tell us about the author's assessment of the two diametrically opposed belief systems. Given this contrast, what drew Henry Scobie and Helen Rolt together and kept them in their relationship?

25. In Book I, Part One, chapter 1, section 3 of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, the protagonist is said to think, "Nothing was ever lost by delay. He had a dim idea that perhaps if one delayed long enough, things were taken out of one's hands altogether by death." How does this sort of thinking work out in the remainder of the novel? Does it prove to be true? Why or why not?
26. In Book I, Part One, chapter 1, section 3 of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Scobie is described in the following way: "It had always been his responsibility to maintain happiness in those he loved." To what extent is this true? Am I my brother's keeper? What resulted from Scobie's attempt to put this philosophy into practice? Why did he fail so miserably?
27. In Book I, Part One, chapter 1, section 5 of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, the protagonist muses, "Why . . . do I love this place so much? Is it because here human nature hasn't had time to disguise itself? Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meannesses, that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up. Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst." To what extent is his description of West Africa true of the world as a whole? How does this enlighten the challenge involved in Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as oneself?
28. In Book I, Part One, chapter 2, section 4 of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Scobie thinks, "Despair is the price one pays for setting oneself an impossible aim. It is, one is told, the unforgivable sin, but it is a sin the corrupt or evil man never practices. He always has hope. He never reaches the freezing point of knowing absolute failure. Only the man of good will carries always in his heart this capacity for damnation." What does he mean by this? Evaluate from Scripture this notion that one who pursues the good is always doomed to failure.
29. In Book II, Part One, chapter 1, section 2 of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, the protagonist struggles with the problem of evil in the following terms: "It would need all Father Brule's ingenuity to explain that. Not that the child would die: that needed no explanation. Even the pagans realized that the love of God might mean an early death, though the reason they ascribed was different; but that the child should have been allowed to survive the forty days and nights in the open boat - that was the mystery, to reconcile that with the love of God." Scobie encounters the problem in other ways beside the death of a child after forty days in an open boat. Does Greene ever give an answer to the dilemma he has raised? How would you answer this vital question? Be sure to use Scripture in your explanation.
30. In Book II, Part One, chapter 1, section 3 of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Henry Scobie says, "Point me out a happy man and I will point you out either egotism, selfishness, evil - or else absolute ignorance." Do the events and characters in the novel support the protagonist's assertion? Why or why not? Evaluate this pessimistic view of the human experience from Scripture.

31. In Book II, Part Three, chapter 1, section 3 of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, the narrator describes the protagonist in these words: "Virtue, the good life, tempted him in the dark like a sin." How can virtue be a temptation? Why did Scobie perceive it as such? What flaw in his perception caused him to turn away from virtue as from a sin?
32. In Book III, Part One, chapter 2, section 1 of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Louise dismisses Helen's struggles by saying, "But she's not a Catholic. She's lucky. She's free, Wilson." Why does the novel portray Catholicism as a form of bondage? How accurate is this assessment? Be sure to cite specifics from the book in your answer as well as incorporating teachings from Scripture.
33. At the end of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Father Rank tells the newly-widowed Louise Scobie, "The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart." He implies by this that God's mercy may well extend beyond the formal teachings of the Catholic Church, thus leaving her with some hope for her husband's ultimate salvation. Evaluate this statement and the views of God and His revelation that it implies.
34. Critics responding to Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* often asked him his view concerning the final state of his protagonist's soul. He refused to answer the question, leaving his readers to speculate about the matter on their own. Based on the evidence contained in the novel and what you know of Scripture, how would you answer the question?
35. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward suicide in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* and William Shakespeare's *Othello*. The two protagonists both believe their final acts are noble and that the shame they have brought on themselves leaves them no choice. Do you agree? Are their motives really similar? Cite details from both works of literature to support your arguments.
36. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward suicide in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* and Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. The two protagonists kill themselves because they believe that the shame they have brought on themselves leaves them no choice. Do you agree? Are their motives really similar? Cite details from both works of literature to support your arguments.
37. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward suicide in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. The two protagonists kill themselves because they believe that the shame they have brought on themselves leaves them no choice. Do you agree? Are their motives really similar? Cite details from both works of literature to support your arguments.
38. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward suicide in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. The two protagonists both take their lives because they are unable to deal with the complications of extramarital affairs and believe they have no choice. Do you agree? Are their motives really similar? Cite details from both works of literature to support your arguments.

39. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward suicide in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The two protagonists both take their lives because they are unable to deal with the complications of extramarital affairs and believe they have no choice. Do you agree? Are their motives really similar? Cite details from both works of literature to support your arguments.
40. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward suicide in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The two protagonists both take their lives because they are unable to deal with the complications of extramarital affairs and believe they have no choice. Do you agree? Are their motives really similar? Cite details from both works of literature to support your arguments.
41. *The Heart of the Matter* and *The Power and the Glory* are two of Graham Greene's "Catholic" novels. Both deal with a protagonist who struggles with sin, repentance, and salvation. Compare and contrast Henry Scobie and the Whisky Priest in terms of their characters, their struggles, and the ways they eventually resolve the issues they face.
42. *The Heart of the Matter* and *The Power and the Glory* are two of Graham Greene's "Catholic" novels. Both are critical of the institutional Catholic Church. Compare and contrast the critiques found in the two novels. What flaws does the author bring out in each book? What are the consequences of these flaws for the protagonists in the stories?