

Tekst 7

The following text is the beginning of the first chapter of The Grass is Singing, by Doris Lessing.

The Grass is Singing takes place in South Africa during the 1940s and deals with apartheid, the racial segregation between blacks and whites.

MURDER MYSTERY **By Special Correspondent**

Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found murdered on the front verandah of their homestead yesterday morning. The houseboy, who has been arrested, has confessed to the crime. No motive has been discovered.

It is thought he was in search of valuables.

- 1 The newspaper did not say much. People all over the country must have glanced at the paragraph with its sensational heading and felt a little spurt of anger mingled with what was almost satisfaction, as if some belief had been confirmed, as if something had happened which could only have been expected. When natives steal, murder or rape, that is the feeling white people have.
- 2 And then they turned the page to something else.
- 3 But the people in 'the district' who knew the Turners, either by sight, or from gossiping about them for so many years, did not turn the page so quickly. Many must have snipped out the paragraph, put it among old letters, or between the pages of a book, keeping it perhaps as an omen or a warning, glancing at the yellowing piece of paper with closed, secretive faces. For they did not discuss the murder; that was the most extraordinary thing about it. It was as if they had a sixth sense which told them everything there was to be known, although the three people in a position to explain the facts said nothing. The murder was simply not discussed. 'A bad business,' someone would remark; and the faces of the people round about would put on that reserved and guarded look. 'A very bad business,' came the reply — and that was the end of it. There was, it seemed, a tacit agreement that the Turner case should not be given undue publicity by gossip. Yet it was a farming district, where those isolated white families met only very occasionally, hungry for contact with their own kind, to talk and discuss and pull to pieces, all speaking at once, making the most of an hour or so's companionship before returning to their farms where they saw only their own faces and the faces of their black servants for weeks on end. Normally that murder would have been

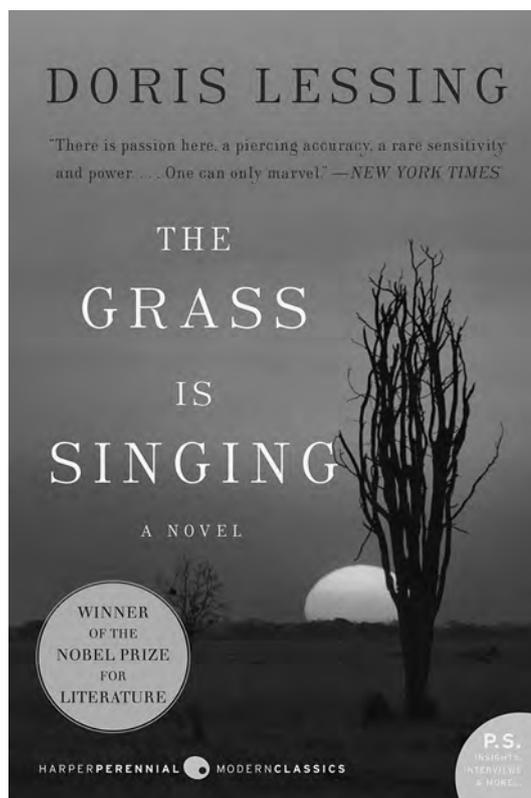
discussed for months; people would have been positively grateful for something to talk about.

- 4 To an outsider it would seem perhaps as if the energetic Charlie Slatter had travelled from farm to farm over the district telling people to keep quiet; but that was something that would have never have occurred to him. The steps he took (and he made not one mistake) were taken apparently instinctively and without conscious planning. The most interesting thing about the whole affair was this silent, unconscious agreement. Everyone behaved like a flock of birds who communicate — or so it seems — by means of a kind of telepathy.

- 5 Long before the murder marked them out, people spoke of the Turners in the hard, careless voices reserved for misfits, outlaws and the self-exiled. The Turners were disliked, though few of their neighbours had ever met them, or even seen them in the distance. Yet what was there to dislike? They simply 'kept themselves to themselves'; that was all. They were never seen at district dances, or fêtes, or gymkhanas. They must have had something to be ashamed of; that was the feeling. It was not right to seclude themselves like that; it was a slap in the face of everyone else; what had they got to be so stuck-up about? What, indeed! Living the way they did! That little box of a house — it was forgivable as a temporary dwelling, but not to live in permanently. Why, some natives (though not many, thank heavens) had houses as good; and it would give them a bad impression to see white people living in such a way.

- 6 And then it was that someone used the phrase 'poor whites'. It caused disquiet. There was no great money-cleavage in those days (that was before the era of the tobacco barons), but there was certainly a race division. The small community of Afrikaners had their own lives, and the Britishers ignored them. 'Poor whites' were Afrikaners, never British. But the person who said the Turners were poor whites stuck to it defiantly. What was the difference? What was a poor white? It was the way one lived, a question of standards. All the Turners needed were a drove of children to make them poor whites.

- 7 Though the arguments were unanswerable, people would still not think of them as poor whites. To do that would be 31. The Turners were British, after all.



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- “a tacit agreement” (alinea 3)
- 1p 29 Welk van de onderstaande citaten is **geen** voorbeeld van wat dit “tacit agreement” zou kunnen inhouden?
- A “as if some belief had been confirmed, as if something had happened which could only have been expected” (alinea 1)
 - B “the three people in a position to explain the facts said nothing” (alinea 3)
 - C “as if the energetic Charlie Slatter had travelled from farm to farm over the district telling people to keep quiet” (alinea 4)
 - D “Everyone behaved like a flock of birds who communicate – or so it seems – by means of a kind of telepathy.” (alinea 4)
- 1p 30 Based on paragraph 5, what would most likely be the explanation for the Turners being disliked?
- A The Turners broke the code of conduct of the white farmers.
 - B The Turners felt superior to the white community they were part of.
 - C The Turners often kept things secret from their neighbours.
- 1p 31 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 7?
- A condoning discrimination
 - B contributing to their downfall
 - C letting the side down
 - D settling an old score unfairly