A House for Mr Biswas

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF V. S. NAIPAUL

V.S. Naipaul was born in rural Trinidad, the grandson of indentured servants from South Asia who came to work on Trinidad sugarcane plantations. His father was the journalist Seepersad Naipaul, on whom the character of Mr Biswas is based, and his mother came from the prominent Capildeo family, the model for the Tulsi family in *A House for Mr Biswas*. He moved from the countryside to Port of Spain at age six, attended Trinidad's best-regarded secondary school, and then won a scholarship to Oxford, where he felt out-of-place and suffered a self-described "nervous breakdown." Nevertheless, after graduating in 1953, the same year of his father's death, Naipaul lived the rest of his life in England. He married his Oxford classmate Patricia Hale in 1955, while living in London and writing his first novel (*The Mystic Masseur*) and book of short stories (*Miguel Street*). However, he found literary fame only after the 1961 publication of *A House for Mr Biswas* and began writing nonfiction soon thereafter, publishing travelogues of the Caribbean (*The Middle Passage*) and India (*An Area of Darkness*) before returning to London, famous but penniless. He would later take extended trips to East Africa, Argentina (where he began a decades-long affair with Margaret Gooding), and Indonesia, Iran, and Pakistan (where, in 1996, as his first wife Patricia Hale lay dying of cancer in a London hospital, he resolved to leave his mistress Gooding and marry a journalist he had just met, Nadira Alvi). He lived out his later life in a cottage in the English countryside and ultimately published more than a dozen novels and as many books of nonfiction. He was knighted in 1990, and the Swedish Academy awarded him the 2001 Nobel Prize in Literature "for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories." Despite his international acclaim, Naipaul often faced scathing criticism for his pessimism, treatment of women, and especially his nonfiction's critical view of non-European peoples and countries (including Trinidad).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A House for Mr Biswas is set in the final half-century of British rule over Trinidad, which was populated mostly by indigenous Arawak and Carib people before Spanish conquest in the fifteenth century (it also underwent periods of Dutch and French rule). When the British secured control of Trinidad in 1797, the majority of its population were slaves of African descent working on sugarcane plantations. After the British Empire abolished slavery in 1833, the island increasingly shifted toward cocoa production, and more than 100,000 workers from India came to the island as indentured servants who theoretically agreed to work for a term before returning to India but, in practice, were generally forced to stay. Since the early twentieth century, oil extraction has been Trinidad's primary economic activity and transformed the island into the Caribbean's wealthiest, although inequality remains high, and intergroup divisions remain rampant, particularly between the two largest communities of Indian and African descent. These divisions, and the island's increasing turn toward oil production, are unmistakable in *A House for Mr Biswas*, which begins around 1900 and ends about a decade before Trinidad achieved independence from British rule in 1962, just a year after the book's publication. Naipaul moved to London near the beginning of the Windrush Generation, the mass influx of Afro-Caribbean people into England after the 1948 British Nationality Act gave citizenship to everyone living in British colonies. This wave of migration resulted in immense racist backlash in the UK as well as changing the structure of society in the Caribbean, where those educated in Britain (like Owad and Anand in *A House for Mr Biswas*), if they chose to return, suddenly found access to far superior economic opportunities but often felt socially alienated from both their home countries and England.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although V.S. Naipaul was famously averse to acknowledging his literary influences and was generally more keen to insult than praise other writers, he is often compared to the other most prominent British travel writer on Africa, Joseph Conrad, who is best remembered for his novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Naipaul's writing also bears resemblance to that of the British Victorian novelist Charles Dickens, whose numerous portraits of characters struggling against poverty inspire and parallel Mr Biswas's own journey. Other important Caribbean writers of Naipaul's generation include fellow British-Trinidadian Samuel Selvon, best known for *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), and the fellow Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, from St. Lucia, who is famous for his poetry. Naipaul is also often referenced alongside British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie, best known for *Midnight's Children* (1981) and internationally famous for the controversy surrounding *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Naipaul's brother Shiva Naipaul is most famous for his first novel, *Fireflies* (1970), which is often compared to *A House for Mr Biswas*. Naipaul's other famous literary works include *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), a largely autobiographical novel about migrating from Trinidad to England, and *In a Free State* (1971), a collection of three short stories.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *A House for Mr Biswas*
- **When Written:** 1958-1961
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1961
- **Literary Period:** Postcolonial, postmodern
- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** Trinidad in the first half of the twentieth century
- **Climax:** Mr Biswas finally—but foolishly—purchases his own house from a dishonest solicitor's clerk.
- **Antagonist:** The Tulsis, con artists, natural disasters
- **Point of View:** Third-person narrator

EXTRA CREDIT

Fictionalized Autobiography. Many of the characters and events in *A House for Mr Biswas* are fictionalized versions of Naipaul's own family history: his father, like Mr Biswas, grew up on a rural estate and was lucky to learn to read while his brothers did not; Naipaul actually has a cousin named Owad and a sister named Savi; and his mother's family, the Capildeos, grew up in "The Lion House" in Chagaunas, on which Naipaul based the Tulsis' "Hanuman House" in Arwacas.

Survivor's Guilt. In a 1983 article for the *New York Review of Books*, the author claimed to have never read *A House for Mr Biswas* since he sent the final version for publication; when he heard an abridged version on the radio, he claimed to have been "in tears, swamped by the emotions I had tried to shield myself from for twenty years."

PLOT SUMMARY

A House for Mr Biswas follows the titular character from his unlucky birth in rural Trinidad, through his repeated displacement, unsatisfying marriage to Shama Tulsi, lackluster parenthood, and financial missteps in his quest for a **house**, to his death in the city of Port of Spain at the age of 46. Throughout his life, the romantic and insatiable Mr Biswas, who is prone to pride, disappointment, irrational optimism, and despair, dreams of finding financial stability and a house for his family. When he finally buys the house he always wanted, it turns out to be a scam—the house is ill-constructed and nearly uninhabitable, and Mr Biswas is unable to pay his mortgage. His health declines, he gets laid off from the *Sentinel*, and he dies in a heart attack.

In the prologue, Mr Biswas's tale begins where it ends, with his firing, debt, and beautiful but crumbling house, which he bought after one nighttime visit that strategically hid its flaws. Still, it was a much better place to die than the Tulsis' house full of relatives. Although Mr Biswas passed away with little more than the mortgaged house, at least he didn't die "as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated."

Indeed, Mr Biswas's birth was decidedly unlucky: at midnight, the most inauspicious of hours, he came out "six-fingered, and born in the wrong way." Pundit Sitaram warned that he would be a lecher, spendthrift, and liar; that he would lead to his parents' ruin; and that he should stay away from trees and water. He receives the name Mohun, but the narrator insists on calling him Mr Biswas even from his earliest days. His father, Raghu, was a miserly sugarcane worker who buried his earnings in jars underground and superstitiously insisted on staying home from work whenever Mr Biswas sneezed. While his elder brothers Pratap and Prasad joined their father in the cane fields, Mr Biswas was too sickly and weak to work, until his neighbor Dhari needed someone to look after his new calf. While he was busy gazing at a shallow stream one day, the calf wandered off and drowned; too afraid to tell anyone, Mr Biswas hid under his father's bed until the whole village assembled at the lake, and Raghu began diving for the missing animal and boy. He pulled up the dead calf but drowned while looking for Mr Biswas just as the protagonist arrived on the scene. With the neighbors hunting through the family's garden at night, looking for Raghu's buried jars of money, Mr Biswas's mother Bipti decided to sell the land and move to her sister Tara's house in the town of Pagotes.

In Pagotes, Mr Biswas was fortunate enough to go to school, where he learned to read from the authoritarian teacher Lal and began a friendship with a local boy, Alec, who taught him to draw letters exquisitely. After getting kicked out of his pundit apprenticeship with Jairam and his job at a rumshop with Tara's brother-in-law, Bhandat, Mr Biswas decided to work with Alec painting signs. Mr Biswas's sign-painting took him to the Tulsis' magnificent Hanuman House in the town of Arwacas, where an intimidating man named Seth hired him to paint signs in the Tulsi Store. Mr Biswas immediately fell in love with one of the Tulsi daughters, a girl of sixteen named Shama, and wrote her a love note. However, Mrs Tulsi intercepted his note and, to his surprise, promptly offered him Shama's hand in marriage. He accepted the offer and immediately regretted his decision, but nevertheless moved into an upstairs room at Hanuman House, where dozens of family members cohabited in a tenuous but relative harmony. Mr Biswas immediately hated his new surroundings, antagonized as many Tulsis as possible—including Shama; Shama's sister Chinta; Chinta's husband, Govind; a devout and orthodox brother-in-law named Hari; and Mrs Tulsi's two studious sons, whom she paid special attention and he disparagingly nicknamed "the two gods." After spitting and throwing his food onto Owad, the "younger god," Mr Biswas received a hearty beating from Govind and an order to leave the house immediately.

After his eviction, Mr Biswas went to a remote village called

The Chase to run a new store the Tulsis had purchased there. Shama initially resented him for trying to "paddle [his] own canoe" and landing them in a tiny house in the middle of nowhere. However, they began to find some common ground, and she soon became pregnant—their daughter Savi was born soon thereafter. But business was turning sour at The Chase, especially given Mr Biswas's willingness to sell to the townspeople on credit. Eventually, Mr Biswas lost all his savings when a local stick-fighting thug, Mungroo, sued him for damaging his credit. With his whole family—Shama, Savi, and his new son, Anand—at Hanuman House, and his sense of isolation at The Chase growing, Mr Biswas began to cherish the community he found among the Tulsis in Arwacas and let Seth talk him into "insuranburning" (insuring-and-burning down) the store at The Chase.

Mr Biswas's next destination was Green Vale, an estate near Arwacas where he worked overseeing workers under Seth. He found his work tedious and his home life, in a tiny room in a shared barracks, exceedingly miserable—his only solace lay in reading the newspapers that the resident before him decided to use as wallpaper, and he began dreaming of building his own house behind a grove of trees nearby. He unsuccessfully fought to "claim" Savi from Hanuman House and then, after a nervous breakdown that culminated in his attacking Shama, turned his attention to Anand, who agreed to stay. He had already invested all his money in constructing a rudimentary house from reclaimed materials with the help of a local builder, Mr George Maclean; while there, the father and son quickly found a shared affinity for literature, philosophy, and science experiments. But soon thereafter, after Mr Biswas's puppy Tarzan showed up dead on their doorstep, a severe lightning storm tore the house to pieces, leaving Mr Biswas again without a home. The Tulsi brothers-in-law brought him and Anand back to Hanuman House, where he recovered and began to feel "safe and even a little adventurous," perhaps for the first time in his life. Although he was finally united with all his children—including two new daughters, Myna and the infant Kamla—Mr Biswas walked out of the house with a small suitcase and no idea where to go.

Mr Biswas jumped haphazardly onto a bus to Port of Spain, where he stayed with his sister Dehuti and her husband Ramchand in their ramshackle house on the periphery of the city. He stumbled into the office of the *Sentinel*, a newspaper where an old friend from Arwacas worked for some time. Although it took him a day of unpaid sign-painting to convince Mr Burnett, the editor, to give him a shot at reporting, Mr Biswas landed himself an unpaid "month's trial." His initial stories about dead babies were uninspiring, but after "DADDY COMES HOME IN A COFFIN," Mr Burnett was impressed and Mr Biswas became a full-time reporter. Mr Biswas's family agreed to move to Port of Spain, and Mrs Tulsi offered Mr Biswas's family the spare rooms in her vacant house there for only eight dollars a month.

Soon, a "new régime" took over the *Sentinel*: Mr Biswas was no longer allowed to write sensational reports, but now was called to "REPORT NOT DISTORT." Management assigned him to cover cricket matches and court cases, always in bare-bones detail, and fired Mr Burnett. With Mr Biswas increasingly miserable, his children began reconnecting with their family in the countryside—first with Tara and her husband Ajodha, and later with the Tulsis at Hanuman House.

Because of fights with Seth, the Tulsis abruptly decided to leave Hanuman House for an estate at Shorthills in the North of Trinidad, and Mr Biswas's family got kicked out of Mrs Tulsis's house in Port of Spain. Once again, Mr Biswas came to live with the Tulsis, although this time he found it rather inoffensive, particularly because Mrs Tulsi was aging and indifferent. However, the glorious estate began falling into deeper and deeper disrepair, threatening the family's survival. Eventually, Mr Biswas was forced out of the house after being accused of stealing. He promptly had his own house built nearby; unfortunately, the family's attempt to burn the brush surrounding the new house led them to burn the house down instead.

Luckily, however, Mrs Tulsi's home in Port of Spain was again available, and Mr Biswas moved back there with Govind, Chinta, their children, all the Tuttles, and a widow named Basdai. The three brothers-in-law quarreled endlessly but indirectly, and Govind and W.C. Tuttle both grew rich working for the Americans who built military bases and oil infrastructure in Trinidad during World War II. Mr Biswas started writing a column for the *Sentinel*'s "Deserving Destitutes Fund"—he visited poor Trinidadians and picked one every day to win a sum of money—before losing his mother Bipti and grieving deeply for the love and connection he felt he never shared with her. Anand became one of his school's star pupils, beating his cousin Vidiadhar in their rivalry by winning an exhibition scholarship to the local college.

When Anand started college, Mr Biswas found a new job conducting surveys for the Community Welfare Department under the ambitious and beautiful Miss Logie. Just as he began to feel like the most prominent of the house's brothers-in-law, Mr Biswas learned that W.C. Tuttle bought his own house across town and Mrs Tulsi was moving back in preparation for Owad's return from England.

When Owad arrived, he quickly took control of the family, winning everyone's attention and reverence for his endless stories about medical adventures and politics in England and Russia. He soon alienated and angered Anand and Mr Biswas, and Mrs Tulsi forced the Biswases to move out. One day, a solicitor's clerk told Mr Biswas about a house he was trying to sell—the same house where the protagonist died in the Prologue. Mr Biswas talked himself into buying it and borrowed more than four thousand dollars from Ajodha to make the

purchase. He moved his family into the new house, only to discover that it was shoddily constructed by the solicitor's clerk himself and much worse than comparably priced houses in the neighborhood.

The epilogue summarizes the last five years of Mr Biswas's life: Anand and Savi went abroad for college, Mr Biswas finally grew to respect Shama's rationality, and he suffered two heart attacks that left him hospitalized and sedentary. Savi returned from university and found a job that paid far more than he ever made, and the adamantly secular Mr Biswas wondered, "How can you not believe in God after this?" He died shortly thereafter; family from all around Trinidad attended his cremation and then went back to their respective homes.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mr Biswas – The novel's protagonist, Mohun Biswas (referred to exclusively as Mr Biswas), is a cynical Indo-Trinidadian man who spends his whole life pursuing a **house** of his own. After being born into unlucky circumstances in a mud hut in rural Trinidad, Mr Biswas spend most of his life moving from one unfulfilling residence and job to another. Conflict and regret pervade his life: he marries Shama Tulsi abruptly and soon moves into Hanuman House, her family's home in Arwacas. He quickly feels ignored and irrelevant there and becomes an outcast. His attempts to escape the family (and the family's attempts to escape him) lead him to live in miserable isolation working for the family's business in The Chase and Green Vale while Shama and their children remain at Hanuman House, but he inevitably returns there after a series of disasters. Over time, he finally finds a job that matches his high-minded romantic disposition: as a reporter for the Trinidad *Sentinel*, writing sensational and factually dubitable articles about foreign visitors and "Deserving Destitutes." He alternatingly hates and adores his children—first, he loves his daughter Savi but resents his son Anand, whom he sees as weak and effeminate; later, he takes a liking to Anand and ignores Savi; and throughout, he pays little attention to his two younger daughters, Myna and Kamla. Near the end of his life, he falls victim to yet another confidence trick—one that leads him to buy a ramshackle, overpriced house and get into thousands of dollars of debt. Even then, his outcome isn't all that bad: he has a house of his own, a wife who somehow remains loyal to him after decades of mistreatment, and children who value him and, most importantly, have opportunities for economic advancement that he lacked throughout his life.

Shama – Shama is Mr Biswas's wife, one of Mrs Tulsi's fourteen daughters, and the mother of Savi, Anand, Myna, and Kamla. Mr Biswas first meets Shama when she is sixteen and working at the Tulsi store; after writing her a love note that Mrs Tulsi discovers, he is pressured into marrying her, and she has no say in the matter. He quickly begins resenting her and everything she represents: namely, his own poor decision-making, as well as the Tulsis' class status, orthodoxy, and network of support and friendship. Despite Mr Biswas's extensive abuse, both physical and verbal (in response to which she usually argues back but often breaks down in tears), Shama remains loyal and keeps his household running by raising the children, cooking and cleaning, and keeping track of the family's finances. She often goes back to Hanuman House, where she is particularly close to her sister Chinta, when living with her husband becomes unbearable. Although she is well-educated and much smarter than Mr Biswas recognizes, her aspirations center around raising her children successfully and ensuring that her family avoids financial ruin due to her bumbling husband. Indeed, Mr Biswas does not respect her or recognize her as the silent voice of reason until the very end of his life.

Savi – Savi is Mr Biswas's eldest daughter, whom he intended to name "Sarojini Lakshmi Kamala Devi," but Seth and Hari legally named "Basso" instead. While Mr Biswas lived at The Chase, she was born at Hanuman House, where her mother and aunts cared dearly for her, and her father barely visited her until she was old enough to go to school. In an attempt to "claim" her, Mr Biswas buys her an extravagant dollhouse for a month's wages one Christmas, but Shama quickly dismantles it after it causes too much infighting among the sisters and children. Mr Biswas brings her to Green Vale afterwards, but she has nothing to do there and nothing in common with her father, so she quickly returns home to Hanuman House. Eventually, however, she takes a liking to Port of Spain and moves there enthusiastically, coming to see herself as superior to her backwards cousins in the countryside. At first, she is confident, proud, and mean to her "coward" brother Anand, but eventually she becomes meek and self-effacing, particularly after embarrassing the family during a singing performance and finding school more difficult than Anand. She goes abroad to study on scholarship and returns in the Epilogue; she grows very close to her dying father, finds a lucrative job, and appears poised to save the family's finances at the end of the book.

Anand – Anand is Mr Biswas and Shama's second child and only son. Anand is three years younger than Savi and was also born while his father was absent, working at The Chase. In his earliest years, Anand is timid, anxious, diminutive, and often afraid to talk to his disappointed father, who gives him little attention and lets the Tulsis "claim" him. He has trouble in his first years at the mission school, but eventually becomes Mr Biswas's favorite son, particularly after staying with his father at Green Vale "because they was going to leave you alone." Anand quickly takes after his father's interests in science, religion, and especially literature. After Mr Biswas convinces him to move to Port of Spain with promises of real ice cream and Coca Cola, Anand becomes something of a prodigy at

school, winning affection and support from everyone in the family, much as Owad had. He becomes "strong" and starts to look down on his "weak" sisters; later, despite believing he failed his exhibition exams, he actually scores near the top of his class and wins a scholarship to the local college. His academic successes lead him to first revere, and then resent, Owad upon his return from England. At the end of the book, when Mr Biswas dies, Anand is abroad, also on scholarship. Many scholars have suggested that, especially since Mr Biswas represents V.S. Naipaul's father, Anand represents Naipaul himself and could even be seen as the book's narrator.

Mrs Tulsi – The Tulsis' authoritative and stoic matriarch, Mrs Tulsi coordinates Mr Biswas's marriage to her daughter Shama and rules over Hanuman House, caring for her whole family despite her propensity to fainting and mysterious illnesses that demand her fourteen daughters' full attention. Although Mr Biswas generally despises her in the first half of the book, Mrs Tulsi coordinates his marriage, feeds and shelters him, takes special care of his children, and insists on continuing to provide for him despite the blatant lack of respect he shows her. Later, she houses Mr Biswas and his family in Port of Spain before moving everyone to Shorthills and then ultimately allows him to return to her **house**. As she ages and her cherished son Owad goes off to university, she loses motivation to care for the family and eventually starts ruling through mysterious pronouncements from her bedroom, which allows the Shorthills estate to fall into disrepair; but she regains her energy when Owad returns from England and returns to fawning over him.

Owad – Mrs Tulsi's younger son, whom she coddles intensely and Mr Biswas takes to calling "the younger god." He and Mr Biswas get into many arguments early in the book; eventually, Mr Biswas spits and throws his food on Owad, which leads to his banishment from Hanuman House. Owad goes to school in Port of Spain, where he spends his weeks with Mrs Tulsi and actually becomes close friends with Mr Biswas, whose job he respects. Eventually, Owas moves to England for medical school; the whole family assembles for his going-away ceremony and then again for his homecoming, upon which he has become a chubby, refined, communist and "the new head of the family." He wins the unconditional admiration of everyone in the family, including Mr Biswas and Anand. However, after a string of disastrous arguments with them both, he leaves on a trip to Tobago and is scarcely heard from again.

Bipti – Mr Biswas's selfless mother, Bipti, suffers immensely and seemingly insensibly throughout the book. After giving birth to the protagonist at her mother Bissoondaye's hut, Bipti watches her husband, Raghu, die, her older boys go off to the cane fields, her daughter runs away with a yard boy, and her other son, Mr Biswas, struggle to find himself a job or wife. Her depression at this misfortune abates suddenly when Mr Biswas marries into the Tulsi clan, which she considered the last element of her life's work. Although she believes she has nothing more to live for, she also finds a sense of peace and comfort for the rest of the novel, even though Mr Biswas is often reluctant to visit her. When she visits him at Shorthills, however, and develops a close relationship with his wife, Shama, Mr Biswas suddenly comes to respect his mother immensely. When Bipti dies, he mourns at length, even though he never appreciated her during her life.

Raghu – Raghu, who is Mr Biswas's father and Bipti's husband, is a notoriously miserly cane estate worker who buries his money in jars that nobody can find. He is not present for Mr Biswas's birth, and Pundit Sitaram advises the family that he should not see his son until the twenty-first day. He refuses to go to work whenever Mr Biswas sneezes, which is a sign of bad luck, and dies while diving to look for Mr Biswas in a pond, believing that he and the calf he was looking after have drowned. After his death, neighbors invade his family's garden at night, looking for his buried money, and this drives Bipti to send her children away and bring Mr Biswas to Pagotes.

Dehuti – Dehuti is Mr Biswas's sister. Throughout their childhood, Dehuti and Mr Biswas play together frequently while their brothers, Prasad and Pratap, are busy working in the cane fields. After Raghu's death, Bipti sends Dehuti to live with Tara as a servant in the hopes of teaching her upper-class etiquette and eventually marrying her off to a wealthy family. However, she instead elopes with Tara's yard boy, Ramchand, and moves to a well-built hut and then a shanty in Port of Spain. Eventually, she becomes an honorary Tulsi sister, joining the others at Hanuman House on important occasions.

Ramchand – Ramchand is Mr Biswas's garrulous and confident brother-in-law and Dehuti's husband. He is initially a yard boy at Tara's **house**, but elopes with Dehuti. This horrifies the family because of his low caste, but he ends up living in a comfortable hut and ultimately moving to Port of Spain, where he works at the Mad House, houses Mr Biswas for some time, and convinces Mr Biswas to reconcile with the Tulsis. Unlike the rest of the book's Indian characters, he cares little about social status or caste.

Tara – Tara is Bipti's childless sister and Mr Biswas's aunt. Tara marries the wealthy businessman Ajodha, becomes "a person of standing," and rejects many of the orthodox Hindu practices the Tulsis (whom she dislikes) continue to follow. On account of Tara's worldliness, Bipti sends Dehuti to work in Tara and Ajodha's household to learn upper-class etiquette. Tara plays an important maternal role for Mr Biswas throughout his life, offering him guidance, comfort, and opportunity when nobody else can.

Ajodha – Ajodha is Tara's wealthy, scrupulous, and health-obsessed husband who always makes Mr Biswas uncomfortable. Ajodha owns a rumshop, garage, and bus service, among numerous other business ventures, and pays

the young Mr Biswas to read him a health column called *That Body of Yours*. His status indicates Mr Biswas's social class to the Tulsis; when Mr Biswas later visits him to borrow money for his **house** in Green Vale, Ajodha sends him away with a number of vitamin supplements instead. At the end of the book, Mr Biswas does borrow money from Ajodha for his new house on Sikkim Street, but ultimately dies deeply indebted to him.

Seth – Seth is the most powerful and respected man in the Tulsi household, although he is actually Padma's husband and not a Tulsi himself. He initially hires Mr Biswas to paint signs in the Tulsi Store, but thereafter his presence is most often a sign of trouble for the protagonist. He coordinates most of Mr Biswas's moves around Trinidad and manages most of the Tulsis' businesses, underpaying and abusing his workers, before trying to singlehandedly take possession of them and becoming ostracized from the family. After Padma's death, he has a wild streak and gets caught "insuranburning" a lorry. He comes to Port of Spain to welcome Owad back from England, but Owad refuses to acknowledge him, and Seth is never seen again.

Chinta / C – Known as "C" until she mentions her real name in the third chapter, Chinta is Shama's sister and closest confidant in Hanuman House. Chinta is Govind's wife and the third most powerful woman in the **house** after Mrs Tulsi and Padma. She is strong-willed and protective, often arguing passionately with Mr Biswas when he disrespects the family. The narrator notes her suave card-playing and insistence on making disgusting ice cream for the children every Christmas; later, she accuses Mr Biswas of stealing eighty dollars from her room, which leads to his eviction from the Shorthills estate. Eventually, she moves with her family to the Port of Spain house, where she suffers merciless beatings from Govind and beats her children in turn whenever they misbehave.

Govind – Govind is a cheery, illiterate former coconut-seller who began to work in the Tulsis' fields after marrying Chinta. Mr Biswas's early attempts to befriend him by complaining about the other Tulsis eventually led them to a physical fight. While they never fully reconcile, Govind personally carries Mr Biswas in his arms from Green Vale. At Shorthills, Govind withdraws from the family, sells fruit from the estate's trees, and destroys the cricket pavilion to build a cowshed, where he spends most of his time beating the cows. Eventually, he gets wealthy by driving a taxi for the Americans who come to Trinidad during World War II, terrorizes everyone in the Port of Spain **house**, beats Chinta mercilessly, and becomes obsessed with his three-piece suits.

Shekhar – Shekhar is Mrs Tulsi's beloved older son, whom Mr Biswas disparagingly calls "the elder god." Like his younger brother Owad, he is educated at Catholic school; he has trouble finding a wife and, when he eventually marries Dorothy, he moves in with her family and becomes alienated from the family due to her Christian faith. He comes to resent Owad, who gets to go abroad for school.

Hari – A respected Tulsi brother-in-law, Hari is sickly and wise, chews his food forty times, spends inordinate amounts of time in the latrine, and spends his evenings reading Sanskrit scriptures on the verandah at Hanuman House, which lead Mr Biswas to nickname him "the constipated holy man." Mr Biswas's initial attempt to befriend him fails because Hari is deeply orthodox, while Mr Biswas has (briefly) adopted Aryanism, and their relationship never improves. Hari leads all the Tulsi family's religious ceremonies and house-blessings; he falls ill and dies while the family lives at Shorthills.

W.C. Tuttle – A brother-in-law who joins the family in Shorthills and loves the Western stories and novels of the American writer W.C. Tuttle; Mr Biswas soon takes to calling him W.C. Tuttle, and his real name is never revealed. Like Govind, he uses the estate's resources to his own advantage, dismantling its infrastructure for ill-fated business ventures: first selling fruit and fruit trees, then opening a furniture factory. Soon, however, he buys a lorry, which he successfully rents out to the American army. He later moves his family into the Port of Spain **house**, where he plays a gramophone incessantly and alternatingly gets along and fights with Mr Biswas. Eventually, his family moves to another house, but he eventually brings them to visit Mr Biswas on Sikkim Street.

The Solicitor's Clerk – A man who builds **houses** in his spare time, then lives in them with his mother until he can sell them. He builds and sells Mr Biswas the Sikkim Street house for 5,500 dollars (even though he actually only wanted 4,500 dollars for it). He is slick and hides his shoddy craftsmanship by showing Mr Biswas the house in the rain and at night, when the scorching afternoon sun does not shine into the living room and the flaws in the staircase are not visible.

Miss Blackie – The Tulsis' black Catholic maid, whose real name is never revealed. Her actual job is also unclear, since the Tulsi sisters do most of the work at Hanuman House. It appears that her primary duty, especially in the second half of the book, is comforting and appeasing Mrs Tulsi. This often leads Miss Blackie to offensively degrade and apologize on behalf of all black Trinidadians.

Pratap – Mr Biswas's older brother, who works in the cane fields from a young age and never learns to read. When the neighbors raid his family's garden looking for Raghu's buried money, Pratap wants to attack them, but his mother, Bipti, holds him back. Later, he ends up relatively well-off and shelters Bipti in the sturdy **house** where he lives with his wife and children.

Dhari – A neighbor who entrusts the young Mr Biswas to care for his calf, which disappears while the protagonist is busy playing with fish in a stream and is later discovered to have died. Dhari begins a feud with Bipti and her children, breaking into their garden at night to dig for Raghu's buried money.

Bhandat – Ajodha's alcoholic brother and Jagdat and Rabidat's father. He runs the rumshop and lets Mr Biswas stay with him

for a brief time. He eventually kicks Mr Biswas out of the **house** after falsely accusing him of stealing a dollar and runs away to live with his mistress after his wife dies.

Jagdat – Bhandat's melodramatic older son, who moves in with a woman of a different race and fathers a child out of wedlock at a young age. In adulthood, he always dresses in a shirt and tie that resemble funeral attire. Mr Biswas reencounters him at Tara and Ajodha's **house** after many years, and he advises Mr Biswas to be wary about borrowing money from Ajodha.

Misir – A writer for the *Sentinel* whom Mr Biswas befriends in Arwacas. He persuades Mr Biswas to join the Aryans and, during a later visit, try his hand at writing short stories. Misir had sent his family away and begun writing stories, invariably about starving unemployed men who die in tragic circumstances.

Mungroo – The Chase's most prominent stick-fighter, who buys everything at Mr Biswas's shop on credit (but never pays) and leads a band of extortionists. After Mr Biswas hires Seebaran to help with his accounts, Mungroo sues Mr Biswas for "damaging his credit," and his lawyer wins him one hundred dollars in a suspicious settlement with Seebaran.

Mr George Maclean – A builder in Green Vale who helps Mr Biswas build his first **house**. Maclean manages to find cheap materials for the house and works for rates so low that Mr Biswas does not understand how he can make a living, especially since he hires Edgar to help him out. His low-quality materials make the house difficult to inhabit, but still much better than living in the Green Vale barracks.

Mr Burnett – An editor at the *Sentinel* who hires Mr Biswas—first, provisionally for a month, after watching him paint a sign, and later full-time. He asks Mr Biswas to give him "a real shock" and promotes a sensational but often factually questionable style of journalism. After the *Sentinel* begins winning more readers and its owners decide to change its style, Mr Burnett gets sacked and returns to America. He writes Mr Biswas a letter encouraging him to do the same, but the protagonist never responds.

Vidiadhar – Chinta and Govind's son, who is a few months older than Anand and named after the author. At school in Port of Spain, he and Anand compete in the exhibition class; after their exam, Vidiadhar is confident and flouts his apparent success by starting to study the subjects he will learn in college. In fact, Anand wins the scholarship, and Vidiadhar does not even pass the exam. He later turns into a "games-playing thug."

Basdai – A widow who moves into the Port of Spain **house** with Mr Biswas and W.C. Tuttle's families after they return from Shorthills. She lives in the servant's quarters, cares for the boarders who stay in the home, and watches the "readers and learners" while they study. She eventually moves "under the house" when Govind and Chinta take over her room.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Padma – Padma is the second most powerful woman in the Tulsi household after her sister, Mrs Tulsi. Everyone continues to respect her, even when they ostracize her husband Seth, until her death. The family believes that her spirit visits them at Shorthills.

Myna – Mr Biswas and Shama's second daughter, who is born at Hanuman House while Mr Biswas is living at The Chase. She becomes a laughingstock due to her bad bladder at Shorthills but later wins Mrs Tulsi's affections when she reluctantly agrees to pick imaginary lice from her grandmother's head.

Kamla – Mr Biswas and Shama's youngest daughter. Mr Biswas is at Hanuman House when she is born but runs off to Port of Spain without meeting her. She is known for her sleepwalking habit.

Prasad – Mr Biswas's other brother who, like Pratap, is illiterate and works in cane fields for most of his life.

Bissoondaye – Bipti's mother and Mr Biswas's grandmother, who helps make preparations for his birth.

Pundit Sitaram – The pundit who warns of Mr Biswas's inauspicious circumstances of birth and recommends the first syllable of his name. The pundit also warns that his sneeze is unlucky, he should avoid water, and he will be his parents' demise.

Lakhan – A carter who lives near Mr Biswas's childhood home and repeatedly tries to dive into the lake before Raghu when Mr Biswas and Dhari's calf disappear. Later, he also tries to dig up Raghu's money jars.

Sadhu – An elderly neighbor who comforts and feeds Bipti and her children after Raghu's death.

Lal – An Indian teacher and Christian convert at the Canadian Mission School who beats his students freely and looks down on Hindus.

F.Z. Ghany – A traveling solicitor who prepares a birth certificate for Mr Biswas when he needs one for school.

Pundit Jairam – A pundit who houses Mr Biswas and teaches him as an apprentice for eight months. Jairam follows controversial interpretations of Hinduism and treats Mr Biswas with cruelty and indignation, eventually kicking him out after he steals bananas and accidently throws a soiled handkerchief on a holy tree.

Soanie – Pundit Jairam's wife.

Alec – Mr Biswas's childhood friend at the Canadian Mission School who dresses extravagantly, takes kidney pills, and teaches the protagonist to draw beautiful letters. Later, he works in Ajodha's garage and is always covered with grease, before switching to sign-painting and taking on Mr Biswas as an assistant.

Rabidat – Bhandat's younger son, who (like his brother Jagdat)

lives with a woman of another race and has "no one knew how many" children. He and Ajodha are proud of his muscular build; this contrasts with Mr Biswas, whose flabby muscles swing around like "hammocks."

Pundit Tulsi – The famous father of the Tulsi clan, an important and powerful religious leader who left India under mysterious circumstances and died suddenly in a car accident in Trinidad. Pictures of him line the walls at Hanuman House, and the family practically worships him.

Pankaj Rai – An ugly Aryan man whom Mr Biswas quickly declares a "purist" pundit and begins following. Pankaj Rai later gets sent back to India after he is found "interfering with Nath's daughter-in-law."

Shivlochan – The pundit who takes over from Pankaj Rai, Shivlochan barely speaks English—which supposedly testifies to his incompetence—and tries to persuade Misir against advocating "conversion by the sword."

Jai – A younger Tulsi cousin who likes to show off.

Sushila – A widowed Tulsi sister who is ostracized because of her husband's death but still has significant power in the household—particularly by performing rituals and setting curses.

Sumati – A Tulsi sister best known for viciously flogging her children.

Moti – An old Hindu man who is at first warm but later suspicious. He approaches Mr Biswas at his store in The Chase, encourages him to contact Seebaran about his accounts, and acts as an emissary for all their business.

Seebaran – A shadowy, supposedly expert, devout Hindu lawyer. Acting through his go-between Moti, Seebaran begins to collect debt from villagers who owe Mr Biswas money—until the stick-fighter Mungroo sues Mr Biswas and bankrupts him.

Edgar – A "muscular, full-blooded Negro" worker who initially helps Mr Maclean build Mr Biswas's **house** in Green Vale but does not return for the second round of building.

Tarzan – A puppy Mr Biswas adopts in Green Vale who enjoys eating local chickens' eggs and gets mysteriously killed a few hours before a storm destroys Mr Biswas's rudimentary **house**.

Dorothy – Shekhar's Christian wife whose religion and modern ways cause extensive tension between her family and the rest of the Tulsis. After spending vacations in South America, she decides to start talking to her family in Spanish when her in-laws are around so they cannot understand her.

Miss Logie – The head of the Community Welfare Office who hires Mr Biswas and takes his family on vacation to her **house** in Sans Souci. She is warm, confident, and personable, which surprises and attracts Mr Biswas.

TERMS

Dhoti – Knee-length cloth pants traditionally worn by Indian men.

Brahmin – The traditional Hindu caste of teachers, scholars, and religious leaders.

Pundit – A wise Brahmin scholar and ceremonial leader.

Puja – Hindu prayer rituals.

Hanuman House – The Tulsis' massive "alien white fortress" in the town of Arwacas, which has a partially visible statue of "the benevolent monkey-god Hanuman" on the roof. The house has three parts: the Tulsi Store downstairs, the new upstairs wing above the Store, and the crumbling, two-story old house behind the new building and connected to it by an upstairs bridge.

Ceylon – The colonial term for Sri Lanka, used by the Tulsis to refer to their backyard.

Aryans – A term for the ancient Indian aristocracy that has been widely appropriated to other contexts. **Mr Biswas** joins the "Arwacas Aryan Association," a group fighting against many orthodox tenets of the Hinduism practiced by the descendants of Indian indentured laborers in Trinidad, including child marriage and idol worship.

Ague – An acute or intermittent fever, especially malaria.

Thaumaturge – A miracle worker.

Scarlet Pimpernel – A character invented by the British-Hungarian novelist Baroness Orczy who wore a disguise and saved French aristocrats from the guillotine during the French Revolution. The Scarlet Pimpernel became a common reference for characters who perform heroic deeds in secret, and **Mr Biswas** wrote a column as "the Scarlet Pimpernel," challenging people to recognize him for a prize.

Saman Tree – A species of large, flowering tree, often called a rain tree or monkey-pod tree, with a relatively narrow trunk but an extremely wide canopy.

Ramayana – One of the two primary ancient Hindu epics in Sanskrit.

Samuel Smiles – A Scottish writer, journalist, and reformer famous for his tales of people finding success through hard work, defense of free-market capitalism, and belief that poverty was the result of irresponsibility. **Mr Biswas** reads his work extensively, initially believing his journalism to be fiction, and later mimics him when he is assigned to write the "Deserving Destitutes" column for the *Sentinel*.

Epictetus – An important ancient Greek Stoic philosopher and slave who argued that people can live happily and more virtuously by limiting their investment in events over which they have no control and recognizing their responsibility over actions they do control. **Mr Biswas** reads his *Discourses* voraciously after receiving a copy from an estate owner's wife

who visits the Arwacas Aryan Association, but ironically never seems to implement his ideas.

Marcus Aurelius – A Roman emperor best known for writing the *Meditations*, a journal of practical exercises derived from Stoic philosophy and especially Epictetus, whom **Mr Biswas** reads throughout his life.

Charles Dickens – A famous Victorian English novelist, to whom V.S. Naipaul is often compared, best known for writing social commentary. **Mr Biswas** discovered that reading Dickens "ridiculed and diminished" his own struggles in life, motivating him to

Gospo – An orange-lemon hybrid or "sour orange."

Port of Spain – The capital and main city in Trinidad, where **Mrs Tulsi** brings **Owad** for his schooling and **Mr Biswas** later moves and buys his house. Compared to the other places where he lives, Port of Spain is astonishingly urban and cosmopolitan, especially because of the foreign ships that visit its harbor.

Pagotes – The fictional town to which **Mr Biswas** moves after his father's death. **Tara** and her relatives live here.

Arwacas – A fictional town, named after the indigenous Arawak people and based on V.S. Naipaul's childhood home of Chaguanas, where the Tulsi family lives in Hanuman House.

The Chase – A remote village, with only two rumshops and some food shops and surrounded by sugarcane fields, where **Mr Biswas** operates a store for six years.

Green Vale – A fictional estate near Arwacas where **Mr Biswas** oversees estate workers for **Seth** and builds his first house.

Shorthills – A fictional town, located in a lush valley among the hills of Trinidad's Northern Range, where the Tulsis move after leaving Hanuman House and **Mr Biswas** builds and burns down his second house.

Sans Souci – A beach town on the northeastern coast of Trinidad where **Miss Logie** takes **Mr Biswas** and his family for a week's vacation after he starts work at the Community Welfare Department.

Tobago – Trinidad's smaller and much less populated sister island.

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.

INDEPENDENCE VS. BELONGING

V.S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr Biswas* traces the titular protagonist's life in Trinidad from birth to death, chronicling his journey through temporary **homes**, unsatisfying jobs, and frustrating family relationships before he finds an eventual, if fleeting, sense of freedom in his own home. This quest to find independence—from family, drudgery, and fate—is the crux of Mr Biswas's struggles, and his need to find a sense of belonging in a place and social group drives his quest for his own house. Yet these two impulses, to belong but also live independently, seem to pull in opposite directions: the first toward his family and the second away from it. Surprisingly, Mr Biswas manages to feel fully dependent when he is utterly alone, and independent when he relies on others.

Mr Biswas's quest for a house reflects his search for belonging and independence. Throughout the whole book, lacking any better option, he lives wherever he is allowed to go—almost always with relatives, employers, or even relatives that employ him. However, he almost invariably hates the people he lives with and the places where he lives, feeling that he does not belong and resenting his dependence on others, which leads him to try and find a house of his own. The house where Mr Biswas is born ends up sold to a neighbor and demolished for the construction of oil drilling infrastructure: his original place of belonging, "the only house to which he had some right," is destroyed—and would have made his family extraordinarily wealthy had they stayed. After this loss, he bounces among other people's houses for his whole life—at least eleven places altogether, none of which he belongs in, because none of them belong to him. He always feels a burning desire to turn "from a visitor into a dweller" by building a home for himself, creating a place where he both belongs and can live independently from others. In particular, at Hanuman House, the Tulsis' family home where many son-in-laws live along with Shama's sisters, Mr Biswas becomes ostracized for his surliness and explosive arguments with the other family members. Despite the Tulsis' numerous gestures of goodwill, during his initial stay in Hanuman House, he never feels truly part of the family and resents the fact that he must rely on other people (and especially eat their bland food).

Although a house of his own symbolizes the unity of independence and belonging, the tension between these two drives tears Mr Biswas apart, fueling his horrible mood swings, cruelty toward his family, and failure to achieve either independence or belonging. When he lives in the barracks at Green Vale, Mr Biswas falls into a deep depression—he gets to live a solitary life independent of his family (although he still relies on them for work) but fears the laborers around him. Indeed, he realizes that he fears and resents *all* people, whom he sees as capable of finding the freedom and community he has never had, and finds little pleasure living on his own. When

he achieves independence, he recognizes how much he yearns for belonging. Before one of his family's visits, he contemplates killing them; after they arrive, he refuses to interact with them and has a mental breakdown, which leads him to attack his wife, Shama, in front of their children and send them back to Hanuman House. Then, without realizing why, he insists that his son Anand stay; when Anand agrees, he is overjoyed and finds sincere happiness for the first time in the book.

Ultimately, Mr Biswas manages to achieve both independence and belonging without rejecting the family that he previously believed barred him from both. He learns to see his dependence on his family as a form of belonging and not as an imposition on his personal space. After he leaves Green Vale, Mr Biswas is overjoyed to wait out his illness in Hanuman House, where he finally realizes that—due to the family's size—nobody will bother him or pay him much mind. Whereas the emptiness of his life in Green Vale depressed him, he finds peace in "the absence of the world" in Hanuman House. When he moves to Port of Spain, Mr Biswas again finds a sense of belonging and independence precisely through dependence on his family members: his brother-in-law Ramchand houses him and shows him around town, and then he finds the financial freedom to pursue his journalism career when Mrs Tulsi allows his family to live in her house for only eight dollars a month. Yet, when Mr Biswas finally buys his own house on Sikkim Street in Port of Spain, it is nearly uninhabitable and throws him into a deep debt from which he never recovers. He is miserable until the closing pages of the book, when he is nearing death, but his daughter Savi has returned from her studies abroad to find a job that pays more than he ever could have made. Finally, his family feels complete, and he finds a sense of belonging through a house and child that belong to him.

In a sense, Mr Biswas's ability to feel independent and satisfied while utterly dependent and penniless reflects the ambivalent identity of colonized individuals and nations: they are never fully independent from colonial or financial overlords, whether they choose to identify with the victim or the oppressor, their families and histories or the powers that have forced them into destitution. Naipaul suggests that the feeling that one has actively chosen one's path and community—even when one lacks choice in some fundamental sense—is a crucial component of a valuable life and can prevent one from dying "as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated."

SOCIAL STATUS AND HIERARCHY

Despite—or, perhaps, because of—his birth to illiterate peasants in a mud hut in rural Trinidad, Mr Biswas is obsessed with social hierarchy and constantly worries about how he fits into it. His demands for respect and attention usually fall on deaf ears, especially within the Tulsi family, but his career as a journalist and government welfare agent in Port of Spain finally elevate him the status he has always sought. Despite achieving success through hard work and self-improvement, however, Mr Biswas does not abandon his faith in outward symbols of status, which ultimately contributes to his downfall. Naipaul shows how the temptation to conspicuously prove one's wealth and success can undermine one's ability to actually achieve them.

Mr Biswas is obsessed with winning respect and attention from the people around him, and this becomes his primary metric for self-worth. As an infant, Mr Biswas received luxurious oil massages from his mother; afterwards, "Mr Biswas's importance steadily diminished" as his parents began viewing him as a liability, and nobody ever offered him the same level of care or affection. From the moment of his birth, the protagonist is only ever called "Mr Biswas," and few other characters get this honor of being called by his last name; his desire for respect and sense of social entitlement precede and overshadow his actual status.

Mr Biswas's insistence on respect reflects his desire to find legitimacy in the society that surrounds him, and not only in his own family. He was continually frustrated with the Tulsis because they did not acknowledge his presence or the value of his labor; indeed, Owad's respect for Mr Biswas's job was enough to engender a friendship between the two. At Green Vale, Mr Biswas was excited when he became a driver at the sugar estate because the workers initially looked up to him, particularly when he brought out the moneybags to pay them on Saturdays. And, when he worked for the government, "he discovered that he was a dandy" and began to buy expensive, tailored suits to show off his newfound wealth. Although he hated cricket and complained about having to cover it at the *Sentinel*, in his new post, Mr Biswas goes to an important match with a tin of cigarettes and box of matches, because that is what he believes respectable gentlemen should do. Similarly, his favorite parts about his jobs at the *Sentinel* and Community Welfare Department are the recognition they earn him—when he spends much of his time interviewing desperate and impoverished Trinidadians, he finds himself incapable of empathizing with them. Instead, he values his work merely because of his status and salary, and not because he might be doing a social good for people who grew up just like him.

More fundamentally, Mr Biswas insistently sees the world as divided into winners and losers, but his desire to "win" whenever possible also makes him horribly gullible and leads him into trouble, as it makes him jealously resent anyone above him who does not respect him back (like Pundit Jairam, Hari, Seth, and eventually Owad) and actually prevents him from winning the status he wants. Early in the book, after realizing that he does not want to marry Shama, he nevertheless goes along with it despite his reservations, feeling thrilled that "he had been involved in large events" and "achieved status." Later, of course, he resents his confinement in the Tulsi family but never comes to think that his own propensity for social

climbing may have been to blame. His most egregious mistake of all is buying an expensive **house** that looks beautiful and well-constructed in the dark—when a man comes to buy the materials from his old, burned-down house in Shorthills, Mr Biswas convinces himself to spend 5,500 dollars on the new house because his savings have suddenly gone from 800 dollars to 1,200 dollars, which—since it is in the thousands—feels close enough to 5,500 dollars that he comes to believe he is worthy of the better house. This conspicuous purchase turns out to be quite literally empty—the house's bricks are hollow, and it is bound to crumble any day.

Ironically, most of Mr Biswas's deepest failures are direct results of his attempts at winning esteem in the eyes of the world. The ultimate superficiality of his house reveals the shallow nature of his quest for status: he sees the house's beautiful street and façade but fails to notice any of its flaws and buys it on impulse for a thousand dollars above its actual price. And, realizing these flaws, he nevertheless takes inordinate pride in his house, especially when the so-called W.C. Tuttle and his wife come to visit. The family's true upward mobility stems from his own the children's education in England, a place Mr Biswas never gets to visit, while his gestures to win the respect he believes he deserves in Trinidad end up looking foolish and overeager. Naipaul accordingly suggests that colonized peoples might understandably pursue status in order to overcome oppression, but warns that this can easily turn into a game of appearances that masks and often sabotages the economic and political terms under which freedom must be pursued.

EDUCATION, WORK, AND LANGUAGE

Whether he realizes it or not, Mr Biswas's ambitions and successes are structured around his pursuit of language: he becomes a sign-painter because he loves the shapes of letters, and a journalist because he loved reading the newspapers that lined the walls in Green Vale. Although Pundit Sitaram declared Mr Biswas unlucky upon his birth, he did encounter one great stroke of luck in life: his literacy, which not only gave his children a meaningful chance at earning the economic independence he never fully achieved but also, against all odds, allowed him to find a vocation. Mr Biswas also strove to write literature, a dream he never realized—but for which his son Anand seems well poised. If work is the path to well-being in a postcolonial state, education is the most important step toward work that is meaningful, dignified, and lucrative enough to enable upward economic mobility.

Mr Biswas's meager education, which was nevertheless better than his siblings', allowed him to rise out of rural poverty. Mr Biswas's first break was meeting Alec in school and copying his new friend's letter-drawings; he even won the class's approval by writing "I AM AN ASS" calligraphically on the blackboard. His appreciation for the potential beauty of letters led him to his job as a sign-painter, and, later, as a reporter for the *Sentinel*. In fact, literacy also allowed Mr Biswas to write the love note in English that convinced Mrs Tulsi to marry him off to Shama—and consequently also gave him opportunities for work and relocation through the Tulsi family's connections. Meanwhile, Mr Biswas's elder brothers, Prasad and Pratap, were illiterate and uneducated, spent their whole lives working on cane fields, and could scarcely relate to the protagonist when they visited him later in life.

Although he always thought of language as beautiful in itself, rather than as a means to an end, Mr Biswas was never able to realize his ultimate literary ambitions. Mr Biswas became a dedicated reader when he discovered *The Book of Comprehensive Knowledge* at Ajodha and Tara's house; for the rest of his life, he spent as much time as possible with novels and used them as a sort of shelter from the realities of life and hardship. For instance, he convinced himself to go on with his more dreadful *Sentinel* assignments by reading Dickens novels about characters who worked hard despite their misery. Yet Mr Biswas failed repeatedly to write—he could not match his friend Misir's formulaic stories about impoverished people's failures to escape their condition, nor could he finish his own formulaic stories about his unhappy marriage after he splurged on a typewriter in Port of Spain. When asked to give a reading for his literary club, he lacked "the poet's words" and instead offered a letter to his dead mother, Bipti. His job as a reporter required him to unlearn his initial flowery enthusiasm, pigeonholing his prose first into brief, simple headlines and then into the restrained language demanded by the *Sentinel*'s new ownership: "REPORT NOT DISTORT." Ultimately, then, while Mr Biswas's love for language led him to the writer's profession, he never allowed himself to write words as art or produce the kind of literature that he had always admired.

Mr Biswas's life as a writer, in various limited forms, nevertheless fulfilled his lifelong ambition to find meaningful and dignified work. More importantly, however, it gave his children the opportunity to earn the thorough and rigorous education he could not access. Mr Biswas's life of work was dominated by his search for a "vocation," rather than merely a job; although he occasionally found his assignments frustrating, his satisfaction as a reporter—while his brothers were still working in cane fields—seems like his life's most unlikely and significant achievement, much more than winning his own **house**. In Port of Spain, Mr Biswas was adamant about sending his children to school and so enthusiastically supported Anand's efforts in school that his son was embarrassed to be seen with him. Nevertheless, Anand quickly absorbed his father's love of literature and found success with his school compositions.

In romanticizing Mr Biswas's troubled, lifelong affair with words, Naipaul certainly means to honor his own father's

success in finding dignified work and inspiring his son to become a writer. However, he also shows how haphazard, meandering, and dangerous the intergenerational path from poverty to affluence can be. Since Mr Biswas certainly represents V.S. Naipaul's father, a journalist who was lucky to get an education and avoid a life of manual labor, Anand's enthusiasm for writing (and overseas education, from which he does not return at the end of the book) lends credence to the theory that Anand is a fictionalized version of Naipaul himself.

GENDER AND FAMILY

Mr Biswas's struggle for freedom is largely a struggle for freedom from the Tulsi family he impulsively marries into. Unlike the fairly modern relatives he grows up with, the Tulsis are orthodox Hindus, which infuriates Mr Biswas to no end—particularly because their home life is orchestrated and controlled by women. Accordingly, Mr Biswas's quest for a **house** arises in large part from sense of emasculation amidst the Tulsis. His desire for a house also reflects a desire to exert authority over his family, which he conceives in terms of the nuclear unit of a couple and their children rather than the traditional joint-family unit in which siblings live together, supporting their parents and children. Mr Biswas's insistence on authority leads him to treat his wife with ceaseless and profound cruelty; nevertheless, while he is by no means a feminist figure, by the end of the book, he achieves this authority and finally stops taking women's emotional labor for granted, beginning to recognize their support and contributions to his life.

The Tulsis' orthodox Hinduism at once oppresses the family's women by restricting their roles to domestic labor and supports them within the circumscribed sphere of the home. The status of Tulsi women depends largely on their marriages; this is why Mrs Tulsi is willing to marry her daughters to men of whatever occupation and disposition so long as they come from the right Hindu caste—including Mr Biswas, whose part-time job as a transient sign-painter does not dissuade her from letting him marry Shama. Tulsi women are both powerless outside the home because their traditional marriages bar them from doing much outside the house but supported and connected inside the home because the women form Hanuman House's core social unit.

Mr Biswas is continually frustrated that nobody pays him the attention he believes he deserves and he carries no weight in the household's decisions or community. Indeed, nobody seems to notice when he comes and goes, and he feels emasculated because, while women's status is formally dependent on having husbands, in the house the husbands' status depends on their wives. While everyone fears Seth, for instance, his power is derivative of his wife Padma's and his esteem in Mrs Tulsi's eyes; the sisters eventually turn against him, but never against her. Similarly, Mr Biswas attempts early on to befriend his brothers-in-law but gives up after they report his complaints about the family to Mrs Tulsi; they are loyal to the family's women and not to one another.

Mr Biswas accordingly sees his quest to break free of the Tulsis and win economic independence as a referendum on his masculinity. At Hanuman House, his inability to contribute economically reflects his failure as a man—and everyone tells him so. For a long while, while living in The Chase and Green Vale, he also became an absent father, seldom visiting or thinking about his children at Hanuman House except during occasional campaigns to "claim" them from the Tulsis—he is, for instance, he is not even allowed to name his own child. Instead, Seth and Hari choose Savi's name—and those of the rest of his children—which infuriates Mr Biswas, who feels like his paternal role has been usurped. Mr Biswas feels emasculated primarily because of how his family treats him and longs for nothing more than the opportunity to seize control of his family's life from the Tulsi women. His "tyranny" over his family in Port of Spain demonstrates his success in transitioning from the traditional Hindu world, where men's labor determines a family's resources and social standing but women control the household, to a then-modern nuclear family where women are generally still confined to domestic labor yet also lack decision-making power in the home.

After Mr Biswas moves his family out of Hanuman House, he finally gains the paternal authority he sought for so long; in a city of nuclear families without the strict gender divisions of traditional Hinduism, women have a greater, but still limited, freedom to control their own economic destinies through work. For instance, Mr Biswas is astonished that his boss at the Community Welfare Department, Miss Logie, is a woman; Shama takes over his bookkeeping and ensures that the family does not go bankrupt; and ultimately Savi returns to Trinidad in the Epilogue, poised to save the family financially with her well-paying job. While he disdained women's power in Hanuman House, Mr Biswas begins to respect women's power in the economy: he looks up to Miss Logie and fears her judgment and, most astonishingly, even finds a limited respect for his wife, Shama, in the novel's closing pages. He appreciates her loyalty (despite his decades of abuse), her sober judgment in encouraging him not to buy the house (although it is too late), and her eagerness in taking care of the house while he is in the hospital (if only because this domestic labor proves to him that he is the true head of the household). He also comes to finally respect his own mother, Bipti, in Shorthills, when he discovers that Shama respects her, and she helps clear the yard of debris; this redeeming moment overwhelms all of his previous disdain for her resignation and passivity, and it later leads him to mourn her death deeply.

A House for Mr Biswas contains little explicit critical analysis of gender, but Mr Biswas's sense of domination by women—and inability to acknowledge how they support and sustain him

throughout the book—defines his feelings of suffocation and powerlessness among the Tulsis. Reflecting the gender norms of the late 1950s (the book was published in 1961), Mr Biswas yearns for a Western nuclear family in which women would still lack many opportunities outside the home but also lose the power *inside* the home—the very power that allows the Tulsi women to retain some independence and autonomy. While Mr Biswas's textbook transition from tradition to modernity brings his family into a world where his daughter can have an education and career, this transition does not constitute a clean break from women's oppression into (even relative) women's liberation. Despite their absolute lack of power over *where* they live, the Tulsi women have relative power over *how* they live in the home, and so Mr Biswas's fate demonstrates the resiliency of the patriarchy and complicates the conventional assumption that orthodoxy confines while modernity frees.

COLONIALISM, OPPRESSION, AND ESCAPE

A House for Mr Biswas was published during the ill-fated West Indies Federation, a year before Trinidad and Tobago became an independent nation, but set in the earlier years of the twentieth century. Naipaul's portrait of Trinidad thus reflects a post-slavery colonial society in the midst of an economic and social transition toward the postcolonial state. The island is highly stratified, and different groups' animosity for one another on the basis of race, religion, class, literacy, and the urban/rural divide demonstrates how Trinidad's colonized people internalized imperial hierarchies. Yet Naipaul is also notorious for his deep appreciation of the opportunities that empire paradoxically gives colonized peoples, and this ambivalent pride is on full display in this novel. The source of Trinidad's problems also appears as its solution: by studying in England, speaking English, and helping out the Americans, Trinidadians become wealthy and self-sufficient.

While Trinidad may have been undeveloped prior to colonialism, colonial interventions further impoverished it and created entrenched social divisions through slavery and indentured servitude. The island is divided among a minority of white colonists, the descendants of black slaves, and the families of Indian indentured servants (who are further divided between Hindus and converts to Christianity). The colonial legal and financial systems that govern Trinidad during the book systematically produce injustice rather than justice: for instance, a dishonest lawyer swindles Mr Biswas out of all his money in The Chase without ever meeting him, and he only makes it back when he agrees to "insure-and-burn" the store; in both cases, characters twist the colonial legal system to their own purposes, and Mr Biswas only hears of its dealings, which determine his livelihood, from afar. Mr Biswas experiences the colonial law as a privileged domain by means of which privileged Trinidadians maintain their power. When he finally becomes privileged enough to work for the Community Welfare Department, its work proves useless and it is quickly dissolved. The class of landless peasants that he helps while working for the Department—the same class he was born into—descends directly from the unfree labor that populated the island in the first place, and even after the abolition of slavery and indenture (under coercive, slavery-like labor conditions), the majority of Trinidadians are still working in cane fields and struggling to survive. World War II devastates the island because it is a colonial possession, even though there was no fighting anywhere near it: food was hard to come by because of rationing, and Americans began taking land for military bases. In other words, Trinidad's status as a colony allows its people to be systematically exploited by distant, powerful forces, whether they physically reside on the island or not.

The island's people end up internalizing and perpetuating these colonial hierarchies themselves, which sustains the deep and futile divisions among them. While there continues to be a lively debate over whether Naipaul is himself a racist, in this novel Afro-Trinidadians clearly live in the worst conditions and suffer the worst discrimination from others. Mr Biswas and his family subject them to insulting stereotypes: the whole family is astonished when a black student scores highest on the exhibition exam, and Mrs Tulsi enlists her maid, disparagingly named Miss Blackie, to help justify her refusal to pay black laborers the wages she promised. When they return to Arwacas after living in Port of Spain, Mr Biswas's family disdains the rural Indians they meet there. The deep-seated divisions in Trinidad are also religious: one reason the Tulsis and Tara's family hate one another is that the former are orthodox Hindus and the latter modern Hindus; indeed, Mr Biswas alienates himself from most of the Tulsis when he joins a group of Hindu dissenters conveniently named the Aryans. In contrast, Mr Biswas and his family revere most of the white people they meet: for instance, Mr Biswas idolizes Mr Burnett at the *Sentinel*, and Mrs Tulsi adores the Jewish doctor who visits her throughout her illness. This is another artifact of a colonial racism that associates whiteness with benevolence and power.

Despite its devastating effects on Trinidad, for Naipaul, the colonial state's power is also a necessary tool by means of which the dispossessed can achieve social advancement. Most noticeably, English education is the secret to economic success in Trinidad. Even though his family speaks Hindi at home, Mr Biswas's jobs all require him to write in English, something his brothers Pratap and Prasad never learned to do. Similarly, by going to school in England, Mrs Tulsi's son Owad and Mr Biswas's daughter Savi achieve far more social mobility than their parents ever do. Govind and the brother-in-law Mr Biswas calls W.C. Tuttle both earn fantastic salaries and gain status in Port of Spain by working for the American army: by

unquestioningly embracing colonial power, they achieve far more than they could on their own terms. Indeed, Naipaul seems fundamentally suspicious about Trinidadians' ability to develop economically for themselves. In Shorthills, the Tulsis purchase a French colonial estate—a clear metaphor for colonized people gaining control of their land after independence—but then begin hilariously dismantling it, destroying the swimming pool and cricket ground, cutting down trees, and letting a gully out front turn into an impassable gorge. In trying to take charge of their environment and means of survival, Naipaul suggests, colonized people undermine the admittedly corrupt beauty of what lay there before. Indeed, V.S. Naipaul's ambivalent attachment to imperial power was clear in own life: he never considered moving back to Trinidad and recoiled at being called a "West Indian writer."

While Naipaul is attentive to the circumscribed, stratified universe that colonialism creates and the way this limits Mr Biswas's horizon of possible achievement in Trinidad, he nevertheless sees that colonized people's best chance at winning dignified and autonomous lives usually lies in imitating the colonizer's ways—even if it means abandoning their culture working subserviently for the West. In this sense, Mr Biswas's struggle to free himself from the control of his economic and social superiors and ultimate end—in monumental debt, in a house he was deceived into buying—parallels his nation's broader fate in the twentieth century.

SYMBOLS

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

HOUSES

Mr Biswas's quest for a house symbolizes his overwhelming desire to claim space for himself, organize that space himself, and determine his own life within that space. After his childhood home mysteriously disappears, Mr Biswas spends his life traveling from one temporary family residence to another, fueling his desire for a house of his own. However, nearly all the functional houses in the book are organized and run by women (especially the Tulsis' Hanuman House in Arwacas). When men take charge of houses, they inevitably fall apart: Mr Biswas's own houses at Green Vale and Shorthills get destroyed, and the larger estate at Shorthills ends up in shambles because the men of the house strip and sell its component parts for their own personal gain. At the end of the book, Mr Biswas finds immense comfort when he returns from the hospital to find that his wife Shama has put the house in order—his desire for independence through a house is unachievable in the sense that he never truly comes to, or ultimately wants to, truly dominate the domestic space.

In the novel, houses also symbolize class status and financial standing. Mr Biswas continuously notes the shortcomings and furnishings of the places he visits, and his interest in the sturdiness and intricacy of others' houses and furniture therefore reflects his attention to how the quality of a living space expresses the class status of its inhabitants. When Mr Biswas finally gets a house at the end of the book, it seems to indicate his financial independence and elevated class status. Ironically, he loans thousands of dollars to pay for it and dies with a debt seemingly greater than all the money he had ever saved his entire life. Of course, this house is not truly worth the money, but rather a cheap imitation of what a well-built and functional house should look like—Mr Biswas can only achieve a hollow, false version of what he wanted, yet somehow this is enough for him; the poverty and financial dependence on his uncle Ajodha that he takes on to obtain the house belie the appearances of class status and financial independence that it represents.

Finally, houses also symbolize the onerous project of independence in formerly colonized territories; as Trinidad's people won sovereignty over their land in the years around this book's publication, they were tasked with forging a new national identity based on the territory to which most were shipped as laborers. Mr Biswas's sense of alienation from his many homes and partially-fulfilled desire to truly belong in a house of his own represent colonized people's struggle to translate places and systems of oppression—the plantation, the institutions of colonial government, the local economy—into places of proud belonging and systems that benefit the population as a whole.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *A House for Mr Biswas* published in 2001.

Prologue Quotes

❝ How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated.

Related Characters: Shama, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

The novel's prologue, which covers the same events as the epilogue (Mr Biswas's house, sacking, illness, and death) ends with this passage describing the even greater irrelevance and misery he narrowly avoided by buying his house. Although the prologue presents Mr Biswas's end as tragic and his house as a foolish purchase, these closing lines suggest that he fought for a place in the world until the end and set up his transformation in the rest of the book. By the end, his same jobless, penniless demise nevertheless looks like a profound accomplishment.

According to this passage, the house represents Mr Biswas's pursuit of both independence from the Tulsi family—a life on his own terms and not someone else's—and belonging in the world. The house proves Mr Biswas's belonging because it belongs to him: he only feels necessary and accommodated in the world by claiming exclusive sovereignty over a piece of it. While his house is shoddy and he owes more than he can pay on it, he nevertheless gets to live out the final years of his life in independence.

This struggle to claim his piece of the world is also a metaphor for colonized people's fights for independence in the twentieth century, in terms of both territory and identity—brought from India to Trinidad as indentured workers, the parents of the novel's main characters struggle to define their identities in the Caribbean, where they are caught in the tensions among their traditional Hindu culture, the varying situations of the island's diverse ethnic communities, and the shift to modern capitalism that increasingly swallows them up and establishes rigid criteria for status and success.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Mr Biswas never went to work on the estates. Events which were to occur presently led him away from that. They did not lead him to riches, but made it possible for him to console himself in later life with the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, while he rested on the Slumberking bed in the one room which contained most of his possessions.

Related Characters: Raghu, Bipti, Pratap, Prasad, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

From the day of his unlucky, ill-timed birth into a family of poor, illiterate sugarcane estate workers, it seemed unlikely that the young, weak, and malnourished Mr Biswas would accomplish much of anything in his life. Astonishingly, as the reader has already learned in the prologue, Mr Biswas managed to become a journalist in Trinidad's capital, marry into the wealthy Tulsi family, and read the Roman philosopher Marcus Aurelius in a house of his own.

In this passage, the narrator establishes that the novel's events, including his father's drowning, diverted Mr Biswas from the from the estate work and rural lives to which his brothers Prasad and Pratap had no alternatives, if only by chance. Indeed, throughout the novel, the most important events in Mr Biswas's life happen suddenly and unpredictably, often against his wishes and due to his gullibility and incompetence. His father's death leads him to live with his aunt Tara in Pagotes and attend school, which in turn lets him become a sign-painter, meet the Tulsis, marry Shama, move to Port of Spain, and win his reporting job and house; the novel's whole plot appears as the workings of an inexorable fate that Mr Biswas has no control over or knowledge about. The prologue contributes to this fatalism by revealing what he ultimately accomplishes in life.

This passage also draws out the tension between Mr Biswas's two professional goals—money and status on the one hand, and meaning and personal expression on the other. While his brothers nevertheless grow wealthy through cane work, Mr Biswas is the only character in the book who ends up with a true *vocation*; his reporting job matches his disposition and is intrinsically interesting to Mr Biswas. It does not pay well, but for most of his time at the *Sentinel* Mr Biswas loves the opportunity to write for a living and pursue stories that are as exciting and extraordinary as the novels he reads in his youth.

❝ And so Mr Biswas came to leave the only house to which he had some right. For the next thirty-five years he was to be a wanderer with no place he could call his own, with no family except that which he was to attempt to create out of the engulfing world of the Tulsis. For with his mother's parents dead, his father dead, his brothers on the estate at Felicity, Dehuti as a servant in Tara's house, and himself rapidly growing away from Bipti who, broken, became increasingly useless and impenetrable, it seemed to him that he was really quite alone.

Related Characters: Raghu, Dehuti, Bipti, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

After Raghu dies and neighbors begin searching the family's property for his buried jars of money, Bipti moves her kids out of their childhood village and away to live in Pagotes with her sister Tara; Mr Biswas loses his childhood home and the treasures buried underneath it (not only the money, but also, it later turned out, immense oil reserves, which the village was razed for drillers to access). Everywhere he lived for the rest of his life, except briefly in Mrs Tulsi's house and then his own at the end of his life in Port of Spain, Mr Biswas felt marginalized and out-of-place, like a visitor who did not belong. It is debatable whether the originary loss of his village led Mr Biswas to feel this way or merely allowed him to make sense of his own alienation. Regardless, it represents his sense that he is unwanted, uncared for, and unimportant in the world.

His displacement also points to that displacement of the roughly 100,000 Indian laborers, including Raghu, Pundit Tulsi, and V.S. Naipaul's ancestors, who were trafficked by the British to Trinidad as indentured servants, as well as (more indirectly) the slaves whose descendants essentially make up the rest of the island's population.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ In this way official notice was taken of Mr Biswas's existence, and he entered the new world.

Related Characters: Lal , F.Z. Ghany, Bipti, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr Biswas first went to the Canadian Mission School in Pagotes, his teacher Lal demanded a birth certificate for his registration, but Mr Biswas did not have one; his mother Bipti took him to obtain one from the solicitor F.Z. Ghany, and suddenly Mr Biswas came to exist not only in the real world of people and things, but also the official world of government records. This points to the power of both writing and the law; the former transforms Mr Biswas from a nameless peasant to a full citizen as well as forming the basis of his entire career, and the latter operates throughout the novel as a tool for the rich and literate to pursue their own self-interest, often at the expense of the powerless and illiterate.

Various later events in the book hearken back to this original encounter with official documents. His children get birth certificates immediately, and Mr Biswas learns from them that their names have been chosen without his input. Later, Mr Biswas meets a poor certificate-writer outside a courthouse in Port of Spain and marvels that the documents are effectively a commodity to buy and sell. And eventually, Mr Biswas later works for Trinidad's Community Welfare Department, collecting survey data on illiterate peasants in order to give the government a picture of their lives and struggles. In all these cases, writing mediates between the powerless and the powerful, but is a tool largely reserved for the powerful, and the government's insistence on written documents allows it to operate unilaterally and mysteriously from a distance, which often leads it to oppress and ignore rural Trinidadians who lack the education to read or the resources to fight back.

❝ As fatigue overcame him he began to long for the day to end, to relieve him of his freedom. He went back to the dark rooms tired, empty, miserable, yet still excited, still unwilling to sleep.

Related Characters: Bhandat, Ajodha, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

For a portion of his youth, Mr Biswas works in his uncle Ajodha's rumshop and lives with its proprietor, Ajodha's cruel and violent brother Bhandat. One day, Ajodha and Bhandat go to the funeral, leaving the rumshop closed and Mr Biswas with the first free day of his life, which he spends wandering aimlessly around the town of Pagotes, eating and smoking, and ruminating about his lack of freedom.

When Mr Biswas finally gets time and space to himself, he is unable to make use of it—he has no idea what to do with the independence he always dreamed about. This reflects both the fact that he has never truly chosen anything in his life and the tension between his desire for independence and his desire to feel loved and welcomed. When he has nobody to depend on or worry about and can finally do what he

wishes, he realizes that he does not even know what he wants and cannot achieve happiness on his own. In these lines, after he returns home to Bhandat's house, this tension is on full display: he wants to return to a life without choice (for sleep "to relieve him of his freedom") but is also thrilled to have finally done something for himself and excited at the prospect of building his future through such agency.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ How often did Mr Biswas regret his weakness, his inarticulateness, that evening! How often did he try to make events appear grander, more planned and less absurd than they were!

And the most absurd feature of that evening was to come. When he had left Hanuman House and was cycling back to Pagotes, he actually felt elated! In the large, musty hall with the sooty kitchen at one end, the furniture-choked landing on one side, and the dark, cobwebbed loft on the other, he had been overpowered and frightened by Seth and Mrs Tulsi and all the Tulsi women and children; they were strange and had appeared too strong; he wanted nothing so much then as to be free of that house. But now the elation he felt was not that of relief. He felt he had been involved in large events. He felt he had achieved status.

Related Characters: Seth, Mrs Tulsi, Shama, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mr Biswas's hasty marriage to Shama demonstrates how his concern with social status often gets in the way of his better judgment. Even though he already felt deceived and suffocated by Mrs Tulsi and her family, and even though the narrator shows that he would consider the marriage a mistake in the long term, Mr Biswas was so excited to feel like "he had achieved status" that he overlooked his reservations and jumped into the esteemed—but largely dysfunctional and distant—Tulsi family. In the rest of the novel, Mr Biswas continues making bad decisions out of reverence for powerful, respected, and authoritative people.

All the while, it is unclear whether his marriage truly was a bad decision; while he was miserable for decades living with the Tulsis and failing to connect with Shama, the family nevertheless offered him the economic opportunities and connections that helped him achieve his job, house, and healthy nuclear family.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ When her feet began to swell, Mr Biswas wanted to say, "Well, you are complete and normal now. Everything is going as it should. You are just like your sisters." For there was no doubt that this was what Shama expected from life: to be taken through every stage, to fulfill every function, to have her share of the established emotions: joy at birth or marriage, distress during illness and hardship, grief at a death. Life, to be full, had to be this established pattern of sensation. Grief and joy, both equally awaited, were one. For Shama and her sisters and women like them, ambition, if the word could be used, was a series of negatives: not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow.

Related Characters: Shama, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

Living at The Chase a few years into their marriage, Mr Biswas and Shama's relationship has slightly improved but they continue to quarrel and disagree. Most of all, he begins to see the complexity of her personality as she spends cares for him when they are alone but always prefers her family's company. When she becomes pregnant with their first child, Mr Biswas realizes how much their sense of motivation and purpose in life differs: he grew up in poverty and wants nothing more than to make a name for himself and find the sense of purpose and belonging he never had. She grew up in a healthy, if overgrown, Hindu family and wants nothing more than to live as her mother does, fulfilling her duties to the family, rearing and caring for children.

While Mr Biswas wants to forge his own path through life, Shama simply wants to live out the formula of what she believes life should be. Ironically, throughout the text, Shama is much more competent, diligent, and reasonable than Mr Biswas and would likely fare far better in his position. In the houses she shares with Mr Biswas, she ensures that everyone is fed and taken care of, and she frequently tries to counter his worst decisions (especially financial ones), though he often ignores her.

This division between husband and wife most of all reflects the way entrenched gender roles shape people's desires and experiences in the world: in this society, men's social

value hinges on their economic success and women's on their success in the home, and Mr Biswas and Shama both internalize these precepts. Gender roles are also inflected through the difference between traditional and modern ways of life: the orthodox Tulsis value communal harmony and duty, while Mr Biswas values his independence and autonomy, so refuses to live his life according to religious tenets or codes. Her ambitions are built on an idea of the family collective, his on that of the individual.

> *Real calling name: Lakshmi. Signed by Mohun Biswas, father.*

Related Characters: Hari, Seth, Shama, Savi, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr Biswas's daughter Savi is born at the Tulsis' Hanuman House while he stays in his store at The Chase, he yearns to name her "Sarojini Lakshmi Kamala Devi" (though much to his disappointment, she is not a boy). Seth and Hari decide to name her Basso but call her Savi, and Mr Biswas writes this line on her legal birth certificate in order to try and ensure he gets his way—which, of course, he never does.

The fight over Savi's name shows how Mr Biswas remains powerless among the Tulsis—Seth and Hari take over the paternal authority that should be his, and his addendum to the birth certificate has no effect. It also attests again to the power of writing and especially legal documents to determine official truths. The Tulsis' insistence on getting birth certificates immediately shows their social status and proximity to the colonial government, as well as contrasting with Mr Biswas's own humiliating visit to get the birth certificate he needed to register for school.

Much later, Anand finds Savi's birth certificate in a drawer and notices this peculiar line, which Mr Biswas seems to have scrawled unintelligibly (despite his talent for painting beautiful letters on signs).

Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

> AMAZING SCENES WERE WITNESSED YESTERDAY WHEN.

Related Characters: Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

This headline, from one of the newspapers that serve as wallpaper in the Green Vale barracks, becomes an obsession for Mr Biswas: he repeats the line to himself and imagines his own exploits being described by it; the first chapter of the book's second part, in which he gets his job at the Trinidad Sentinel, is titled "Amazing Scenes."

In addition to spurring Mr Biswas's earliest interest in journalism, this peculiar headline also shows journalism's power to shape perception: nothing follows the word "WHEN." The reader never learns what the line is describing but only that it must be incredible; it is only "AMAZING" because the journalist insists that it is. The indirect creative power of such journalism is what originally excites Mr Biswas about writing sensational pieces for the *Sentinel*. When he is forced to produce formulaic reports on court cases and cricket matches instead, he is incredibly frustrated that he loses the power to shape his stories, to credibly insist that he was witness to "AMAZING SCENES." This line also reflects his aspiration to connect life and literature; although he long dreams of living the adventurous life of a fictional character, journalism allows him a bridge between fiction and real life, in which he can earn a living as a writer, focus on the aspects of life that truly are as wondrous as fiction, and shape the world's perception of them.

> There was no need to ask where Jagdat was going. He was going to his family. He too, then, lived a divided life.

Related Characters: Tara, Ajodha, Rabidat, Jagdat, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis

In Pagotes, unsuccessfully seeking a loan from Ajodha to help him build his house at Green Vale, Mr Biswas sees Bhandat's sons, Jagdat and Rabidat, for the first time since before his marriage, when he briefly lived with them. Jagdat

was dressed peculiarly in a shirt and tie and spending much of his time with a "Spanish" woman and their "four or five" kids. On the way home, Mr Biswas runs into Jagdat on the street outside Tara and Ajodha's house; Jagdat smokes while complaining endlessly about Ajodha's insistence on policing others' health and wide-ranging stinginess before they part ways and the narrator expresses Mr Biswas's thoughts on the matter in this line.

Although Jagdat lacked many of the advantages and lucky breaks that brought Mr Biswas to the Tulsi family and to the brink of homeownership for the first time, their lives are nevertheless parallel: both split their time between a family whose values they hate (Ajodha and the Tulsis) and a place where they are independent but lack resources (with the Spanish woman and at Green Vale). For the first time, Mr Biswas sees something of himself in another person; they identify with one another even if they are extraordinarily different people in most respects, and they both seek to unify their "divided" lives into a single life where they can at once have the money and resources they need to survive, live in harmony with families who love them rather than treating them as disposable, and most of all autonomously pursue their own values and work. While Mr Biswas briefly finds all three at the end of the book, when the reader last encounters Jagdat in the second part's fifth chapter, he is still frustrated and living with Ajodha.

❝ The darkness filled his head. All his life had been good until now. And he had never known. He had spoiled it all by worry and fear. About a rotting house, the threats of illiterate labourers.

Now he would never more be able to go among people.

He surrendered to the darkness.

Related Characters: Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

In Green Vale, after he decides one night to live for the present instead of endlessly deferring his happiness to the uncertain future, Mr Biswas falls into a deep depression and realizes how miserable his present actually is. Most of all, he realizes that he fears and hates other people—all people, for they seem to enjoy the happiness and freedom he has never had and never expects to find. When he realizes he should not view the present as a temporary stepping-stone to the better future he is fantasizing about, he begins to see the continuity between the present and the future, and he convinces himself that his feeling of alienation will never pass. He has never felt comfortable around people, so he decides he will never again "go among" them.

Mr Biswas's depression centers on his struggle to take responsibility for himself. Even though he directs his anger against other people, in a way Mr Biswas realizes here that he is his own greatest enemy: his own refusal to reflect on his situation and desires, as well as his horrible jealousy of anyone who had it better than he did, have made him miserable but helpless to change for his entire life. However, while he recognizes his responsibility in this respect, he copes with his depression by continually refusing to take charge of his life. For instance, when he sees his bedsheets scattered and his fingernails bitten, he sees them as signs that the world wants him to be depressed (even though they are entirely within his control); he decides not to fight but to "surrender to the darkness."

Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ He was going out into the world, to test for its power to frighten. The past was counterfeit, a series of cheating accidents. Real life, and its especial sweetness, awaited; he was still beginning.

Related Characters: Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 292

Explanation and Analysis

After healing from his illness, depression, and fright in Hanuman House, Mr Biswas decides not to visit his newborn daughter or put up with the Tulsis; instead, he slips away one morning and decides to confront the world, to pursue his ill-defined dreams. He gives up on his helplessness and dependence and—even though he has no idea where he is going—decides for one of the only times in his life to take control of his situation and put his past behind him. This is the moment of decisive action that ultimately leads Mr Biswas to Port of Spain, his job at the *Sentinel*, and the relative success of his later years.

Mr Biswas contrasts his early years in the countryside with the "real life" and world that lay beyond. In Green Vale, he became depressed when he realized that he should not view the present as a temporary path to the future because

he also realized that he had none of the things he wanted in life. Now, he decides that he must both view the present as meaningful and take charge of that empty, unsatisfying present; he turns back from despair at his dissatisfaction to hope for satisfaction, but no longer expects it to fall unexpectedly into his hands. By enduring and overcoming the world's "power to frighten" he might win a right to its "especial sweetness."

Part 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

He comprehended the city whole; he did not isolate the individual, see the man behind the desk or counter, behind the pushcart or the steering-wheel of the bus; he saw only the activity, felt the call to the senses, and knew that below it all there was an excitement, which was hidden, but waiting to be grasped.

Related Characters: Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

On his first day in Port of Spain, Mr Biswas is immediately captivated by the city's vibrant energy and, particularly, his sense that it is a cooperative project: everyone has a role and purpose in the city; people coexist and produce a concentrated wealth of opportunity, culture, and beauty. Like the Tulsi family, Port of Spain is a relatively anonymous community, but unlike Mr Biswas when he lives with the Tulsis, everyone in the city manages to retain their independence and autonomy. While the countryside feels suffocating and closed, the city seems endless and radically open, the perfect place for Mr Biswas to build his future.

"This education is a helluva thing," Ramchand said. "Any little child could pick up. And yet the blasted thing does turn out to be so damn important later on."

Related Characters: Dehuti, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

Ramchand, the illiterate yard-boy who elopes with Mr Biswas's sister Dehuti before moving to Port of Spain to work at an insane asylum, lives in a rundown tenement but nevertheless manages to send his sons to school because he recognizes that education is the easiest way for poor Trinidadians to ensure their children have a chance at rising out of poverty. Mr Biswas, of course, is a sort of living proof: although he never grows wealthy or even financially comfortable, his education allows him to meet and join the Tulsis, and later to associate with Port of Spain's elite. Furthermore, his own children end up going abroad to school—Savi makes an impressive salary when she returns, and while Anand is still abroad at the end of the book, he presumably becomes the author himself.

Ramchand is particularly surprised that "any little child" could do well in school—after living in a society so stratified that education becomes a privilege for the rich, it becomes easy to think that the poor are deprived of it because they somehow could not make use of it. If the uneducated poor cannot find work besides manual labor no matter how hard they try, the educated poor at least have a chance to pursue their own interests, and Mr Biswas was the first in his family to gain this opportunity. This state of affairs foreshadows Mr Biswas's work with the poor at the Deserving Destitutes column and Community Welfare Department; it also recalls Mr Biswas's reading of Samuel Smiles, who praised responsibility and hard work but also believed that the education was crucial for the impoverished to escape their predicament.

DADDY COMES HOME IN A COFFIN
U.S. Explorer's Last Journey
ON ICE
by M. Biswas

Somewhere in America in a neat little red-roofed cottage four children ask their mother every day, "Mummy, when is Daddy coming home?"

Less than a year ago Daddy—George Elmer Edman, the celebrated traveller and explorer—left home to explore the Amazon.

Well, I have news for you, kiddies.

Daddy is on his way home.

Yesterday he passed through Trinidad. In a coffin.

Related Characters: Mr Burnett, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

This is Mr Biswas's breakthrough story for the *Trinidad Sentinel*. As his editor, Mr Burnett, requested, it is a provocative and irreverent tabloid piece with no "amazing scenes." Indeed, it is more creative than newsworthy, but this is precisely what Mr Biswas wanted from writing: a form of creative expression. Both journalism and sign-writing combine the practical and aesthetic functions of language, transmitting information by packaging it in beautiful words and letters.

The story itself also reflects Mr Biswas's anxieties and interests. For one, its subject—the loss of a father—hearkens back to both his own father's death and his own abandonment of his children to go explore Port of Spain. It also depicts what Mr Biswas found most enchanting about the city: how it condenses the world's diversity in a single place, and how ships from across the world stop their on their way to and from more interesting places. This story resurfaces on the last page of the novel; the narrator reveals that Mr Biswas long felt guilty for his pointed and unempathetic tone, and it turns out that he also fails to get a dignified mention in the paper. The news surely distorts the world, but (at best) it nevertheless keeps a record of events for posterity.

"I raised my hand but I did not know if it got to the top. I opened my mouth to cry for help. Water filled it. I thought I was going to die and I closed my eyes because I did not want to look at the water."

Related Characters: Raghu, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 342

Explanation and Analysis

Just after Mr Biswas publishes his first popular news story, his son Anand finds his earliest academic—and literary—success in this composition for school. Although he ignored his teacher's instructions, Anand's story about nearly drowning at the Docksite harbour extension earned him a grade of 12/10 and praise from his family, who began to invest themselves heavily in his education and feed him the milk and prunes they claimed to be responsible for his uncle Owad's success in school. Water remains remarkably unlucky for Mr Biswas, but by disrupting his life it also indirectly brings good fortune: just as Raghu's drowning contributed to Mr Biswas's ability to go to school, Anand's near-drowning motivates him to study hard, win the exhibition scholarship, and ultimately move to England and become a globally respected novelist (V.S. Naipaul himself).

Part 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

"I don't want you to be like me."

Related Characters: Mr Biswas (speaker), Anand

Related Themes:

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

Although Anand largely follows in his father's footsteps, taking a liking to school and literature, in a rare moment of raw emotion Mr Biswas offers this warning. He had just switched from reading books about social injustice to reading Dickens, which both echoed and minimized his own now-diluted struggles. He asked Anand to learn complicated vocabulary from these Dickens novels so as to not "be like me." This line is at once a self-pitying lament about his own decreasingly fulfilling job at the *Sentinel* (which, under "the new régime," forced him to "report not distort" and abandon his creativity) and a reminder that his high hopes for himself have translated into a devotion to his children's future. As he runs up against limits to his own potential, Mr Biswas begins to see Anand's potential as endless; again, knowledge, writing, and education define that potential, and ultimately bring Anand to England. Indeed, Anand is the only person Mr Biswas is ever vulnerable with, although he seldom acknowledges his son's emotions in return, which reveals how much he fuses his son into his own identity.

Mr Biswas had never thought of Tulsi property as belonging to any particular person. Everything, the land at Green Vale, the shop at The Chase, belonged simply to the House. But the lorries were Seth's.

Related Characters: Mrs Tulsi, Seth, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 374

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr Biswas gets kicked out of Mrs Tulsi's house in Port of Spain, he realizes that it is not truly Mrs Tulsi's at all—it belongs to Seth. Mr Biswas is again displaced, this time at no fault of his own, because of conflicts over limited resources and living space. This demonstrates a tension and shift in ideologies of property: the Tulsis almost always share their property and resources with everyone in the family (which is why Mr Biswas never sees "Tulsi property as belonging to any particular person"), but as Seth increasingly seeks to claim all their holdings for himself, communal ownership transitions to the Western capitalist model of private property.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ He had found a site such as he always wanted, isolated, unused, and full of possibilities. It was some way from the estate house, on a low hill buried in bush and well back from the road. The house was begun and, unblessed, completed in less than a month.

Related Characters: Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 406-7

Explanation and Analysis

Mr Biswas's second attempt at building a house goes much faster than his first; he uses the same plans, one ubiquitous throughout Trinidad, and has it done in a few weeks. With Hari dead, nobody even thinks about blessing it, which keeps away the Tulsi influence he considers toxic. Although the site is remote and later proves nearly uninhabitable, Mr Biswas is initially blinded by pride and excitement: the empty hill is "full of possibilities," for his house as well as the future he imagines there. Nevertheless, it is still on Tulsi land, like the Green Vale house that he also burns down—the family accidentally burns down this new one while trying to clear the bush on the hill. Perhaps these fires signify that, since the land was not truly Mr Biswas's, he would have never been truly independent in the house. Still, he seems to be moving perceptibly closer to his dream of winning control over his own space.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ It was now that he began to speak to his children of his childhood. He told them of the hut, the men digging in the garden at night; he told them of the oil that was later found on the land. What fortune might have been theirs, if only his father had not died, if only he had stuck to the land like his brothers, if he had not gone to Pagotes, not become a sign-writer, not gone to Hanuman House, not married! If only so many things had not happened!

Related Characters: Raghu, Kamla, Myna, Anand, Savi, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 421

Explanation and Analysis

As he watches his brothers-in-law Govind and W.C. Tuttle grow rich off of the Americans' money, Mr Biswas laments his own financial hardships and, in the process, accidentally opens up to his children about his own upbringing for the first time ever. While he inevitably points out the contrast between his own childhood poverty and his children's relative material comfort, he also appeals to a wealth he believes to be his birthright, on the only land where he ever truly belonged. Curiously, like that of W.C. Tuttle and Govind, Mr Biswas's wealth would have required cooperating with the industrial forces of colonial modernity that appear in this book as Trinidadians' only opportunity for economic advancement.

Also significant in this passage is Mr Biswas's lament that he ever left his childhood village—of course, this is partially his fault, for contributing to his father's death, and he voluntarily did everything else he lists here, although this was more out of his suggestibility than his independent will. The string of regrets ends with his marriage into Hanuman House; after this, which was obviously instrumental to his later success (and without which his children would have never been born to hear him tell these stories to him), he did finally take action against the seemingly unstoppable forces of fate that he blames for his misery: he went to Port of Spain and became a journalist. Whereas Mr Biswas's relative achievement in life appears largely as the result of accident, here he inverts the narrative and wishes to undo all those accidents, as though sacrificing his career and family for money.

Mr Biswas went past Dehuti to look at the body. Then he did not wish to see it again. But always, as he wandered about the yard among the mourners, he was aware of the body. He was oppressed by a sense of loss: not of present loss, but of something missed in the past. He would have liked to be alone, to commune with this feeling. But time was short, and always there was the sight of Shama and the children, alien growths, alien affections, which fed on him and called him away from that part of him which yet remained purely himself, that part which had for long been submerged and was now to disappear.

Related Characters: Savi, Anand, Shama, Dehuti, Bipti, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 461

Explanation and Analysis

At Bipti's funeral, two feelings of alienation pull Mr Biswas in opposite directions: he feels that he was never there for his family and has therefore lost the relationships he might have had with them, *and* he feels that he is forced to provide for the "alien affectations" he lives with and calls his family. The latter is peculiar because he has finally grown closer and more connected to Shama and his children; yet, since Hindu sons usually live with and support their parents, he ended up choosing the Tulsis over Bipti, effectively abandoning her to poverty and joining a family from whom he felt just as disconnected as he always had from his mother. Despite this choice, he still sees himself as authentically belonging to his real parents, yet now forever unable to recover "that part of him which yet remained purely himself." After Bipti briefly visited the house he built at Shorthills, Mr Biswas felt for the first time like his two opposed families could be unified, but he never had a chance to act on that possibility and lost his mother without reconciling his sense that he could belong to both families at once.

The poem written, his selfconsciousness violated, he was whole again.

Related Characters: Bipti, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 465

Explanation and Analysis

After he writes a lengthy letter to his mother who has just passed away, Mr Biswas feels a poignant sense of healing: he had told her what he needed to say, made sense of his own feelings, and reconciled the psychic divide between his new family and old that tortured him after Bipti's death. As usual, Mr Biswas's greatest moments of fulfillment and vulnerability come through the written word, but curiously, this is the only purely creative piece he ever produces during his life, which is why the narrator describes it as a "poem," and he reads it to his literary club. His need to honor and cathartically reconcile with his dead mother through semi-autobiographical writing clearly parallels V.S. Naipaul's efforts to do the same for his father through this book. Mr Biswas's feeling of wholeness, understanding, and reconciliation with his past suggest that he has uncovered a sense of authentic belonging in his family, if still not in the world.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

It sickened him that he had fallen into Mrs Tulsi's trap and shown himself grateful to her. She was keeping him, like her daughters, within her reach. And he was in her power, as he had been ever since he had gone to the Tulsi Store and seen Shama behind the counter.

Related Characters: Shama, Mrs Tulsi, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 506

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs Tulsi kicks Mr Biswas out of the house to prepare for Owad's return, he grows furious; one day she calls him to the porch and tells him that he will be allowed to return. He is incredibly joyous before he realizes he is being manipulated and gets even angrier than before. As usual, he is easily charmed, but he soon falls victim to a much more dangerous confidence trick (that of the solicitor's clerk). He is getting precisely what he wants—a place at the Port of Spain house—but also begins to realize that he will never have a firm place or consistent role in the Tulsi family. Instead, they will accommodate and discard him as they see fit, which means he must return to fighting for his own independence.

In fact, Mrs Tulsi manipulated Mr Biswas into various decisions throughout the book: she convinced him to marry Shama, to move to Green Vale, and later, to move to Shorthills. However, this instance is slightly different: she is likely more interested in dispelling his anger and particularly

winning attention, rather than getting her way (after Owad's departure, she redirected her need for attention to the family as a whole and started demanding that various daughters and grandchildren attend to her imaginary illnesses).

[Mr Biswas] turned the long room into an office. In this room, where the lotuses still bloomed on the wall, he had lived with Shama. Through the Demerara window he had tried to spit on Owad and flung the plateful of food on him. In this room he had been beaten by Govind, had kicked *Bell's Standard Elocutionist* and given it the dent on the cover. Here, claimed by no one, he had reflected on the unreality of his life, and had wished to make a mark on the wall as proof of his existence. Now he needed no such proof. Relationships had been created where none existed; he stood at their centre. In that very unreality had lain freedom. Now he was encumbered, and it was at Hanuman House that he tried to forget the encumbrance: the children, the scattered furniture, the dark tenement room, and Shama, as helpless as he was and now, what he had longed for, dependent on him.

Related Characters: Govind, Owad, Mrs Tulsi, Shama, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 509

Explanation and Analysis

While working in Arwacas for the Community Welfare Department, Mr Biswas decides to stay at Hanuman House to save money. It is nearly empty, occupied only by a nameless widow since Seth shed control of the Tulsi Store and the family lost its esteem in town. The house once held the entire family and represented Mr Biswas's sense of oppression among them, but now, empty, it stands for the family's fall from grace and its previous meaning for Mr Biswas gets inverted: he remembers his time at Hanuman House not for his feeling of suffocation and helplessness, but rather for his lack of responsibilities and commitments, which in retrospect looks like freedom.

Now that he has "proof of his existence" through his career, children, and cosmopolitan life in Port of Spain, he increasingly feels that he belongs in the world but no longer feels free to pursue his future unencumbered. Before, he was dependent because he relied on others for food and shelter, and now he is dependent because he must provide food and shelter to his family. When Shama first became dependent on him, it was proof of his ability to stand on his own feet as a man, working and providing for his family. Now, she is an annoyance and he wishes to escape the life that he has created for himself. This all shows the inevitable tension between his two central goals: belonging (in a place and in a community) and freedom (from the control of others).

Part 2, Chapter 6 Quotes

"You are not really a bureaucrat. You are a journalist, a writer, a man of letters."

Related Characters: Owad (speaker), Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 521

Explanation and Analysis

Although Owad returns from England ostentatious, attention-hungry, and disdainful of Trinidad, he briefly stops insulting Mr Biswas's job to insist him that, in truth, he is not as a public service worker but the "man of letters" Owad remembers from his earlier life in Port of Spain. This may be the highest praise Owad gives anyone (besides the Russians) after his return. Even though Owad is a Communist and Mr Biswas works at the Community Development Department, Owad rightly points out that his brother-in-law's job entails nothing more than paperwork and is only a cosmetic solution to Trinidad's wide-ranging poverty, an excuse for the country to put off restructuring its economy and continue developing unequally under capitalism. But, more importantly, he reminds Mr Biswas that he spent his life searching not for a well-paying job but for a *vocation*—something personally as well as financially fruitful—and decided to abandon it for fifty dollars more a month. It is no coincidence that Mr Biswas returns to the *Sentinel* at the end of the book—even if the paper mistreats and underpays him—as his first days working for it were the most exciting and fulfilling period of his life, the only time he ever felt excited to go to work. Mr Biswas's three great achievements were his house, the opportunities he provided for his children, and this vocation (but never merely his job).

"Communism, like charity, should begin at home."

Related Characters: Mr Biswas (speaker), Mrs Tulsi, Anand, Owad

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 533

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr Biswas takes over Anand's fight with Owad, they eventually reach a boiling point, and Owad walks out. Mr Biswas's subsequent declaration that "communism, like charity, should begin at home" seems to summarize his lifelong arguments with the Tulsis but also betray his failure to appreciate them, as well as obviously lampooning his brother-in-law. Namely, he notes that Owad's ardent belief in social equality contradicts his condescension toward the whole family and insistence on making all important decisions; he is an authoritarian, not a communist. Arguably, however, the Tulsi family used to be something of "charity at home"—when Mr Biswas first moved into Hanuman House, Mrs Tulsi fed and housed him, receiving nothing in return. Although Owad's return from England brings the family again together, he does so by drawing attention to himself, much like her mother did after his departure with her illness at Shorthills.

Mr Biswas also boldly insists that there is not and should not be any great line dividing the home from the economy, social space, and environment that lie outside it: this attacks, for instance, the Tulsis' unrealistic expectations of Shekhar (that he should stay an orthodox Hindu at home despite his Western education and social world) and cruel insistence that women only ever cook, clean, and rear children. Yet it also deprives women of their relative power in the home—as does, of course, Owad's newfound esteem in the Tulsi household. Of course, given Mr Biswas's own selfishness and egocentrism, there is certainly a hint of hypocrisy in this line.

❝ The goats were an invention of Mr Biswas which never failed to irritate Suniti. "Goats," she said to the yard, sucking her teeth. "Well, some people at least have goats. That is more than I could say for some other people."

Related Characters: Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 544

Explanation and Analysis

Although this paragraph is a pedestrian argument between Mr Biswas and a Tulsi niece who plays no important role in the book, it is important because it repeats verbatim from the prologue, where it stood in synecdoche for the protagonist's constant arguments and tension with Shama's family. Its repetition shows that the book is finally returning to where it started, with the end of Mr Biswas's life. By starting and ending in the same place, Naipaul suggests that his novel captures the totality of Mr Biswas's life and creates dramatic irony for the reader who knows where the book will end (although not how Mr Biswas will get there). Now, however, his impending death looks less tragic—he no longer seems to have failed by dying indebted and jobless in a ramshackle house, because the reader knows how deeply he values the prospect of a house and how fulfilling his work at the *Sentinel* once was.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ And it was astonishing how the furniture, to which they had grown accustomed, suddenly, exposed on the tray of the lorry in the street, became unfamiliar and shabby and shameful. About to be moved for the last time: the gatherings of a life-time: the kitchen safe (encrusted with varnish, layer after layer of it, and paint of various colours, the wire-netting broken and clogged), the yellow kitchen table, the hatrack with the futile glass and broken hooks, the rockingchair, the fourposter (dismantled and unnoticeable), Shama's dressingtable (standing against the cab, without its mirror, with all the drawers taken out, showing the unstained, unpolished wood inside, still, after all these years, so raw, so new), the bookcase and desk, Théophile's bookcase, the Slumberking (a pink, intimate rose on the headrest), the glass cabinet (rescued from Mrs Tulsi's drawingroom), the destitute's diningtable (on its back, its legs roped around, loaded with drawers and boxes), the typewriter (still a brilliant yellow, on which Mr Biswas was going to write articles for the English and American Press, on which he had written his articles for the Ideal School, the letter to the doctor): the gatherings of a lifetime for so long scattered and even unnoticed, now all together on the tray of the lorry.

Related Characters: Mrs Tulsi, Shama, Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 551-2

Explanation and Analysis

Mr Biswas's furniture represents a lifetime of aspiration and labor, all directed at the thing he was finally about to achieve: a house of his own. Each piece points to a different period of his life, from the kitchen table that came with the shop at The Chase to the typewriter and combined bookcase and desk Mr Biswas bought in his earliest days at the *Sentinel*. In this passage, Mr Biswas reflects on his life through objects—from the prologue, the reader knows he is about to die, and so this moment shows the deathbed reflections he never quite undertakes in the epilogue.

However, his possessions look wrong out of context, as though they are a collection of random, impersonal objects rather than as the very things that have sustained Mr Biswas and his family throughout their numerous moves and hardships. Their personal significance to him so exceeds their apparent value or condition that perhaps they serve as proof that he has finally made a sustaining mark on the world.

Epilogue Quotes

❝ One of the first stories Mr. Biswas had written for the *Sentinel* had been about a dead explorer. The *Sentinel* was then a boisterous paper and he had written a grotesque story, which he had often later regretted. He had tried to lessen his guilt by thinking that the explorer's relations were unlikely to read the *Sentinel*. He had also said that when his own death was reported he would like the headline to be ROVING REPORTER PASSES ON. But the *Sentinel* had changed, and the headline he got was JOURNALIST DIES SUDDENLY. No other paper carried the news. An announcement came over twice on re-diffusion sets all over the island. But that was paid for.

Related Characters: Mr Biswas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 564

Explanation and Analysis

The reader learns about Mr Biswas's death indirectly; Naipaul never says how or when the protagonist dies, but as with Mr Biswas's houses, there are several false alarms before the real thing. The reader instead hears through the newspaper, which (as usual) pares his florid epitaph down to the bare facts (and mistakenly says his death was "sudden" when everyone around him was anticipating it). Like the book, his death jumps from the beginning to the end—his first important story to, in a sense, his last. His suggestion that the explorer's family probably did not read the paper leaves the reader to wonder whether his own relations heard about his death through the *Sentinel*, the radio, or word-of-mouth. Here, his immense labor in and dedication to reporting are memorialized by a few nondescript words. This is, of course, also a reflection on what it means to honor the dead—that was Naipaul's goal in this book, for (like Anand in the story) he was abroad in England when his father died.

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.

PROLOGUE

The novel begins: "Ten weeks before he died, Mr Mohun Biswas, a journalist of Sikkim Street, St James, Port of Spain, was sacked." He was 46 and sick for some time; his family was penniless, unable to pay the debt on their **house**. His children could not help out: the two older ones were studying abroad and the two younger ones still in school.

The reader first meets Mr Biswas through his tragic end. He seems to die with nothing—no job, no money, no support—yet it later becomes clear that this apparent destitution was in fact a great accomplishment for Mr Biswas (and especially his children's education).

Mr Biswas's wife, Shama, would have previously asked her family, the Tulsis, for help. Instead, she proposed that they sell potatoes; Mr Biswas replied that he might sell his car. They agreed that "we'll manage" and never spoke of these plans again. Mr Biswas did not want to defy Shama, whom he had come to trust and respect; he was proud of her loyalty to their family.

Shama's loyalties seem to have switched from her own family to Mr Biswas and their children. Although the turbulence of their past is apparent, their relationship seems like Mr Biswas's greatest source of support and solace at the end of his life.

He was more proud of his **house**, despite its mortgage. He especially appreciated "the audacity" of being able to control his own space; during the rest of his life he always lived in crowded quarters with strangers or the Tulsis. He had finally won a house on a half-lot of land, "his own portion of the earth." It was well-known in town, the two-story "huge and squat" construction of a solicitor's clerk who, as a hobby, used his position and contacts to build houses out of old American Army camps "with little professional help."

Even though Mr Biswas's ownership is in many respects incomplete, he nevertheless experiences the independence from the Tulsi family and sovereignty over his household that prove his central anxieties in the rest of the book. Even though he gets cheated in the process, his ability to purchase property also reflects his victorious rise into the middle class.

The design was shoddy—doors were missing, only the kitchen and bathroom were cool enough for comfort during the day, and the uneven staircase was clearly an afterthought. Mr Biswas paid 5,500 dollars for it; although he built two **houses** (really "crude wooden things") in the countryside, he simply assumed that concrete made the house "new and modern," so bought it on impulse before even visiting during the daytime hours. There were cheaper but older houses in town, and many lots were crowded with houses that were also crowded with families. Mr Biswas's living room was like an advertisement: "What a change from the Tulsi house!"

Mr Biswas bought the house simply because of its external appearance and the social value that this purchase represented for him. In the chapters to follow, he continually focuses on the quality of others' homes, but after buying his own home for the wrong reasons, he seems to discover that space and privacy are actually the house's greatest benefit. This contrasts with the communal, joint households where most Indo-Trinidadian characters live and suggests that, to an extent, Mr Biswas has shed a "traditional" way of life for a modern one.

The solicitor's clerk lived in each **house** with his mother while he began to build the next—Mr Biswas found this touching because he neglected his own mother (Bipti), who died "in great poverty." In his refined English, the clerk claimed that he was sad to leave the house, but had to because his mother could not climb the steps. Shama never visited the house and refused to opine on it—Mr Biswas thought this was because she did not want to leave her family.

Mr Biswas's concern for privacy and independence contrasts with his sentimentality toward his mother. It is no coincidence that the narration turns immediately to Mr Biswas's wife, Shama, for his disappointment in her lack of ambition and concern for all things domestic closely parallels his frustrations with his own mother.

Indeed, the Tulsis gossiped to no end about Mr Biswas's plans. Shama's niece Sunti "didn't hide her amusement," and Biswas, who always had contempt for her, shouted back that she should go tend the goats—which he invented just to irritate her—before turning back to Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*.

Mr Biswas's animosity for the Tulsis is immediately clear, as are his literary predilections. This is ironic, for Marcus Aurelius wrote extensively about how to temper the emotions, accept challenges, and stand strong in the face of adversity—all of which Mr Biswas clearly does not do.

As soon as they bought the **house**, Mr Biswas and his family began to see its flaws, like the perilous staircase and the broken doors and windows. However, they avoided talking about their disappointment and quickly got used to it.

Mr Biswas does manage to echo Aurelius by accepting his house's myriad faults; as throughout the book, silence is the closest he and his family get to reconciliation or acceptance.

The first time Mr Biswas returned from the hospital, the **house** was put in order for him. It was "a welcoming world, a new, ready-made world" that reminded him of his achievements and surprised him all over again.

Mr Biswas sees the house as a reflection of his own capacities and accomplishments, conveniently forgetting that his wife and children are the ones who actually put the house in order. His pride in bringing a new world into being reflects his investment in Western capitalist notions of individual success.

One thing that surprised Mr Biswas was the kitchen safe, which he bought unfinished after his marriage and painted over and over through the years—in 1938, he also painted his typewriter, which he bought during his "brief, happy, hopeful" early years in journalism. And there were the hatrack and the bookcase, the diningtable and the upstairs bed to which Mr Biswas could no longer climb—"but bigger than them all was the **house**, his house." It would have been terrible had Mr Biswas died without it, "amid the squalor" of the Tulsis, without even trying to claim some "portion of the earth" as his own, "as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated."

The objects Mr Biswas has accumulated serve to archive his past, reminding him of his gradual rise toward the greatest object of all: his house. They also stand for the relationships that he cultivated and also cultivated him. This is why his belongings justify his sense of belonging—his feeling that the world finally accommodates and needs him, and that he has made something of himself. Instead of living with his family or the Tulsis, who paid him little attention and would never yield to his desires, he makes as clean a break as possible and finds objects that he can control and shape to his will.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1: PASTORAL

Mr Biswas's parents had "another quarrel" just before his birth, leading his mother, Bipti, to take her three children from his father, Raghu, and walk to the village where her own parents lived. Bipti told them about "Raghu's miserliness"—as usual, her father affectionately chalked it up to fate, even though fate led him to the Caribbean sugar plantations and "left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamplands," perhaps leaving him grateful for his survival. Bipti's mother, Bissoondaye, put the children to bed and brought a midwife. In the middle of the night, Mr Biswas was born with six fingers, "in the wrong way." Bissoondaye hung cactus strips over her doors and windows to keep evil spirits out, but the midwife warned that "this boy will eat up his own mother and father."

Even before he is born, Mr Biswas's family life is defined by conflict—and, crucially, a conflict over material resources. Indeed, his enthusiasm at buying a rudimentary house is much clearer now that the narrator reveals that he grew up in the "crumbling mud hut" his father never surpassed. The family is already saturated with a misfortune that leads them to resignation: Raghu's journey from India to Trinidad never brought him upward mobility, and Mr Biswas seems fated to fail in his quest, too—but the prologue has already demonstrated that he managed to beat the odds.

A pundit (later revealed as Pundit Sitaram) came the next day to explain that Mr Biswas was indeed born at "the inauspicious hour" of midnight and predict his personality with an old astrological almanac: Mr Biswas would have spaces between his teeth, meaning he would be "a lecher," "a spendthrift," and/or "a liar." In addition, his six fingers meant to "keep him away from trees and water"—particularly natural water. The boy's evil could be avoided if Mr Biswas's father would not see him for twenty-one days—and then, on the twenty-first day, only look at him in a brass plate covered in handmade coconut oil.

From the start, Naipaul portrays Indo-Trinidadians' traditional Hinduism as a sort of irrational superstition. The pundit's arbitrary declarations mirror Raghu's belief in the supremacy of fate over willful action. Nevertheless, the prologue makes it clear that Mr Biswas ultimately inverted this principle, overcoming his ostensible fate through his dedicated quest for independence.

Pundit Sitaram recommended a name starting with "*Mo*," and Bipti could only think of "*hun*," so Mr Biswas became *Mohun*—a holy name for Krishna, the pundit assured Bipti, who apologetically paid him what little she could afford.

Mr Biswas's first name—which almost never appears in the book—seems to be a pure accident, as it is determined by the recommendation of religious authority and only coincidentally a holy name.

On his ninth day of life, Mr Biswas's sixth finger simply fell off in bed; Bipti "thought this was an excellent sign" and buried it in the backyard. He got "attention and respect" thereafter—his family massaged him and stretched out his limbs—and Bipti held a celebration for him nine days later, which people throughout the village attended. Raghu came too, but agreed to leave until the twenty-first day after a lengthy argument with Bipti and her parents.

From the moment of his birth, the protagonist gets the Western title "Mr" Biswas, which carries the "attention and respect" he never seemed to receive in his lifetime. Indeed, Mr Biswas's concern with this "attention and respect" reflects the sense of entitlement that embroils him in conflict throughout the book and the sense of unbelonging that dominates his self-image from his earliest years.

Bissoondaye began making coconut oil, which was ready when Raghu came back on the twenty-first day, well-dressed and "very correct." Mr Biswas was very confused at being held above an oiled brass plate, but the viewing was successful. Bipti and her children went home to Raghu, and henceforth "Mr Biswas's importance steadily diminished." "He still carried weight," but his family never forgot his unlucky nature and particularly his unlucky sneeze, since he so often caught colds—whenever he sneezed in the morning, his father would superstitiously stay home from work; Mr Biswas's sneeze predicted "minor mishaps" of all sorts.

Mr Biswas's childhood "importance" only stems from the threat he may have posed to his family, had his father failed to properly view him on the twenty-first day. His lack of "importance" recalls his feeling of being "unnecessary and unaccommodated" (as he put it in the prologue), which suggests that his eventual grumpiness might stem from the dearth of love he received as a child. Although the pundit never warned about Mr Biswas's sneeze, his parents quickly begin to see it as a bad omen.

One morning, Raghu heard Mr Biswas sneeze from the road, and Bipti had to convince him to go on to work; he returned shortly thereafter with a leg "swathed in bloody bandages," but the cart-man who brought him in would not help him get home because he feared Mr Biswas's sneeze. Raghu had a "deep fear" that Mr Biswas would bankrupt the family—he always felt on the brink of destitution and became more cautious the more he accumulated wealth.

Mr Biswas does seem poised to destroy his parents, as predicted. But Raghu was already cautious and miserly before Mr Biswas's birth, and he interpreted his son's evident unluckiness in terms of his greatest fear—whereas Mr Biswas dies comfortably but indebted in the prologue, Raghu continually sacrifices the chance to put his money to use because he is so afraid to lose everything.

Raghu picked up his paychecks on Saturday, as the Indian clerk shouted out amounts that the overseer paid workers from stacks of bills and coins. He was fascinated by the bags the overseer filled with coins and began converting his currency down to fill his own bags, which he proceeded to hide—nobody knew where, and rumors of his wealth just led him to spend even less.

Raghu is fascinated with currency as an object, perhaps because the overseer's bags signify his power and social status. By accumulating and hiding wealth, he also builds up a reputation, even though his family continues to live in poverty. Already, status is about others' perception more than actual means, which recalls Mr Biswas's pride in his beautiful but barely inhabitable house.

"Mr Biswas grew," and his limbs became "dusty and muddy and unwashed," covered in eczema and stinking sores. He was stunted from malnutrition but never noticed that he was hungry or never went to school—he only minded that he could not go in ponds and rivers, like his brothers Pratap and Prasad (whom his father taught to swim) but enjoyed his baths and played with Dehuti, his sister. At nine and eleven, Prasad and Pratap were already acting like adults, caring for buffaloes in the fields. Mr Biswas could not go to the buffalo pond, and so when he was old enough he joined the "grass-gang" (whom the buffalo boys endlessly mocked).

Mr Biswas's body begins to reflect his apparently poor luck and lack of attention from his family. Prospects that most contemporary readers might consider basic rights—food and education—do not even cross his mind, which attests to both the severity of his upbringing's poverty and the sheer improbability of his ability to later go to school and become a reporter. He is destined to follow in his father's footsteps, becoming a manual laborer like his older brothers.

Later, Mr Biswas would have begun working on the cane fields (but would never have advanced on the estates because he was illiterate). Pratap, who was also illiterate, nevertheless found success: he made enough to buy his own land, sell his own cane, and eventually purchase "a large, strong, well-built **house**." Mr Biswas never went down this path—instead, "events which were to occur presently" led him down a path that ended up with him reading Marcus Aurelius in his Slumberking bed.

Pratap seems to have achieved prosperity without status: he grew to live a comfortable but unrefined and indistinct life. The narrator suggests that Mr Biswas avoided this fate through accident, and perhaps even through his bad luck, which barred him from the kind of work that sustained the other men in his family. His willingness to lounge in bed while his brother gradually worked for his wealth suggests that luck may be more to thank than hard work for his success.

When his neighbor Dhari's cow birthed a calf, he paid Mr Biswas to bring it water. Mr Biswas took a liking to the calf, and upon walking it to feed one day he came across the shallow stream where Bipti and Dehuti washed the family's clothes. He returned to the stream periodically, disturbing its fish and watching his spit disappear into it, transfixed, until one day the calf disappeared. He searched all afternoon but gave up, went home, and hid in the bushes.

The pundit's prediction that Mr Biswas would be unlucky around water seems to have already come true: his fascination with the stream distracted him from the task he was supposed to perform. There is also a layer of irony in the pundit's pronouncement here: he noted that "Mohun" is a name for Krishna, a Hindu god who cared for a herd of cows (which is why cows are sacred in Hinduism). When charged with this same duty, Mr Biswas fails miserably.

From the bushes, Mr Biswas watched his parents send a reluctant Prasad to fetch firewood. Mr Biswas slipped inside the family's hut from behind to hide under Raghu's bed, where he pondered the dusty cloth smells and the muffled sounds that surrounded him. Dhari came to report that his calf had gone missing, and Raghu told him and Prasad to go search for Mohun and the missing animal. Bipti mentioned that Mohun "knows he mustn't go near water" and Dhari wailed, believing that Mr Biswas must have drowned his calf in the pond.

Mr Biswas's childish refusal to face the consequences of his negligence contrasts with Prasad's adult responsibilities; clearly, his brothers are model children in the family, but the narrator has already revealed that this ultimately led them to live the same kind of relatively unenlightened, provincial lives as their father.

A crowd of neighbors congregated; some exclaimed that they had seen Mr Biswas bring the calf to the pond, but Raghu decried them as "a pack of liars." A carter named Lakhan noted that Raghu seemed not to care about his son, and the two argued about who would dive into the pond to look for him. Raghu suggested that Dhari was responsible, because he charged Mr Biswas with caring for the calf, but Dhari threatened to bring the matter before a magistrate, so Raghu led the villagers to the pond.

In Mr Biswas's village, rumor travels fast and serves as people's primary source of information, which is significant because the protagonist eventually turns to the formalized, Western medium of newspaper journalism to the same end. By threatening to bring the matter to court, Dhari shows that the British colonial legal system has the ultimate power to determine guilt and could even bankrupt Raghu; its judgment would rely on a legal concept of property rather than the folk principle that Dhari should have heeded the superstitions others followed when dealing with Mr Biswas.

Mr Biswas listened to this uproar "at first with pleasure, then with apprehension." He heard his father come and go, and then finally left his hiding place at night to find his sister Dehuti crying over his clothing. When she saw him, she began to scream, but an elderly neighbor named Sadhu came to comfort her and brought her away, leaving Mr Biswas "alone in the dark hut, and frightened."

Mr Biswas's initial pleasure probably stemmed from the attention others were finally paying him. His attempt to comfort his crying sister actually frightened her—again, despite his best intentions, he still manages to harm his family and still finds himself utterly isolated and misunderstood.

The villagers congregated around the unassuming pond as Raghu went diving after his son, convinced that "there is something down there" but unable to see and unwilling to let Lakhan take over. He went down again and recovered the calf, covered in slime and weeds, and then yet again as Lakhan continued to insist on taking a turn to look for Mr Biswas. The villagers suddenly heard a sneeze, fell silent, turned and saw Mr Biswas; but Raghu had not returned and Lakhan dove in to recover his unconscious body—"but it was too late."

The calf did indeed die without Mr Biswas's supervision, which cements the ironic contrast between Krishna and the novel's unholy, unlucky protagonist. So does his sneeze at the precise moment of his father's drowning, which may have been prevented had Raghu been willing to give Lakhan a turn. Although Lakhan had previously noted that Raghu was not particularly worried about his son, his sense of absolute paternal obligation actually led his children to lose their father.

Bipti began sending the villagers with messages, most importantly to her childless sister Tara, "a person of standing" who married a relatively well-off merchant. Clad in heavy gold and silver jewelry, Tara soon came to plan the funeral.

Again, among the mostly illiterate villagers, information travels via word-of-mouth rather than the written word. Tara's wealth and status appear to make her an important contact.

At the funeral, Mr Biswas earned the attendees' "honour and sympathy," but also "a little dread." He spontaneously started smelling and tasting raw flesh (even though he never tried meat) and began spitting furiously. Tara led the women in wailing for Bipti; because "cremation was forbidden," Raghu lay in a coffin wearing his finest dhoti. "Photo now," exclaimed Tara, but the photographer declared it too dark and brought everyone outside. He was "of mixed Chinese, Negro and European blood," so could not understand the family's Hindi as they brought the coffin outside. Bipti and her four children posed for the photograph, with Tara translating the photographer's English.

Mr Biswas's sensory hallucinations evoke the flesh of both the calf and his father. The funeral is pervaded with the tension between Hindu tradition and Western modernity: the family cannot cremate Raghu because of British laws, Tara insists on documenting the occasion with a photograph, and much is lost in translation because the family and the photographer are separated by a language barrier. The photographer's mixed heritage also points to Trinidad's complex history of migration under colonialism.

Mr Biswas first saw the photograph in 1937, hung on the wall in Tara's drawingroom amidst many other photos of funerals, friends, and landscapes. It was faded and punctuated by the photographer's stamp and signature. He "was astonished at his own smallness," his visible scabs and eczema, and the "unnaturally large, staring eyes" of everyone in the picture.

Looking back years later, Mr Biswas feels alien to himself—he particularly notices the early outward marks of the fragility, vulnerability, and femininity he feels internally for much of his life. Tara's various photographs suggest that she is worldly and well-connected, in contrast with Mr Biswas's family in his early childhood.

Tara rightly anticipated that the photograph would be "a record of the family all together for the last time," as they split up shortly after the funeral. Bipti sent Dehuti to Tara, where she would learn etiquette and find odds of marrying well but have to live as Tara's servant. Tara told Bipti to buy Dehuti new clothes, but Bipti confessed that Raghu left her nothing—even though Tara and everyone else in the village knew about his miserliness. The family searched the hut for his money, and Tara called Bipti a fool after she continued to insist there was none.

Without Raghu's income, the family must break up—there is no question of Bipti supporting the family because of the rigid expectation that men work and women marry the most successful men they can manage to find (which also explains Dehuti's move to Tara's house). Ironically, Raghu's careful insistence on saving as much as possible—by burying his money underground—actually contributed to his family's eventual financial demise rather than guarding against it.

Unable to cook, the family began to eat with Sadhu; Mr Biswas thought his unsalted food tasted like raw flesh and spat it out. After Bipti gave him Raghu's blanket, he screamed all night, as the raw smell seemed to emanate from it. Bipti awoke to a familiar but unidentifiable noise, which she soon realized was someone traipsing around the family's garden, breaking the bottles Raghu had planted there. She woke up Prasad and Pratap—while Mr Biswas "closed his eyes to keep out the danger"—and, out the window, they saw Dhari digging up the bottles and singing. Pratap threatened to "beat him like a snake" and Dhari taunted them, saying that he was "here to look after you." Bipti closed the window and let Dhari continue, assuring her sons that their neighbor was "only after your father's money" and remembering Raghu's warnings "about the people of this village."

Mr Biswas continues to see his guilt in terms of the Hindu prohibition against eating meat. His reflex to hide from danger contrasts with Prasad's willingness to take on an adult role in the household, now to fill the vacuum of male power his father's death has left. Dhari gestures to this same vacuum when he claims he will "look after" them; without a father figure, the family seems to lose others' respect and be seen as vulnerable and powerless. In fact, Bipti refrains from intervention because she does not seem particularly worried about the buried money that should now be hers.

Pratap and Prasad woke before dawn, remained silent about Dhari's meddling in the garden and went to work at the buffalo pond. After sunrise, Bipti went outside to see their flowers uprooted and vegetables destroyed. Dhari yelled from across the street, and she called him a "shameless vagabond" back. Surveying the garden he destroyed, he warned that "they will keep on looking" for Raghu's money, and asked whether Bipti might want to help "them" out. Bipti had nowhere to turn: "she distrusted the police, and Raghu had no friends."

Noticeably, Bipti only grows angry after their food source is destroyed—not when she realized Dhari was looking for Raghu's buried money the night before. Without Raghu, Bipti is completely isolated: she has no social ties outside her family, and her distrust of the police is logical given Trinidad's severe inequality and tense relations among different groups—presumably, the state is more likely to harm than help her.

At night, Bipti, Pratap and Prasad waited with Raghu's cutlasses and sticks—Mr Biswas again drifted off to sleep but woke to hear Dhari singing wedding songs as Pratap paced frantically around the hut with his cutlass. Bipti saw Lakhan, Dhari, and another neighbor, Oumadh, searching the garden with lanterns. Pratap yelled that he would kill them and sobbed as Bipti comforted him and sent him to sleep. Dhari warned, "we will be here every night now to look after you," and Pratap sat on the ground holding his cutlass.

Compared to his brothers and mother, Mr Biswas seems to feel uniquely powerless—just as he hid under his father's bed rather than face the consequences of losing the calf, he goes to sleep while the rest of the family prepares to fight Dhari and the other neighbors. Curiously, Lakhan is among them even though he previously seemed sympathetic toward Raghu and the family.

"In the end Bipti sold the hut and the land to Dhari" before moving with Mr Biswas to live with some of Tara's relatives in Pagotes. Pratap and Prasad went to live with a distant relative and continue working on sugar-estates, "and so Mr Biswas came to leave the only **house** to which he had some right." Everyone had left, and he grew apart from his "increasingly useless and impenetrable mother," leaving him to feel "really quite alone."

Mr Biswas's sense of isolation deepens as he is coerced out of the only property his family ever truly owned. Just like his father's displacement from India structured his lifelong distrust of others and obsession with hoarding wealth in case of catastrophe, Mr Biswas's displacement from his childhood home seems a likely impetus behind his enthusiasm for obtaining his own property in the prologue.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2: BEFORE THE TULSIS

After leaving home, Mr Biswas could not say where his **house** was or whether anyone found Raghu's money. The land where they lived soon yielded oil, and while working on an article years later Mr Biswas "saw nothing but oil derricks and grimy pumps" there. "The world carried no witness to Mr Biswas's birth and early years," a truth he first encountered at the Canadian Mission school in Pagotes, where his teacher Lal—a convert from Hinduism to Presbyterianism—asked him for his age and birth certificate, which Bipti could not produce.

The discovery of hidden underground wealth on its land—in the form of oil—ultimately, if indirectly, fulfilled Dhari's search for Raghu's buried treasure. However, Mr Biswas's dispossession also led him to school, which he never even considered beforehand and his brothers never got to attend; he only realized what he had lost when he learned that his birth was unofficial without a government record.

Tara took Bipti to the decrepit office of an uncouth solicitor named F.Z. Ghany, who handled a few cases in a different village each day of the week, in order to come up with a "buth suttificate" for Mr Biswas. Bipti insisted that only Pundit Sitaram knew when Mr Biswas was born, but Tara did not trust him, so Bipti chose June 8, and Ghany had them sign a certificate with the "nice Hindu name" of Mohun Biswas, who was busy "spitting carefully" in a corner of the room. Ghany encouraged Bipti to bring in her other children the next week, and finally "official notice was taken of Mr Biswas's existence, and he entered the new world."

Mr Biswas was present but did not participate in his entry into "the new world" beyond his family's original small village; just like his name, his birthdate was chosen arbitrarily, although in spite of the pundit's influence rather than because of it. Tara's distrust in Sitaram reflects her animosity toward the rituals and requirements of Bipti's more traditional Hinduism; this is closely tied to Tara's class status and relatively Westernized lifestyle.

At school, the children chanted multiplication tables, which Lal found delightful—he appreciated their "thoroughness, discipline, and [...] stick-to-it-iveness," which he felt Hindus usually lacked. He caned Mr Biswas with a tamarind rod for miscalculating "ought twos" and asked another student (Alec) where he found his bodice he was wearing—from his sister-in-law, the boy explained, and Lal told him to tell her the multiplication tables he learned.

Like Tara, Lal represents the more assimilated class of Indians in Trinidad and resents the traditional Hindus he views as backward. His harsh discipline and emphasis on rote memorization are conventional instruments of the British colonial education system—only, here, they are being implemented by an Indian who has internalized those values.

From Lal, Mr Biswas also learned about poems and prayers, geology and desert oases. But he viewed it all as "unreal" until he heard about the Great War from Alec, the boy who wore the bodice and other brightly-colored clothes "because I is a Portuguese or something." He "revealed his secret" to Mr Biswas, who "dramatically unbuttoned" to do the same, and later shared his "Dodd's Kidney Pills."

With Alec, Mr Biswas finally forms a relationship of his own accord and finds some antidote to his loneliness. While Mr Biswas enjoyed his early days in school, he saw the British curriculum as completely disconnected from his life—the subjects of his education are closer to fantasy than reality, which ultimately constitutes part of their appeal.

Alec and Mr Biswas were inseparable; they smoked cigarettes for the first time and traded their shirt buttons for marbles together. Mr Biswas began to copy Alec's intricate drawings of letters and, when he wrote "CANCELLED" beautifully on a math test he had little interest in completing, Lal yelled for the "sign-painter" to come write "I AM AN ASS" on the blackboard, which Mr Biswas did exquisitely, to the class's approval.

Lal foreshadows Mr Biswas's later work as an actual sign-painter; even though the words he draws are inimical to his education, they are still perhaps the most valuable lesson he takes from it. He is enamored with the surface beauty of letters as such, rather than their meaning, which is why the narrator says he draws *(rather than* writes*) them.*

In their six years of friendship, Mr Biswas and Alec learned next to nothing about one another's lives at home. Mr Biswas was embarrassed and unhappy with his accommodation in a mud hut full of strangers, and especially with Bipti's sense of depression and lack of affection. His fully-grown, boring brothers visited at Christmastime, and although Dehuti lived nearby, he almost never saw her, except when Tara's husband "held a religious ceremony and needed Brahmins to feed." He went over in a clean dhoti and his sister served him food, but upon leaving "he became once more only a labourer's child." Indeed, later in life, he could always get along with the rich but always had to return home to poverty.

Although Mr Biswas found a limited sense of belonging at school and with Alec, home still felt alien and uncomfortable, as it remained throughout his life. When Tara calls him to her house, he goes only in his capacity as a member of the scholarly Brahmin caste—he is the only one of his family's Brahmins to get an education (which shows that caste is irrelevant to work life in Trinidad, even if it still structures Hindus' social life), and he feels honored to associate with people of high status, even if his own status is an accident of birth.

Ajodha, Tara's thin and cold husband, made Mr Biswas uncomfortable. Ajodha liked when others read to him and often paid Mr Biswas to read from an American newspaper's medical column about risks to the body, whose author inexplicably continued to think of something new every day for several decades. Whenever he visited Tara, then, Mr Biswas had little occasion to see his sister.

Ajodha is unaffectionate and aloof, but his insistence that others read to him reflects his desire to be recognized for his status (both in terms of class and within his family). Despite his peculiar field of interest, he feeds Mr Biswas's early interest in reading and writing.

Bipti worried that none of her children had married, and Tara nevertheless decided to pull Mr Biswas out of school and make him into a pundit. Pundit Jairam taught him Hindi, scriptures, and ceremonies for eight months in the **house** he shared with the "crushed, hard-working" wife who took care of him. Jairam was famous for his outspoken religious views, and Mr Biswas began receiving attention when he visited Tara to lead prayers and bring the money and gifts her visitors offered back to Jairam.

For Bipti and Tara, formal schooling was a default and temporary option for children until they could find work, rather than a meaningful means to a wider range of work opportunities later in life. Like Pundit Sitaram's outlandish superstitions, Jairam's cruelty toward his wife and insistence on living off others' sacrifices suggest that religion functions here as a tool for certain powerful individuals to control other believers.

One day, Pundit Jairam received a large bunch of bananas as a gift, and as they ripened beautifully Mr Biswas figured that there were plenty and decided to take two, but their absence was obviously noticeable. Jairam came home, ate his dinner, and talked through his religious arguments. The next morning, Mr Biswas remembered what he had done and began collecting flowers for puja, but Jairam did not come, so he went to bring his teacher some milk.

Mr Biswas rationalized his theft on the principle that Jairam could never put all the bananas to good use, which subtly but importantly reflects a broader tension over ideas of property and excess in this book. In many cases, property is shared among the members of a household and excess fills the gaps wherever it is needed, but this clashes with the Western concept of legal property rights, in which the formal owner of property maintains rights to excess property.

At breakfast, Pundit Jairam gave his plate to Mr Biswas and told him to eat. Mr Biswas declined, for the food was not his own; Jairam ordered his wife Soanie to bring the bunch of bananas and told Mr Biswas that they must be his now, since he touched them, and that he must eat them all now lest they go to waste. Mr Biswas was surprised by Jairam's tone but started to eat, taking no pleasure in the bananas' taste and eating one after another until he grew sick. He never ate bananas again and began getting stomachaches whenever he felt "excited or depressed or angry." He also grew constipated, and his unpredictable defecation led him to leave Jairam and return to Pagotes.

Jairam shows that, despite his Hindu orthodoxy, his attitudes about ownership are deeply Western: even though Mr Biswas is living in his house as his apprentice, the boy has no right to Jairam's surplus bananas and unfairly claims them all by taking two. This moment seems to stick with Mr Biswas through his digestive troubles, which tend to arise when he faces conflicts over what belongs to whom. Meanwhile, Soanie is subservient and voiceless in Jairam's household, which reflects women's status as domestic servants, effectively, and also as property in traditional Indo-Trinidadian families.

One night, Mr Biswas was afraid to go to the latrine in the dark and risk waking up Pundit Jairam. He used a handkerchief instead and threw it off the back verandah, only for Jairam to berate him in the morning: the handkerchief landed on the oleander tree, polluting its flowers so they could no longer be used for puja. Jairam told Mr Biswas he could never be a true pundit—Mr Biswas destroyed his father, Raghu, and Jairam could not let the same happen to him. And so Jairam sent Mr Biswas back to Pagotes.

Just as he accidentally killed the calf in the first chapter, Mr Biswas again accidentally breaks a religious taboo because of his efforts to avoid other people's judgment, which gets him kicked out of yet another home.

Bipti was alarmed, not excited, to see Mr Biswas upon his return. She questioned him in a rage before turning protective and feeding him, but "she could not coax him out of his sullenness." At the time, he did not realize the "absurd and touching" fact that his mother welcomed him to a home and meal that were not hers to give, but thirty years later he would recite a "simple poem in blank verse about this meeting," in which "the circumstances improved to allegory: the journey, the welcome, the food, the shelter."

Although Bipti feels that her son has again proven his incompetence at work, she puts her maternal obligations toward him first; in his poem, Mr Biswas presumably realized that he was treated as belonging in a place where he clearly did not, by a mother whom he had wounded repeatedly and irreversibly. Bipti seems to have done everything in her (limited) power to counteract his feelings of alienation and rootlessness.

Bipti was also irritated because she was forced to defend Dehuti, who eloped with the yard boy at Tara's **house**. Upon visiting Tara's house, Ajodha implored Mr Biswas to explain how he got himself kicked out of Pundit Jairam's; at first, everyone laughed, but when recounting the banana incident Mr Biswas "saw his own injury very clearly" and began crying into Tara's arms.

Dehuti's escape also puts Bipti in the difficult position of defending a child who broke a taboo and angered those around her; her stubborn loyalty recalls Shama's in the prologue and demonstrates that Mr Biswas was loved even if he did not feel like it. This moment also illustrates that women in this book are forced to unilaterally support their disloyal family members in order to save face.

Alec had begun working in Ajodha's garage, "doing mysterious greasy things." Mr Biswas went to Ajodha's rumshop, run by his brother Bhandat, who "apparently drank, beat his wife and kept a mistress of another race." The shop, past its prime, was a simple construction of iron and concrete invariably full of drunk and miserable estate workers. Every night, Bhandat counted "the day's takings"; he was paranoid and quick to anger, accusing Mr Biswas of spying for Tara because he was stealing from her every night: after giving enough drunk patrons less than they paid for, he could steal the price of one drink. He always did this with flair and grew angry with Mr Biswas afterward; seeing these antics, the drinkers took to calling Mr Biswas "smart man," and he took revenge each morning by spitting in the rum bottles, which were all identical but labeled and priced differently.

Although Ajodha is frigid and unempathetic, he also offers both Alec and Mr Biswas economic opportunities; his disposition certainly contributes to his success in the emerging capitalist economy of colonial Trinidad, as do Bhandat's deceptiveness, greed, and paranoia. Of Bhandat's vices, having "a mistress of another race" is the most socially offensive to Hindus. This evidences their animosity toward other groups and treatment of women as disposable. The insult "smart man" suggests a tension between education and intelligence on the one hand, and worldly, business-savvy cynicism on the other. (Ajodha manages to combine both.)

Mr Biswas lived with Bhandat's family, sleeping with his two sons on a floor mattress in a windowless room. Whenever the shop was closed, he would visit Bipti, Alec, or Tara, whose bookcase now had twenty volumes of *The Book of Comprehensive Knowledge*, mistakenly delivered by an American traveling salesman. Ajodha never read them, but he was happy to see Mr Biswas doing so, and so on Sundays Mr Biswas would read him the week's *That Body of Yours* columns before perusing *The Book of Comprehensive Knowledge* for the rest of the day.

Mr Biswas again moves into a home to which he doesn't belong, with people he does not particularly like, because he needs to make money. The outrageous, alluring promise of "Comprehensive Knowledge" entices Mr Biswas but also parodies his search for power and wholeness through ideas with little bearing on his life, as well as the history of Western efforts to develop so-called theories of everything. Ajodha and Tara get the book by accident, just like the way Mr Biswas gets his education.

Ajodha encouraged him to convince Bhandat's boys to read *The Book of Comprehensive Knowledge*, but they were too busy dedicating their nights to sexual fantasy, in which Mr Biswas never quite managed to participate in the proper way. They also talked about Bhandat's mistress, whom he visited on the weekends. During the week, Bhandat shouted at and beat his wife, frightening the boys and Mr Biswas next door, and continued stealing more and more from the rumshop.

Again, in comparison to other boys, Mr Biswas is timid, erudite, and awkward—sex is not even on his radar yet, and Bhandat's boys respond to their father's neglect in much the same way as Prasad and Pratap did theirs: by trumpeting their masculinity and focusing on concrete success in the world, rather than daydreaming about "Comprehensive Knowledge."

One weekend, after one of Ajodha's relatives died, Bhandat's family went with Ajodha and Tara to the funeral, leaving Mr Biswas with a free weekend and Bhandat's two rooms to himself. He could not decide what to do with them, so ended up wandering around the environs all day until returning home "tired, empty, miserable, yet still excited, still unwilling to sleep." He awoke to Bhandat, drunk and unexpectedly home early, accusing him of stealing a dollar and spying for Tara and Ajodha. Bhandat beat Mr Biswas until his cheekbone bled and kicked him out, sending him back to Bipti.

When Mr Biswas finally finds a moment of absolute independence—he has no work to do and nobody to order him around—he is elated but quite literally cannot figure out what to do with himself and becomes depressed at his inability to make anything of his freedom. When Bhandat returns, Mr Biswas again finds himself thrown from place to place without any say in the matter, accused of breaking rules despite having had no ill intentions.

When Mr Biswas returned home, Bipti massaged him with oil "for the first time since he was a baby" and argued with him about where he might go next, reminding him that Pundit Sitaram prophesied his failures. Mr Biswas implored his mother not to go see Tara but she did, and he told her all about Bhandat's theft and mistress. Tara did not believe his reports, and then she explained that the missing dollar was merely in the bottom of Bhandat's pocket. Mr Biswas cried, saying, "I have no father to look after me and people can treat me how they want," which won Tara's sympathy. However, he blamed her for Dehuti's departure, which pushed her over the edge: she left and Bipti told Mr Biswas he would "reduce us all to pauperdom." Mr Biswas declared that he would get his own job and **house**.

Again, when Mr Biswas must shamefully return home, he earns the affection from his mother he always desired—he only seems to find love through helplessness now that he has "no father to look after me," but he continues to provoke and push away the people who pity and care for him, especially when they put other family members first (Tara believes Bhandat over Mr Biswas). Even though his first foray into independence has just failed, Mr Biswas stubbornly insists on pursuing it nonetheless—which turns into a lifelong quest.

Mr Biswas began looking for a job on Monday morning, walking up and down the main road and imagining himself working in each of its stores—but none of them appealed to him, except (momentarily) the undertaker's shed full of coffins: he thought he could "help to bury Bhandat." He pondered the strange notion of "dry goods," wandered past food stalls, and watched carts race up and down the road. He went home to inform Bipti that he would not take a job or see Tara, but planned to kill himself, and his mother heartily encouraged him: "That would be the best thing for you. And for me."

Mr Biswas is caught between his desire to make something of himself and his complete ignorance about how *to go about doing so. His education and reading on* Comprehensive Knowledge *have done little to prepare him for the manual labor that likely awaits. When he threatens suicide, presumably because he sees no easy path to work and might win his mother's attention, she again calls his bluff and shows that he can only rely on himself.*

Energized with rage, Mr Biswas marched down the main road for miles, till he had long left town. Ramchand, Tara's former yard boy and Dehuti's husband, tapped him on the shoulder and greeted him amicably. Ramchand said that he was working at a different rumshop, explained that Dehuti often asked about Mr Biswas, and invited him over for dinner. Mr Biswas was impressed that Ramchand cared about his approval—he was of a lower caste, after all, even if he made good money. At dinner, Mr Biswas realized that he never had taken his caste status as a Brahmin seriously—and it felt like even more of a joke at Ramchand's well-decorated hut, even though Dehuti seemed unhappy with him and particularly with their possessions.

With his family's indifference on full display, Mr Biswas simply escapes via the path of least resistance: he walks on and on without a plan until, for the umpteenth time, a family member saves him from himself. At Ramchand's hut, Mr Biswas realizes both the social privileges his caste has bestowed on him in the Indo-Trinidadian community (Bipti and Tara previously lamented Dehuti's relationship with Ramchand because of his lower caste status) and the ultimate futility of caste in a world where money is the be-all-end-all of status.

In fact, Dehuti barely spoke or interacted with either of them; she brought out her baby but seemed entirely "untouched by her husband's bubbling desire to please." She was "frankly ugly," too, sitting in the astonishingly mature manner of an old woman and seemingly unlike the sister Mr Biswas used to know. Ramchand asked Mr Biswas to read the writing on his walls—calendars and cards from Sunday school—and declared that he would be "a great man. Reading like that at your age."

Dehuti's attitude recalls Bipti's resignation after Raghu's death; suddenly, all of Mr Biswas's siblings have transformed into adults except for him. Despite his sense of worthlessness and alienation, Ramchand assures him that his education promises to make him "a great man" and foreshadows the advantages it eventually gives him.

Ramchand felt sorry for Ajodha (who was "just asking" to "fall really sick"), Pratap (whose donkeys kept dying), Prasad (who could not find a wife), and Bhandat (because of his mistress). He obviously "thought his own condition perfect, and this perfection delighted him." Ramchand showed Mr Biswas the extra room they were building and suggested that he might be able to stay there, which depressed him even more. Dehuti claimed to lack "modern ambitions" and thought herself hideous, in response to which Ramchand smiled.

Ramchand seems to have already achieved precisely what the protagonist wants for himself: a house, wife, job, and (most importantly) strong sense of self. Rather than inspiring Mr Biswas, this makes him jealous. Dehuti despairs at being forced to live a "modern" materialistic lifestyle rather than the traditional Hindu one of her family, from whom she is now ostracized because her husband prioritizes his possessions over his social connections.

Mr Biswas's stomach began to swell, preventing him from eating despite his hunger, because "their happiness, which he couldn't share, had upset him." He left and promised to return, although he knew that he never would because his ties to Dehuti had been broken. He resolved to stop looking for a job and just ask Tara.

Mr Biswas's emotions continue to manifest physically—just as he smelled raw flesh after his father's death, he gets a stomachache upon realizing that Ramchand has managed to find "happiness" by forging his own path and turning his back on the Hindu community.

Alec returned to Pagotes, now covered in paint instead of grease. Mr Biswas watched him paint a sign for the Humming Bird Café and outlined his predicament before joining him as an assistant. The Café's proprietor asked if Mr Biswas could paint birds, so his sign would look just like that of the Keskidee Café across the street. They explained that the "modern thing is to have lots of words," like the signs in Port of Spain, and ran through a number of possibilities before settling on "Idlers keep out by order." And "so Mr Biswas became a sign-writer," learning to control a paintbrush and finishing "IDLERS KEEP OUT BY ORDER" before moving on to cigarette advertisements.

Alec's early interest in letter-drawing has translated to a job painting signs, which is the first indication that people might seek professions that match their dispositions rather than taking on the most convenient work. Similarly, their pitch to the Humming Bird Café relies on an appeal to the "modern" ways of the city over the most immediately salient model—as a metaphor, this points to Mr Biswas's discovery that he can follow a "modern" path to achieve Ramchand's kind of lifestyle instead of simply following those around him.

Soon, Mr Biswas returned to Tara's **house**, but was disappointed to discover that one of Bhandat's sons had taken over his old job reading to Ajodha. Bhandat had run off with his mistress after his wife died in childbirth; Tara took in his boys and refused to speak his name ever again. His sons enjoyed their newfound comfort.

Tara continues to make up for her family's emotional unavailability; when she takes in Bhandat's abandoned sons, Mr Biswas responds with jealousy at his own apparent decline in status, like he did at Ramchand's hut.

Sign-painting was satisfying but inconsistent; Alec traveled around looking for work, and Mr Biswas spent much of his time practicing. "Work, when it came, came in a rush," and a rush of sign-writers followed to appease the competing shopkeepers, who always wanted more elaborate signs than the competition. Mr Biswas read foreign magazines for lettering inspiration and quickly took a liking to the stories in them, before turning to novels whose rich descriptions of "intoxicating worlds" excited him. He grew restless and wanted to move, but Bipti thought herself too old to live among strangers.

Despite finding part-time fulfillment through work, Mr Biswas still lives in a house full of strangers and feels alienated at home. Yet he never thinks about the prospect of moving away and leaving his mother alone, which might testify to his attachment or sense of family obligation. Still enamored with books, he discovers literature for the first time and begins to further refine his taste for the possibility of escaping his predicament.

Bipti also promised to marry off the reluctant Mr Biswas, which would complete her life's work. Pratap and Prasad were already married, but Mr Biswas preferred to read, soon finding himself "addicted" to books by Samuel Smiles and then elementary science manuals. Still, he occasionally mustered a belief in romance, like when he worked on signs through the night or hung out the doors of Ajodha's buses as their conductor, shouting the "glorious Amerindian names" of faraway places.

Samuel Smiles was a Victorian journalist famous for preaching the virtues of self-help and blaming poverty on people's own irresponsible behavior. But Mr Biswas's own poverty resulted directly from the British policy of indentured servitude, which makes his interest in Smiles ironic. While he is busy reading Western books and fantasizing about taking charge of his own life, Bipti tries to fulfill her traditional duty as a Hindu mother by marrying him off.

Alec and Bhandat's boys sometimes came and "took Mr Biswas to certain **houses** which terrified, then attracted, and finally only amused him." But also exciting were the occasional "glimpse of a face, a smile, a laugh," even though girls no longer represented "painful loveliness" to him and he only secretly considered love. He waited and yearned "for the world to yield its sweetness and romance," and first saw Shama at Hanuman House in Arwacas "in this mood of expectation."

Bhandat's boys remain fixated on sex, while Mr Biswas begins to dream about love, which would scarcely be possible for him since arranged marriage is the norm in his community. The exile faced by Dehuti and Ramchand would certainly face him if he married for love, and especially if he married a non-Hindu.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3: THE TULSIS

"Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress" in Arwacas, with the Tulsi Store downstairs and a statue of "the benevolent monkey-god Hanuman" standing on the roof, barely visible and vaguely sinister. The "pious, conservative, landowning" Tulsis were descended from the famous Pundit Tulsi, about whom "an irreverent and extremely popular song" was penned after his death in a car accident. Nobody knew why he came to Trinidad as a laborer—his family was prominent in India and, as a result, his family was revered in Trinidad too.

Mr Biswas is immediately enamored with the Tulsis' elevated status, to which their monumental house and fame by association both attest. Pundit Tulsi's high status in India would have been exceedingly uncommon among indentured workers—the family's status in Trinidad both shows how the Hindu community imported traditional, seemingly outdated social codes to the Caribbean and suggests that he might have been fleeing something.

An intimidating Tulsi named Seth hired Mr Biswas at a paltry rate to paint some signs for the windowless and awkwardly-shaped Tulsi Store. As he painted, Mr Biswas secretly watched the unmarried Tulsi girls who worked in the store, and especially the beautiful Shama, who was about sixteen. Because her relatives were all over the store, he felt uncomfortable talking to her, and when she noticed him staring he pretended to whistle and look the other way. But Shama glanced back, too, and so upon returning to Pagotes Mr Biswas announced to Alec, "I got a girl in Arwacas," to his friend's delight. News quickly spread, and although Bhandat's older son (Jagdat) openly bragged of his illegitimate child with a woman of a different race, Bhandat's younger son (Rabidat) questioned whether Mr Biswas was telling the truth.

The Tulsis' rudimentary store seems to contrast with their esteem in Trinidad's Hindu community. The relationship between Bhandat's older son and a non-Indian woman clearly violates the norms of their community, but ironically Mr Biswas's romantic aspirations lead him to fall for an orthodox Hindu girl. Mr Biswas's love for Shama, consummated by a glance, is more a product of his fantastical imagination than any actual relationship; although he based his concept of love on novels, he dramatically overplays his feelings for Shama.

The next day, when the Tulsi Store closed down for lunch, Mr Biswas slipped a note to Shama, who smiled mockingly at him before turning to a client, "a fat Negro woman" looking for "flesh-coloured stockings." Shama pulled out a pair of black cotton stockings, and the woman grew furious, throwing boxes onto the floor and frightening Shama. This made Mr Biswas even more ashamed, and upon noticing that the commotion had thrown the note into the open he went to hide it—but the woman stood in the way, and the stoic Mrs Tulsi, adorned in as much jewelry as Tara, came inside to speak with her.

The argument between Shama and the "fat Negro woman" demonstrates the deep racial tensions that pervade colonial Trinidad and this novel. Much as in contemporary beauty advertising, "flesh-coloured" means the color of white flesh, and the black woman is infuriated when Shama reminds her of her skin color, which marks her social inferiority in Trinidad. Although Shama looks at race quite literally, colonial racism runs so deep, even among colonized and racialized people, that the woman feels deeply offended.

As Mrs Tulsi stood behind the desk, right next to the note—"*I love you and I want to talk to you*"—Mr Biswas was convinced that she had found it. She shouted obscenities at Shama in Hindi and gave the woman a free pair of stockings; Shama's tears made Mr Biswas lose all affection for her. He went to a nearby café and ate a deeply unsatisfying sardine roll, feeling grateful that he did not sign his name on the note. Upon his return to the store, Shama was gone and nobody bothered him as he painted "BARGAINS! BARGAINS!" on a misshapen column. At the end of the day, Seth came inside, muddy and stained, to request in English that Mr Biswas talk with Mrs Tulsi.

Mr Biswas's expression of love, like his job as a sign-painter, is only possible because of his education. His ability to write a note in English also shows his status and worthiness for marriage to the Tulsi family, leading Seth to address him in English as well. However, Mr Biswas recoils when Shama cries, displaying her immaturity—this implies that she might not be able to reciprocate his affection and may remind Mr Biswas of his weak, long-suffering mother and sister.


Seth led Mr Biswas out the back door to a "damp, gloomy courtyard" and left him in the ugly grey wooden **house** behind it. He was surprised at the house's walls—the wooden ones had deteriorated, and those in the dark kitchen were mud—and the juxtaposition of deteriorating and elegant furniture in the main hall.

Mr Biswas is attentive to Hanuman House's construction, which seems unreflective of the Tulsis' elevated social status. This focus on construction materials and furniture becomes a trope throughout the rest of the book and ultimately reflects Mr Biswas's own desire to purchase a sturdy house and create a space of belonging for himself.


Mrs Tulsi sauntered down the stairs, holding the note. Mr Biswas denied writing it but Mrs Tulsi said that someone saw him put it down. The children rushed inside, home from school, alongside Seth, who told Mr Biswas the note was "nothing to be ashamed about." This astonished the boy, who expected to be kicked out forever, and then Shama's sisters brought him food, which he was reluctant to eat.

Beyond his astonishment that his romantic feelings are encouraged rather than dismissed, Mr Biswas gets a sense of the Tulsi household's rhythm and hierarchy as the children come home, Shama's sisters serve him food, and Mrs Tulsi clearly takes charge over family affairs—even above Seth.


Seth suggested that he might know Mr Biswas's family and asked who his father was—Mr Biswas simply responded that he was Ajodha's nephew, and Seth said he remembered selling Ajodha some land. C, one of Shama's sisters, brought Mr Biswas some tea with "a frank, unimpressed stare," and her smiling, sunburnt husband (Govind) soon came inside and told Seth how their animals were faring. Mr Biswas wondered whether the couples had their own rooms and where the children lived.

Mr Biswas names Ajodha to draw attention away from his father's low birth. While Seth and Mrs Tulsi seem excited about his presence, "C" and the other sisters seem used to meeting suitors; curiously, while in traditional Hindu joint families wives move in with their husbands, it appears that the Tulsi brothers-in-law move to Hanuman House with their wives.

Mrs Tulsi asked Mr Biswas whether he liked "the child" and he affirmed that he did. Seth offered to speak to Ajodha and insisted that Shama was "a good child" with "a little bit of reading and writing even." Dodging the question of whether Shama liked Mr Biswas back, Seth assured Mr Biswas that they were not "forcing" him. Mrs Tulsi called him shy, but Mr Biswas suddenly shouted back that he was not—only that he did not have the money to think about marriage. Mrs Tulsi ensured him that it did not matter.

Because of Hanuman House's unusual matriarchy, Mr Biswas need not be financially independent to marry Shama—their marriage is closer to a business than a romantic affair, as she is neither present nor interested. Even though he has not even begun to think about marriage in his day-to-day life, social pressures suddenly force him to make a decision.

With the children running about, Mr Biswas "felt trapped," for "the world was too small, the Tulsi family too large." (For years, at night when he slept alone and Shama with the children, he regretted "his weakness, his inarticulateness, that evening!") And the most absurd part of all was that he was overjoyed on his way back to Pagotes. He still felt strong-armed by the Tulsis, but he was elated that "he had been involved in large events. He felt he had achieved status."

The unruly children signal that Hanuman House is not and will never belong to Mr Biswas, suggesting that he will keep feeling alienated and uncomfortable there, at the fringes of the family. Despite his doubts about whether he would even be happy in the marriage, he went along with it simply because it promised social status—he considers his marriage from an external observer's status-focused viewpoint rather than his own.

Mr Biswas's route home passed "ambitious, incomplete, unpainted, often skeletal" wooden **houses** that deteriorated as their impoverished owners lived in only a few rooms. Mr Biswas felt "he had by one stroke made himself exempt" from the failure they represented and eagerly reported to Alec that he had met his girl's mother and would soon marry into her wealthy family. As he secretly wondered that night whether he should really return, he began to feel "that it was he who had acted," and that he must have done so in good conscience. Shama was beautiful and her dowry would be significant, but Mr Biswas still felt "he would be losing romance forever."

Mr Biswas's achievement of "status" also suggests that he could avoid the poverty that he had grown up with and grown to expect for his future. Like his accidental education, his accidental marriage would forever transform his opportunities in Trinidad. Mr Biswas modifies his story after the fact to portray himself as the decisive agent in it; fate seems to have acted, and he would rather embrace it than recognize his powerlessness over a situation that soon proved miserable.

In the morning, feeling that all was normal, Mr Biswas returned to work at the Tulsi Store and ate a lunch he did not much enjoy, on brass plates he did not much enjoy, with the family. He noticed a photograph of Pundit Tulsi on the wall, and Mrs Tulsi reminisced solemnly about his protectiveness and decency, mentioning that he built the **house** with his own hands—out of clay brick that he made in the backyard, which the family calls Ceylon—and then died suddenly right before the family was about to travel to India, leaving the family penniless and two sons unmarried.

The bland food and brass plates are another ominous sign for Mr Biswas's coming life among the Tulsis—nothing about his visits suggest that he will be satisfied marrying into their family, and his delight at achieving status has already worn off. Pundit Tulsi's untimely death before returning to India is symbolic of Indians' general inability to use their right of return from Trinidad, and the name of the backyard—Ceylon—refers to Sri Lanka, the island in India's "backyard."

Their family's sudden poverty was no big deal, affirmed Mrs Tulsi, for they did not much care about "drums and dancing and big dowry" at weddings. Mr Biswas agreed that this fanfare was irrelevant and she compared him to Pundit Tulsi, whose photographs were scattered all over the wall. Mrs Tulsi praises Mr Biswas's "good blood," and he agreed that "a simple little ceremony at the registrar's office" would suffice.

Contrary to his fantasies, Mr Biswas discovers that he stands to receive no dowry, and that the Tulsi family is actually not particularly wealthy. While he expected them to be modern, cosmopolitan, and extravagant like Tara, their status is an entirely separate question from wealth.

When Mr Biswas left Hanuman House, he realized that marriage would create enormous problems for him: where he and his mother, Bipti, would live, and especially how he would get a job. He figured that the Tulsis might help, but as soon as they notified the registrar, they became "unapproachable" and he was too ashamed to tell anyone in Pagotes that he was to marry. He felt unacknowledged and invisible at Hanuman House, as even Shama "ostentatiously ignored him." Despite this, he never considered reneging on his plans, for he felt entirely committed. Mr Biswas soon moved into Hanuman House, but left most of his clothes at home and lied to his mother to ensure that he would return there.

Although Bipti wanted nothing more than for Mr Biswas to marry, this obviously conflicts with her reluctance to ever leave Pagotes. He soon finds himself in a fifth unhomely home, amidst a new family he neither likes nor trusts. Amidst his frustrations, much as in the past, he chooses to withdraw and sulk rather than voice his concerns and seek to improve his situation. As Shama appears for only the second time in the book outside the prologue, she and Mr Biswas are already married and already failing to get along.

After the marriage ceremony, Mr Biswas moved with Shama into an upstairs room in Hanuman House and began plotting his escape. He did not touch her—not that he would have known how—or even look at her. He received no dowry, **house**, or job from the Tulsis—Mrs Tulsi and Seth did not even consider it.

There is no romance or elation in Mr Biswas's marriage to Shama; he has again unluckily stumbled into a situation that dashed his high expectations and waited too long to do anything about it. The marriage is a mere formality—they live together, even though Shama already lived in Hanuman House, but they barely interact.

The Tulsis had a servant whom everyone called Miss Blackie (except Mrs Tulsi), but the daughters did most of the housework, and the husbands worked their land and cared for their animals in return for food, housing, paltry wages, and respect from everyone outside the family. "They became Tulsis," and all the Tulsi daughters who married wealthy or powerful men left and joined their families. Mr Biswas began to realize how little the family cared for their daughters, and that "he was expected to become a Tulsi."

There is no subtlety in the Tulsis' open racism toward the so-called "Miss Blackie," even despite Mrs Tulsi's graciousness toward the woman who asked for "flesh-colored stockings" a few pages before. The family is both remarkably female-centric (the sons-in-law join their wives' family and rely on the family for work and survival) and remarkably indifferent; the daughters are not coddled, nor is Mr Biswas, to his continued frustration.

After finishing the signs in the Tulsi Store, as Shama began to cry about being neglected in front of her family, Mr Biswas packed his things and returned to Pagotes, coming to see the whole affair as a "good fright." However, Bipti immediately began praising him for marrying into a good family and went to visit Hanuman House the next day. Upon her return, she was thrilled with the family's lovely manners and beautiful **house**—by which she meant the upper floor of the clay-brick building, which Mr Biswas was not even allowed to enter.

Of course, Bipti's values align more closely with the Tulsis' than with her son's; her excitement at visiting the renovated section of Hanuman House compounds Mr Biswas's sense of betrayal, as though the Tulsis consciously project one image of themselves to the world while guarding the true disarray they live in.

After hiding at home for two days, Mr Biswas visited Tara's **house** in search of emotional support and found Bhandat's younger son (Rabidat) reading *That Body of Yours* to Ajodha, who exclaimed, "Married man!" and called Tara over. She wept and gave Mr Biswas twenty dollars and then dinner, speaking with "unhappiness and disappointment," which Mr Biswas echoed in noting that he didn't receive a dowry or compensation for the signs he painted.

Ajodha is again remarkably tone-deaf and tells Mr Biswas precisely the opposite of what he wants to hear; Tara, on the other hand, continues to be his only source of comfort, and the only person whose values and goals for him align with his own. Here, she laments the fact that Mr Biswas has unwittingly thrown his modern predilections away and stumbled into a traditional Hindu family.

Tara insisted on going to Hanuman House and soon returned with the news that he would be running a shop for the Tulsis "in a village called The Chase." Nothing could change the fact that Mr Biswas was now married. Tara explained that the Tulsis wanted to help him with the job, rather than "any dowry or big wedding," because his was a "love match." Ajodha yelled "Love match!" in excitement at Rabidat, Bhandat's younger son, whose taunts Mr Biswas primarily blamed for his marriage. Tara and Ajodha encouraged Mr Biswas to head back to Shama, and he was disappointed when Tara claimed that his wife was "none of her business."

The Tulsis' insistence that Mr Biswas and Shama's marriage is a "love match" is horribly ironic, since it was truly an arranged marriage that Mr Biswas stumbled into in his quest for a love match; still, this is a convenient excuse for the Tulsis, who increasingly seem stingy and antagonistic rather than proud, accepting, and generous, as before. Unsurprisingly, Mr Biswas also shifts the narrative, blaming Rabidat for setting his mind on love and sex; ultimately, he found limited empathy but was altogether too afraid to ask for what he really wanted: a way out of his marriage.

Noticing his apprehension, Tara asked Mr Biswas whether he was "afraid of them already, like every other man in that place." And a few days later, he returned to Hanuman House.

Tara easily saw how Hanuman House's men were cut off from the world, unable to pursue their own desires because of their dependence on the Tulsis.

Surprised that Mr Biswas had returned so fast, Shama asked whether he was "tired catching crab in Pagotes"—that occupation was "the lowest of the low." He said he had returned to "help all-you catch some here" as everyone stared and then continued on with their lives, "hardly to notice him." His status in the **house** was "fixed": the rest saw him as untrustworthy, weak, and contemptible.

Mr Biswas has no importance in Hanuman House: there is nothing for him to do, and nobody relies on him or notices his presence. While he no longer needs to work for food or shelter, he never gains the status he thought marrying into the Tulsis would grant him.

Nobody mentioned the store in The Chase, so Mr Biswas continued his sign-writing as best he could until he struck up a friendship with Misir, who worked for the *Trinidad Sentinel*. Every day, he returned home unceremoniously, propped himself up in bed and read as the Tulsis complained about his pants made of floursacks.

The Tulsis are evidently poor at keeping their promises, and they and Mr Biswas seem to block one another out as much as possible. The reader knows that, like Misir, Mr Biswas ended up working for the Sentinel, *although his path there is far from direct.*

The nosy children slept in the Book Room, on the verandah, and on the bridge that connected that part of the **house** to the statue-filled drawing-room that Bipti had found so impressive. The small, unadorned prayer-room lay above the drawing-room.

Naipaul's close attention to detail and architecture exemplify his realism; while the children have no rooms, a whole wing of the house is cordoned off for religious purposes, which metaphorizes the way that, in this book, traditional Hinduism impedes people from effectively using their resources.

Mr Biswas always stayed in his small corner of the long room; Shama even brought his food there, and despite his insistent silence she gradually realized that "she had to make do with what Fate had granted her." When eating, he would ask about the "little gods"—her studious brothers (Shekhar and Owad) who slept in and seldom left the new upstairs wing that included the drawing-room and prayer-room. He also asked about Seth, the "Big Boss," and Mrs Tulsi, the "old queen" or "old hen" or "old cow." During his "vile abuse of the family," he would sometimes spit into the courtyard downstairs, hoping to hit some of them.

Again, people explain their misery through fate rather than trying to overcome it; because of the traditional expectations surrounding Hindu marriage, Shama has no choice but to put up with Mr Biswas's cruelty and jealousy toward the "little gods" who receive more attention than he ever did. He decides to take out his own misery by making Shama's life miserable, too—their desire to escape one another is perhaps the only thing they have in common.

After a few weeks, Mr Biswas grew tired of hating everyone in the **house** and decided to make some "alliances." The sisters talked about their husbands' ailments and took care of each other's children; Shama and C were close, so Mr Biswas approached C's handsome and jovial husband, Govind, a former coconut-seller who now worked in the Tulsis' fields. Mr Biswas considered Govind "a fellow sufferer" who had thrown away his own life to become part of the Tulsis', and when Govind occasionally agreed to chat with Mr Biswas, they had little to talk about besides the Tulsis—whom Govind didn't much mind.

Mr Biswas tried to warm up to the Tulsis for entirely selfish reasons—his opinion of them did not change, but he merely found his own negativity unsustainable, then was astonished when Govind found Mr Biswas to be unsavory, too. Mr Biswas's deep lack of self-awareness is on full display here: he does not seem to understand that the other Tulsis mostly get along and projects his disdain for the family onto his uncannily cheerful brother-in-law.

One day, Shama reported that Seth wanted to talk to Mr Biswas, who refused to go downstairs until she began crying. In front of the whole family, Seth asked Mr Biswas how long he had been living there—two months—and whether he had "been eating well"—of course he had. Mr Biswas felt small and powerless as Seth insisted he should be feeding his wife rather than letting her family feed him, remarked on Mr Biswas's cruel nicknames for his family members, and began reprimanding Mr Biswas—now in Hindi—for failing to appreciate the Tulsis' generosity.

Finally, Seth holds Mr Biswas accountable for his venomous attitude toward the family and parasitic dependence on them; but the protagonist's response is again self-pity rather than the self-help he has read so many books about. Even though Seth had previously addressed Mr Biswas in English (when planning his marriage with Shama), now he switches to Hindi to express his frustrations; this switch reveals the relative prestige of English over Hindi in Trinidad, even among Indians.

Seth asked Mr Biswas to work on the fields—his literacy was no excuse, for Seth and the "gods" could read and write too. The younger of those gods, Owad, implored Mr Biswas to apologize, but Mr Biswas "abruptly lost his temper" and yelled that he would never apologize before rushing back upstairs.

Mr Biswas continues to see himself as above working on the sugarcane estates, like his brothers and father, and still cannot understand how he might be taking advantage of the Tulsis' generosity.

Mr Biswas packed his things as he argued with Shama and finally asked her to tell Seth he was never paid for the signs he painted. She refused, and they resumed bickering, until C and Seth's wife, Padma, came upstairs to beg him to stay. C revealed that her name was Chinta "to indicate the depth of her unhappiness and the sincerity of her plea," which proved to Mr Biswas that Govind told Seth about his "blasphemies," and Chinta had come to placate him.

It is unclear why the Tulsis would want Mr Biswas to stay, unless they are afraid that his departure would hurt the family by breaking the formal contract of marriage between him and Shama (which has ruined the lives of both parties). Of course, this is the same reason Mr Biswas reluctantly returned to Hanuman House after fleeing to Pagotes—even though their marriage was pushed through as a formality, everyone now feels bound to the social convention it expresses.

Mr Biswas realized that, for the first time, he had a true enemy—and so he decided to stay, thinking "he had already won" and feeling pity for Chinta and Padma, who showed little emotion because she had ostensibly been called to resolve Seth's conflicts many times before. Mr Biswas admitted that he would not go—Chinta stopped crying but Shama started to, and her body seemed to melt.

The family's efforts to keep him at Hanuman House lead Mr Biswas to double down on his belligerence; he has gone from resignation to a sincere belief that he can beat them at their own game, whatever that happens to be, and so for the first time he chooses to fight back rather than run away.

Mr Biswas started to seek out friendships with his other brothers-in-law. First was the pale and sickly Hari, who spent extraordinary amounts of time eating rice and using the latrine. He looked uniquely unfit to work on the Tulsis' estate and, as a trained pundit, found no greater pleasure than reading upstairs after work and performing puja. The only place Mr Biswas could talk with him was the dinner table, but he chewed his food forty times, so Mr Biswas spoke quickly to take advantage of the occasional gaps between bites that were his only chance at conversation: "What do you feel about the Aryans?"

Hari, a pundit who would ordinarily stand at the top of the Hindu social hierarchy, nevertheless has to work in the fields; Naipaul again shows how traditional Hindu practices become absurd when displaced to Trinidad. This corroborates Mr Biswas's sense that the Tulsis treat the brothers-in-law unfairly—of course, despite all his complaining about his treatment, he remains the only *brother-in-law who does not have to work on the fields.*

The Aryans were Hindu missionaries from India who protested the orthodox tenets of their religion: they wanted to overturn caste and reject idols, educate women and accept converts. Hari was clearly not amused and accused Mr Biswas of "doing a lot of thinking about them."

The Aryans' progressive Hinduism runs contrary to many of the Tulsis' core practices: they barely educate their daughters, whom they marry only to high-caste men, and keep a room full of religious idols.

Indeed, "Mr Biswas was almost an Aryan convert" because of his conversations with Misir, who told him to listen to the "purist" pundit Pankaj Rai. Mr Biswas did not know what "purist" meant and was afraid to ask, but he liked the sound of the word and looked forward to the opportunity to meet "the Tulsis' most important rivals," the wealthy landowning Naths. Mr Biswas immediately appreciated that Pankaj Rai wore an elegant coat and was as short as he was, with "an equally ugly nose" and "unusually heavy, drooping eyelids" that made his critiques of orthodox Hinduism particularly poignant. Mr Biswas ended up agreeing with the pundit's arguments and was honored that he signed a copy of his book with reference to Mr Biswas as a "dear friend."

Mr Biswas's hilarious incompetence leads him to a revere a man he scarcely understands with a label he scarcely understands—his original motivation for investigating the Aryans was the opportunity to further his campaign against the Tulsis who continued to tolerate and provide for him, and his immediate motivation for revering Pankaj Rai was the man's aloofness, power, and willingness to flatter Mr Biswas by calling him a "dear friend." As when he marries into the Tulsi family, Mr Biswas simply admires Pankaj Rai's authority.

Upon returning home, Mr Biswas mocked Shama for what Pankaj Rai would do to her high-caste family members—Seth would become a leather-worker and the "two gods" (Shekhar and Owad) barbers. Worst of all, Mrs Tulsi "ain't a Hindu at all" because she married Shama off so unceremoniously and sent her sons to a Catholic school: "Ro-man Cat-o-lic! Roman cat, the bitch." But at least Pankaj Rai would let her convert. The Tulsis, Mr Biswas insisted, were "just one big low-caste bunch."

Even though Pankaj Rai wants to abolish caste distinctions, Mr Biswas can only formulate insults in terms of the caste system; again, he ends up looking like a fool, even though his well-worn message of hatred for the Tulsis gets across as intended.

Although Mr Biswas intended to address Hari respectfully and expected that his brother-in-law "would welcome disputation," Hari and his wife barely responded at dinner. Later, Mr Biswas met him on the verandah with his copy of Pankaj Rai's book, *Reform the Only Way*, but Hari gave it back after a glance. Mr Biswas resolved not to try and make friends with the other, "less intelligent and more temperamental" brothers-in-law.

Mr Biswas's genuine but inept attempts at engaging Hari meet the most hurtful possible response, dismissal, which bolsters his suspicion that he can never truly belong at Hanuman House. He considers himself superior to the family's "less intelligent and more temperamental" men—this also describes him vis-à-vis Hari.

After a week or so, Seth asked Mr Biswas about Pankaj Rai in the hall and mentioned that he was almost imprisoned for "interfering with Nath's daughter-in-law." Despite Pankaj Rai's two degrees—BA and LLB—Seth did not trust him. Mr Biswas, who by now insisted on speaking English with the Tulsis, was perturbed but still defended his "dear friend," rejecting Seth's "piece of scandal." Seth said he would "cut the balls off all these Aryans" and mentioned that Mr Biswas should try and make friends with his "creole converts."

Just as Mr Biswas fell for the Tulsis' status, charm, and authority but later became disillusioned with them, it turns out that Pankaj Rai was also an alluring fraud, but Mr Biswas is unwilling to admit it here. His insistence on speaking English reflects his presumptuous belief that he is better than them: more "modern" and, of course, closer to Trinidad's British overlords.

Mr Biswas shouted "Hello, pundit!" to Hari on the verandah as he passed to the Book Room, observed the decaying religious texts that filled its shelves, and turned around to greet Hari again on the verandah: "Hello, Mr God." He told Shama he had a new nickname for Hari: "the constipated holy man." She had started playing into his game, and he offered "the holy ghost," too, before noting that "the two gods" (Shekhar and Owad) looked more like monkeys and joking that "the place is like a blasted zoo." Shama suggests that he should be called "the barking puppy dog," but he preferred "man's best friend." They lay in bed together, her head on his flabby arm.

After Hari rejects Mr Biswas's friendly advances, the protagonist yet again covers his woundedness with provocative condescension. He and Shama bond only when she begins to acknowledge his ridiculous name-calling and turns it against him; he feels so completely alienated and ignored that he finds comfort in her willingness to engage with him at all, even if she is demeaning him back.

Instead of his brothers-in-law, Mr Biswas decided to hang around the Aryans, who were now led by Shivlochan, a definite non-purist who barely spoke English and effectively let Misir set the group's policy agenda: more education, less child marriage, more love marriages (Misir called arranged marriages like his own "cat-in-bag," which Mr Biswas found charming). Misir and Shivlochan agreed that "peaceful persuasion" would be the best strategy to spread their ideas, but Mr Biswas protested that they should not "start with your own family" because his was so orthodox. If not "peaceful persuasion," Mr Biswas and Misir agreed, the only option was "conversion by the sword." Shivlochan protested their rejection of non-violence but Misir talked him down and called the *Sentinel*, which printed a two-inch notice on the AAA (Arwacas Aryan Association) the next day.

The ostentatious name of Aryan leader "Shivlochan, BA (Professor)" indicates his charlatanism, but so does his inability to speak English—even among by Hindus trying to save Hinduism, English is the language of prestige. Debating how to transform a religion with hundreds of millions of adherents from a Caribbean island tens of thousands of miles away from India, the Aryans seem more self-congratulatory than revolutionary. But Mr Biswas still finally finds a group where he seems to belong. Even more egregiously than before, Mr Biswas commits himself to righteous, principled actions that he will clearly never actually undertake; Naipaul continues to expose his antiheroic resignation to fate through contrasts with conventional heroic stereotypes like the religiously motivated crusading warrior.

The newspaper notice mentioned Mr Biswas's name, and Shama insisted that he talk to Seth, who complained that he threatened to "disgrace the family" and hinder the boys' odds of getting into the Catholic college. Mr Biswas declared them "just jealous" and "the elder god" (Shekhar) blamed Mrs Tulsi for letting Mr Biswas move in. Furious that Mr Biswas wanted the girls to go to school and choose their own husbands, Seth declared that "The Black Age has come at last." Mr Biswas commented that he still agreed with "the old ways too" but never got what the Tulsis promised him—when he did, he said, he would finally leave. Mr Biswas was clearly defeated, but in his mind "he was winning" his war against the Tulsis.

Mr Biswas's Aryan antics actually do advance his campaign against the Tulsis: he threatens their carefully-cultivated reputation, and most importantly the chances of their sons, who Mrs Tulsi coddles so extensively because their success promises to determine the entire family's further down the line. Yet he still does not seem to understand that, even though he wants to leave Hanuman House, the Tulsis do not—for precisely the same reason—and accordingly his threats to stay fall on deaf ears.

Soon, Mrs Weir, a sugar estate owner's wife who took a particular interest in Hinduism, began coming to Aryan Association meetings and invited a handful of Aryans to tea, giving them Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, Epictetus's *Discourses*, and various "other booklets" before she left. These booklets soon littered the Tulsi **house** and led Mr Biswas to an argument with "the elder god" (Shekhar), who in fact wore a crucifix, the weekend before he left for his examinations for the Catholic college. Shama began taking Mr Biswas upstairs, and Chinta ran to make sure she did not faint before continuing to the room of Mrs Tulsi, who actually had fainted.

The educational and religious landscape of Trinidad is cross-fertilized with various traditions and ideas: the orthodox Tulsis, who worry about their son-in-law Mr Biswas being associated with a progressive Hindu organization, nevertheless send their children to Catholic schools; Mr Biswas freely reads Greek and Roman philosophy and treats the Tulsis' latent Catholicism with an irreverence that offends the family. Shekhar is so central to the household—the future rides on him—that his dissatisfaction leads Mrs Tulsi to tears.

Mrs Tulsi fainted frequently, and her children had a complex protocol to get her to her room, which was usually led by Padma or, in her absence, the widowed Sushila, whose status in the household was never quite clear. While Mrs Tulsi's children fanned and massaged her, the children waited downstairs in silence with the sons-in-law. One of them "was invariably responsible for precipitating Mrs Tulsi's faint" and would be ostracized until things returned to usual the following evening.

The Tulsi sisters are clearly tightly knit and well-coordinated when it comes to taking care of their mother, whom they invariably put before their husbands; again, this deviates from the traditional Hindu family structure that makes women the property of their husbands' families, often even after they are widowed. Indeed, while the Tulsi women's status largely depends on their having husbands, Sushila retains an important role among the sisters during periods of crisis.

Mr Biswas refused to wait downstairs, as was expected, and nobody would talk to him in the morning—until he asked Mrs Tulsi whether she was feeling better and she replied that she was, which astonished and pleased him. He ate his biscuits and tea on the staircase as Owad, "the younger god," brought a camphor cube from his morning puja to Mrs Tulsi, who—to everyone's surprise—ordered him to take it to Mr Biswas next. Mr Biswas rejected his "idol worship," everyone fell silent, and Mrs Tulsi went upstairs.

After offending Mrs Tulsi, Mr Biswas continues to flout the household's normal procedures; nothing will make him indulge the family's religiosity. The Tulsis are so fed up with Mr Biswas that they try to reach out to him in order to make him feel comfortable at Hanuman House—but, in rejecting their efforts, he is now driving his failure to belong there.

Shama cried out and Owad's eyes welled up with "tears of anger;" even the Catholic Miss Blackie was offended. Mr Biswas quoted Pankaj Rai's criticism of idols and Owad called him a Christian; Sushila told Owad to calm down and "just give him enough rope. He will hang himself."

The Tulsis' religious predilections again turn ironic: Owad, a Catholic school student, derides Mr Biswas as a Christian. The widow Sushila appears as the voice of reason; her formal ostracism due to her husband's death does not affect her important role in the family's social fabric.

Mr Biswas sang an old song from school upstairs, then left Hanuman House. All day, his depression compromised his sign-painting. He returned home, his joy transformed "into disgust at his condition" and hopelessness about his "campaign against the Tulsis." He wished to disappear—the **house** would go on without him, as had all the houses he ever lived in as nothing more than "a visitor, an upsetter of routine." Bipti probably was not thinking of him, and his childhood home had been destroyed.

When rejection strikes afresh, Mr Biswas regresses to thinking about school, possibly the only place where he ever felt comfortable and motivated. In a rare moment of genuine reflection, he explicitly realizes that he has never belonged or been wanted anywhere; he has always been precariously dependent on others and never had others depend on him.

Shama brought Mr Biswas's food upstairs, and he complained again about "those blasted brass plates" and the preponderance of starch on them. He spit out the window and finally hit someone: Owad. He tried again and missed, paced around his plate and picked it up, planning to throw it all out the window. But he decided to just spill the food down on Owad, who bawled and called Mrs Tulsi.

Although Mr Biswas's complaints about the food and plates are routine, his relationship with the Tulsis has clearly reached a breaking point. Owad is an obvious target, since he represents all that Mr Biswas tasted but never quite received: love from his family, a quality education, and status in the household.

After a commotion downstairs, Govind came upstairs and attacked Mr Biswas, who "allowed himself to be pummeled." Chinta called the others to stop Govind before he killed Mr Biswas and got sent to the gallows. Mr Biswas thought clearly throughout the beating, trying his hardest to strike Govind back but deciding it might be "unmanly to do so." Owad cheered for Govind to kill Mr Biswas, and the women's laments did little to stop him. Mr Biswas felt no pain until, suddenly, "he heard himself bawling," and everyone fell silent.

The consistently passive Mr Biswas does not even fight back, even going so far as to invert the conventional association of masculinity with strength and stamina in order to justify his apparent weakness. His own actions seem to elude him: he notices himself crying as though in the third person, from the perspective of a removed observer.

Everyone but Shama and Mr Biswas left, and as dinner began downstairs, Mr Biswas noticed "a new bond" among the members of the Tulsi family: himself. He asked Shama to bring him dinner, but she began to cry, and "he would have liked to hit her." She told him to get his own food and left.

Finally, Mr Biswas eventually wins attention in Hanuman House. For the first time, Shama is not even willing to perform the prescribed wifely duties that defined her entire relationship with Mr Biswas.

Alone, Mr Biswas kicked the lotus pattern on the wall and then his books, felt his "heavy and dead" face and noticed the pain he felt everywhere. He saw his "absurd" reflection in the mirror and resolved to go get the salmon and bread with peppersauce that he wanted for dinner. He looked at his body, which he felt he could not develop because of "all that bad food from that murky kitchen," and put on a hat to cover his face. He passed the whole family, insulting their food on his way out of the **house**, and began eating oysters with peppersauce at a roadside stall.

Mr Biswas only decided to leave Hanuman House and take independent, disobedient action because Shama refused to bring his food; he manages to even fault the Tulsis for feeding him too well, after spending his childhood malnourished. He responds to Govind's beating after the fact, by attacking the few inanimate objects that he actually cherishes—his books—in a sort of proxy self-destruction.

The oysterman drunkenly told a disjointed story about his son shooting a tin can before waving a stick around and yelling, "Tell anybody to come!" Meanwhile, the woman with him kept shucking the oysters. In all, Mr Biswas ate 26, and he paid his 13 cents as he walked with satisfaction to Mrs Seeung's shop, where he bought salmon and bread; the bread was stale, but he was happy to defy the Tulsis' wishes by eating bread from a shop, which they believed was unclean. He did not enjoy the salmon but felt he had to finish it and was increasingly distressed in doing so.

Mr Biswas seems to enjoy the feeling of disobedience more than what he actually gets by disobeying the Tulsis; even though he hates having to eat their food, it seems that his alternatives are not particularly satisfying. He feels compelled to finish the salmon to prove that he is dedicated to rebellion, even though none of the Tulsis are present or would much care; his distress suggests that he may be realizing his failure to think through the consequences of leaving.

The next morning, Seth kicked Mr Biswas out of the **house**. He went to the shop in The Chase along with Shama, who was pregnant

Mr Biswas managed to hold on much longer at Hanuman House than at his previous residences, but again finds himself rejected and ejected (although, this time, his errors were certainly not accidental).

PART 1, CHAPTER 4: THE CHASE

The Chase was a remote village of sugarcane workers with only two rumshops and a handful of small food-shops, including the one Mr Biswas operated out of a tiny, decrepit room for six years. There were two rooms in the back and, in the yard, a makeshift kitchen constructed of tree branches, pieces of corrugated iron, and walls made of "almost anything." It was surrounded by empty land, and the Tulsis only bought it on the false tip that a road would be built nearby.

Mr Biswas has successfully left Hanuman House, but scarcely of his own will—instead of simply asking about the store he was promised at The Chase, he forced the Tulsis to kick him out. Now, he finally finds himself in a home where nobody else rules over him—although it is dilapidated and isolated.

The move out of Hanuman House was easy for Mr Biswas but arduous for Shama, who owned much more and bought kitchen supplies from the family store with Mr Biswas's hard-earned sign-writing income. When they arrived at The Chase, Mr Biswas faced hostility from other shopkeepers and, of course, his wife, who spent the whole voyage staring silently out of the donkey-cart. Mr Biswas did most of the unloading, paid the carter, and surveyed the tins that the previous shopkeeper had left behind as the village's boys cheered for the departing cart outside.

In a town as small as The Chase, everybody notices when Mr Biswas and Shama move in; they immediately become part of the village's social fabric. Shama's wealth of possessions serves as a constant reminder of her family's higher class status than her husband's. Outside Hanuman House, where the Tulsis provided everything, Mr Biswas and Shama now have to negotiate the financial dimension of marriage, too.

Shama began crying loudly, complaining of her shame and lamenting that Mr Biswas's desire to "paddle [his] own canoe" led them to this horrid place. Instead of comforting her, Mr Biswas started ruminating about the lonely, silent, dark establishment he was set to run; Shama ended up comforting him by starting to set up the **house** and lamenting his fruitless attempts at helping.

Suddenly, the novel's substantial cast of characters dwindles to two; without the Tulsis around, Mr Biswas and Shama's relationship is free to take its course, since they have nobody but each other. Already, her energy contrasts with his passive contemplation, and he continues to receive but never give emotional support.

The previous owner left behind an iron bed that smelled of bedbugs (which never died out as Mr Biswas and Shama carried it from place to place), as well as a small, sturdy kitchen table. Mr Biswas was grateful that Shama brought an expensive Japanese coffee-set and admired her enthusiastic efforts to set up the **house**. She also made him food, which he found miraculous, since "for the first time a meal had been prepared in a house which was his own." In the following weeks, they made the house "cleaner and habitable," but it always felt "temporary and not quite real," a mere preparation for the life to follow.

Mr Biswas's pride in his new home depends entirely on Shama providing for him; he is proud of what he has, *not what he has* done, *even though even most of the objects in the house are not even his own. Mr Biswas and Shama begin to leave their mark on the home they have abruptly inherited; yet, while this is the first time Mr Biswas gets to control his own space, he nevertheless views it as temporary.*

Mr Biswas set his mind to selling goods, and the ease of doing so astonished him, making him feel as though "he had pulled off a deep confidence trick" by stocking his shelves and waiting for people to come buy things. In the first month, he "made the vast profit of thirty-seven dollars," and Shama quickly turned out to be an apt bookkeeper. They became accustomed to their solitude and no longer fought, although Mr Biswas found the place's intimacy hard to bear and had mixed feelings about "the atmosphere of service and devotion" from his wife. So "he was even glad when abruptly, it broke."

After growing up in poverty, laboring for his income, and reading so much self-help literature, Mr Biswas is surprised to realize how easily wealthy families like the Tulsis can passively profit off their property. As Shama's contributions finally become visible to him, he begins at once to appreciate her and realize that he does not deserve her loyalty; he is so unaccustomed to close relationships that he does not know what to do with one.

One day, Shama proposed a house-blessing ceremony and Mr Biswas flew into a rage. She sighed, and he soon discovered "how a woman nagged," which astonished him since he was "living in a wife-beating society." And he was further astonished that Shama nagged so adeptly, seemed like such "an experienced housewife," and especially went through her pregnancy so smoothly.

Mr Biswas is surprised at Shama's ability to get what she wants—after thinking of her as a powerless young girl for so long, he admires her power briefly before starting to feel threatened by it. He is, of course, angry at her orthodox ways and plan to bring the Tulsis into his space.

After three days, Mr Biswas finally pointed out Shama's nagging—mostly, she sighed and blew her nose in bed, and she did so even louder that night. In the morning, Mr Biswas agreed to the house-blessing. Shama hired three workers to build a bamboo tent in the yard and bring in food; all the Tulsis came "except Seth, Miss Blackie, and the two gods" (Shekhar and Owad), who were busy in school. Hari donned his pundit's dhoti, and the Tulsis barely acknowledged Mr Biswas.

Although gender norms dictate that Mr Biswas has all the formal decision-making and financial power in his marriage, Shama is perfectly capable of getting what she wants; she is incredibly resourceful and easily bends circumstances to her will, while he daydreams about circumstances spontaneously changing to benefit him.

Mr Biswas felt like "a stranger in his own yard," with the Tulsis even ignoring the sign he hung out front declaring himself the store's proprietor. He had nowhere to go, so he stood out front and planned his coming argument with Shama. Sushila caught some of the older children playing in the dark, and Mr Biswas found others playing house in a hedge—one of them even imitated him, and the ensuing laughter "filled Mr Biswas's mind with thoughts of murder."

Suddenly, Mr Biswas goes from owner to stranger—his sense of belonging vanishes when the Tulsis (the house's actual owners) visit and their children again scatter around his territory, just as they occupy every available corner of Hanuman House. The children's game proves to Mr Biswas that he is truly the family's laughingstock.

Since her family's arrival, "Shama had become a Tulsi and a stranger again." The ceremony was about to begin, but Mr Biswas did not want to see it and soon realized that his wares were in jeopardy. He rushed back to his shop and found a cluster of children in the corner, breaking soda bottles, surrounded by fallen and open tin jars. He kicked the children out and grabbed one boy by his collar, which prompted the boy to run outside to his mother, yelling, "Uncle Mohun beat me."

Shama's allegiance seems to abruptly shift back, and Mr Biswas discovers the Tulsis directly undermining his business—for once, he has a legitimate grievance against them (even though it is the children who are at fault). Even the child addresses Mr Biswas as "Uncle Mohun," denying him the formal title that he otherwise feels he deserves throughout the novel.

Mr Biswas followed outside to set the record straight as "Hari droned imperturbably on" with the house-blessing and Padma found the broken bottles inside—eight cents each, Mr Biswas explained, and the boy's mother, Sumati, began beating him with a stick over her sisters' protests. Mr Biswas figured that the beating was for show and, after it ended, Sumati declared that "everybody is now satisfied" and returned to the ceremonial tent.

Everything about this passage is a mere performance: Hari's blessing is endless and empty; Mr Biswas saves face by speaking to Sumati and Padma; Sumati beats her son only because family norms demand it. This attachment to empty ritual relates to the Tulsis' orthodoxy and concern for social status.

A swarm of "uninvited guests" from the village lined up outside Mr Biswas's shop, seeking the free food that would follow the blessing ceremony. Mrs Tulsi told Mr Biswas he had a "nice little property" and he could not decide whether she used the English word "property" out of satire or sincerity. He complained about the state of the **house**, and she suggested he make some improvements with sugarsacks—he said perhaps people could just live in coal barrels instead of houses. Sushila led Mrs Tulsi away.

Still suspicious of Mrs Tulsi's motives, Mr Biswas undermines his opportunity to reconcile with her after their final conflict Hanuman House. The Chase's poor workers take advantage of the opportunity to eat the wealthier Tulsis' free food; the English word "property" is, of course, the concept that allows the Tulsis to build their wealth while most of Trinidad stays poor.

Mr Biswas went inside and lay down on his bed, resuscitating his old romantic fantasies of leaving everything and everyone. He heard Shama rattling the door hook and pretended to be asleep; she came inside and said, "you make me really proud of you today," surprising him with her vitriol. He told her to go outside and "make sure it properly bless," and she left, telling her sisters he had a headache.

Mr Biswas returns to his favorite pose: retreating from the world, laying in bed, daydreaming about freedom but refusing to pursue it out of fear. Like her mother, Shama approaches Mr Biswas with an ambiguous statement that he treats as sarcastic, which leads her to respond in kind.

After the house-blessing ceremony, Mr Biswas's business took a turn for the worse—a new shopkeeper came into town and started making money. Shama complained that he let too many people buy on credit, reminding him that "ought oughts are ought." He suggested that they un-bless the **house**; she suggested that people owed too much to even want to come by. He replied that perhaps he didn't have a shopkeeper's face, and in fact looked like nothing in particular—not a "shopkeeper, lawyer, doctor, labourer, overseer." He came down with "the Samuel Smiles depression."

The villagers seem to always flock to new shopkeepers, who would not understand that they likely cannot pay their debts. Mr Biswas begins to think about whether he is made to fulfill a particular calling or vocation but, as usual, concludes that the world has no defined place for him to belong and settles for imagining alternatives instead.

"Shama was a puzzle," composed of various selves: the girl from Hanuman House but also "the wife, the housekeeper, and now the mother." Mr Biswas paid little attention to her pregnancy, but her sisters did, which led her to behave differently, enduring her pregnancy in the fashion of her sisters but not complaining about it. Clearly, Shama expected to undertake life's "established pattern of sensation" by pursuing "a series of negatives: not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow."

Mr Biswas begins to see Shama as a complex, multidimensional person who nevertheless has simple desires; like the others in her family, she is driven by a sense of duty to others rather than any independent quest or longing. This structure of motivation is a key difference between the traditional Hindu lifestyle Mr Biswas left behind and the modern one he increasingly adopts as the book progresses.

Shama's sisters helped her make diapers out of Mr Biswas's floursacks and brought her to Hanuman House when it was time for the birth. She left him clean clothes and simple recipes, written in the same words she usually spoke, which he found charming. And he started to think of "mostly male" names for the child; his customers suggested he let the pundit do his job naming the child, but Mr Biswas rejected the idea and continued writing names for his boy on the back of a volume of Shakespeare.

Unsurprisingly, the Tulsi women do most of the work related to childbirth, but Mr Biswas still wants control over his child. His hope for a son reflects both his desire for a child who is more like him than Shama (and perhaps will choose him over the Tulsis) and, of course, the common preference for male children (who can work) in Hindu and Western societies alike.

In fact, the baby was a girl, healthy and already named Savi when Mr Biswas reached her in Mrs Tulsi's Rose Room in the Hanuman House. His pick was "Sarojini Lakshmi Kamala Devi," but Seth and Hari named her instead and already registered her birth under the name Basso—that was the "real name" that someone could call her to "damage" her, but everyone would call her "Savi."

Just as Raghu was absent for Mr Biswas's birth, Mr Biswas is absent for Savi's and barely plays a role in her first days; Seth and Hari effectively take over his paternal duties, which solidifies the Tulsis' claim to Mr Biswas's daughter.

Atop the birth certificate, Mr Biswas wrote, "*Real calling name: Lakshmi. Signed by Mohun Biswas, father.*" He and Shama both felt like he violated the sanctity of a government document. He complained that Seth had written his occupation as "labourer," insisted on addressing his daughter as Lakshmi, and boldly wrote "proprietor" instead of "labourer" on the birth certificate.

Recognizing the power of government documents to determine official truth, Mr Biswas puts his literacy to good use and again fights the Tulsis as indirectly as possible. Savi's birth certificate proves Mr Biswas's upward mobility but feeds his jealousy, given his own childhood poverty and irrelevance to the world.

Mr Biswas passed the drawing room, the wooden bridge, and the old verandah on his way to the hall, where nobody paid attention to him, and the children solemnly ate sulphur and condensed milk for their "eggzema." Mrs Tulsi asked Mr Biswas about Savi and let out a string of "simple, unconnected statements" that built to a "puzzling profundity" as she cried on his shoulder and worried about the future. She finally declared that "they can never kill you," and Mr Biswas wondered, "who are they?"

Even right after his daughter's birth, Mr Biswas still fails to win the attention he wants in Hanuman House. Of course, Mrs Tulsi does offer him attention, but he wants much more attention, and her incoherent platitudes about life and death quickly turn the spotlight back on herself.

Seth came inside and implored Mr Biswas to start acting responsibly; in response, Mr Biswas asked whether Hari might be able to un-bless the **house**, and the children laughed before Seth reminded them that they would not get food because of their "eggzema." Mrs Tulsi returned to her pontificating, and Mr Biswas asked her for a coal barrel.

Seth reestablishes himself as the Tulsis' male authority, which contrasts with Mrs Tulsi's inexplicable weeping. Mr Biswas's return to coal barrels is telling: this is the absurd logical conclusion of his desire to belong in a home (it would not matter whether the home is livable, or merely a coal barrel, so long as it is his own).

Mr Biswas went to visit Misir, who had sent his family to his mother-in-law and begun focusing on writing short stories about starving, unemployed people who die tragically. Misir suggested that Mr Biswas start writing stories but recoiled in disgust when his friend mentioned his responsibilities and new daughter, blaming "this cat-in-bag business." Mr Biswas asked about the Aryans; Misir said that nobody cared, that "Shivlochan is a damn fool" and Pankaj Rai is back in India, which would make a good story. Mr Biswas claimed to have seen a two-headed dead pig at Hanuman House and suggested that Misir write about that, instead, and went home.

Misir (whose name is suspiciously close to "misery") writes absurdly pessimistic, formulaic stories about unlucky people who find neither success nor belonging—these obviously point to Mr Biswas's own fate. Naipaul may be parodying the kind of story he could wrongly be seen as trying to write; after all, in the prologue, he challenged the reader to see Mr Biswas's story as one of dignified accomplishment rather than pathetic failure.

After three lonely weeks, Shama and Savi returned; Mr Biswas delightedly resumed living "without having to assert his rights or explain his worth" and complaining to Shama. He loved watching her so gently bathe the baby and took solace in the fact that Savi would be massaged and hear rhymes like him, Shama, and generations of babies before them.

Mr Biswas felt lonely during Shama's absence only because he had nobody to listen to his complaints and affirm his worth. And, with a child, he feels that he is somehow participating in the course of human history.

One evening six months later, "a small worried-looking man" named Moti came to Mr Biswas's store and asked for some lard, then declared that he was proud Mr Biswas was a good Hindu and did not have any. Moti mentioned a devout Hindu lawyer named Seebaran, who saved "the man before you." Despite his wealth, a man named Mungroo managed to live entirely off credit, which Mr Biswas was embarrassed to have given him.

Moti is obviously trying to win Mr Biswas's favor by praising his religiosity and claiming special knowledge about the previous shopkeeper. While Mr Biswas realizes that the other villagers have duped him, he does not seem to expect that Moti may be doing the same

Moti asked to look through Mr Biswas's accounts, began leafing through his papers, and suggested that he talk to Seebaran lest he become a pauper. Then he declared he was leaving, but Mr Biswas begged him to tell Seebaran, who would have "a *lot* of work here." He went to tell Shama, exclaiming, "you don't know Seebaran?" before she revealed she heard his entire conversation with Moti. She suggested he ask Seth, whom Mr Biswas distrusted immensely even though "he used to study doctor. Doctor or druggist."

This exchange is a struggle over trust: Mr Biswas immediately trusts the newcomer whom the business-savvy Shama finds suspicious and refuses to listen to her. He trusts people who offer affirmation and praise, while Shama trusts those like Seth, whom she takes to be knowledgeable.

Mungroo was a champion stick-fighter who organized the village's young men in "a fighting band" in case The Chase needed defending. Mr Biswas used to enjoy watching their evening practices, and especially the way the sticks were made. First, designs were carved and then burnt into the sticks; the scent vaguely reminded him of when his own father used to burn the same poui bark in his childhood. Then, the sticks soaked in coconut oil and were "'mounted' with the spirit of a dead Spaniard."

On the surface, Mungroo's band seems like an alternative means of defense for loyal villagers whom the police and government might mistreat. Like Dhari and Seth, Mungroo's status depends on his capacity for coercion and violence. The Chase again evokes Mr Biswas's childhood through sensory experiences unique to village life.

Mungroo was actually a roadmender but did not like to work, preferring to extort money out of the villagers in exchange for his protection. But Mr Biswas admired him and continued selling to him on credit, which only stopped when he complained to other villagers, who told Mungroo, who hurt Mr Biswas's pride by ceasing to speak with him and spitting every time he walked by the store.

In fact, Mungroo is an extortionist thug and not a protector, but Mr Biswas still seeks his good graces because of his power in the village; once again, the protagonist is blinded by the allure of power.

Moti soon came by with papers from Seebaran, full of dotted lines to sign, which cryptically declared that Mr Biswas must pay "*this sum*" plus "*One Dollar and Twenty Cents ($1.02c)*" for the letter. Moti declared that Mr Biswas need not pay it, went back through the accounts and noticed that many of the creditors had not signed their slips, and then explained that Mr Biswas would need to pay much more than one-twenty to get Seebaran to fight his case. They settled on five dollars, which Mr Biswas gave Moti alongside the accounting slips, and the visitor jumped on his bike and pedaled off while Mr Biswas watched from his counter.

Mr Biswas fails to notice the math error that points the reader to Seebaran's untrustworthiness; although he previously compared shopkeeping to a confidence trick, he now seems to be falling for one. He makes hasty agreements without thinking through their implications; Moti demands more money because Mr Biswas failed to get his receipts certified, which reflects the gap between personal trust in village life and the government's rigid standards for legitimacy.

Shama mockingly suggested Mr Biswas "empty the drawer and run after" Moti, then left for the back room, where she sang a cremation song and prepared to take Savi to Hanuman House. After her departure, Mr Biswas watched his creditors return from the fields, imagining that they would repay him soon.

Shama, of course, already realizes Mr Biswas's grave mistake but still lacks any influence over his poor decisions; there is nothing she can do besides return to her family.

Mungroo called Mr Biswas outside, where he stood leading a crowd of villagers with papers. Confident that "the law was on his side," Mr Biswas threatened to send Mungroo to jail. Mungroo's followers restrained him; Mr Biswas said they would testify for him in court and directed Mungroo to Seebaran

Mr Biswas recognizes that the formal law technically supersedes Mungroo's local power and ends up arrogantly flaunting his case before it is even complete, as though he had absolute power to determine Mungroo's fate.

Moti visited after a week to go over the people who had and would pay. But he explained that Mungroo had retaliated and presented a letter calling Mr Biswas to court "for damaging *his* credit!" Seebaran always tells clients to keep their mouths shut, explained Moti, but Mr Biswas protested that he had never even met the man—although Moti replied that "he want to see you now." Without signed slips, Moti continued, Mr Biswas had little chance of winning in court, so it was in his best interests to settle.

Of course, Mr Biswas's absolute trust in Seebaran is eventually revealed as absurd and self-defeating; the lawyer's mysterious proclamations from a distance recall the arbitrary levers of colonial power and allow the powerful to take advantage of the poor.

In fact, Seebaran and Mungroo's lawyer already decided on a hundred dollars for damages and a hundred for legal fees. Mr Biswas went to bring Shama back from Arwacas, but did not tell her about the debt—instead, he borrowed the needed money from Misir, who had begun offering loans, and ultimately spent more than half of his time in The Chase paying it back.

A hundred dollars is a lot of money to Mr Biswas, and it increasingly seems like the previous shopkeeper left because of Seebaran, not in spite of his help. As usual, Mr Biswas is afraid to admit his failures to Shama, who always knew better. Like Trinidad's first Indian laborers, he is now indentured by his debt.

The six years Mr Biswas lived at The Chase were boring, unnecessary, and monotonous. He aged, developing wrinkles and a "perpetually distended" stomach due to indigestion. He stopped reading Samuel Smiles and switched to theology (both Hindu and Christian), Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, but soon gave up entirely to focus on his work and financial issues. He thought perpetually of leaving.

Mr Biswas's eroding aspiration and imagination demonstrate his aging as well as his wrinkles; he finally realizes the tremendous distance between his reality and his hopes, which might account for his initial turn to philosophy and theology before he gives up reading altogether.

Another comfort was painting. He made "cool, ordered forest scenes" and "perfect flowers" on his shop's wall and floor, and even "attempted a portrait of Shama" before she gave up on posing for him after he focused endlessly on her clothes and the sack of flour she was sitting on.

For Mr Biswas, painting has transformed from an occupation to a form of artistic expression, much like writing for Misir, when literature fails to offer him a perspective beyond his daily financial struggles.

Mr Biswas also read and tried to write stories, but "lacked Misir's tragic vision" and gave up everything he started. Other times, "he devoted himself to some absurdity" for weeks on end, like growing out his fingernails or picking at his face, whenever Shama had gone home. She had a son, whom Mr Biswas agreed to name Anand at Seth's behest, three years after Savi, who stayed at the Tulsis' **house**. He visited her every week, asking prying questions, like who had given her heavy iron boots to straighten out her bow-legs. (It was Mrs. Tulsi.)

Mr Biswas tries for the first time to write fiction, an aspiration he will never fulfill (since he represents Naipaul's father, this aspiration is not merely personal but intergenerational, and it is no coincidence that Anand is born at this same stage in the novel). With nothing but boredom awaiting him at The Chase, he begins to value and pursue his connections with his family.

The Tulsis kept multiplying, with new children born and the family of a recently deceased son-in-law moving in. Shama complained about their lack of manners and tendency to "theft and obscene practices," but was glad to hear that "the widow" had begun "inflicting spectacular punishments on her bereaved children." Savi, too, celebrated their mistreatment even as Mr Biswas tried to convince her to return home. She loved her granny, despite her father's protests and pleas for Shama to stop letting Mrs Tulsi feed her fish brains.

The Tulsis' myriad children are an undifferentiated crowd—Mr Biswas does not bother figuring out who is whose, for he is only invested in his own children. Mrs Tulsi cares for Savi in a way that he never can and he never received during his own childhood; like Shama, Savi seems to identify with the Tulsis much more than her father.

Because he continued to think he was only living at The Chase temporarily, Mr Biswas never improved the **house**, which made him surprised upon discovering "that house and shop bore so many marks of his habitation," from the wear on the hammock to the smell of cigarettes and paint in the back room. And he realized "that these disregarded years had been years of acquisition," that they now had too many possessions for a donkey-cart, like the hatrack they bought "because it was a piece of furniture all but the very poor had," the hat Mr Biswas bought to put on it, and a beautiful mirror.

Mr Biswas is so bored at The Chase that he likely needs to believe he will be leaving it soon; but his view of it as a temporary stop disconnected from the normal progression of his real life is interrupted by his realization of what has changed and accumulated over the years. The hatrack shows how Mr Biswas's tries to achieve class status by imitating the outward signs of it, even when it means retroactively buying a hat to justify his peculiar purchase.

Mr Biswas began to see that Hanuman House was governed not by chaos but by a strict hierarchy: Padma ruled above Chinta, who superseded Shama, Savi, and then himself at the bottom. He realized that the adults valued the children as "a source of future wealth and influence" and realized "he needed such a sanctuary" as the Hanuman House, where he went whenever possible and did his best to win esteem. He usually failed but gradually won acceptance and "a certain licence," securing laughs from the family and even the ability to have interesting conversations about religion, since he abandoned his Aryanism. During "important religious ceremonies," he was now deemed "too incompetent, and too intelligent," to work with the other men and instead went with Hari to argue with pundits.

Mr Biswas's perspective on the Tulsis continues to shift as he views it from a distance; feeling increasingly disconnected at The Chase, he sees Hanuman House as his best opportunity for connection and finally achieves it—not through his successful flattery, but through his obvious show of effort, which others acknowledge and appreciate despite his previous surliness. Now that his context has changed and he can no longer take the Tulsis for granted, he wages a campaign for acceptance rather than a campaign of disobedience.

Mr Biswas started to go back for these ceremonies the day before and fantasize about finding the comfort and satisfaction that had let Pundit Jairam and Ajodha live so happily. But he never found it, instead feeling uneasy at realizing that he would always have to return to the "nonentity" he had always lived and now found in The Chase's boring store. And, as always, he feared for the future, which appeared to him as a timeless void. Once upon a time, conducting a motorbus for Ajodha at night, Mr Biswas had passed a boy leaning on his family's solitary hut, wearing only a vest; he continued to remember the image of that boy.

Mr Biswas begins to envision happiness not as a radical break from his boring life, inspired by fiction, but rather as a concretely achievable goal continuous with his current (but unsatisfying) life. He increasingly sees the value of finding supportive family relationships and sufficient personal space in his everyday life. Yet he is unsure whether he stands to achieve this and recognizes that his moments of clarity are few and far between, interruptions from his isolated drudgery in The Chase.

This sense of "utter desolation" often came to Mr Biswas before the ceremonies at Hanuman House and, in time, he again grew resentful of the Tulsis. He began to blame Shama for his sense that The Chase was a temporary home; Hanuman House would always be hers, but never his, as the Tulsis' unique Christmas celebrations—which excluded all the sons-in-law—invariably reminded him. He would always return to Pagotes and see Bipti, who always compared him to Raghu and claimed "she had nothing more to do, and was waiting for death." She would bring him tea, chat with someone outside in her newly "energetic and capable" voice, and emphasize her poverty.

He no longer resents the Tulsis because of their impositions on his life, but now because of their happiness that he can never fully join—this recalls his simultaneous inspiration and envy when he visited Ramchand's hut. Bipti is paradoxically relieved and energized now that "she had nothing more to do" in life; much like Shama, she conceived her goals in terms of a checklist of maternal duties, and now that they are fulfilled, nothing more weighs on her.

Eventually, Shama declared her intention to give up The Chase and go back to Hanuman House, which led her and Mr Biswas back to arguing, "only, now everything Shama said was true and cutting." They argued like this for two years. When she again found herself pregnant and claimed "you had nothing to do with it," they argued until Mr Biswas hit her; "they were both astonished," and he was sure he lost the argument because of her humiliating emotional strength. She went back to Hanuman House while he fantasized about flying kites with Anand and determined that he would not visit Shama until she reached out—and then did go after the baby must have been born, somehow realizing "that he was closing the doors for the last time" in The Chase.

Mr Biswas continues to block out the obvious but painful truths that Shama points him to; for the first time, he physically attacks her, but his violence seems to reflect his emotional weakness and inability to admit his faults. He refuses to budge because he imagines it would be a show of the vulnerability he has finally admitted to himself in private. When he finally gives up and goes to visit his third child—whose birth he also missed, like those of Savi and Anand—he seems to finally admit his need for connection and support by realizing that he does not want to return to his isolated life at The Chase.

Mr Biswas cycled to Arwacas, sitting upright and belching to relieve his indigestion, dodging policeman because his bicycle had no lights. When he arrived, the usual group of old men was congregated outside Hanuman House, talking endlessly of returning to India even though they were afraid to do so and "leave the familiar temporariness." As usual, the children were scattered throughout the hall, and fortunately "no one seemed surprised to see him." He noticed new children who moved in after their father died. Savi mentioned that she had not seen her father "for a long time," as well as that Shama had a new baby and reported that Mr Biswas beat her.

The old men are clearly character foils for Mr Biswas: just as he imagines The Chase as a temporary step and finds himself stuck there for much longer than planned, they always planned to return to India but increasingly realize that they are bound to stay in Trinidad. Throughout this book and the nearly post-colonial world it depicts, people imagine that they will eventually find belonging and are merely temporarily displaced, only to discover that they must find belonging in their state of displacement.

Shama was busy massaging her new daughter, Myna, upstairs on the bridge and barely acknowledged Mr Biswas's presence before asking if he had eaten, overlooking his constant complaints about the Tulsis' food and its effect on his digestive system.

Mr Biswas's violence is clearly on Shama's mind, so she focuses on the relatively neutral topic of food (even though, for her quarrelsome husband, it is still controversial).

Myna slept, and her parents walked past the children, including Savi, playing their new card and board games on the verandah. Shama said that Mrs Tulsi was sick, gave Mr Biswas cold leftovers, and asked whether he planned to return to The Chase that night. And "he knew then that he hadn't intended to go back, ever." He watched the sisters play cards—Chinta with particular flair—as Shama made him a bed with the children's on the verandah.

As Shama cares for Mr Biswas and he watches the family play games, he again gets a taste of the support and conviviality he never had as a child and yearns for so deeply. Although he has finally found independence at The Chase, he realizes that independence cannot be its own end, for his desire for belonging means he needs community and vulnerability, too.

In the morning, the mothers were preparing their children for school, and Mr Biswas suddenly realized that Savi had started going, too. Shama made Savi tie her shoes and Mr Biswas offered to help, but Savi needed to learn—or receive a beating from Shama, who found a stick and then stood watching while "Savi fumbled ineffectually" with her laces. Shama had Savi's younger cousin, Jai, demonstrate his shoe-tying abilities and then hit Savi with the stick while Mr Biswas watched. But Sushila came to remind them that Mrs Tulsi was sick and the hall fell into silence, as Shama stormed away. Sumati finished readying Savi for school and sent her away. Shama almost never beat Savi at The Chase but it was a matter of course, tradition, and sibling rivalry among the sisters at Hanuman House.

Mr Biswas realizes how much of Savi's early life he missed and how scarce his role in her life has been thus far; his impulse to help her tie her shoes represents a belated and feeble effort to make up for his absence, but Shama's insistence that she learn to do it independently subtly parodies Mr Biswas's own inability to truly stand on his own two feet. He also notices how the presence of Shama's sisters at Hanuman House shapes the way she treats their daughter; astonishingly, for one of the first times, he starts to comprehend social norms.

Mr Biswas ate breakfast before Shama took him upstairs to see Mrs Tulsi, who was "barely recognizable" laying in her forehead bandage next to a table covered in medicine jars and bottles. Inadvertently, Mr Biswas began talking in Hindi to Mrs Tulsi, who replied, "it doesn't matter how I am" and sniffed her smelling salts. She called Shama to massage her head with rum and lamented her family's horrible luck—namely, their having too many daughters. She had fourteen when her husband died; Mr Biswas and Shama's two would "have to live with their Fate. Mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law. Idle husbands. Wife-beaters." She proclaimed that she had "lived long enough to know that can't expect anything from anybody" and instead expected those who spat on her to keep asking her for more. "When you have a soft heart," she lamented," you have a soft heart."

Although Mr Biswas had always insisted on speaking English to the Tulsis in the past, his accidental break back into Hindi marks his willingness to lay aside his pretensions for the sake of the family whose value he has only now begun to realize. Mrs Tulsi's frustration at her daughters recalls Mr Biswas's burning desire to have a son while Shama was pregnant with Savi; immersed in self-pity, she subtly points Mr Biswas in the right direction by alluding to his violence toward Shama and contrasting her own generosity and selflessness with his entitlement and expectations that others provide for him.

Mrs Tulsi and Shama both cried as Shama massaged her mother with more rum. Seth entered and asked Mrs Tulsi how she was feeling, failing to acknowledge Mr Biswas and Shama out of impatience. Soon, Mr Biswas realized "that the scene had been arranged," the stage was set for decisions, and Shama's tears both relieved some of Mr Biswas's embarrassment and reflected her pain at the "husband she had been given by Fate."

As usual, the Tulsis are putting on a manipulative show, but Mr Biswas still opens himself to their influence. Mrs Tulsi's miserable illness, they suggest, is a response to his own failure as a husband, father, and provider; of course, Mr Biswas's motives are still much more selfish.

Mr Biswas told Seth that the store was on "a bad site" and explained that his debtors would never pay him. Seth remembered the Mungroo case and proposed that their only option was to "insure-and-burn," which would give Mr Biswas good money. He asked whether Mr Biswas was "still too proud to get your hands dirty in the fields" and proposed he work as an estate driver in Green Vale, which Shama begged him to try. Mr Biswas explained that he knew nothing about estate work while Mrs Tulsi and Seth mentioned Owad's success in college.

Seth is eager to bend the law to the family's advantage, and despite Mr Biswas's facetious insistence that he knows nothing about sugar estates (even though he grew up surrounded by estates and estate workers), he finally warms up to the notion of performing the one job that always separated him from his own family and led him to feel superior to them.

Mr Biswas asked whether he would be in charge of "this insuranburning," leading everyone to laugh. Seth proposes that Mr Biswas tell the police that Mungroo threatened to kill him, which means they would blame him for any fire. He could burn down the shop a few weeks later, Seth explained, and Mr Biswas asked if this was "why all those motorcars burning up every day in this place? And all those **houses**?"

The Tulsis know not to trust the incompetent Mr Biswas with any power over their business; long after falling victim to a scam, he finally realizes that people all around him are taking advantage of the sweeping laws that cannot properly discriminate between legitimate and fraudulent claims.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5: GREEN VALE

Mr Biswas never forgot the huge trees in Green Vale, which hid the estate from the surrounding plains. In the estate's barracks, twelve families lived in one long, divided space, and Mr Biswas moved into one of the end rooms. Its window and walls were covered in newspapers, which made him "continuously exposed to the journalism of his time."

Green Vale's trees seem to imprison Mr Biswas inside, and his drive to build a house suggests an attempt to escape this isolation and finally claim a space of belonging. The newspapers foreshadow his turn to journalism; he is "continuously exposed" to the profession's rhetorical power.

Mr Biswas's family brought all their furniture: the safe, table, hatrack, bed, rocking chair, and Shama's dressing table, in which Mr Biswas only had one drawer. The other drawers contained birth and marriage certificates as well as tokens from Shama's past life—a Bible and letters from a British pen-pal—which, to Mr Biswas's astonishment, demonstrated that she had once been in touch with the outside world.

Even though Mr Biswas still feels relatively rootless and lost in his family life, his accumulation of objects testifies to the reality of his relationships and impacts on others and the world. But they again remind him of his low birth: Shama's government documents and letters to Britain mark her family's status by demonstrating its proximity to Trinidad's colonial rulers.

Mr Biswas was employed as "a driver, or sub-overseer," for 25 dollars each month, twice the laborers' pay. Although he had lived around sugarcane his whole life, he knew nothing about its cultivation, and Seth had to teach him when he came for inspections and to pay his workers every Saturday. He never knew that his father so respected drivers, but his workers clearly did, especially when he handled the moneybags on Saturdays. And he wondered whether his brothers were standing in line, waiting for their pay, at other estates elsewhere in Trinidad.

Although his family spent most of their lives on the cane fields, through pure coincidence Mr Biswas ended up on the other side of the equation, carrying the moneybags his father always coveted and wanted for himself. Despite Mr Biswas's misery, his position on the estate reminds the reader how far he has actually come and how much he has gained through his marriage into the Tulsi family.

But during the week, knowing that Mr Biswas was new to the job, the laborers easily deceived him and mocked his ill-fitting hat; he wished he had a horse like Seth, but once he mounted it and was promptly thrown off. Seth promised Mr Biswas a **house** but never followed up, and Mr Biswas grew more and more brutal, beginning to hate his workers and wonder why they earned so much as three dollars for a week's work in the fields.

The tense relations between laborers and property owners demonstrates both the injustice of the colonial plantation system (whose inequalities persist after independence in Trinidad) and the way that work shaped Mr Biswas's personality; the structural animosity between capital and labor led him to a personal animosity for them.

Mr Biswas blamed Shama for throwing him into such physical and uncomfortable work, and the barracks' filthy yard made him sick, so he would eat while reading the newspapers that covered the wall. He bathed using the spouts outside and invariably had to run around in front of the building in his towel, for everyone to see; one day, his towel slipped and he became furious at Shama, who went to Hanuman House with Anand.

Mr Biswas continues to embarrass himself, dwell on his shame, and deflect responsibility for his failures; just like novels and painting in previous phases of his life, the newspapers offer him an escape into a world of ideas and remote events.

The following Saturday, Seth told Mr Biswas that the shop in The Chase "insuranburn now," giving him 75 dollars, which he added to the fund for his **house**. He thought about the house endlessly and had it entirely planned out: wooden walls and ceilings, and a roof of galvanized iron; a drawing-room, two bedrooms, a verandah, and a kitchen in the yard; pillars so he could build an upper floor and a beautiful red and ochre paint job.

Mr Biswas miraculously gets money just as suddenly and arbitrarily as he lost it at The Chase; he now seems poised to build his coveted house with money he has scarcely earned. His detailed plans reflect both his obsessive desire to control every detail of the place where he might finally get to live unimpeded and his continuing fixation on class advancement.

Shama did not like listening to him talk about the **house** and spent most of her time at Hanuman House, which was very close to Green Vale. Mr Biswas began cooking for himself and taking walks, but often he just lay in bed and read the newspapers. He grew obsessed with the headline, "AMAZING SCENES WERE WITNESSED YESTERDAY WHEN," repeating the words and posting other lines on pieces of cardboard on the opposite wall.

The headline about "AMAZING SCENES" sets up but does not describe a scene; it shows how journalists can shape people's expectations about and evaluations of particular events, as well as reminding Mr Biswas about his fantasy of living a spectacular, romantic life. Mr Biswas fails to connect with Shama in any terms beyond those of his own fantasies; like at The Chase, they both end up isolated and bored.

As Christmas approached and Mr Biswas's old, jovial signs hung around the area, Savi wondered whether the same father she knew could have painted them. At Christmastime the Tulsi Store was bustling and full of exciting luxuries, although the sisters tried to hide their excitement and "the elder god," Shekhar, was particularly melancholy this year, frightened at the prospect of being married off. Everyone's attention turned from the shop to the kitchen on Christmas Eve, and in the morning the children got balloons, apples and whistles or dolls in their pillowcases or stockings. Christmas itself "turned out to be only a series of anticipations," with meal after meal disappointing most of those present.

Since Mr Biswas has stopped sign-painting, he seems to have become an entirely different person; it was the only profession that gave him satisfaction and the main source of satisfaction in his life at the time (besides reading). The family's excitement about Christmas is purely cosmetic, but the Tulsis' collective thrill still shows how they create a meaningful community that does not exist for Mr Biswas in Green Vale—even if around Christian holiday (which points to the legacy of cultural mixture in Trinidad).

In Green Vale, there were no Christmas celebrations whatsoever, besides eating and drinking and the unfortunate eventual beating of wives. Mr Biswas went to visit Bipti and Tara, then on Boxing-day, his brothers Pratap and Prasad who "had married nondescript women from nondescript families." He went to Arwacas the next day and stopped in a store to buy Christmas gifts on sale for the children. The shopman offered him a cigarette and brought him into the store; when they reappeared outside, a boy brought a large dollhouse and balanced it on Mr Biswas's bicycle, which they pushed together down Arwacas's High Street.

Green Vale's desolation and loneliness during Christmas contrasts with Hanuman House's festivity. In this passage, women are not only beaten, but also erased, treated as "nondescript" one-dimensional characters relevant only because of their relationships with men. And Mr Biswas remains extremely gullible to people who appear to address him with respect and dignity, but fails to see their ulterior motives.

The dollhouse was better furnished than any **house** Mr Biswas had ever lived in, but he soon recoiled at realizing he spent over a month's wages on it and still bought nothing for his son. This was as usual, for he truly knew Savi but "Anand belonged completely to the Tulsis." The Tulsis already knew about the dollhouse, and everybody fell silent when Mr Biswas brought it into the hall. "When I give, I give to all," noted Mrs Tulsi with fury, criticizing Mr Biswas for forgetting his son. The sisters beat their children for playing with the dollhouse that was not theirs, and Shama told Savi to put it upstairs. She stared dreadfully at Mr Biswas, who said he was going home and asked Savi and Anand to follow him outside.

By buying Savi the dollhouse, Mr Biswas continues his imagined war over her with the Tulsis; he wants her to belong to him, consequently neglecting his son and throwing away his wages in the process. Of course, this dollhouse is also a metaphor for the house he wants for himself and his family: he offers Savi a model of what he cannot provide for her in reality, fulfilling his fantasy of affluence in miniature.

Mr Biswas already felt disappointed in Anand, who was small, shy, and anxious around his father. He implored Savi to let Anand play with the dolhouse too. Anand asked Mr Biswas for a car next time and began running around the yard, shouting, when his father agreed. The next week, Mr Biswas bought Anand a miniature car and took it to Hanuman House, where Savi greeted him in tears: "They break it up." The dollhouse was not only beaten up, but also completely disassembled, turned to firewood, by Shama.

Although Anand has seldom spent time around his father and has good reasons to fear him, Mr Biswas looks down on his son primarily for his apparently feminine traits, which reveals how deeply concepts of gender roles influence his perception of people's worth (his own failure to provide for his family, for instance, makes him feel like a failure as a man).

Mr Biswas called for Shama; the family retrieved his "frightened yet determined" wife before scattering upstairs. Shama confessed that she broke the dollhouse, but said she did so merely for herself. Mr Biswas asked whether she "know[s] what I think of you and your family," but she claimed not to care; he felt powerless and speechless. He told her to dress Savi, who screamed, and the **house** returned to its usual activity while she brought Savi's clothes. Mr Biswas led his daughter outside and did not even think of Anand until he got to the High Street.

By breaking the dollhouse, Shama again shows Mr Biswas that the Tulsis take precedence over him, but her claim that she broke it for herself reminds him that he would not have her loyalty even if the Tulsis were not around to compete for it. Nevertheless, he feels he has successfully claimed Savi by sowing division between his daughter on the one hand and Savi's mother, brother, aunts, and cousins on the other.

Mr Biswas began to cycle toward Green Vale, with Savi balanced on the crossbar, until "a Negro policeman" stopped them on the road and gave him a summons for riding with no license and no lights. They walked the rest of the way and "spent a miserable week" in Green Vale. Savi was isolated and got lunch only because a visiting old woman pitied her—but she never ate it, for she did not trust the strangers. She waited for the days to pass as Mr Biswas read to her from his novels and philosophy books, tried to draw her, and failed entirely to break through to her. Occasionally, she heard him argue with himself on their walks; they were both excited for her return to Hanuman House on Saturday, just in time for the first day of school on Monday.

The fact that the police officer who stops Mr Biswas is black speaks volumes about the process of decolonization in Trinidad: colonialism's victims take over its levers of power and perpetuate its norms. Mr Biswas fails to connect with Savi much in the same way he fails to connect with Shama: he has no interest in finding common ground with her. He tries to relate to her through literature, expecting that she will immediately grasp its personal significance for him and growing the impasse between them instead.

That Saturday, Shama, Anand, and Myna came with Seth to fetch Savi. While doing his usual work with Seth, Mr Biswas heard Savi chat excitedly with her mother and felt betrayed by her. While Seth went to check on the fields, Mr Biswas sat inside, ignoring his family, even when Anand came inside to ask if he wanted some tea. He realized that "they had all forgotten the doll's house." When Anand did bring him tea, he thought about throwing it on Shama's "fussy embroidered dress and smiling, uncertain face." He drank it instead.

Mr Biswas realizes that Savi still fundamentally belongs to the Tulsis; she no more becomes his property by visiting him than he became a Tulsi during his initial stay in Hanuman House. The family's borrowings from British culture are also on display: the family drinks afternoon tea, and Shama wears a "fussy embroidered dress."

Seth came back, remarked that Mr Biswas had "a case," and declared that he would take care of it. Mr Biswas stayed in his rocking chair until dinnertime, when he became more jovial and Shama more morose while he ate at the table. Shama went to eat with the children on the steps outside and began crying as Mr Biswas mocked her tears.

As usual, Seth enters on official business that Mr Biswas is too incompetent to handle on his own. Mr Biswas continues to insist on separating himself from the Tulsis, physically and in conversation.

Shama told Mr Biswas that he does not understand: he simply walked into her family, paid no attention to what people were doing around him, and then "curse[d] me upside down." All the sisters were angry about the dollhouse, beating their children whenever they even talked to Savi. She "had to satisfy them." He asked whether "Chinta would break up a dolly-house Govind buy?" as Shama continued to cry for the rest of the night.

Shama points out Mr Biswas's deep sense of entitlement: he wants the family to bend to his will despite contributing nothing to it; he refuses to belong to her family but wants the family to belong to him. Even though he is dangerously suggestible and often bends over backwards to appease people with authority, he cannot understand how Shama might be subject to social pressures at Hanuman House.

Shama asked how Savi acted during her week at Green Vale and was delighted to hear that she threw away the food from the old woman. Feeling better, Mr Biswas ignored Shama and started talking about the **house** he wanted to build. He tried to convince Savi to stay with him, but Shama took her and Anand home on Sunday night. Mr Biswas still felt alone but took comfort in the fact that "he had claimed Savi."

Once he starts to feel more comfortable around Shama, Mr Biswas simply begins ignoring her; it is no wonder that he continues to feel alone. Even though both he and Savi were unsatisfied with her time at Green Vale, he still feels a need to "claim" her from the Tulsis.

Shama revealed she was pregnant yet again, filling Mr Biswas with terror about the future as he descended into perpetual fatigue and restlessness. He no longer wanted to visit Hanuman House—sometimes he turned back once he had already reached Arwacas—and "did everything as noisily as he could" but nothing in his life changed, not even the newspaper headlines on his wall, even as he felt "an alertness, an expectancy" in the world around him.

Mr Biswas's loneliness begins taking over his life; Shama's fourth pregnancy and the atmosphere "alertness" show that the world continues to advance even as he stagnates, and he begins to feel not only that he belongs nowhere in the world, but also that he never will belong anywhere.

When Seth decided to take back twenty acres of land that he had been renting to laborers, he and Mr Biswas "went from hut to hut, breaking the news." Seth seemed bored and inconvenienced, as though he was taking the laborers' land for their own good, and told Mr Biswas not to trust them. The workers dug up some roots and Mr Biswas and Seth agreed to hire a watchman, but they gradually became hostile, mostly to Mr Biswas.

The configuration of land rights in Trinidad lets Seth simply dispossess laborers of their livelihoods with no prior notice or justification; this also tarnishes Mr Biswas's already rocky relationships with them. Again, Mr Biswas's status in the world is transformed more or less by accident.

Mr Biswas began locking himself in his room at nights, doing everything he could to "destroy the stillness" of the room and world around him. He thought about the things in his room that could destroy his body—the rocking chair that could crush his hands and feet, a nail on the wall that could pierce his eyes—and started thinking about letters and their beautiful shapes instead.

The world's "stillness" proves to Mr Biswas his failure to belong; his fixation on things that could hurt him reflects his fear of the workers' wrath as much as his own self-destructive impulses. As in his childhood, he finds comfort in the sensuous appearances (but not necessarily the meanings) of letters and words.

At Hanuman House, a handful of the children married and moved out, including Shekhar, whose matching process was arduous and took him to live with his wife's family. Mrs Tulsi left, too, buying three **houses** in Port of Spain ("one to live in, two to rent out") while she looked after Owad there. The family fell into disarray—only Padma and Seth continued to win respect, and order only returned when Mrs Tulsi and Owad came home on the weekends. But holidays continued jovially, as before. Anand had begun going to the mission school, which he despised and feared, and his family started taunting him about it. This infuriated Mr Biswas, and he told Savi to call the rest of the Tulsis crab-catchers. Chinta and Mr Biswas argued—she wondered if he learned anything in school—until she complained to Shama, who failed to quell her husband's temper.

Again, gender dynamics in the Tulsi household invert the norms of Hindu and Western families alike: Shekhar lives with his wife's family, like Mr Biswas with his, and without Mrs Tulsi's authority the family falls gradually into disarray. Mr Biswas reverts to a tense and argumentative relationship with the Tulsis; he projects this conflict onto Savi (who represents his side) and Anand (whom he associates with the Tulsis). Curiously, Mr Biswas and Chinta argue primarily about education and work—Mr Biswas's insults wound Chinta because they associate her family with the low-caste work of crab-catching.

One day, Mr Biswas found Anand kneeling in a corner of a room because, as Savi revealed, he was ashamed that he was too afraid to go to the "*nasty, stinking*" restroom at school. Everyone ridiculed him after school, and Shama beat him at home; but Mr Biswas recounted his troubles at Pundit Jairam's **house**, and Anand stopped crying. Mr Biswas asked if Anand wanted to come with him—but received no reply—and told Shama to stop making him kneel.

Anand's squeamishness about his bodily functions proves that he is his father's son, even if Mr Biswas wants to associate him with the Tulsis. Both were shamed and ridiculed for their fear and, realizing that in this moment, Mr Biswas begins to identify with his son for the first time.

Outside, Anand loitered next to Mr Biswas's bicycle, saying nothing. Mr Biswas, "irritated by his shyness" but charmed by his fragility and deteriorating clothes, nevertheless cycled home alone in the dark.

Anand's small stature recalls Mr Biswas's own childhood weakness and ill health; he translates his mixed affection and disdain for himself onto his son.

The same week, Mr Biswas determined that he needed to begin working toward his **house**; otherwise, "nothing would arrest his descent into the void." He picked a site nearby, behind some trees and across a ditch from the barracks, and on Sunday morning he talked to a black local builder named George Maclean (who was also a cabinet-maker, carpenter, blacksmith, painter, tin cup-maker, solderer, and egg-seller). Mr Biswas met the "eager and uncertain" Mr Maclean at his home and proposed "a little business," slowly and carefully suggesting that he wanted a house built, for Trinidad was littered with unfinished houses and Mr Biswas could not yet afford the full cost of his.

Although he has grand plans to make himself a home, Mr Biswas actually gets started on the construction much like he started painting, writing, and growing out his fingernails at The Chase: as a distraction. The resourceful George Maclean's comically wide variety of professions reflects the difficulty of making ends meet in rural Trinidad—so do the unfinished houses around the island—and also highlights Mr Biswas's contrasting ineptitude for anything practical.

Mr Maclean simply asked Mr Biswas if he wanted a **house**. Mr Biswas affirmed that he did, but only a "small and neat" two-bedroom construction. In fact, Mr Maclean predicted all the specific features that Mr Biswas would want included. Altogether, "it going to cost you about two hundred and fifty, three hundred dollars."

Mr Biswas's exchange with Mr Maclean is saturated with class tensions: while Mr Biswas is afraid of rejection or revealing his lack of money, Maclean is remarkably direct and nonjudgmental. Curiously, Maclean is one of the few characters in the book also dignified with "Mr."

A few days later, Mr Maclean came to see the proposed site and was surprised to find that it sloped. Mr Biswas fantasized about the garden he wanted to build in front and asked about making the concrete pillars "plastered and smooth." Mr Maclean asked for 150 dollars up front, and Mr Biswas agreed to give him 100, then "a little bit more" every month, to build the **house** "little by little." Mr Maclean talked about needing "good labour," a word Mr Biswas found pleasant-sounding, and implored him to find more money as soon as possible.

Mr Biswas fixates on the fine details of his house before he can even pay for it; his perfectionism reflects his desire to achieve absolute control over his living space. The proper word "labour" (instead of something like "work") points to an upper-class refinement and reminds Mr Biswas that he has risen from a family of manual laborers to a status that allows him to employ *manual laborers.*

Mr Biswas did not want to borrow money from Seth, Mrs Tulsi, or Misir, so he decided to try Ajodha, but found that he did not want to go, thought about going to Hanuman House, changed his mind back and forth, and took the bus to Pagotes.

Finding his options limited, Mr Biswas returns to the first relatives who sheltered and nurtured him amidst his childhood hardship.

Tara's yard looked the same as ever, and although Ajodha was definitely busy milking the cows nearby, Mr Biswas wanted to speak with his aunt first. She looked ill and weakened, so Mr Biswas felt it wrong to ask directly for money. As Tara went into the kitchen, he noticed the bookcase—*The Book of Comprehensive Knowledge* was still there, with various magazines and catalogues littering the lower shelf.

Mr Biswas returns to the scene of his initial romance with literature and "Comprehensive Knowledge"; just like his quests for these both, Tara's house has endured and remains exactly the same as before.

Sitting on the verandah, Tara asked Mr Biswas to stay around for dinner and to talk about his children, and then the Tulsis, whom she and Ajodha always hated for being too devout and insufficiently modern. "In [Tara's] clean, uncrowded, comfortable **house**, waiting for a meal he knew would be good," Mr Biswas felt the same.

Tara's lifestyle and values continue to align closely with what Mr Biswas wants for himself. Her criticisms of the Tulsis validate his own but also remind him of the life he could have lived if he had not so hastily married Shama.

Rabidat, the younger of Bhandat's sons, walked in; like his brother, Jagdat, "he was living with a woman of another race and had some children, no one knew how many." Dressed casually in shorts and an unbuttoned shirt, with a "superb body," he sat down, flipped through a film booklet, asked, "How is everything, Mohun?" and then shouted for food before Mr Biswas could say anything.

Rabidat's casual relationship, clothes, and manner prove that he is "modern" compared to the Tulsis; like Tara's house, his physical beauty evokes Mr Biswas's failures by contrast.

Ajodha walked onto the verandah, briefly exchanged words about a lorry with Rabidat, and then began chatting with Mr Biswas, who pretended he was visiting because Bipti was sick. They drank some milk from the cows, Mr Biswas said that his mother turned out to be fine, and then Ajodha asked about his job before commenting on his belly fat and making fun of Rabidat, who returned to show off his muscles. Ajodha grabbed Mr Biswas's hand to poke himself in the stomach: "Hard as steel." He explained that this was partially because he never used pillows.

Like Rabidat, Ajodha seems to live in his own world, jumping from topic to topic and giving Mr Biswas little power in the conversation. His complete self-absorption and bizarre health advice are just as absurd and alienating as the Tulsis' orthodox Hinduism.

Mr Biswas resumed talking about his steady job and future **house**, but Ajodha began talking about a supplement called Sanatogen. Rabidat asked Mr Biswas how he could afford the house, and Ajodha insisted that, unlike Rabidat, Mr Biswas "has been saving up." Just like that, "Mr Biswas realized that the time to ask had gone for good." Tara and Ajodha asked him about the house's construction and continued to berate Rabidat, who began to cry, for not living up to Mr Biswas's standards, then sent him away to check the takings in Ajodha's theater.

Although Ajodha has achieved everything Mr Biswas wants, he seems unable to recognize or appreciate it. In fact, Ajodha's blindness to Mr Biswas's overall misery and struggle to achieve upward mobility leads him to praise Mr Biswas for things he only hopes to achieve. Rabidat, who remains poor despite his modern ways, reacts to his perceived failures much as Mr Biswas did in his early life.

Tara and Ajodha continued asking Mr Biswas about the **house**, but Bhandat's older son, Jagdat, soon came to the verandah, dressed as usual in attire strikingly reminiscent of funeral-wear. Tara mentioned Mr Biswas's house and, laughing, Jagdat asked he was inviting them all to the house-warming. They ate, separately, silently, and without enjoyment. Mr Biswas was optimistic that he might be able to talk with Tara alone after dinner, but Ajodha would not leave—and insisted he take a bag of oranges home for vitamin C, then added some avocado pears. Tara apologized for Ajodha's temper, and Mr Biswas went to see him in his room, but Ajodha lay still in bed, awake, resting and unwilling to talk.

Jagdat's formal and serious clothes contrast starkly with his younger brother Rabidat's, as well as with his own attitude. Suddenly, the air turns as solemn as this funeralwear, and despite Mr Biswas's excitement about the meal just pages earlier, he becomes too preoccupied with the family's social dynamics to enjoy it. Tara is still the only person Mr Biswas trusts, but she lives at the mercy of Ajodha, who provides her with means and status but not a loving relationship

As Mr Biswas went to catch the bus on the main road, Jagdat tapped him on the shoulder and offered him a cigarette—nobody was allowed to smoke at Tara and Ajodha's **house**—and explained that he and Ajodha both knew that Mr Biswas had come to "squeeze something out of the old man," and that Ajodha "could smell a thing like that before you even start thinking about it." Mr Biswas asked Jagdat if he was planning to build a house, too, and Jagdat reacted melodramatically, accusing Tara and Ajodha of "spreading stories about me." Mr Biswas asked how many kids Jagdat had—"four or five," he replied, "well, four." He mentioned that Bhandat was living "in a ramshackle old house full of creole people" and "that son of a bitch not doing a damn thing to help him."

Despite his formal clothes, Jagdat's secret smoking suggests that in staying at home he remains somehow stuck in childhood. He also reiterates what Mr Biswas should have remembered from his own childhood: the modern Ajodha is a businessman first and an uncle second; unlike the Tulsis, he does not see family as sacred. Jagdat's overdrawn response to Mr Biswas's innocuous question confirms the underlying resentment he feels toward Ajodha but also mirrors Mr Biswas's deep jealousy of and rage at the Tulsis.

Jagdat explains that Ajodha might help with vitamins but never with money—he barely paid his gardener and even docked his pay for a cup of tea. "That is the way they treat poor people," Jagdat continues, but at least "God is good." Mr Biswas knew it was time to leave but did not want to go, and Jagdat began talking about his children—like Mr Biswas, he "lived a divided life." His woman was "Spanish [...] but faithful." Mr Biswas unceremoniously took the bus home.

Jagdat realizes the injustice intrinsic to the capitalist system that increasingly superseded family as the central organizing principle of Trinidadian society: rich people like Ajodha can get away with nearly anything and benefit from paying the poor less than a subsistence wage. Mr Biswas's relationship with Mr Maclean lingers in the background of this conversation: he wonders how Maclean manages to survive on the paltry wages he pays.

Mr Maclean came by the barracks in the morning, explaining that he was ready to begin Mr Biswas's **house**. Mr Biswas was ready to give him "a hundred" and "more at the end of the month," but there would be "no concrete pillars." Mr Maclean sent in the misshapen crapaud pillars that night, alongside nails and scantlings. He brought his tools and set up a rudimentary workbench, and then came his labor: "a muscular, full-blooded Negro" in tattered clothes named Edgar.

Mr Biswas's high hopes for the house prove impractical; Mr Maclean's resourcefulness shows not only that Mr Biswas can still get a house, but also that there are ways to provide for oneself outside the rigid protocols of the formal market. Like Tara, he is incredibly jovial and charitable, almost too good to be true—her benevolence hinges on her class status, but his suggests that Mr Biswas may value class status too highly.

After work, Mr Biswas returned to the site to find Edgar digging holes for the pillars and Mr Maclean's completed frame for the **house** nearby. Maclean explained that Edgar "does do the work of two men," except never knows when to stop digging and likes to drink on the job. So Mr Maclean told Edgar to stop digging and sent him to buy some rum; he sprinted off to buy it and returned, still running, a few minutes later. Mr Maclean and Edgar began drinking with a toast "to you and the house, boss."

Edgar's strength, cheerfulness, and stupidity play on racist stereotypes about enslaved black workers in the West. As in his capacity as an overseer on the sugar estates, here Mr Biswas finds himself suddenly flipped in status, from a physical laborer (like his family, or as in his sign-painting days) to an owner who benefits from but does not perform labor.

The next day, Mr Maclean had another frame completed. Their costs puzzled Mr Biswas: their materials were 85 dollars but the remaining 15 dollars seemed insufficient to pay two men working at least eight days. After they left, Shama came to see the **house** and confirm her fear that Mr Biswas spent all his money on the construction. She was obviously pregnant by now and asked what this expenditure meant for the children; Mr Biswas figured that people in Hanuman House must have been worried about the possibility that he would take the children away from them, and she accused him of throwing his money away before insisting that Hari bless the house.

Mr Biswas's surprise that Mr Maclean and Edgar can work for so little extends the underlying analogy to slavery and also shows how little he recognizes his new economic privilege as a member of the Tulsi family. He and Shama continue to fight over control of their family—he imagines that the Tulsis assume he is trying to claim his family (even though the house is primarily about claiming space for himself), and Shama wants to claim the house for the Tulsis by having Hari bless it, much as in The Chase.

The next morning, a "constipatedly apathetic" Hari came to bless the **house**, "whining" his way through the prayers and offerings. Soon, "the house had begun to take shape," but Mr Maclean said Mr Biswas needed to buy more materials before he could return.

Shama once again gets her way, and Hari's blessing once again looks like an unnecessary formality with little inner meaning.

Mr Biswas would go and look at the **house**'s skeleton every day, glad that it was not as crooked as he had anticipated. He wanted pitchpine floorboards, broad wall boards, and corrugated iron for the roof. But after two months, he only had 18 dollars more for the house, and Seth proposed that Mr Biswas buy cheap galvanized iron from their old brick-factory behind Hanuman House. So he went there, only to see that the iron in question was rusted and misshapen. Savi and Anand questioned whether it would suffice, but Seth lowered the price from five to three dollars, and Mr Biswas could not resist.

Even though his house is nowhere near finished, its skeleton represents Mr Biswas's dream of independence, which he is also gradually building whenever the resources he needs to pursue it are available. So he continues to choose cheap secondhand materials over higher-quality ones at the market price. As in his work life, in the construction he makes do with whatever he can get.

When he returned to Green Vale, Mr Biswas encountered Mr Maclean, who promised that the iron would be easy to fix up and paint. However, his tone was different. He suggested that pitchpine might burn easily and said a man has offered to sell him some cedar for just seven dollars; Mr Biswas hated cedar but agreed.

The subtle shift in Mr Maclean's tone is suspiciously reminiscent of Moti's on his second visit to The Chase; in his willingness to compromise, Mr Biswas quickly loses control over the details of the house that he previously thought so important.

Anand, Savi, and Shama came on a lorry with the corrugated iron that weekend; none of the pieces fit together, but Mr Maclean promised to fix them and asked whether it might make sense to make rafters out of tree branches, since they would be invisible from the outside.

The house deviates further and further from the perfection Mr Biswas imagined, but he also seems to increasingly realize how little this ideal image matters: simply having *a house might be enough.*

Mr Maclean started working, and Edgar was never to be seen again. Although the branches reminded Mr Biswas of a hut and the corrugated iron dropped rust all around the **house**, Mr Biswas was delighted to have a roof, which nearly covered the house and made it look habitable, although all its holes were obvious. Mr Maclean filled them with stones and pitch, which ran all over the roof in confused patterns. But it worked to keep the rain out, and nearby chickens started taking shelter in the empty house. Mr Maclean put in the floorboards and then again took leave until new materials arrived, having worked two weeks for eight dollars, which Mr Biswas found astonishing. Local children started playing in the house, leaving nails and footprints around it.

Edgar disappears mysteriously, without any explanation or real consideration by either Mr Biswas or the narrator. With the makeshift roof covered in stones and pitch, function continues to take precedence over beauty, coherence, and Mr Biswas's original plan. Mr Biswas's joy about the house, despite its imperfections, suggests that he may have started seeing independence as more important than status, at least in this narrow context and period of his life.

Mr Biswas also started getting threats from the dispossessed workers and started sleeping with a sword and a stick for protection. He also got a puppy, which he named Tarzan, and which immediately began terrorizing the local chickens (and eating their eggs). One day, in response, the poultry owners sent Tarzan home covered in chicken droppings.

By aligning himself with the estate's owners over its workers, Mr Biswas finds himself in physical danger for the first time. He begins playing out his conflict with the workers indirectly, through his dog, Tarzan.

Mr Biswas kept painting placards and started buying up cheap novels, but he could not bear to open their badly made covers, which reminded him of death. One night, Mr Biswas heard noises outside and waited by the door with his cutlass, only to find Tarzan damp and covered in egg outside. He started leaving his oil lamp on at night and worrying that someone might burn his **house** down; Shama and Seth said not to worry, but the house slowly "became greyer."

Like at The Chase, Mr Biswas seeks any respite he can find from the agony of his day-to-day responsibilities; his fear compounds his existing paranoid isolation, and it is unclear whether he truly adopted Tarzan for protection or company—regardless, he gets little of either.

One evening, tired of seeing everything as temporary, Mr Biswas decided to treat all his time as meaningful. After his evening bath and dinner, he took *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* off the shelf, broke its spine, and started reading, forgetting everything but the novel, imagining a clearing in the forest—and then "a billowing black cloud," which startled him and made him wonder what he truly feared.

Surprisingly, Mr Biswas abruptly decides to take charge of his life—rather than living for the sake of a better life to come, he begins to pursue his happiness in the present, and finds precisely the opposite: as he decides to stop distracting himself, he realizes how miserable he truly is.

It was people that Mr Biswas feared, the people who filled every corner of the world, and he wondered why he managed to realize this so suddenly. Once "his whole past became a miracle of calm and courage," the black cloud came rushing back, filling his mind, showing him that his life had been perfectly fine thus far, but he "spoiled it all by worry and fear." And "now he would never more be able to go among people," so "he surrendered to the darkness."

Mr Biswas is not just thinking about the threats from other people in Green Vale, but also about his lifelong failure to connect with others, from his brothers and mother to Ajodha and Jairam to, of course, the Tulsis. Even though he has never been remotely happy in his life, he begins idolizing his past once he realizes that his fear was not explicit until now.

In the morning, Mr Biswas soon remembered his fear and decided that it must not have left him. The world outside had people. He recited the newspapers and prayed, but could not escape people, and opened the door to greet Tarzan, to whom he explained his fear and confessed, "I am not whole." He pet Tarzan and remembered enjoying it in the past, when he was whole. But now, he was overcome with fear and "grief for a happy life never enjoyed and now lost."

Having determined to stop viewing his life in Green Vale as temporary, he starts to see his anxieties as permanent, which makes him even more miserable; after years of dreaming about success and romance, he has now convinced himself of their impossibility. He can only turn to his dog for support.

The next day, Mr Biswas found a momentary respite from his despair as he started each element of his daily routine. The laborers were somehow no longer "negligible, non-descript people" but full individuals. Speaking with them, he initially forgot his fear but quickly discovered "another relationship spoiled, another piece of the present destroyed." In the afternoon, he realized that he did not fear children, but only felt grief at the fact that they would experience "good and beautiful" things he never had. When he returned to his room, he got into bed "and forced himself to cry for all his lost happiness."

Mr Biswas's "black cloud" of depression takes over his perceptions, coloring all the daily interactions that he previously thought inconsequential and turning them into weighty referendums on his capacity for human connection. His "grief" about his children is nevertheless only a jealous grief for himself: because they share the advantages of the Tulsi family, they might avoid the obstacles he faced in his early life.

Mr Biswas was powerless to stop his questioning; even the newspapers made him afraid. Eventually, he decided he had to ignore it and decided to go to Hanuman House. Everyone he passed on his way filled him with panic, which was normal, already "part of the pain of living." But every single thing in his path that used to make him happy now led him to fear, and he felt he was destroying the present and past alike by merely looking at them. Afraid of deceiving his children, he returned to Green Vale.

Mr Biswas sees his despair as threatening his world's richness: everything loses its charm and potential, and he wants to protect his children from himself. In a sense, Mr Biswas reaches a personal turning point here: he finally sees his capacity to hurt and deceive others, which has already strained his relations with the Tulsis.

Mr Biswas thought that, if he repeated the night before, he might banish his unhappiness. So after his bath and dinner, he sat down to read *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*—but kept remembering his fear. His "period of lucidity" diminished every morning, the calm before the questioning diminished every time he encountered anything at all, and ultimately any delay vanished, "and all action was irrelevant and futile." He still found it better to be out in the world than alone, and he began to hate the emptiness of Sunday afternoons.

Mr Biswas tries to overcome his sense of alienation by reenacting the ritual that created it, which parallels his usual response to struggles: he repeatedly returns to Shama and Hanuman House, leaves wherever he is staying and finds another home that only turns out worse for him, and conceives himself as unable to act while actively choosing the same things that have already made him miserable.

Mr Biswas looked for signs that his sudden "corruption" might dissipate—perhaps his bedsheets were not scattered in the mornings, or his fingernails were not bitten—but these occasional good signs never persisted. One night, while he was biting his nails, a part of one of his teeth broke off, and he threw it out the window.

Mr Biswas wants proof that the world will save him from himself, even though all these "signs" are within his control. Although he has relative independence in Green Vale, he certainly does not feel *independent or in control.*

Visiting one Mr Biswas Saturday, Seth asked what was wrong. Later, Mr Maclean called to say that he had found some more bargain wood for a wall. Asphalt was falling from the roof and the cedar floorboards were shrinking—the new boards were also cedar—but Mr Maclean was unsurprised at Mr Biswas's apathy. He built a bedroom wall, two doors (cedar planks instead of the panels Mr Biswas wanted), and a window.

The ordinarily pleasant parts of Mr Biswas's life—his house and his Saturdays paying the workers with Seth—fail to shake his depression. Mr Maclean's shortcuts continue to wreak cosmetic havoc on the house, and now they have begun to reflect back Mr Biswas's own sense of failure.

Mr Biswas awoke from his dreams throughout the night. In the first, black threads chased him from the Tulsi Store to Green Vale—the same threads of asphalt that fell down from the **house**'s roof, and he could not help remembering that "Hari blessed it." In the next, from atop a hill, he saw a crying woman—who was "Shama, Anand, Savi, his mother [Bipti]"—seeking help but wanted her to go away. Tarzan was outside the door with an injured paw, and Mr Biswas remarked, "you like eggs too much."

The chasing threads of asphalt and Hari's blessing explicitly tie the Green Vale house (which is supposedly Mr Biswas's own) back to the Tulsis. The crying woman points clearly to Mr Biswas's failure to address others' emotional trauma while demanding attention to his own, and the fact that it partially represented Anand reflects Mr Biswas's disdain for his son's femininity.

A few nights later, Mr Biswas awoke to the watchman reporting that "they set fire to Dookinan land," a small plot across a ditch from the rest of the fields. Mr Biswas made the laborers cut the cane separating his land from the rest, and they did before putting out the fire. Afterward, "Mr Biswas realized that for more than an hour he had not questioned himself," but the fear immediately came back—still, this proved to him that "he was going to get better soon." Yet this "was the first of many disappointments," moments of freedom that he eventually learned to stop counting.

Although the fire demonstrates the threat the laborers pose to Mr Biswas, paradoxically the crisis of making the same laborers respond to it draws him out of his depression rather than reminding him of why he is miserable. His relief seemed to stem from his sense of power and immediacy—both of which he otherwise lost in Green Vale, with the laborers and his family no longer respecting him, plus nothing to look forward to in the immediate future.

Shama brought the children to Green Vale that Christmas; Mr Biswas dreaded their arrival, hoped that an accident would stop them and started plotting to kill them and himself. When they arrived, his plans suddenly seemed absurd, and he resigned himself to "the deception and especial pain" he would inevitably suffer at their presence. He envied and soon began hating Shama: her pregnancy, her noises, her care for the children, and her clothes. In the bed, Mr Biswas separated himself from Anand with a wall of pillows.

Mr Biswas's self-destructive depression leads him to want to destroy the children he views as extensions of himself. It is, for once, fortunate that he continues to shrink from action; he adopts his usual stance of powerlessness and resignation, silently hating the family that reflects his lifelong failure to take action—indeed, his powerlessness and resignation.

Mr Biswas barely left bed the next day, wanting to do nothing and feigning malaria. All that week he remained fatigued, did not want to leave his room, became constipated, and could only relax in bed. He watched Shama "closely, with suspicion, hatred and nausea," never speaking to her directly.

Although Mr Biswas has been lamenting his isolation and inability to connect with others, when he has the option to interact with his family, Mr Biswas deliberately isolates himself even further.

One morning, Shama checked Mr Biswas for fever—he had none and hated that her hands smelled of vegetables. She asked if there was "something on [his] mind," and he said there were "lots of little black clouds." They argued and he started relishing it before recoiling out of fear and realizing that "he was dying" because of his family. He yelled at them to "get out!" and never come back inside the room or touch him.

Mr Biswas's depression and rage are not discontinuous with his prior self; so far, this argument is just a more extreme version of his daily conflicts with Shama. He enjoys it because he feels powerful and can blame his disappointments on his family instead of himself.

Shama stood in front of the door; Mr Biswas opened the window, and he screamed and cried as he tried to push himself through it. With Tarzan, Savi, and Anand right below him, he tried to kick Shama and struck her in the stomach. Women from the barracks came to help Shama, and one of them, who "had often been beaten and had witnessed many wife-beatings," told the family to pack up and go.

Mr Biswas again crosses the line to physical abuse but a community again intervenes on Shama's behalf—the disturbing frequency of domestic violence at Green Vale reflects how entrenched male domination seems to be in Trinidad, but the women form a community of support around shared oppression.

As his family packed, for some reason, Mr Biswas insisted that Anand stay. Anand pet Tarzan in silence, while each of his parents asked him to go with them; when Mr Biswas held out a box of crayons, Anand said he would stay, and then nothing more. Holding Myna, Shama walked to the road with Savi. Mr Biswas offered to give the crayons to Anand, who refused. When Mr Biswas asked why Anand chose to say, he replied, "because they was going to leave you alone." They barely spoke for the rest of the day.

Like the rest of his occasional decisive actions, Mr Biswas's insistence that Anand stay is as inexplicable to the world as to himself. Likely, he tacitly recognizes that he needs company, support, and belonging but is too afraid to admit it and so pushes his family away rather than seek their love. Anand, on the other hand, seems to immediately recognize this conundrum, due precisely to the same traits Mr Biswas previously considered weak and effeminate.

After Shama left, Mr Biswas reverted from fatigue to restlessness and turmoil. Anand spent one day in the fields with his father but then decided to stay home with Tarzan and the toys Mr Biswas made him, and the father and son drew pictures together at night. Mr Biswas taught Anand about God (the boy's true father), gravity, and "people called Coppernickus and Galilyo." On Saturday, Seth could not convince Anand to go home. At times, thinking he had ague (a fever), Mr Biswas made Anand recite hymns in Hindi, which he did in a fright. But Mr Biswas's science lessons seemed to compensate for the boy's suffering.

Mr Biswas begins to bond with his son over art, philosophy, science, and literature; he has finally found not only an outlet for his intellectual interests, but also a way to meaningfully influence his son, a source of esteem and authority within his family, and the genuine care from another person he had always sought and seldom found (besides occasionally in Tara). This is a crucial moment in the lives of Mr Biswas and Anand, both of whom turn wholeheartedly to intellectual pursuits in the coming chapters.

For "many reasons," Mr Biswas left the barracks for his **house**'s lone finished room. He hated the noise of the others living in the barracks and wondered whether he might find a better mindset starting the new year in his new house. While "he feared solitude more than people," he felt comfortable moving because he had Anand. He cleaned the small room, although the asphalt snakes were stuck on the floor, and almost completely filled it with his furniture. While it was inconvenient to lack a kitchen and return to the barracks for water and the latrine, "the incompleteness of the house didn't depress him."

Mr Biswas's inexplicable decisive action—asking Anand to stay—in turn led him to take subsequent, calculated actions like moving to and cleaning the house, as well as admitting his desire for connection with others. While the house is scarcely comfortable or completely functional, it still represents Mr Biswas's partially fulfilled desire to establish an independent space for himself and, now, bring his family there with him.

Mr Biswas dreamed frequently of the asphalt snakes, and he jumped screaming from his bed one night after one actually fell on him. He cut them all down, but they grew again, and he started feeling sick. He wrapped himself in his flour sack sheets, rocked in his chair, accidentally crushing Tarzan's tail. He made Anand repeat "*Rama Rama Sita Rama*" and asked whether the boy wanted to leave—which was "the most oppressive of all his fears."

Some of Mr Biswas's irrational fears from the past—his dreams about asphalt snakes and his rumination about whether his rocking-chair could crush him—are indirectly fulfilled here. These bad omens in turn suggest that his "most oppressive" fear might soon be realized.

One afternoon, two men approached Anand in the yard and brought him with them to the road, claiming to be "digging for treasure" They started puling pennies out of the gravel while they waited for Mr Biswas to return. When Anand claimed that the driver was "not my father really," the men sent him away, then almost took the cents he found on the road and tried to beat him when he refused—but Anand threatened to tell Mr Biswas, and they let him go. Anand ran home and told Mr Biswas that the fat man, Dinnoo, "was trying to thief my money." The other man claimed that Seth promised them work, but Mr Biswas sent them away.

To Anand, Mr Biswas was "not my father really" because Mr Biswas had previously emphasized that God was the boy's true father; still, the workers still fear Mr Biswas's power as the estate driver and accordingly back down. Their claim to be "digging for treasure" eerily recalls the neighbors' search for Raghu's buried money during Mr Biswas's childhood. By successfully handling the situation here, Mr Biswas symbolically protects his family in a way his mother never could.

One morning, Anand got up—earlier than Mr Biswas, as usual—and, with a blank expression and quivering mouth, showed his father Tarzan's dead body on the staircase. The dog's neck and stomach were cut open; Anand screamed that he wanted to leave, and Mr Biswas promised to take him to Hanuman House the next day. Filled with anxiety at the prospect of isolation, he was trying to buy time. Both forgot the dog, Mr Biswas because of the "deeper pain" of his son's imminent departure and Anand because he wanted to go immediately.

Although the narrator never explicitly says so, Tarzan's death was clearly intentional, most likely a threat by the laborers; Mr Biswas appears poised to get pushed out of yet another home, and his greatest fear—that Anand would leave—comes true. Of course, he continues to prioritize his own anxiety about isolation over his son's trauma and desire to leave.

Mr Biswas buried Tarzan in the yard. The sky darkened, with thunderstorms looming by four in the afternoon and no time to take Anand back that day. They cooked and listened to the rain; Mr Biswas said that Anand would have to return the colored pencils if he wanted to go back to Hanuman House; the boy did not want them, and Mr Biswas tried unsuccessfully to convince him to keep them.

The environment works in Mr Biswas's favor, ensuring that Anand cannot yet return to Hanuman House. Mr Biswas tries to crudely manipulate his son into staying, which suggests that he neither fully understands nor can reciprocate the genuine concern that led Anand to stay with him in Green Vale.

"The real rain" followed a roaring wind and struck the leaky roof so loudly that Mr Biswas and Anand could not hear one another. The water flowed down to the road, lightning lit up the sky, and the thunder was frightening. Anand found his father "writing with his finger on his head" in bed, then played with a winged ant, since he was "still officially annoyed."

The worsening rain is comforting until it becomes threatening; it makes it feel as though whole world is violently conspiring against Mr Biswas, his house, and his son. Although in absurd fashion, Mr Biswas returns to writing for comfort.

The rain suddenly lightened, and Mr Biswas repeated "*Rama Rama Sita Rama*" in bed. "A fresh cycle" of heavy rains began, and Anand noticed that the room was full of winged ants falling from the ceiling and biting black ants crawling on the walls. Mr Biswas kept asking, "you see them?" and Anand opened the door to see two men taking shelter under huge leaves outside. The biting ants carried the winged ants' bodies away; Mr Biswas took the cutlass and Anand the walking-stick. They said "*Rama Rama Sita Rama*" together, then Mr Biswas started cursing people from his past (mostly the Tulsis) before the rain slowed, Anand opened the door, and the men were gone.

The war between the red and black ants points bluntly to the threat posed by the men outside, whom Mr Biswas and Anand cannot evade in the downpours. Nevertheless, the danger proves to be more imagined than real. The impersonal threat of thunder and rain reminds Mr Biswas of all the particular people who have wronged him throughout his life; his impulse to curse the Tulsis here contrasts ironically with the entire next chapter.

The heavy rain returned, and Anand started killing the ants with the walking-stick until one bit his hand—they were climbing up the stick, so he threw it away. The roof shook and lighting struck the **house**, breaking the window, extinguishing the oil lamp, lighting everything up, and leading Anand to shriek. The rain and wind came inside, blowing open the door and sending the room into disarray. Anand saw a man outside, holding a lamp and a cutlass "like a miracle." The man, Ramakhilawan, who lived in the barracks, cried "my poor little calf!" as he came inside, pulled on the window (which the wind slammed shut), and relighted the oil lamp.

Water remains unlucky for Mr Biswas, just as in his childhood. The exclamation "My poor little calf!" is a clear allusion to the calf Mr Biswas was supposed to guard but let drown in his childhood; Ramakhilawan seems to be acting out what Mr Biswas failed to do before his father died trying to save him. It is also notable that a subordinate who worked for him rescues Mr Biswas; in his times of need, Mr Biswas continues to find unlikely saviors.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6: A DEPARTURE

A messenger brought the news of the calamitous rains to Hanuman House that same evening. The sisters and husbands convened, the sisters conferred, and they all ultimately decided to send the men to Green Vale. Sushila and the children performed rituals to protect Hanuman House and banish misfortune; the children went to sleep and the sisters played cards and read downstairs, with Chinta going back and forth between "her frowning card-playing manner" and the Ramayana she had resolved to be the first of the family's women to read.

As usual, power in Hanuman House is delicately balanced between the men and women; the sisters run the meeting and take care of the house while the men work outside of it; Sushila again takes charge of important magical protections from the margins. Chinta's quest to finish the Ramayana *shows that Mr Biswas's literacy and passion for books are not unique among the Tulsis.*

The men returned with Anand sad and sleepy and Mr Biswas in Govind's arms, "deeply exasperated and fatigued." Although he had not spoken to Mr Biswas since fighting with him years ago, Govind "put himself on the side of authority," and Chinta acknowledged this by taking care of Anand. They put Mr Biswas in the Blue Room and gave him sweetened milk with spices, brandy, and butter; he was comforted to be there, better safeguarded from the rain by Hanuman House's thick walls, but found himself "continually awakening to a new situation" mysteriously linked to disjointed events from his past. He noticed that the objects around them were in their proper places and quickly fell asleep, comforted by the sound of the rain.

Despite all their animosity to Mr Biswas, Govind and Chinta still take care of him and Anand in their time of need. Just as when Mr Biswas returned there from The Chase, Hanuman House has again become a sanctuary for him, where certainty and predictability are comfortable even if he still does not like the family. The rain, too, has switched from menacing to reassuring. He thinks freely about his past only in moments of illness, despair, or vulnerability like this one.

The next morning, it was still raining and dark, and the children were excited to stay home from school, investigate the events of the night before, and play outside in the flooded streets. The rain stopped and the town dried up in the mid-morning, and Shama proposed that they bring the furniture in Green Vale to Hanuman House. A trusted Catholic Indian doctor stopped by, prescribed Mr Biswas a regime of vitamins, and proposed he see a specialist in Port of Spain. Then, the thaumaturge came to purify the Blue Room; the miracle worker proposed hanging aloe in doorways and windows and getting a black doll, and unsuccessfully offered Mr Biswas a concoction.

Shama's request to move the furniture back to Hanuman House makes it clear that Mr Biswas is not expected to return to isolation. As Hindu aristocrats under British colonial rule, the Tulsis continue to mix Eastern and Western practices (Hindu rituals and Western medicine). Port of Spain again gets a passing mention—like in Mr Biswas's sign-painting with Alec years before, Port of Spain implies sophistication and progress to those in the countryside.

The Tulsis hung the aloe and black doll, and then moved in Mr Biswas's still-soaked furniture. Savi was frustrated that the children "misused" the rocking chair by fighting to pull one another off it, so she complained to Shama, who told her not to worry about it. A few of Mr Biswas's painted placards were also put up in the hall and Book Room.

The rocking chair transforms from Mr Biswas's personal property into part of Hanuman House's shared property. By hanging up his placards, the Tulsis finally acknowledge Mr Biswas's contributions to the family and incorporate him into their collective.

As he "slept and woke and slept again" in darkness, Mr Biswas found comfort in "the absence of the world" and peace in surrendering, which led him to "this worldless room, this nothingness." He felt distant from the depressed mindset that had so thoroughly enveloped him.

Ironically, Mr Biswas's depression in Green Vale also stemmed from a sense of alienation and nothingness; here, though, that same feeling is soothing and emboldening, perhaps because he can be certain that others are nearby to care for him.

Pratap and Prasad visited Hanuman House, treating the children kindly but underestimating their number and chatting politely with their brother Mr Biswas. So did Ramchand, who was now working as a warden at Port of Spain's Lunatic Asylum and recommended that Mr Biswas, like his patients, listen to music on a gramophone. He also suggested Mr Biswas join him and Dehuti in Port of Spain; on his way out, Sushila and Chinta commented on his evident low caste.

Mr Biswas's old family has a rare encounter with his new one; despite everyone's affability, the gap between them is evident, and Mr Biswas increasingly seems like one of the Tulsis. Ramchand inadvertently highlights Mr Biswas's apparent madness in an attempt to help. Meanwhile, caste continues to divide Trinidad's Hindus—it is telling that even the widowed Sushila notices it.

Later that night, Seth visited Mr Biswas, who neither wanted to nor even could return to Green Vale—the people there burned his **house** down, and although Mr Biswas cried, he was overjoyed and relieved at the news, noticing his anxiety and anguish disappear, feeling incredibly grateful to Seth and somehow wanting "to embrace him, to promise eternal friendship, to make some vow."

Mr Biswas's departure from Green Vale increasingly resembles his from The Chase: Seth's visit again brings news of a burned-down house and Mr Biswas is again elated, seeming to pick the least suitable target for his uncharacteristic love.

Shama gave birth that night, but Mr Biswas never recorded it in his *Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare* book. The midwife took care of the new daughter in the Rose Room, and Mr Biswas took his medicines. He realized that his fingernails were healing and felt himself overcoming his "periods of darkness," gaining strength through his confinement in the Blue Room. He even got nearly all the children drinking Ovaltine, which was part of his treatment.

Even though Mr Biswas was present at Hanuman House, he managed to miss his fourth and final child's birth, just as he missed the first three (and his father missed his own). As his fingernails heal, he again only realizes his psychological states through outward changes to his body.

Feeling "safe and even a little adventurous," Mr Biswas left the Blue Room and found Hari on the verandah, wondering how he became so respected among the family for his knowledge of Sanskrit and scripture. Mr Biswas thought for a second that he, too, could become an esteemed pundit but stepped back to take stock of his life and discovered that he had found no true vocation his entire life and would soon have to do something about it. However, this did not worry him, for his unparalleled dissatisfaction at Green Vale was now his gold standard for misery, and he now he recognized how lucky he was for his children to have food and shelter.

Mr Biswas tried and failed at all the Tulsis' professions: shopowner, cane worker, pundit. His attempts to find himself through imitation failed, and his self-awareness suddenly broke through as he realized that he was fortunate to have the opportunity to try these professions at all. Hari's passion for punditry, although not one Mr Biswas shares, nevertheless points the protagonist to the possibility of finding fulfillment in a vocation as well as in a family.

Slowly, Mr Biswas spent his remaining money on Ovaltine; soon, he had to vacate the Blue Room in anticipation of Owad's return. Not wanting to interact with him or Mrs Tulsi and not wanting to live elsewhere in Hanuman House, Mr Biswas packed his clothes and paintbrushes in a small cardboard suitcase and set out early in the morning "into the world, to test for its power to frighten," to finally plunge himself into "real life."

Mr Biswas's comfortable and revelatory stay in Hanuman House did not lead him to satisfaction, but it did finally motivate him to seek something greater for himself—even if this meant running away aimlessly with his few possessions, as he so frequently did in his youth.

Mr Biswas thought about going to meet Shama and her new baby but "his senses recoiled" at the idea, and he left as soon as the children left for school. High Street was bustling with vendors, and he felt he could safely ignore his fears, as though "the world had been restored to him."

In seeking his vocation, Mr Biswas again pushes his family away and takes advantage of their generosity. He searches for a job exactly as in his childhood, with little plan or preference.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1: "AMAZING SCENES"

Mr Biswas ended up in Port of Spain entirely by accident; after leaving Hanuman House in the early morning, he was mostly worried about finding somewhere to sleep that night. He had not chosen what way to turn at the junction—to the north were Pagotes and Port of Spain (where Ramchand and Dehuti lived), and to the south his brothers—but a bus came by and its conductor grabbed Mr Biswas's luggage, repeating, "Port of Spain." Remembering his own days as a bus conductor, Mr Biswas got in.

As usual, Mr Biswas's most decisive transformations are accidental products of circumstances he refuses to resist. So far in the book, Port of Spain has figured only as a distant symbol of a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, urban life, but it is understandable that this would appeal to Mr Biswas's refreshed romantic imagination.

During the whole ride, Mr Biswas thought about getting off and turning south, but it would be too hard to have the conductor bring his suitcase out. Heading toward the mountains, the bus passed sugarcane fields full of workers and then rice paddies speckled with wood **houses**. The bus abruptly turned west, passing through more and more traffic until it reached Port of Spain, flanked by hills on the right, swamp and sea on the left, all smelling of sea salt, sugar, and cocoa.

Mr Biswas anxiously wonders whether he made the wrong decision, even though he does not seem to think the alternative would have been any better. As Trinidad's capital, Port of Spain condenses everything on the island—its landscapes, exports, and traffic—and it seems that, by arriving there, Mr Biswas has again risen in status.

Mr Biswas disembarked and enjoyed "a day of freedom" paralleled only by the one he spent wandering around Pagotes when Bhandat's rumshop abruptly closed. Walking along the crowded streets, he marveled at the various stores and restaurants, perceiving "the city whole" and never the individuals moving through it, engrossed in the excitement of its activity.

Mr Biswas is thrilled at the city's novelty and organization—its anonymous residents seem to all belong in their particular roles there. Notably, his childhood day in Pagotes was just as free but nowhere near as delightful as this day in Port of Spain; back then, he found his freedom exhausting and burdensome.

At four, when businesses closed for the day, Mr Biswas headed for Ramchand's address, which disappointingly turned out to be "an unfenced lot with two old unpainted wooden **houses** and many makeshift sheds." He found his sister, Dehuti, cooking—she and Ramchand were surprised that he planned to pass some time there and were pleased that he took refuge in them during a troubling time.

Compared to Ramchand and Dehuti's countryside hut, their house is underwhelming, and Dehuti continues to play the part of domestic housewife. Despite offering his home in the last chapter, Ramchand clearly did not expect Mr Biswas to show up, but—as usual—he has nowhere of his own to stay.

Ramchand said that Mr Biswas could "stay here and rest as long as you want," listening to music on the gramophone. Dehuti was not even sullen. When her younger son returned from school, she asked him to tell her what he learned that day: "an account of an escape from a German prison camp in 1917." His parents and Mr Biswas complemented his reading and then asked him about his math, which Mr Biswas could not even do but complemented because "he saw the approving red ticks." Ramchand commented on how "damn important" education turns out to be in life.

While the colonial education system's curriculum seems utterly irrelevant to life in Trinidad, Ramchand sees education's economic benefits, to which Mr Biswas and his children can attest. Despite his lighthearted manner and low caste, Ramchand seems to be offering serious social commentary and is again living the life Mr Biswas wants. Meanwhile, by mentioning the gramophone he plays to his asylum patients, Ramchand again subtly implies that Mr Biswas might be insane.

Mr Biswas shared one of Dehuti and Ramchand's two rooms with their son. The **house**'s interior was much cleaner than the outside, its furniture "brilliantly polished." It had "room and even privacy." But at night Mr Biswas could hear the "intimate whispers" of other tenants—"all Negroes," around whom Mr Biswas had never lived; this made his visit all the more strange and adventurous. Their ways were not the same as "country Negroes," cooking meaty food and living "less organized" lives. "Women ruled men" and children were much less esteemed than in Hanuman House; here, children wore clothes on their bottom halves, the opposite of in the country, and were much more aggressive and sociable.

As always, Mr Biswas notices how houses reflect their inhabitants' status and priorities. After his rest in Hanuman House, he sees the value of privacy, which mediates between his two most central desires: it allows independence without isolation and belonging without helplessness. City and country are not just different but, as suggested by the image of children wearing bottoms in the city and tops in the country, literally inverted versions of one another.

Mr Biswas was enamored with "the organization of the city," its street-sweeping and newspaper deliveries, the fact that people drank milk from bottles, and that Ramchand went away to work every day. Ramchand showed Mr Biswas all around the city, taking him to look at the harbor from the top of Chancellor Hill, "which was a moment of deep romance" since Mr Biswas never realized that "Port of Spain was actually a port," hosting ships from around the world.

Mr Biswas sees the city as evidence of human cooperation and interdependence on a grand scale; unlike in the countryside, everything in the city relies on trust for the same kind of faceless collective Mr Biswas previously despised (in the Tulsis, at Green Vale). Here, he finally sees the wonder in such coordination, facilitates independent choice for all through extensive networks of dependence.

Mr Biswas also enjoyed "Ramchand's city manners" and let his brother-in-law patronize him, which he had always done since he was ostracized from his community in his childhood and simply left for another, demonstrating "the futility of its sanctions." His Indian-accented English was hilarious when he tried to adopt Port of Spain's slang, and his overenthusiastic manner often led him, and by extension Mr Biswas, to suffer others' judgment.

Ramchand and Mr Biswas, both enamored with the city, both try to become of the city. *Ramchand's satisfaction and confidence relate directly to his bold decision to leave the Hindu community—unlike Mr Biswas's ill-fated decision to stay in the community by marrying Shama, Ramchand's choice to leave it allowed him to forge his own path and pursue his own values.*

After two weeks, Ramchand told Mr Biswas not to worry about finding a job, but he was penniless and felt "burdened by his freedom," wanting to join the city rather than merely walking through it. He considered returning to sign-writing, but Ramchand suggested working at the Mad House with him. He said, "why the hell not?" and Ramchand recoiled, mentioning that he was worried about "the *impression*" that using his contacts would make.

As in his childhood, Mr Biswas loses interest in absolute freedom when it leaves him unmoored from any commitments that would make him truly belong in a place. Like the Tulsis, Ramchand's exaggerated gestures of generosity are just for show and favor; he rejects Mr Biswas out of the same concern with status.

Soon, Mr Biswas's "spasms of fear" returned, he found his nails "all bitten down," and "his freedom was over." He sought out the specialist doctor he was referred to, finding him in a beautiful office that "suggested whiteness and order." The people in the waiting room "didn't look sick," and when the Chinese receptionist asked if he had an appointment, Mr Biswas's response was to accidentally whisper, "*fish-face*." He gave her the letter from the doctor in Arwacas, but felt like "a fraud" when she started reading it. He waited for his appointment watching the "correctly ill" patients before him and wondering if his three dollars would cover the doctor's fees, here where "illness was clearly more expensive."

As Mr Biswas seeks out help, he sees the pristine office not as evidence of the doctor's ability to solve his problems but as proof that he does not belong, that his class status makes his illness "incorrect" and unworthy of treatment. He particularly worries about unfamiliar people; his discomfort with the office's "whiteness" and the Chinese receptionist points to Port of Spain's cosmopolitanism and economic power as well as the persistent racial divisions throughout Trinidad.

Mr Biswas thought about literature and abruptly decided to leave, told the receptionist he felt better and walked outside, down St Vincent Street. He finally saw "the city as made up of individuals, each of whom had his place in it." He sat under a bench in the War Memorial Park, his stomach hurting, his freedom terminated and his place already determined for him by his past. He enjoyed his stomach pains, which seemed to show him "the restoration of the world" and remind him how far he had come.

Like in his depression at Green Vale, Mr Biswas shifts from seeing an undifferentiated crowd of people who properly belong to seeing a society of individuals who, to various extents, choose their place and commitments in the world. This promises that he can do the same, yet he still insists that his place has been chosen for him rather than being up to him to choose.

Walking south, through a more built-up area and toward the sea, Mr Biswas came to the Red House, which had a sign posted outside: "RESERVED TO JUDGES." He walked up the steps to a fountain under a dome, where well-dressed professionals mixed with "professional beggars" who nevertheless had "an air of establishment" and lived without bothering anyone.

In the past, Mr Biswas only encountered the legal system as a distant entity with absolute power over his fate; now, he stands face-to-face with the levers of power. Even the beggars seem to belong and enjoy a status superior to his own.

Mr Biswas started reading the posted government notices and "an elderly Negro, respectably dressed," called for him, asking if he wanted "a certificate" of any sort—"Birth, marriage, death." He rejected the offer, and the man lamented that "nobody wanting certificates these days," perhaps because too many people were doing the same thing as he was. The man asked Mr Biswas to refer anyone who needed a certificate to him and said that his name was Pastor. Mr Biswas walked away, in awe of the facts that the government managed to keep records of everyone's birth and death and that Pastor even managed to find a place in the city.

Mr Biswas's encounter with Pastor recalls his childhood trip to procure a birth certificate; he was born outside the law, without formal recognition, and now learns that even those with the power to grant certificates are relatively low in the hierarchy—but, unlike him, they nevertheless belong somewhere in it. The scale and audacity of government power captivate him: the prospect of comprehensive records is just as unfathomable as the Book of Comprehensive Knowledge.

Having returned to his old disposition from Green Vale, Mr Biswas realized that he did not fear people but felt "regret, envy, despair." He thought about the newspapers on the wall in Green Vale and noticed the newspapers' offices across the street. He remembered that Misir worked for the *Sentinel*, walked inside, and asked to speak with the editor, who referred him to Mr Woodward, but Mr Biswas insisted that he came "all the way from the country to see him." The narrator interspersses a headline version of what could have transpired: "*Amazing scenes were witnessed in St Vincent Street yesterday when Biswas*" attacked the paper's staff and burned the office down.

Mr Biswas continues to gradually progress along his circuitous path toward self-knowledge. Here, his fear yields to a more exact understanding of what he is missing out on. So it is no coincidence that he rushes into the Sentinel *office in search of a job; after staring at newspaper headlines for years in Green Vale, he realizes that reporting might be the vocation he has always sought but also imagines his own willful actions as spectacular and newsworthy.*

The receptionist brought Mr Biswas to the editor's cubicle. The editor (later revealed as Mr Burnett) was "a small fat man, pink and oiled from the heat" and asked what story Mr Biswas brought. He replied, "I don't have a story. I want a job." The editor was embarrassed and asked if Mr Biswas had any experience working on a newspaper—Mr Biswas thought of the articles he never wrote for Misir and replied, "once or twice," before listing some of the authors he read. The editor smiled when he mentioned Samuel Smiles, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus, asking if he read them for pleasure, and Mr Biswas replied that he read them for "the encouragement."

Compared to his relatively timid disposition in the past, Mr Biswas suddenly turns so assertive and confident manages to get a word in with the editor. In the process, he talks his way through the Sentinel*'s layers of social hierarchy, to which he is ordinarily so sensitive. Even though he despaired in the doctor's office earlier that same day, suddenly his romantic, literary fantasies resurge and drive him back to work with words.*

The editor (Mr Burnett) asked how old Mr Biswas was—"thirty-one"—and what his profession was—"sign-painter." He walked him outside and asked him to paint warning signs in a yard. Later that afternoon, as Mr Biswas imagined headlines and swore to himself, the editor returned, surprised that Mr Biswas had not left yet and satisfied with his work. He told Mr Biswas to return the next day for "a month's trial" without pay.

Not only do Mr Biswas's sign-painting and reporting both reflect his attraction to the written word, but the former leads directly to the latter. His age is scarcely mentioned, so this passage gives an important landmark: the prologue states that he died at forty-six after working for the Sentinel *for some time.*

Mr Biswas worked enthusiastically, overusing his "extravagant vocabulary" at first, until Mr Burnett made him read enough London papers for him to learn their style. He soon learned to formulate stories and; given the *Sentinel*'s sensationalist style, Mr Burnett appreciated Mr Biswas's facetiousness and sense of fantasy: "the only way we can get readers is by shocking them."

Mr Biswas initially takes his literary predilections somewhat too seriously but gradually learns to shed his eccentricities and conform to the demands of his genre. Besides his brief stay with the cruel and unforgiving Pundit Jairam, this is the only time anyone has invested in training Mr Biswas.

The next day, Mr Biswas offered Mr Burnett a made-up story: "FOUR CHILDREN ROASTED IN HUT BLAZE. *Mother, Helpless, Watches.*" Mr Burnett suggested he formulate normal, not bizarre, characters and cut down on unnecessarily long words. He visited the police, the morgue, and the City Council; his next story, after some edits, read: "WHITE BABY FOUND ON RUBBISH DUMP *In Brown Paper Parcel* Did Not Win Bonny Baby Competition." Mr Burnett suggested Mr Biswas "lay off babies for a while."

Mr Biswas's first "stories" are completely absurd, but both concern childhood loss and abandonment, reflecting his own deep sense of loss from childhood (albeit in a more extreme sense). More subtly, these stories also point to the way he has abandoned his children by moving to Port of Spain. Despite his troubling interest in dead babies, Mr Biswas has finally found a profession that is also a means of expression.

Mr Biswas never got over the excitement of seeing his words appear in print the morning after he wrote them. But he had still failed to give Mr Burnett "a real shock." After three weeks, Mr Biswas was sent to replace a shipping reporter who accidentally got crushed at the docks; he visited tourist ships and got to write about visitors from all over the world. Now "every part of the world was near." He visited an American ship and nearly joined a camera flash-bulb smuggling ring, interviewed a novelist who assumed his leading questions had "a sinister political motive," and found notoriety visiting a ship from Brazil.

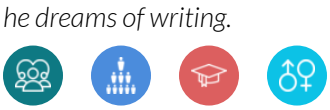
Mr Biswas's printed words demonstrate that he has found something of a place in the world: right alongside the other articles and headlines. And, through his shipping assignment, the rest of that world finally opens up to him: he gets to write about stories just as exciting as the ones he read in novels.

Mr Biswas's story, which "chilled" Mr Burnett, was headlined "DADDY COMES HOME IN A COFFIN" and covered an American explorer who died in the Amazon. The *Sentinel* hired him for "fifteen dollars a fortnight," and Mr Burnett told him to buy a suit.

Fittingly, Mr Biswas finally manages to shock Mr Burnett with a story that recalls both his childhood abandonment and his relationship to his own children (whom he still has not contacted from Port of Spain).

Ramchand helped Mr Biswas reconcile with the Tulsis; his name was in the paper every day, and feeling that he could pose as rich and famous, Mr Biswas "felt disposed to be charitable." He was writing as the Scarlet Pimpernel and waiting for anyone on Trinidad to recognize him and claim their prize—which few did—but one day, a peasant in the village where Prasad lived found him. Then, he went to see Pratap and discovered that Bipti had been living with him for some time. She had suddenly become "active and lucid," which surprised Mr Biswas. That night, he wrote, "SCARLET PIMPERNEL SPENDS NIGHT IN A TREE: *Anguish of Six-Hour Vigil*," in which his character was rescued by knowing peasants in the morning.

Having achieved fame because of his article about an absent father dying in a faraway land, Mr Biswas finally reconnects with his own family. Instead of highlighting spectacular events, the next column turns himself into the spectacle: the entire point was to identify the Scarlet Pimpernel (a name Mr Biswas borrowed from a fictional character who was, essentially, the original superhero in disguise). Beyond self-promotion for the sake of status and fame, he also gets to try his hand at fiction, getting as close as ever to the short stories he dreams of writing.



Soon thereafter, Mr Biswas visited Arwacas, marching into Hanuman House to a grand welcome: "You are the Scarlet Pimpernel and I claim the *Sentinel* prize!" Yet the **house** and his family seemed "as though he had never left," while the other children berated him with questions about his column. Returning "was better than he had imagined," although Shama worried about his suit while he ate, and Hari barely acknowledged him when they passed on the verandah.

Upon returning to Hanuman House, Mr Biswas experiences fame and insignificance almost simultaneously: while everyone knows he has been in the newspaper and this excites the children, none of the adults treat him any differently. He appreciates the attention and familiarity but is frustrated that his relative fame has not raised his status in the strict, hierarchical household.

Mr Biswas went to the book room, where Anand joined him. He asked what the adults have been saying about his column, and Anand replied, "nothing," although Chinta thought he "look[ed] like a crook." Shama came in with the new baby, asking it, "do you *know* that man?" Mr Biswas hated the scene. In Hindi, Shama said that the baby's name was Kamla, and Mr Biswas replied in English, asking who named her; it was the pundit, of course, and Shama mentioned that Mr Biswas was in Hanuman House for Kamla's birth before abruptly stopping her sentence. Mr Biswas held Kamla, and Shama took her back, saying the baby "might get your clothes dirty."

The Tulsis, whether because of their previous conflicts with him, their religious orthodoxy, or a more general indifference, do not acknowledge or care about Mr Biswas's work. By proving that Kamla did not recognize him, Shama reminds him that his status does not excuse his failure to fulfill family obligations. Famous outside the house, he starts once again to insist on speaking English and Shama again ridicules him by taking the baby away out of ostensible respect for his dignified attire.

Later, Mr Biswas met with Mrs Tulsi in Port of Spain, leading him to feel as though "he had won a victory." She did not mention his mysterious departure or his job; instead, she suggested that Shama and the children go to Port of Spain and live with her and Owad, or perhaps buy their own **house**—but if they lived with her and Owad, they would only have to pay eight dollars a month, do housework, and collect rent from the other houses she owned.

Mr Biswas feels that he has won something because of his work, which matters no more to Mrs Tulsi than it does to Shama. While he goes into the conversation intending to make a show of force, in fact he receives something better still: although it is still owned by the Tulsis, he can finally have his own space in Port of Spain.

Mr Biswas felt "the offer was stupendous: a **house**, no less." But he complained about how hard collecting rents would be in order to buy time. He realized he could turn "from a visitor into a dweller," in a house that was truly complete and well-built. It was one of the newest and best houses in one of Port of Spain's newest and best districts, and Mr Biswas felt extraordinarily lucky. So did Ramchand and Dehuti, who were tiring of Mr Biswas's imposition on their space. Since they also felt responsible for his reconciliation with the Tulsis, Dehuti effectively joined Hanuman House, helping out before special occasions and attending events with the Tulsi sisters.

Even as he recognizes how much he stands to gain, Mr Biswas refuses to accept the offer or thank Mrs Tulsi; he still seems to see his conversation with her as a sort of fight. For the first time, he explicitly elaborates what he stands to gain from a house: the opportunity to truly "dwell," to have sovereignty and control over his own space rather than imposing on another's (even if Mrs Tulsi technically owns the house).

The furniture moved yet again, finding ample space in its new home. Anand and Savi were reluctant to move, but after an initial visit Savi began to love the city's lights and gardens, although it took the promise of Coca Cola and "real icecream" (not Chinta's homemade slush) to convince Anand to come. Mr Biswas took his son around "with a sense of adventure" one Sunday, seeking out ice cream, which Anand declared "don't taste like icecream at all." And he thought Coca Cola was "like horse pee."

The family's accumulated furniture continues to follow them faithfully around Trinidad. Although Savi takes a liking to the city for the same reasons as her father—its sophistication, novelty, and sensory pleasures—Anand seems prefers the familiar and certain. The promise of imported commercial goods draws him, even if they sound better than they are.

Mr Biswas seldom fought with Mrs Tulsi and Owad, and actually became friends with the latter, who respected his job and ability to "read such big books in foreign languages." He no longer even resented the way Mrs Tulsi indulged her son, feeding him prunes and fancy milk in "proper milk bottles with silver caps," and began to wish the same for Anand.

Even though Mr Biswas's jealousy for and aggression toward Owad originally got him kicked out of Hanuman House, the two relate over a shared interest in all things literary, refined, and esteemed. With his own status finally secure, Mr Biswas abandons his jealousy.

However, Mr Biswas soon "set about establishing his tyrannies, ordering his children to fetch him things and read him documents, arguing when they tried to wake him up when he had requested, winning complaints from Shama but approval from Mrs Tulsi. He made Shama file his papers, and she insisted on keeping track of their accounts (for they were usually almost penniless). These often got muddled, and although she insisted on her mathematical prowess, she would send the kids to their father for help with math homework. Indeed, he found their books inferior and hated them passionately. He even sent them to Sunday school, until Shama thought he was "resuming his religious war" and he switched to reading them novels. She was busy sending out eviction notices, making her "a creature of terror to Mrs Tulsi's tenants," although she never realized it.

Mr Biswas can only now unleash his "tyrannies" because he has finally gained power in his household: for the first time, he is the ultimate authority over his children, rather than Shama and the Tulsis. He finally becomes the patriarch of his family, something idealized in both traditional Hindu and Western cultures but never possible at Hanuman House. While he sees Shama as a secretary of sorts, her other work with papers is far more important: despite Mr Biswas's work and theatrics, she is actually the one who ensures that the family stays afloat financially and even becomes a slumlord by proxy on the side.

Mr Biswas developed his professional skills, learning shorthand and reading extensively about newspaper management and writing before investing in a typewriter and journalism lessons by mail from London. He wrote excellent articles about the seasons but abandoned the second lesson when the first set was returned after a slew of unsuccessful submissions.

While Shama is busy taking care of finances and the family, Mr Biswas continues to see his job as the single most important component of his self-worth and focus wholeheartedly on it, even if his course by mail appears to be a worthless scam.

Mr Biswas tried writing stories but never managed to finish them—invariably, they told of an older man in an unhappy marriage meeting a younger woman often inspired by an advertising worker at the *Sentinel*. Whenever she agreed to go anywhere with him, "his passion at once died," and he gave up, never to tell her about the wife and children he already had. He forgot that Shama was filing these papers, too, and she often dropped his characters' names into their arguments. He decided to paint the typewriter and seldom used it again.

Like Misir's formulaic stories about bankruptcy and tragic death, Mr Biswas's fantasies are crude expressions of his situation: beyond being unhappy with Shama and regretting his impulsive decision to marry her, he is so attached to fantasy that it loses all charm once it enters the realm of possibility. He is only interested in desires he can never satisfy (which explains his desire to write stories, too).

Mr Biswas planted a garden and bought an expensive combined bookcase and desk, which he stuffed with papers and later began to nest mice. He began to take pride in his expensive clothes and social status. Shama spent little on herself but much on wedding presents. She placed great value in weddings and funerals, and the children in holidays, although they became increasingly distant from the other children in Hanuman House, learning to stick together until they got home and resumed fighting. They loved Mr Biswas's family, which treated them with kindness, generosity, and devotion.

Now that he makes a salary of his own, Mr Biswas spends money to flaunt his status and newfound refinement; Shama does the opposite, spending money only in order to give. This contrast reflects their individual dispositions and the archetypal gender role of a selfless, invisible woman who sacrifices her own interests for those of her self-interested working husband.

Mrs Tulsi elected to send Owad to medical school in England, which devastated a jealous Mr Biswas and alienated many of the Tulsis; Shekhar had wanted the same for himself, and he came for a last weekend visit before Owad left, bringing gifts and seeming excited for his brother's trip. Shama put monumental effort into preparing for this visit, the children were thrilled to eat whatever they liked in the kitchen, and even Mr Biswas felt a fraternity with the men and pride at hosting them. On Sunday, the *Sentinel* printed Mr Biswas's article "I Am Trinidad's Most Evil Man," part of a series on the island's superlative characters. Owad and Shekhar found it hilarious, as the "Most Evil Man" was from Arwacas.

An English education promises Owad social status, the best available job opportunities in Trinidad, and of course the chance to culturally whiten himself; even as Naipaul's characters sometimes recognize the entrenched inequities created by British colonialism, they still idolize all things British. Again, Owad's unparalleled fortune ignites status envy in others—but Mr Biswas is also saddened that he stands to lose a companion, much like when Anand declared he wanted to leave Green Vale.

They went for a swim in the harbor and, joking around, Mr Biswas told Anand to hold his head under water for as long as he could, and then Owad and Shekhar threw Mr Biswas into the water. He surfaced in a rage, and they realized that Anand had disappeared. Shekhar dove under and quickly found him and returned him to dry land; when he came to his senses, he said that "the bottom of the sea drop away," cried, and walked off. They followed him home, where he locked himself in his room for the rest of the day.

Mr Biswas is still profoundly unlucky with water, although the narrator again fails to mention it: after his father's drowning and the storm at Green Vale, his son nearly drowns, and at his own behest. Despite his recent fortune in life, Mr Biswas remains just as unlucky and incompetent as always, and this comes dangerously close to destroying his family yet again.

At work on Monday, Mr Biswas published a complaint about the need for warnings at the harbor, and Anand showed him an English composition, "A Day by the Seaside," about his experience (it did not follow the teacher's instructions but earned twelve marks out of ten). Anand did not respond to Mr Biswas's efforts at connection and was embarrassed because he had to read his story for the class; Mr Biswas became angry and beat him until Shama intervened, and Savi threatened to return to the Tulsis. At dinner, Anand pulled Mr Biswas's chair out from under him, which Owad found hilarious, and Mr Biswas withdrew for the rest of the night. Shama gave Anand money for milk and prunes the next day, which he found distasteful, and Mr Biswas set him up with afterschool lessons.

Both Mr Biswas and Anand transform trauma into writing; Anand's success foreshadows his eventual academic prowess and literary aspirations. Since Mr Biswas is a fictionalized version of Naipaul's father, Anand indubitably represents the author himself. Mr Biswas repeatedly lashes out at Anand because he cannot put up with rejection, even if deserved, from his son. Unsurprisingly, he never apologizes for nearly drowning him. Anand's milk and prunes mirror Owad's special diet, which Mrs Tulsi superstitiously gives him to feed his academic potential.

Tulsis flooded the **house** during the week before Owad's departure, celebrating and throwing Mr Biswas's position in the household into uncertainty. He complained to Shama, particularly about the visitors' effect on his flowers, suggesting that they set up trip-wires but eventually giving up on saving his garden and electing to spend as much time as possible away from home instead. However, when he returned one day to find other people's children—four of them—on his bed, he decided to lock himself inside in the evenings instead. With Owad continuously occupied, he felt a distance between them.

As during Hari's house blessings, Mr Biswas feels marginalized in his own space during the Tulsis' farewell, suddenly reminded that he is not the house's true owner, excluded from truly belonging. When he realizes he cannot even trust the Tulsis with his bedroom, he wages a ruthless campaign to claim any space he can. He is, yet again, completely incapable of sharing.

They took photographs, and Seth came on the last day of the festivities to impose his authority on the **house**. Mr Biswas's article about Owad was ignored, as the family preferred to focus on dressing their children or watching Hari's services. Then, they went to see Owad off at the wharf, swarming the ship when they learned they could say goodbye onboard, while Mr Biswas was busy collecting stories from foreigners.

Seth steps in to replace Mr Biswas's short-lived paternal authority over Mrs Tulsi's Port of Spain house; at the formal send-off, Mr Biswas retreats into his job rather than seem part of the family that does not value him, neither for his role in family life nor for his work.

Owad kissed the entire family goodbye; when it was his turn, Mr Biswas said, "I hope war doesn't break out—" and started to cry. In fact, everyone after him wept except Mrs Tulsi. Three drunk Germans stumbled on board, everyone waved to one another, and the ship took off. Mr Biswas felt "a hole in his stomach" at Owad's departure; he took Anand to a café for ice cream and Coca Cola. Life resumed as usual the next day, "but it would be a different day."

Mr Biswas's bad joke not only ends up coming true during Owad's time in Britain (World War II is about to start), but also shows his inability to admit and confront negative emotions in others' presence; he copes by distraction and deflection instead.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2: THE NEW RÉGIME

With Owad gone, Mrs Tulsi moved back to Arwacas; Mr Biswas fixed up his garden and wondered how long he would be able to stay at the **house**. He no longer had an audience to whom he could address his stories, and Shama seldom cared about his work. They heard that Hanuman House was falling into disarray, with Mrs Tulsi losing her authority and no longer interested in the family. Seth's power was too superficial to fix the family's conflicts, and particularly the sisters' distrust of Shekhar. They even heard that Seth was looking to buy property.

With Owad in England and Mrs Tulsi back in Arwacas, Mr Biswas has the house to himself and his family for the first time, but becomes more miserable than before. Despite finding the independence he sought, with Owad's departure he loses his sense of belonging and comfort. So does Mrs Tulsi, and her authority as the Tulsi matriarch is essential for maintaining order in Hanuman House.

When Shama and the children went to Hanuman House for Christmas, they felt like "complete strangers." The Tulsi Store and people of Arwacas felt strangely provincial, and there were no gifts or festivities, just Chinta's "tasteless and rust-rippled" ice cream. The next morning, Shekhar came with sweets, but the sisters felt abandoned by him and blamed his Christian wife, who was educated and modern, calling herself Dorothy and outshining them all in housekeeping and child-rearing. In fact, they all pitied Shekhar for having married her, but Mr Biswas always got along with her. Savi no longer wanted to return to Hanuman House for Christmas.

Although the children used to see Christmas at Hanuman House as a time of abundance and comfort amidst the family, the countryside seems impoverished and bland after living in the cosmopolitan Port of Spain. While the family is furious at Shekhar for marrying outside their Hindu community, Mr Biswas likely sees what he might have been able to achieve himself, had he chosen a partner based on compatibility and love rather than her family's money and status.

The *Sentinel* had gone from Port of Spain's third most popular newspaper to the second, after only the *Guardian*, which led its owners to feel embarrassed at its frivolity. Mr Burnett became more and more stressed until he was sacked, which he revealed to Mr Biswas over Chinese food. When Mr Biswas returned to work, he was agitated and worried about his own role in the *Sentinel*'s frivolity, expecting to be sacked after more than four years. His fears multiplied: if he lost his job, would his children have to return to Hanuman House? Where might he live? But Mr Burnett came and went, and Mr Biswas stayed.

While Mr Biswas's successful writing probably contributed to the Sentinel*'s rise, now its success obstructs his role in the company: after a lifetime of failing to acknowledge others' contributions to his life and welfare, now Mr Biswas begins to worry that his one contribution to a meaningful broader project will be overlooked and dismissed.*

Soon thereafter, "the new régime started at the *Sentinel*." Facts and seriousness took precedence, and Mr Biswas was transferred to the Court Shorts page, tasked with writing formulaic reports on what the prosecution, defense, and magistrate said in court. Everyone's writing style changed, and the department's new *Rules for Reporters*, full of banal slogans like "REPORT NOT DISTORT," instructed them exactly how to behave and what to wear, even at funerals, about which Mr Biswas claimed he could write a much better "bright little feature." He called it all "just another capitalist rag," and he was glad that his name was no longer printed.

*The paper's shift in editorial standards poses to eliminate the dimension of journalism that Mr Biswas initially found most exciting, both in his work at the Sentinel and his time reading about so-called "*amazing scenes*" on the walls in Green Vale: its flair. Under the "new régime" of "REPORT NOT DISTORT," Mr Biswas's job becomes entirely about mediating facts, not at all about creative expression.*

Mr Biswas had to report the scores of a series of cricket matches, which he did not care about and ruined his weekends. He thought about starting his own magazine, rambled at length about people from work, and took as many days off as he could without raising suspicion, although he claimed he wanted to be fired. He harassed the boys who played cricket in the street and read books about political injustices until he found Dickens, which "ridiculed and diminished" all his own problems and gave him the strength to continue plodding along. He told Anand, "I don't want you to be like me," and they saw the vulnerability in one another and felt a mutual responsibility.

Like his lawyers at The Chase and Seth's financial decisions, the Sentinel*'s leadership operates mysteriously from a distance, dispensing its judgments and orders with no interest in the desires of the people it controls. Mr Biswas suddenly finds himself powerless over his own work and alienated in the place where he previously felt meaningful. As usual, literature provides him respite and inspiration; as he begins to admit his vulnerability, he translates his own desire for meaningful work onto his children, who are poised to fulfill his dreams even if he ultimately fails.*

Soon, Mr Biswas was assigned to write weekly features—serious ones, in which he had to "look beyond the facts to the official figures" and ignore suffering to praise the powerful. He lost all sense of feeling and enjoyment in his writing, avoided reading his work on Sundays, continued to expect a sacking, and barely interacted with his aloof bosses.

While Mr Biswas's new column is more important, this is only because it promises to ingratiate the Sentinel *with Trinidad's most powerful people; despite his obsession with proving his social status, his new assignment seems to reveal his utter* lack *of power.*

The garden began to deteriorate and prices began to rise because of the war; Mr Biswas's wages increases barely covered the difference, and food, in short supply, got worse. He and Shama started arguing, as much as they had at The Chase, and the city began to feel monotonous on the midnight walks he took to avoid her.

Even though World War II is being fought oceans away, it still severely impacts daily life in Trinidad, which remains subject to British rule. As Mr Biswas's sense of fulfillment at work erodes, so does his motivation in every aspect of his life.

One day, Anand came into Mr Biswas's room and stuttered his way through a story: "Once upon a time there was a man who [...] Who, whatever you do for him, wasn't satisfied." Mr Biswas laughed and Anand, humiliated, refused to speak to him for days. He would not eat or leave his room and complained that other boys made fun of him—and his father—at school. Mr Biswas promised that they could return to Hanuman House whenever they wanted.

After at least a decade of vicious arguments with his family, Mr Biswas finally gets a direct explanation of his faults from Anand—but, of course, refuses to take his son seriously. It is telling that Anand chooses to express his feelings toward his father in a story: this is exactly what Naipaul has done in writing this book.

Mr Biswas started taking the kids to Tara and Ajodha's beautiful new **house**, but they returned weekend after weekend to their dull and gloomy lives in Port of Spain. Shama only went once, and she was morose there, feeling that Mr Biswas's family did not like or care about her. The children never wanted to visit her family, and she started going less and less. But she was too shy to make new friends, so she became close with the woman who now occupied Owad's old room and soon "the house became Shama's."

While Hanuman House reflects everything backwards and uncomfortable about communal rural life, Ajodha and Tara's house in Pagotes represents the comfort and beauty the family has ceased to find in Port of Spain. Throughout her entire life, Shama has only ever interacted with family, so her shyness is understandable; but she still manages to take control over the domestic space of the Port of Spain house.

Anand was miserable during the week, occupied with tedious memorization for the "exhibition class, where no learning mattered except that which led to good examination results." He and his fellow exhibition pupils lived more through compositions than their daily lives. He started avoiding school and giving up on his private lessons, while his cousins were taking their brahmin initiations, and he adamantly but subtly fought to join them. He began performing prayers and got himself initiated during the holidays, then quickly shed his devotion.

Anand's colonial schooling is less about education than rote memorization; it has no interest in teaching him to think independently or creatively. Like Mr Biswas, Anand initially found an interest in literature, science, and school because he connected it to his life. Now, his "exhibition" education is about achieving status by showing off knowledge, and he turns to the religious education that promises to reconnect knowledge to his everyday life.

Near the end of the year, Mr Biswas received a letter from Mr Burnett, in Chicago, trying to convince him to "give America a try." He dismissed it as a joke but felt honored that Mr Burnett had written him, began drafting a lengthy reply, tore it up when he realized "how bitter he appeared" in it, and never did end up writing or hearing again from Mr Burnett.

It is hard not to wonder what might have come of Mr Biswas's life had he agreed to visit America; when he finally had the chance to pursue his fantasies of escaping Trinidad, like the old Tulsi men who were afraid to go back to India, he turned it down out of fear and impulsivity.

After the school term, the children were suddenly excited to go to Hanuman House. Shama sewed everyone new clothes, which never made it to a visit. Mr Biswas came home from work one day to see his roses destroyed. Seth was standing outside with two black workers, and Mr Biswas nearly threw a rock at them until "large hot gritty fingers" grabbed his wrist and stopped him. Seth accused him of scaring the children and said he did not even realize that these were rose trees.

Mr Biswas is yet again displaced abruptly, through no fault of his own, due to power dynamics that exceed him and see him as collateral damage. While Seth's power struggle with the Tulsis happens in the background of the novel, it clearly represents the family's struggle between tradition and modernity, as well as the corresponding masculine and feminine forms of authority.

In fact, Seth owned the **house**, and after he and Mr Biswas exchanged some more insults, Mr Biswas went inside and started breaking things. Seth's workers started building a shed for his lorries in the yard; Anand refused his father's offer of a walk and went upstairs to find much of the furniture slightly damaged. Soon thereafter, the furniture company came and replaced it all—it fell under the warranty—and Seth's lorries began occupying the shed.

As after his fight with Govind, Mr Biswas lashes out against inanimate objects instead of the people who have wronged him. Like when Seth and Mr Biswas "insuranburned" the shop at The Chase, here the family again manipulates legal agreements to benefit from Mr Biswas's own self-destructive tendencies.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3: THE SHORTHILLS ADVENTURE

The Tulsis never thought of themselves as settled in Trinidad, which was merely "a stage in the journey that had begun when Pundit Tulsi left India." They talked about going elsewhere or returning, but Mr Biswas could not imagine them doing so. However, when Shama went to Hanuman House to report what Seth had done in Port of Spain, in fact the Tulsis "had decided to move on" to a new estate in the mountains of Trinidad's north at Shorthills. Christmas shopping was stunted by the war and Seth was already at war with the family, having decided to stay in Arwacas, although Mr Biswas could not figure out precisely why. The families' children did not speak, and only Padma ever visited Hanuman House. Two of the Tulsis' cane fields burned, and the family thought Seth might be trying to orchestrate a takeover.

Just like Mr Biswas's insistence that various unsatisfying stages of his life would only be temporary, the Tulsis always have their eyes set on escaping to somewhere they might really belong but therefore struggle to live meaningfully in the present. The move to Shorthills gives them something of a fresh start but only crudely substitutes for their dream of returning to India; they appear to be fleeing dwindling profits and Seth's hunger for power, like Pundit Tulsi fled some mysterious threat two generations before.

People talked most of all about the new estate: its glorious **house**, facilities, trees, and surroundings. Mr Biswas was skeptical, especially of the talk about horses and sheep, and his children were apprehensive about moving to Shorthills. Shama was incredibly morose about the whole conflict, defining their Christmas with her insistence on acting exactly as Mrs Tulsi always did. Sisters passed through their house, and when she occasionally visited Shorthills, she would do nothing but cry upon her return.

While Mr Biswas usually eagerly admires beautiful houses, he instantly rejects the Tulsis' enthusiasm about their new estate. Now that the family is accustomed to the city, a move to the country seems like a demotion in its status and a threat to its comfort. While the Tulsis used to offer Shama sanctuary from her insufferable husband, now the situation seems reversed.

Mrs Tulsi was much better, no longer sick and now engrossed in her task of coordinating the family's relocation. She even tried to convince Mr Biswas to move with them, and eventually he agreed to at least visit the estate. She promised that the buses were always on time—theirs was late and empty—and, deep into the hills, a valley opened, dotted with occasional **houses** and huts. From the last bus stop they walked along a gulley, and Mr Biswas began to notice the beautiful flowers and cocoa trees he was promised. They came to the house, which was hidden behind an enormous saman tree on "Christopher Columbus Road."

Mrs Tulsi's illnesses and moods parallel her sense of obligation to her family; when she has to prepare Owad for the future or relocate the family, she eagerly retakes control and restores the Tulsis to order. Mrs Tulsi's tour of Shorthills is again a calculated performance. Whereas Mr Biswas's previous rural homes were banal village huts, the Shorthills estate is much more remote but also considerably more extravagant; its location on "Christopher Columbus Road" points to the island's colonial history and Shorthills' wild, unexplored surroundings.

Despite all Shama's descriptions, the **house** still astonished Mr Biswas: it was a two-story construction partway up a hill, surrounded by lush plant life and flanked by a cricket field and swimming pool, both out of use. He and Mrs Tulsi walked up the driveway and the steps that made him "feel regal," ascending to the painted timber house. The whole scene "was an enchantment," but Mr Biswas decided it was "time to go home." Mrs Tulsi replied, "Isn't this your home now?"

Mr Biswas is captivated by the house's "regal" colonial architecture and amenities. In this sense, the Shorthills estate is a metaphor for how colonial subjects won sovereignty over their land and retook the infrastructure of colonial governance during the mid-twentieth century; Trinidad's situation is unique in part because virtually none of its inhabitants were indigenous to the island.

The Tulsis moved out of Arwacas, renting out their land and store, selling one of their rental tenements in Port of Spain and raising the rent on the **house** Mr Biswas and Shama were living in. Shorthills's people were of mixed race, "a closed, distinctive community" that spoke a mixture of English and French and enjoyed wandering around the Tulsis' estate until they moved in.

Whereas communities elsewhere in Trinidad are usually divided on ethnic lines throughout the novel, Shorthills's residents are mixed and heterogeneous, shaped as much by the French colonialism of the 1700s as the British rule of the 1800s and 1900s.

When Mr Biswas moved to Shorthills, he felt there were more Tulsis than ever before. He and Shama moved into one of the six rooms upstairs, and across the hall lived a new brother-in-law who immediately found Mr Biswas distasteful—when his son bragged to Anand about his books, which were all by W.C. Tuttle, Mr Biswas called them "trash," and Anand agreed. A few days later, the man (whom Mr Biswas later began to refer to as W.C. Tuttle) confronted him.

Even though individual Tulsis come and go, the family's collective life changes little over time—the sister and their families are still homogeneous members of a growing crowd. He looks down on the new brother-in-law for his cheap and unsophisticated taste in literature, despite their shared interest in it (as with Owad).

Waiting for the promised fixes and improvements to the **house**, everybody started dismantling trees and building temples, and Anand decided to convince the kids to start scraping off the house's paint in an effort to get the Tulsis to buy a fresh coat. Mr Biswas barely cared about these improvements, since his job gave him some distance from the Tulsis, and he was busy plundering fruit from the estate's trees to sell to vendors in Port of Spain.

The estate begins to deteriorate as various Tulsis use it for their own self-interest, taking whatever they want and neglecting the impact their actions have on the family as a whole; as the family loses the common values, purposes, and income stream that used to unite it, it fractures more and more.

Soon, the pool was filled in, and a tent for wedding guests was built on top, as "a whole wave of Shama's nieces was to be married off." Everyone immediately turned their attention to the seven weddings, after which seven fewer women lived in the **house**, and everyone resumed waiting for the needed repairs.

Even though the Tulsi women are the family's core unit, they are still considered property to be married off rather than individuals worthy of self-determination—the seven nameless nieces' marriages are inconsequential and routine.

"Scraggy, bare, bewildered sheep" wandered onto the estate, which became increasingly overgrown and "began to look abandoned" now that Mrs Tulsi was too busy being ill to direct things. Govind destroyed the cricket pavilion to build a shed for cows (including one owned, of all people, by Shama). Occupied entirely with beating these cows, he mostly withdrew from family life. Along with "the reader of W.C. Tuttle," he started cutting down the trees and sending the fruit to Port of Spain. The children helped pick fruit and pull weeds. Without plumbing, "some lesser husbands" constructed a latrine outside and others planted new seedlings.

Without Mrs Tulsi's authority, the family and estate descend further into chaos, which points metaphorically to the risks Naipaul sees in the devolution of power from colonial empires to the people they subjugated for centuries. The house's sources of beauty and pleasure—the cricket pavilion and fruit trees—are quickly and unnecessarily dismantled. At Shorthills, the Tulsis seem less like a harmonious family than a village.

"The man Mr Biswas now thought of as W.C. Tuttle" cut open a pumpkin, dismantled the old electricity plant and decided to build a furniture factory in its place. To build the furniture, he hired a blacksmith from his home village, "a Negro called Théophile," who built misshapen and flawed benches, tables, and other furniture pieces, which W.C. Tuttle promised would look well-constructed with varnish. When they moved some of his furniture in and realized it was unusable, "Théophile was dismissed to his village, and there was no further talk about the furniture factory."

Mr Biswas does care enough about his new brother-in-law to even find out his real name; this so-called W.C. Tuttle's ill-conceived and destructive furniture factory recalls Mr Biswas's obsessive cataloguing of his own furniture whenever he moves, and its misshapen products highlight the emptiness of the Tulsis' belonging at Shorthills.

W.C. Tuttle's next project was buying a lorry and hiring it to the American army, which wanted to build a post in the mountains. The widows thought to build a shack and try to sell them Coca Cola and snacks, and then got a liquor license and hoped to sell them rum, but nobody ever stopped (although one lorry did crash into the shack).

Trinidad's takeover by American military forces is essentially a new form of colonialism: while it provides economic opportunities to Trinidadians (seen here by Govind's lorry), the Americans have little interest in interacting with them (as they ignore the widows).

Despite this all, Mr Biswas remained detached, happy that he was paying nothing for rent or food, and could see his savings increase with every paycheck. "He continued to plunder" amidst the **house**'s chaos. It turned out that W.C. Tuttle was selling whole trees and Govind whole lorry loads of fruit, and Mr Biswas felt ridiculous for his pride at selling a half dozen oranges at a time. They only found out about the missing trees because the estate's overseer—who came with the estate and had nothing to do—finally mentioned it.

For the first time, Mr Biswas finds an adequate balance of comfort and independence at Shorthills: whereas he caused much of the family's drama in the past, now he seems entirely immune to it. While he thought he was taking advantage of the estate's resources, he failed to realize how egregiously the other brothers-in-law were willing to exploit them.

Finally, the villagers decided to fight the Tulsis, filling up the morning bus to Port of Spain before their children had a chance. They simply did not go to school for awhile, but W.C. Tuttle finally decided to take them himself, although they needed to get to school by 5:30 in the morning so he could have the lorry to the Americans by 6:00. They arrived before dawn and played around until the caretaker let them into the school at 6:00. They ate their lunches hours early and, again because of the Americans, could never get home before 8:00 in the evening unless they left just after lunch for the Shorthills bus.

The Tulsis' presence in Shorthills is an uncomfortable imposition on the area's poorer residents; even though they are replacing the previous French settlers, their takeover of the valley is its own form of colonialism. Crucially, the villagers cut off the Tulsis' link to the city, on which they still rely after their move to the countryside; W.C. Tuttle's workaround ends up almost entirely alienating the children from the place where they live.

Mostly, the children just walked in the direction of Shorthills, singing songs at Mrs Tulsi's suggestion, until they encountered a bus with space for them. Eventually, one of the men bought a car, which was prone to breakdowns and often did not even make it. After awhile, the Tulsis abandoned the car, preferring to let the children play on it in the yard. Then, "another car was bought" to replace the first. With these difficulties getting to school, poorly defined sleeping arrangements, and yard work on weekends, the children had a horrible time living at Shorthills and began fighting amongst themselves during the week.

While the children at Hanuman House shared the family's common areas and resources more or less harmoniously and received support and direction from their parents, in Shorthills they cleave off into their own mini-society, separate from the adults, with their own conflicts and divisions. The family's halfhearted efforts to make do with what they can find continue to multiply rather than resolve their problems.

Anand disliked his "weak" sisters. Myna had "a bad bladder," and the young Kamla started sleepwalking. Savi became a source of humiliation for the family after botching a singing performance at school and trying to teach other children how to draw maps. Due to his sense of satire, "Anand was among the strong," although his satire led him to hatred, of others and himself. One morning, he laughed when Savi's hand got stuck in the car door, and Mr Biswas decided he was done with Shorthills.

Anand's role has inverted from his earlier years: while he used to be weak and embarrassing to the family, now he enforces the taboo against weakness, which hinges most of all on the children's social status among their peers. His sardonic attitude begins to resemble his father's and actually betrays an inner weakness of character—a fear of vulnerability.

But first, "a number of deaths occurred." First was Sharma, the son-in-law who drove the kids to school; he fell off a branch, and his widow wailed for days. However everyone forgot him after W.C. Tuttle took over driving. Later, Anand found Hari and his wife sitting gloomily at the dining table and recited a poem about a dead soldier to try and cheer them up; Hari died soon thereafter and it turned out that he knew he was sick for some time. W.C. Tuttle took over his funeral rites, too, but nobody could fully replace Hari's role as the household pundit, and a number of the men ended up sharing puja duty. News of Padma's death in Arwacas came a couple weeks later, and this frightened everyone in the **house**, especially because she died so far away. All the sisters set off to Arwacas for the funeral ceremony.

This series of deaths actually draws the fragmented family back together, much like they previously rallied around their disdain for Mr Biswas. Hari and Padma, in particular, play irreplaceable roles in the Tulsi family; without Hari, the family lacks a religious leader and compromises its orthodoxy; other than being the family's second-in-command after Mrs Tulsi, Padma mediated between the family that owned the businesses and her increasingly power-hungry husband, Seth, who managed and then began taking over them.

When the women returned from Arwacas, they revealed that Seth's new property was an enormous grocery store, and they feared that he planned to use the revenue from it to buy Hanuman House. So many people dreamt of Padma that night that they decided her spirit must have visited Shorthills. More stories of Padma sightings followed, with the Tulsis finding various messages in her appearances, most of which alleged that Seth killed her and led the sisters to curse him. Meanwhile, Mrs Tulsi still did not leave her room. Two of the sheep died, too, and the gully began eroding away.

Seth seems to want more than the family's business revenues: he threatens its foundations by trying to buy out Hanuman House and win power over Mrs Tulsi. Again, he stages a conflict between Mrs Tulsi's traditional but matriarchal power over family and his own desire for a paternalistic Western power over it, which parallels Mr Biswas's. The eroding gully begins to literally divide the Tulsis' new estate from the outside world.

Govind and W.C. Tuttle pursued other business opportunities: taxi-driving and opening a quarry, respectively. The widows started a chicken farm and planted maize to feed the animals, but ended up eating it themselves after the chickens either ran away or got eaten by predators. From her room, Mrs Tulsi directed everyone to start eating bamboo shoots (nobody could figure out which part of bamboo was the shoot), then to drink homemade bush leaf infusion instead of tea, "find vegetable substitutes," and finally try eating bird nests. The widows started eating some of the cakes W.C. Tuttle had hidden for the cows, and the family invented various other new kinds of food.

Like W.C. Tuttle's lorry, Govind's taxi is only profitable because of the Americans. The widows are particularly desperate at Shorthills because, now that the family is no longer pooling resources, they have to fight social and family norms in order to survive. Although Mrs Tulsi clearly wants to save the family money, her demands for culinary corner-cutting also reveal her increasingly arbitrary and ineffective rule over the house.

Mrs Tulsi coordinated the manufacture of various products, from cups and plates to mattresses and cushions. The women who were lucky enough to have husbands fed their children in secret; in the meantime, the widows' children roasted a sheep in the woods, which infuriated W.C. Tuttle. He and Mr Biswas made their wives cook separately from the rest; Mr Biswas decided that gospo juice must be some sort of remedy and made his kids drink it every morning until the tree collapsed. Following this tree, the rest of the cricket field eroded away in the rains and the bushes continued to creep up on the **house**. The widows worked tirelessly, withstanding hateful messages from Seth and doing their best to build a bridge across the gully that was now a gorge. But Mr Biswas could not convince Shama to move, even though she was alienated from her sisters.

The family also begins producing goods for itself; after selling others' products in their store at profit for years, the Tulsis are now forced to become producers themselves in order to make ends meet. Their path is the opposite of Mr Biswas's rise from a family of impoverished laborers to one of comfortable property owners and work in an industry entirely divorced from the means of subsistence. The widows' children even eat meat, which is extraordinarily taboo for the religious Tulsis; while Tuttle seems to resent this for religious reasons, Mr Biswas looks down on their poverty and desperation, which prove his own superior status.

Later, Chinta declared that eighty dollars were missing from her room, and both the theft and the degree of her wealth surprised everyone. She spent days searching for the thief, cursing people and ultimately holding a "Bible-and-key-trial" that proved everyone but Mr Biswas innocent. All the sisters became immediately suspicious of him and his family, and his daughters pleaded for them to move away.

Despite the family's adamant frugality, it turns out that Chinta was hoarding money the whole time; and for the umpteenth time, Mr Biswas is ostracized purely by accident, during his period of greatest harmony with the Tulsis.

Mr Biswas found a spot that was "isolated, unused and full of possibilities," hidden behind a bush on a hill near the estate. In less than a month, he had exactly the **house** he wanted to build in Green Vale: two bedrooms, a drawingroom, and a verandah, mounted on cement pillars, with a corrugated iron roof and glass windows. He spent almost all his savings, but "his ambition had remained steady," although it appeared "idyllic and absurd" now. Transport was exceedingly difficult, and he spent the last of his money on a Slumberking bed. The unpainted house appeared not "to invite habitation so much as decay."

Although Mr Biswas could have easily moved his family back to Port of Spain, he sees a new opportunity to pursue his dream of building a house. Whereas the Green Vale house never lived up to his plans, this one follows them exactly and goes up almost overnight. But his independent spot in the forest cuts him off from the Tulsis and, more importantly, even further from his job and his children's school in Port of Spain. His house seems poised to fade into disrepair just like the Shorthills estate.

Shama did not want to move and hoped the **house** would not be finished—so did the children, who would have preferred to return to Port of Spain. They felt imprisoned in the middle of nowhere, with no source of enjoyment and a dark, dangerous landscape around them.

The children, too, feel more isolation than peace at Shorthills; even though their new house undeniably belongs to them, they feel out of place there and would rather reintegrate into the city's complex social networks.

One night, Anand discovered Savi's birth certificate—listing her real name, Basso, and Mr Biswas's name for her, Lakshmi—alongside various photographs of the Tulsis and his mother's terse letters from a George V. in England. He gazed out on the sunset; when Shama realized that he had looked through the door later, she announced that a thief had come in their **house**.

Anand is, as it were, stealing knowledge. Shama's letters to George V. remind Anand and the reader of the Tulsis' previous proximity to colonial power but also suggest that she may have had romantic options beside the arranged marriage her conservative family pushed upon her.

Mr Biswas sent for Bipti to visit. Her feelings about the new **house** were unclear, and since his children had lost their ability to speak Hindi, they could barely communicate with her. To Mr Biswas's surprise, Shama treated Bipti respectfully, and he never forgot the image of his mother helping to clear the brush. The children were excited to burn the land to make a path to the road. Mr Biswas prepared the land in a way he thought strategic, by building "nests" in various places around the house, and then lit each nest without paying attention to his children's cries about the heat. Only one of the nests actually caught on fire, and the flame proceeded meekly from there. "Do it yourself," he told the children. They doused the leaves and set them all alight, stopped the fire at night and retreated inside to do their homework.

Because the children are educated in British colonial schools, they can only speak English and lose the ability to connect with their grandmother; this shows how far Mr Biswas's family has come in two generations but also demonstrates how the necessary tools for economic mobility in a colony can force people to sacrifice their own cultures. Conversely, Shama's respect for Bipti falls perfectly in line with Hindu culture. For the first time, his entire family seems unified and complete, which gives him an unforgettable sense of belonging and purpose. His meticulous preparations for the fire are foolish, and for once he willingly cedes control of his home to his children, who appear to efficiently do what he could not.

Anand dreamed that he was in the bus to school and his sisters were standing above him, shaking him—which they were, because the fire had grown to encircle the **house**. Mr Biswas told the children to beat the fire back, and they walked to the road. Anand and Savi left the crying Myna and Kamla and repeated "*Rama Rama*" as they walked down the road through the darkness, finally reaching the Tulsis' rudimentary bridge across the gorge and still "alert for the smell of snakes."

Like Mr Biswas's store at the Chase and house in Green Vale, his new house in Shorthills, where he again found a temporary independence from the Tulsis and sense of belonging with his family, immediately burns down. Whether the culprit is fate or Mr Biswas's own incompetence (and now, his children's), the world seems to be conspiring against him, which makes his ultimate success in the days before his death all the more remarkable.

Savi and Anand "heard a heavy breathing," which turned out to be a mule following them, and walked up the stairs to try and get inside, but nobody heard their calls—which were much quieter than they thought. Mrs Tulsi finally found them, believing them to be Hari and Padma's departed spirits, and when they informed the family of the fire, everyone was overjoyed.

Savi and Anand almost fail to contact the Tulsis; their growing distance nearly becomes a complete disconnect. Nevertheless, the Tulsis are delighted that Mr Biswas's house has burned down, since it will force him, Shama, and the children to become dependent on them once again.

The Tulsis marched over to Mr Biswas's **house** and worked together to beat the fire back, which "became a celebration." Mr Biswas insisted that "everything under control"; they found burnt eggs and a dead snake, and in the morning, the house was "in a charred and smoking desolation." Villagers flocked to the house, and Mr Biswas offered them charcoal; the ash that blew throughout the village was, he insisted, "best thing for the land [...] best sort of fertilizer."

Even though they had just ostracized him, the Tulsis come to Mr Biswas's rescue; their support in his moment of crisis yet again affirms their commitment to him. Ultimately, Mr Biswas still refuses to admit his error and proudly (and absurdly) insists that burning down his house was a good thing.

PART 2, CHAPTER 4: AMONG THE READERS AND LEARNERS

Mr Biswas was "released" from the Shorthills house after all the Tulsis' transportation options deteriorated beyond repair, so he moved his family back to Mrs Tulsi's newly-vacant **house** in Port of Spain. He put a "FOR RENT OR SALE" sign outside the Shorthills house. The Tuttles, Govind and Chinta's family, and a widow named Basdai also came to Port of Spain; the Tuttles took most of the house, Govind and Chinta had a room but spent much of their money on expensive suits, and Basdai moved into the servant room, leaving two rooms for Mr Biswas and his family.

Despite their attempt to make do in the country, Mr Biswas and his family have resolutely become city people and are relieved to return to their previous comfort there. Unlike in the past, the Port of Spain house has now become a microcosm of the Tulsi family, complete with its politics and infringement on Mr Biswas's privacy. Having spent all his money on the ill-fated Shorthills home, he is again penniless and indirectly dependent on Mrs Tulsi.

In Port of Spain, W.C. Tuttle played a gramophone incessantly and quarreled silently with Govind over parking space; Basdai started mediating the family's arguments. Despite his brahmanic ways, "W.C. Tuttle was all for modernity," filling his **house** with elegant furniture that inevitably caused more arguments still. One day, Shama ordered a glass cabinet that promptly broke on the front steps and "became another of her possessions which were regarded as jokes."

The Biswases and Tuttles compete to show off their wealth and status by purchasing more and more expensive furniture, but the Biswases ultimately recognize this exercise as conspicuous and pointless. While most of the characters in this book are forced to choose between tradition and modernity, W.C. Tuttle makes do with both.

Realizing that they could rely less and less on the Tulsis, the widows at Shorthills started sending their children to live with Basdai. The overpopulated **house** and quarreling children quickly infuriated Mr Biswas and his children, leading them all to various ailments, as Mrs Tulsi started sending in her friends' children from Arwacas, too. Unable to bear the house, Mr Biswas spent as much time as possible hiding away in the office.

With the Tulsis' hierarchy disintegrating, the widows realize that their children no longer have a guarantee of belonging and support in the world, but must instead fight for their survival; the colonial schools in Port of Spain are, of course, their best chance, and the house overflows much like the city in this time period, when people from the countryside flood in seeking opportunities.

Shama revealed that the family was again unable to live off Mr Biswas's salary, even though he was spending his days interviewing rural farmers who "treated him as an incredibly superior being" even though they were buying land, building mansions, and sending their children abroad to college. Govind and W.C. Tuttle continued to provide transport for the Americans and started growing wealthy. For the first time, Mr Biswas started telling his children about his own childhood, and especially the buried treasure and oil that he never got to capitalize on—he blamed everyone imaginable and wished for another job, even if it meant he had to work for the Americans. Shama mocked Mr Biswas, saying he was too unfit to do manual labor.

Despite Mr Biswas's relative success in employment, the changes in Trinidad's economic landscape due to World War II and the Americans' entrance means that service and labor jobs, which formerly set people up for lives of poverty, were suddenly (albeit briefly) in great demand. While Mr Biswas loves reporting for its social esteem, he continues to find recognition most of all in Trinidad's least educated rural areas, while the luster of American money wins attention in Port of Spain.

News even spread to Anand's school, where he was shamed for admitting Mr Biswas's lower-paying job, and the fact that he called his parents "Bap and Mai" and not "Mummy and Daddy," like Vidiadhar.

American influence has even transformed the British colonial schools—details like one's names for one's parents become status symbols.

Mr Biswas knew he would never leave the paper, and as it started losing readers, it appointed him the investigator for its new Deserving Destitutes Fund. He began visiting "the mutilated, the defeated, the futile and the insane" in their dilapidated **houses**. He imagined that he might qualify, too. People sometimes accused him of exploiting them, stole his bicycle parts, and accosted him for money (which he started to carry around and charged the paper as a business expense). Soon, he learned to "distinguish the applications of the fraudulent." Because his superiors at the paper never interfered with him, he had absolute discretion over the fund and gained "responsibility and power." To his delight, people even offered him bribes (which he refused out of distrust). He did, however, take a cheap dining table from one of them, which ate up the last remaining free space in his room.

Mr Biswas's new assignment hearkens back to his own destitute childhood, although his silence about this speaks volumes about his picture of his own class status. Although the "Deserving Destitutes Fund" appears to be a sort of charity, it also sensationalizes and exploits the stories of the people it covers. Mr Biswas does not value his work for the social good he performs, but rather because it gives him "responsibility and power" over others. Indeed, he more often distrusts and despises than pities or empathizes with his Destitutes. In a sense, he becomes the inverse of his beloved Samuel Smiles, visiting the poor to give handouts rather than preach hard work.

One day, Shama woke Mr Biswas with the news that "some people" were visiting—he worried that they might be eager Destitutes. In fact, it was the Shorthills widows, who were wondering if he might be able to write them into his column, but he felt he had to refuse—they were family, and they were clearly not destitute enough. Soon, Bhandat also sent him a request, and Mr Biswas went to his disgusting tenement surrounded by smelly factories. Bhandat gave him a revolting kiss, and Mr Biswas recoiled, afraid and ashamed, before trying to explain that Bhandat was not destitute enough and realizing that he had fallen deaf. Bhandat's mistress brought him tea, which he spilled on the bed, and he flew into a rage, yelling at her in Hindi (which she did not understand). Mr Biswas rushed home and read "his unfinished *Escape* stories" on the latrine.

Although Ajodha and Seth have long found great financial success by mixing business and family, Mr Biswas realizes that he cannot do so at his prestigious institutional job; there is a qualitative difference between these small businesses and Mr Biswas's work, which requires greater accountability due to his role in the public eye and journalism's ethical codes. While Ajodha and Seth undeniably make more money than him, this is one important sense in which Mr Biswas's job is more prestigious and serves ends beyond self-interest. His encounter with the desperate Bhandat evokes one of the most uncertain and unsafe periods of his life.

Mr Biswas started taking his children to Pagotes on Sundays, and quickly struck up "an easy, relaxing relationship" with Jagdat: although they did not particularly get along or care what one another had to say, they would smoke and drink together in order to break Ajodha's rules (and the law that closed rumshops on Sunday morning). They would always get drunk, then take one of Ajodha's vehicles to the beach or river, although Jagdat was an "acute" drunk driver and always managed to sober up immediately upon returning to Ajodha's **house**. At their lunches, Ajodha would complain about his business problems and request Mr Biswas's help.

Unlike his friendships with Alec or Owad, Mr Biswas's relationship with Jagdat is purely out of convenience. Jagdat seems stuck in adolescence, obsessed with defying Ajodha like an angsty teenager and convinced that he does not belong in his uncle's house yet has nowhere to go—much like Mr Biswas in the recent past, when he lived at Hanuman House. Ajodha begins to see Mr Biswas as a trustworthy confidant, despite his nephew's lack of interest in his business.

Shama and the children soon realized what Mr Biswas was up to, and they were often left alone to contemplate the **house**'s atmosphere of tension and conflict. One day, when Anand asked Ajodha to donate to his fund for Polish refugee children, Ajodha was insulted and replied, "who collecting for you?" Gradually, the family stopped visiting Pagotes.

Ajodha does not merely combine business and family; rather, to him, business comprises everything, and the prospect of charity is so offensive that it leads him to complicate family ties. He exemplifies capitalism's most ruthless, individualistic strain.

Back in Port of Spain, Chinta and Govind were singing the *Ramayana* to drown out the sound of W.C. Tuttle's gramophone. After hours of this, when Mr Biswas would bang on their doors to quiet them down, Govind occasionally shouted insults back through the door. Indeed, Govind "had become the terror of the **house**." His face became contorted and he gained weight; when he wasn't singing the *Ramayana*, he took to threatening people at random; whenever he set his sights on Mr Biswas, the two men's children would fight in turn downstairs.

This war of noises quite openly stages a conflict between tradition and modernity: Govind and Chinta's sacred Ramayana *and W.C. Tuttle's shiny, extravagant gramophone playing Western music. Inexplicably, Govind becomes far more menacing than Mr Biswas ever was at Hanuman House, comparable only to Bhandat. Seizing power through force, Govind is not unlike the Americans in Trinidad.*

W.C. Tuttle was "a useful ally" in these fights, in part because, like Mr Biswas, he saw the Tulsis as "barbarians." In fact, he saw himself as the guardian of brahmin purity and Western civilization alike, and his only fight with Mr Biswas was the quarrel about possessions, which the latter "lost by default" when he ran out of space for anything more. Their next major conflict was "the picture war;" Mr Biswas discovered he liked framing pictures, and W.C. Tuttle started posting dozens of pictures of himself, and a few of his family, all around his section of the **house**.

W.C. Tuttle and Mr Biswas, despite their opposed literary tastes, both see themselves as superior to the conformist, unthinking Tulsis. Curiously, Tuttle wants to stand for the highest forms of both tradition and modernity, and it is unclear whether this reflects the absurdity of his personality (like his endless self-portraits) or the genuine possibility of hybrid cultural practices in the wake of colonialism.

Govind was unfazed by the other goings-on in the **house** and kept up his threats, which led "the readers and learners" to hope he might die in a car crash—he won a driver's safety award instead. But soon, he started taking out all his anger on Chinta, whom he beat often and mercilessly. This led the family to respect Chinta, who gained "a matriarchal dignity" from the beatings.

Govind's pattern of domestic violence recalls Mr Biswas's occasional abuse of Shama; tragically, it goes unchecked because of his formal authority, although it proves Chinta's authority in the family and home. Govind, the former cheery coconut-seller, has transformed in precisely the opposite way as Mr Biswas.

Chinta and Govind's son Vidiadhar began a rivalry with Anand at school, where they were both in the exhibition class. One day, they ran into one another while they were getting their milk at the Dairies and refused to talk—Anand was delighted that Vidiadhar did not know how to order properly. They both thought the other cut them in line, so they never spoke again until adulthood. Their siblings started arguing over who had read more books.

Anand and Vidiadhar's cold war in the exhibition class imitates the continuous conflict between their fathers; at the Dairies, they conspicuously consume foods that symbolize intellect and social class but are unwilling to partake in these together or equally, obsessed with proving their (and their family's) dominance.

Meanwhile, "Anand lived a life of pure work," taking private lessons before and after school and doing homework whenever he was not in lessons. So did the rest of the exhibition class, although they all pretended they had other interests and parroted their fathers' opinions on horseracing or films. One day, he wanted to go to the theater after school instead of doing his homework and managed to convince Shama to give him the requisite change.

Like their curriculum, the boys' social life at school is about memorizing information and showing off knowledge; it is a social performance based on imitating their fathers' authority and never a genuine pursuit of intellectual curiosity. Anand's hard work—the Samuel Smiles ideal, which Mr Biswas has never lived—leaves him miserable and exhausted.

Anand brought Mr Biswas to the London Theatre, where a mob pushed them through the entrance, and they realized they were short money for the tickets—there were no half-price tickets on Mondays—and both insisted that the other should go inside with their lone ticket. Mr Biswas went inside; Anand ran home and lay in bed, Shama yelled at him, and Mr Biswas inexplicably walked inside shortly after, writing in his *Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare* book that he would buy Anand a bicycle if he won the exhibition. The next morning, Mr Biswas awoke in an anxious fit before sunrise, and Anand told his schoolmates that he "hated [the film] so much I left it before it began."

Feeling out of place in the crowd at the provocatively-named London Theatre and realizing that they literally could not both get places inside, Mr Biswas and Anand both bail on the movie. It is unclear what precisely inspires Mr Biswas to promise Anand a bicycle, but he is likely trying to reward Anand for his hard work or offer him another version of the status he sought by seeking out the movie. Of course, Anand's wit saves him in his peers' eyes.

On the Saturday morning of the exhibition exam, Anand crammed while Vidiadhar did puja; the family gave each boy various accessories and pens, good-luck charms and fresh formal clothes. The boys and their fathers chatted outside the school—the others noticed the "H" on Govind's license plate, which revealed that his car was a taxi; seeking to save face, Anand forced the anxious Mr Biswas to leave. After the three-hour exam and the ceremonious collection of papers, Vidiadhar looked delighted and proud, but Anand was "dejected, exhausted and irritable." He and Mr Biswas went to the Dairies, which he did not enjoy, and returned for the afternoon session of the exam. Mr Biswas worried about Anand's scribblings on the question papers.

Vidiadhar's religious preparations and Anand's industrious studying reveal that their rivalry is not just personal or familial, but also represents a perennial conflict between Hindu tradition and Western modernity. Although the exam is all that matters, Vidiadhar and Anand are both anxious about appearances before the test; Govind's licence plate shows that he provides rather than enjoys luxury, and Mr Biswas's concern over the test breaks the boys' taboo against acting cool and disinterested.

That night, when Anand returned home from watching a football match with his classmates, he was sure he had failed the exam—he realized he forgot to answer the easy question on homonyms and synonyms that he was saving for last. The Biswas children despaired; Govind and Chinta's rejoiced at Vidiadhar's apparent success, despite his lack of private lessons. The next Monday, all the boys had similar tales of disastrous mistakes.

It seems that the underdog has prevailed: Vidiadhar appears to have won the war for himself, his family, and his parents' traditional ways. Anand's mistake had nothing to do with his knowledge and everything to do with his overconfidence, perhaps inherited from his father.

At home, Mr Biswas produced a letter from an English judge who had read his *Sentinel* articles and wanted him to join a literary club. He went on Friday evenings, when the rest of the widows from Shorthills came to Port of Spain. Mr Biswas felt "a little out of his depth" at the club, but at least he drank well. He needed to read a work of his own and started another short story—but, as usual, never finished it, for news came that his mother, Bipti, had died.

Mr Biswas is delighted to hear that his secret lifelong desire to use writing as a means of expression (rather than merely for communication) has been recognized and validated by a British authority on the matter. In a curious reversal of traditional gender roles, he goes to the club for leisure while the widows focus on making money for themselves.

Mr Biswas brought Shama and the children to Pratap's **house**, where he was surprised at the huge crowd of relatives he had never met. He felt jealousy, not grief. Shama dutifully wept, Dehuti grasped at the other mourners' clothes in a sort of penance for her illegitimate marriage, and Ramchand helped plan the funeral arrangements. Mr Biswas glanced at Bipti's body and then wandered around, wishing he could be alone, feeling that he had lost something from the past and resenting his wife and children as "alien affectations."

Mr Biswas had scarcely seen his mother in her final years and suddenly feels as out of place amidst his own extended family, just as he always had among the Tulsis—but he still blames the Tulsis for estranging him from his real biological family. Dehuti, too, tried to make peace with her failure as a daughter even as Ramchand faced no consequences for their taboo marriage.

At home, Mr Biswas withdrew from his family and began writing incessantly. Shama tried to comfort him and finally learned he was writing to Doctor Rameshwar, who signed Bipti's death certificate after cursing and berating the family. Realizing his family would offer him comfort and support rather than ridicule and shame, he began drafting and redrafting the letter with Anand's help, turning it into "a broad philosophical essay on the nature of man" that quoted liberally from Shakespeare, the New Testament, and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In a time of emotional turmoil, Mr Biswas again turns to writing, and an agent of the colonial government again interrupts the family's usual traditions in order to insist on an official certificate. Mr Biswas deliberately combines references from the West and East and finally opens his writing up to his family. In processing his despair at his mother's death, perhaps he has learned to appreciate the family he does have.

Mr Biswas still felt the pain of having failed to know, honor, or love Bipti; soon, he started another letter, this time addressed to her, remembering her clearing the brush in Shorthills and welcoming him home in his childhood. He felt that "he was whole again" and read his letter to the Friday literary group. During his reading he grew emotional and then ashamed; he came home and was "noisily sick" in the latrine outside.

After processing his anger, Mr Biswas addresses his guilt and regret in his letter to his mother; although he never produces fiction to read at his literary group, he indubitably finds the capacity for authentic literary expression that has so long eluded him.

Mr Biswas and Shama decided that, regardless of his examination results, Anand must go to college—for one, Vidiadhar was already studying college subjects—but worried about how to find the money. One day, as Mr Biswas tried to catch up on his Destitutes column at the office, a reporter brought him the exhibition results: Anand was third in all of Trinidad; he won the scholarship. Mr Biswas gloated for the rest of the day.

Despite his insistence that he must have failed the exam, Anand wins the scholarship and gets to access educational opportunities his father could never even dream of; this actually happened to the author, who likely never would have been able to write this book without his scholarships to school in Trinidad and then to a university in England.

In fact, seven of the twelve scholarships went to boys from Anand's school; everyone was surprised that the overall winner was "a Negro boy of astonishing size" from the same school, who seldom crammed and preferred to brag about his sexual exploits with older women. All twelve boys assembled for a photograph and spent the rest of the day wandering around town, taunting "copulating couples" in the gardens and visiting the college they would attend the next term.

The victorious and unnamed "Negro boy" at once embodies and shatters racist stereotypes about black Trinidadians—while he is more concerned with sex and pranks than his future, he nevertheless gets to have it all. Anand's own future is suddenly full of anticipation and promise; unlike his father, he is in a position to pursue whatever vocation he desires.

Soon thereafter, the Tuttle children stepped up their own studying, and Vidiadhar was demoralized to learn that he did not even pass the exam. Distraught, Chinta stopped feeding Vidiadhar and started threatening everyone in the household. The Tuttles asked Anand to tutor them and gave him "the only presents he had for winning the exhibition"—a dollar and an "unreadable" W.C. Tuttle book. Nobody mentioned the bicycle, and the school did not even deliver its promised prize: both were blamed on the war. Despite the scarcity, Christmastime was still busy and cheerful. Best of all, the maligned Doctor Rameshwar returned Mr Biswas's letter to his office, and Mr Biswas compiled his booklet of *Twelve Open Letters*.

While the distraught Anand won the scholarship, the overly confident Vidiadhar failed his exam, which reflected badly on his whole family and changed the house's social dynamics entirely. Unsurprisingly, Mr Biswas fails to deliver the promised bicycle despite his enthusiastic support for Anand; like his house, it is a financially untenable fantasy. The Biswases manage to fulfill some of their central aspirations—Anand's education and Mr Biswas's publication—and their gaiety easily outweighs their lack of Christmas presents.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5: THE VOID

Mr Biswas was the college's most enthusiastic parent; he decorated all of Anand's books and was the only one to fill out the homework validation sheet everyone else ignored. Myna, the next in line, passed her examination but did not win the scholarship. Gradually, Mr Biswas stopped worrying about his own future and thought only of Anand's. However, one day, he woke up and realized that he had come to see his unhappy circumstances as inevitable, and particularly that he had "lost the vision of the **house**." He sank back into depression and everything continued as usual in the house: the children went to school, the parents fought and worked, the widows tried and abandoned new business ideas.

Mr Biswas continues to take himself far too seriously, valuing Anand's outward appearance of success in school. Nevertheless, Anand's potential turns Mr Biswas selfless for perhaps the first time in the book. Since his son promises to achieve so much, Mr Biswas feels that he has created a place for himself in the world, and the concrete independence represented by his house no longer matters—until he realizes that, with his son's future set, he can still focus on his own.

However, "suddenly, quite suddenly, [Mr Biswas] was revivified." As the *Sentinel*'s resident expert on social issues, Mr Biswas was tasked with interviewing the head of the new Community Welfare Department; he walked out of the interview not with an article but with a job that paid fifty dollars more every month than the *Sentinel*. He found the department head, a white woman named Miss Logie, attractive and graceful, more powerful and ambitious than any Indian woman he had met. Just when he had stopped daydreaming about finding another job, one came to him. He was delighted at the job security of government work and wrote a sincere, gracious letter of resignation to the *Sentinel*; the paper's reply was dictated, five lines typed by a secretary.

Mr Biswas finally gets to translate his quasi-charitable work at the Deserving Destitutes column into a job that promises to address the poverty that defined his own childhood. His jobs are no longer discontinuous results of convenience or family connections; instead, he has begun to build a broader, coherent project and name for himself. Furthermore, Miss Logie challenges his preconceptions about gender, breaking down the strict division between men's labor in formal markets and women's work in the domestic sphere.

Mr Biswas found Miss Logie a remarkably hospitable boss but was frightened when she asked to meet his family—he said they all had mumps (some of the boarders did). She asked if he might want to bring them on a vacation to her **house** at Sans Souci, and he eagerly agreed, coming to see that holidays might be something more than merely "days on which he did not go to work." Shama agreed, and they began secretly preparing for the vacation—although the rest of the household quickly found out.

Mr Biswas fears Miss Logie's judgment—particularly of his still relatively traditional Hindu family—and gets to take part in the Western ritual of a beach holiday, which marks his rise to an even higher class stratum associated with white colonial elites like Miss Logie. Instead of flaunting his success, as he might have done in the past, he decides to hide it from the others in the house so as to avoid internal conflict.

Miss Logie came to pick up the Biswases in her Buick, but Mr Biswas feared that she might stumble upon the eccentrics in his family and ensured that everyone was ready to go early. The boarding children swarmed around them; fortunately, when she arrived, Miss Logie stayed in her car while the chauffeur directed the passengers and handled the luggage. Mr Biswas distracted Miss Logie with conversation; she said she felt ill and did not want to go all the way to Sans Souci, but changed her mind when Mr Biswas clarified that the other children were just orphans and not coming with them.

The scene of Mr Biswas swarmed by Shama's orphaned nieces in front of his house gives the ironic impression that he is already a deeply charitable man worried about the welfare of disadvantaged Trinidadians. Miss Logie and the Biswases are happy to retreat to their privileged bubble and forget the orphans' plight, which suggests there may be a fundamental hypocrisy in their Community Welfare Department.

From Miss Logie's Buick, the familiar landscape of North Trinidad looked better than ever, and Shama chatted endlessly with Miss Logie in the front seat; Mr Biswas was astonished that his wife "was so well-informed and had such violent prejudices." They visited one beach and continued on to Sans Souci, where Miss Logie turned back, and the Biswases clustered in the same room of her enormous but foreboding **house**. The next day, the family visited beaches, picked fruit and nuts from trees, and began to enjoy the house's solitude and comfort. But, just as soon as they arrived, the Buick came to take them back, and "they dreaded returning to what they knew." Back in Port of Spain, the family pretended to keep up as usual before starting to interrogate the Biswases about their trip, and "the house seemed lower, darker, suffocating."

Even though the Biswases passed the same landscape on their way to and from Shorthills, the experience was orders of magnitude better in a private car. Miss Logie again astonishes Mr Biswas by drawing out intellectual dimensions of Shama he had never seen or engaged with—even though this suggests they may have some secret common interests. At Sans Souci, the Biswases are unsure what to do with the material comfort of a huge house; it is foreboding and eerie to suddenly have so much space, and so they cram themselves into the same room like they have all their lives. They have difficulty adjusting to their newly achieved status.

At his new job, Mr Biswas neither helped villagers develop nor enjoyed performances of song and dance; instead, he went door-to-door conducting surveys, and could even get his expenses reimbursed after filling out a series of forms. However, he did not save as much money as he wanted to; he spent it on Savi's schooling and better food, Anand's asthma treatment and higher-quality suits for himself, which he quickly started obsessing about and showing off whenever possible.

Mr Biswas's job is even further from his fantasy than he anticipated: he becomes a voiceless and replaceable bureaucrat, tasked with performing tasks just as mechanical as the court and cricket reports he was ordered to write at the Sentinel. *His work is no more meaningful than before, but he still eagerly adopts the outward signifiers of his new class status.*

One day, Mr Biswas decided to attend "an inter-colonial cricket match." He had no interest in the game but wanted to appear with a tin of cigarettes and matchbox, as was fashionable. He came to the mostly empty stadium late, said "excuse me" in the appropriate fashion as he made his way to his seat, and sat down to thunderous applause from all sides as everyone in the stands stood up, celebrated the end of the match, and left. (He followed.)

As he tries to mimic the upper-classes' manners in order to feel that he has truly joined them, Mr Biswas first appears to be symbolically rewarded for his efforts with the audience's applause before realizing that he has just made himself look buffoonish by showing up at the very end of the game and taking himself all too seriously.

Mr Biswas soon discovered that his data did not add up, for he was studying "a society that had no rules and patterns." Soon, his 200 questionnaires were spread around the **house**, and he returned to cursing everything he could connect to his dissatisfaction. The real cause was that politicians and businessmen were penning attacks on his department, which they saw as a waste of money, and Mr Biswas had even begun to fear reading the newspapers every morning. He started visiting the *Sentinel* because "with every improvement in his condition, every saving, he felt more vulnerable: it was too good to last."

Even though his job was mechanical data collection, Mr Biswas discovers that he has managed to do it wrong, which seems to validate the political attacks on his department. Much like his father, Mr Biswas grows more afraid the better his life gets, since he gains more that he can eventually lose. Class status does not bring the rewards he expected; instead, it just brings new anxieties.

Mr Biswas sent in his reports, and the government gave him a car, which he decided not to mention to anyone else in the **house**. Govind complained that the new "matchbox" took his parking spot while Mr Biswas read the manual. He soon took his family back to the beach at Belinda, on the way to Sans Souci, but their ride was nowhere near as satisfying as their first visit; they decided to visit Ajodha on the way, and both he and Jagdat were skeptical of the new car's sturdiness and safety. On their way back from the beach, the car briefly got stuck in the sand and the whole family was convinced it had been ruined.

Mr Biswas is still rewarded for his incomplete report and again thinks it would be more dignified to ignore rather than combat the jealous Tulsis; he soon discovers that his family, too, rejects his class predilections as foolish and believes they know better. As he fails to receive the respect he desired and feels out-of-place as a native elite, he learns again that his material pursuits are unlikely to bring lasting satisfaction.

W.C. Tuttle never mentioned Mr Biswas's suits, car, or holiday, but after the Biswases had settled into their new lifestyle, he "with one stroke wiped out all Mr Biswas's advantages" by having Basdai inform them that he bought his own **house** in Port of Spain. Mr Biswas became irritable and combative, failing to comfort himself with the knowledge that they would reclaim space in the house and garage. But, in fact, the Tuttles did not plan to leave yet—they had to evict the tenants living in their other house, so Mr Biswas started hoping at the same time that W.C. Tuttle would fail in his case, which he did until he convinced the City Council to force repairs and moved his family out with little fanfare.

W.C. Tuttle's new house is particularly crushing because Mr Biswas had begun to double down on his emotional investment in status symbols; nevertheless, all along, his cars and suits seem to have been mere substitutes for the house he truly desired. He talks himself into contradictions in order to justify his desire to see W.C. Tuttle fail; he has no good will for the Tuttles because their success makes him focus even more on his own perceived inadequacies.

Soon, Mrs Tulsi announced that she was moving into the spare rooms, and everyone fell into misery, anticipating her illnesses and arbitrary orders. She brought Miss Blackie, Sushila, and of course the expected, ambiguous ailments that left her mostly bedridden, in need of attention, and profoundly bored. Sushila was charged with caring for Mrs Tulsi and bearing the brunt of her wrath; Miss Blackie and a visiting Jewish doctor were her confidants, and the other sisters visited periodically out of obligation. She was much nicer to the sons-in-law and ordered the children around, making them perform for her enjoyment and insisting that they take her favorite remedies. Old friends visited from Arwacas and pundits—a different one every time—came to perform pujas until she tired of Hinduism and switched to Catholic rituals.

Although everyone used to respect and adore Mrs Tulsi, she has now become a burden on the family, which illustrates the impermanency of the status and power Mr Biswas so ardently pursues. Just like him, she invents problems and conflicts to win others' attention and secure their loyalty. Like Mr Biswas, she still treats her caretakers as disposable and blames them for failing to validate her illusions (only Miss Blackie consistently does so). While she no longer truly seems to belong in the family, she forces herself to belong by ensuring that the family organizes around her needs and desires and remaining profoundly dependent on her daughters.

Soon, absorbed in her illness, Mrs Tulsi started insisting that Myna pick out and kill her imaginary lice; Myna did this reluctantly, pretending to find one every so often, and soon became her grandmother's favorite. When the newly wealthy Shekhar visited with Dorothy, his Presbyterian wife, the family recoiled and blamed her for his modern dress and pretensions. After going on vacations to Venezuela and Colombia for some time, Dorothy insisted on speaking Spanish whenever the Tulsis were around so they could not understand her. And Shekhar, who was busy campaigning against the Community Welfare Department, would always ridicule and provoke Mr Biswas on his way out.

Somehow, the Tulsis do not see that Shekhar's marriage to a Christian might have something to do with his attending a Catholic school and socializing among the Western elite; they wanted him to be at once a committed, orthodox Hindu at home and a sophisticated connoisseur of the West outside it. W.C. Tuttle's fragmented personality exemplifies the absurdity of this combination, and so Naipaul seems to affirm that colonized people face an unfortunate choice between their own cultures and the West's so-called civilization.

It was finally time for Owad to return from England, and everyone was thrilled to see him, for "absence had turned him into a legend." While Mr Biswas was also excited to see him, he also felt vaguely threatened, as though he would have to leave. He had about 700 dollars by the end of the year—more then ever but not enough to get a loan for a real **house**. He combed through listings and even went to an auction, to no avail, until one day Shama affirmed that Mrs Tulsi was kicking them out and would allow them to live in one of her decrepit, roofless tenements. He resolved to never speak to her again.

At the same time as the Tulsis deride Shekhar for marrying a Christian, they praise Owad because of his opportunity to study in England. Mr Biswas's eviction from the house to make space for Owad implicitly references the violence of British settler colonialism; people with the advantages of empire displace and drain resources from the needy. And, once again, Mr Biswas is forced to move and lacks any say in the matter.

One evening, Mrs Tulsi stopped Mr Biswas on the verandah to ask about Anand's health before mentioning Owad's flowery letters about England and affection for Mr Biswas. To his surprise, she asked whether he was planning to come back to the **house**, and he eagerly agreed. This pleased him and Shama, although he was angry to have "fallen into Mrs Tulsi's trap and shown himself grateful to her." He recognized that she was manipulating him, as she had since the day they met in the Tulsi Store; he grew even angrier than before, and occasionally violent, making him as much an outsider as Govind and leading everyone to yearn even more for Owad's return.

Mrs Tulsi's messages are inconsistent and mixed, so it is no surprise that Mr Biswas sees her selective affection as a "trap" to win attention and loyalty. Now that he and Govind have become violent and uncouth, the rest of the Tulsis yearn even more for Owad's ostensibly cultivated and wise presence as a patriarch for the increasingly disoriented family.

The Biswases moved their furniture into the tenement and spent some of their time there, the rest in the **house** that was now Mrs Tulsi's. Mr Biswas coordinated politics in whole villages during the day, only to return to his rotting tenement at night. One of his assignments was running a "'leadership' course" in Arwacas, where he stayed at Hanuman House with its sole inhabitant, a widow Seth never found out about. In fact, "Seth had acted wildly" since Padma's death, losing his esteem from the townspeople and getting caught in another "insuranburn" scam before giving up on his dreams of power. Because of this, the Tulsis no longer mattered in Arwacas.

The Port of Spain house has gone full circle: from Mrs Tulsi to Mr Biswas and back again. The fulfillment and independence he achieved proved temporary (they were still fundamentally at Mrs Tulsi's behest), like that of the Tulsis in Arwacas, where they are now irrelevant and even badmouthed. Seth's abuse of the legal system finally caught up with him—for once, justice is served in Trinidad—and the former bastion of Tulsi pride and power, Hanuman House, became an empty ruin.

With Hanuman House silent and decaying, Mr Biswas made an office out of his old room and remembered his past agony there, as well as the lack of belonging that allowed him to be independent; this freedom was replaced with an encumbering dependence on others who were also dependent on him.

Like at Green Vale, Mr Biswas recasts his past as the time of true freedom—he realizes now that, although he has found a sense of belonging, he has sacrificed the independence that he used to have when nobody wanted him around.

Mrs Tulsi's renovations in Port of Spain went slowly, as she underpaid and "regularly abused and dismissed" various contractors, while Miss Blackie comforted her by affirming how unreliable "my people" were. After three months, the work was done, and Mr Biswas was allowed to return; he was confined to a single room as the whole family shuffled to provide space for Owad, but he was still relieved. He thought about his children's futures and particularly lamented his neglect of Savi, who "had grown reserved and grave." He realized that he "missed their childhoods."

Mrs Tulsi's leadership became counterproductive and inefficient: she insisted on an absolute control she could never have and failed to understand that labor norms in the country were different from the city (where people could find other work and therefore choose to reject the paltry wages she offered). Much like Mr Biswas, her inability to consider other perspectives leads her to absurdity. Mr Biswas's claim to have missed his children's childhoods is clearly hasty and self-pitying: Myna and Kamla are still young, and perhaps he is thinking about his own missed childhood more than his children's.

PART 2, CHAPTER 6: THE REVOLUTION

The Port of Spain **house** filled with Tulsis and festivities unparalleled since Owad's departure. The evening before Owad's arrival, Mrs Tulsi was ecstatic, and the sisters decided to stay up all night, cooking and celebrating. Visitors arrived in the morning, but Mr Biswas was frustrated to hear that the pundit took his copy of the *Guardian*. They drove to the port, where the ship was approaching and the Tulsis were astonished to see Seth nearby, wearing a cheap suit and fidgeting uncomfortably before lighting a cigarette and being told by an official to put it out.

After their slow descent into warring, self-interested factions, the Tulsis suddenly return to their old communal unity with Mrs Tulsi at the helm. Mr Biswas, as always, feels ostracized and indistinct in this atmosphere—but nobody is as ostracized as Seth, whose motives for coming to the port are unclear. His fall from grace is obvious in his distance from the family, outward anxiety, and inadequate dress.

As the ship came in, the Tulsis saw Owad "wearing a suit they had never known," with "a Robert Taylor moustache" and much larger than before in every way, such that "if he wasn't tall he would have looked gross." He walked off the boat and joined his family in crying. He kissed his mother, Mrs Tulsi, shook Shekhar's hand, and embraced the sisters before moving onto the brothers-in-law. When he shook Mr Biswas's hand, he "suddenly grew distant" because Seth was approaching. It immediately became clear to everyone that "Owad was the new head of the family;" he rejected Seth's hand, dropped Mr Biswas's, and left to seek out his baggage. He returned after Seth walked away.

Owad is immediately foreign to the family, ugly, off-putting, and distinctly British. He addresses his family from his closest to most distant relations, so Mr Biswas's turn at the end signifies that they may not continue as amicably as before. Seth, the family's old patriarch, may be coming to assert his power or merely to wish Owad well; regardless, Owad establishes that he has usurped Seth's role and formally ostracizes him. After this overt rejection, Seth is never seen again.

The *Sentinel*'s photographer took a picture of Owad, and a young reporter approached to take notes; overwhelmed by the whole emotional scene, Mr Biswas got in his car and drove around the island for some time before returning home to find Owad asleep and the rest of the family celebrating outside.

The photographer and reporter have Mr Biswas's first job from the Sentinel, *and Owad's newsworthiness confirms that his return is as important for the rest of Trinidad as it is for the Tulsis, who celebrate him even while he is fast asleep.*

Immediately, Anand, Savi, and Myna approached Mr Biswas with tales of "Owad's adventures in England"—his rescue efforts during the war, his emergency surgeries on famous people, even a seat in Parliament as a result. The family idolized him, mimicking his tastes—and especially his hatred for "all Indians from India," who astonishingly "looked down on colonial Indians" in return. As Anand started parroting Owad's reverence for the Soviet Union, Mr Biswas decided to go to sleep and marveled at Owad's greatness.

Even Mr Biswas's children are so taken by Owad that they begin parroting stories that seem impossibly outlandish; he immediately imposes his colonial prejudices and ostensibly wise European political theory on them all. It is unclear whether anything he says is the truth; he may have become veritably British, or he may have just learned to imitate the British better than any native Trinidadians can.

For the next week, the festivities continued and everyone would gather to hear Owad tell stories about politics in England and Russia. Mr Biswas proclaimed that Russian names sounded strange, and Owad started passing around the Soviet Constitution, which included the line, "he who does not work shall not eat." He also said that in Russia, they grow different colors of cotton and plant their rice by shooting it out of airplanes. Everyone could find their vocation—even the women—although Mr Biswas's job was simply to "pick the pieces up" after people were devastated by capitalism. But Owad praised Mr Biswas for nevertheless truly being "a journalist, a writer, a man of letters." (In Russia, the government would give him a **house** and set him free to write.)

Owad cannot stand anyone criticizing his insistence on Europe's superiority; there is no discussion of why Trinidad lacks the same resources as England and Russia. The principle that "he who does not work shall not eat" points to Mr Biswas's early days in Hanuman House, when he gratuitously took from the family and refused to work in return. While Owad criticizes Mr Biswas's admittedly menial bureaucratic job, he fairly sees that the protagonist has already found—and abandoned—his true vocation as a journalist, the only job he found valuable for reasons beyond his salary, and promises the attractive fantasy that in Russia, Mr Biswas might win recognition and esteem for his creative expression alone.

By the week's end, all the Tulsis adopted Owad's Communism and also his views on sports, artists, and writers. But "while they waited for the revolution, life had to be lived." Owad started working at the Colonial Hospital, looking after Mrs Tulsi (who "improved spectacularly"), and reading his English medical journals. The whole family started visiting him for free medical care, and as the **house**'s leader, he declared that education was not the only thing worth pursuing in the house: "everyone had something to offer," for in Russia peasants were valued too, and soon the family started swimming, boating, and playing ping-pong.

As Owad mimics Europeans, the Tulsis begin shamelessly mimicking him; "the revolution" points to not only his cherished proletarian revolution but also the way his return has seized power within the Tulsi family. Of course, by giving everyone free medical care and encouraging the athletic ones among them, he begins to put his Communist principles into action, but Russia is so distant from Trinidad that it is practically one of the fictional worlds from Mr Biswas's novels.

When Shekhar and Dorothy came to visit, the sisters held Owad's accomplishments against theirs—but Owad nevertheless grew close to Dorothy despite refusing her attempts to set him up with her cousin (who, he complained, was educated in *Canada*). He spent less and less time in the **house** but continued telling his stories to anyone who would listen, and everyone felt a special personal connection with him.

Even though Owad and Shekhar's lives are both defined by their pursuit of Western values over Hindu ones, the family's residual disdain for Dorothy leads them to idolize Owad and denigrate his brother. Owad's colonial bias—against Canada, of all places—not only reproduces the hierarchy imposed by British rule but also seems to conflict with his Communist insistence on equality.

On Sundays, all the siblings would visit the **house**—the sisters mingled while the brothers played bridge. One morning, Shekhar and Owad argued about modern art, and Anand thought it would be funny to scatter the matches they were betting and proclaim, "Portrait by Picasso." Although Owad hated Picasso, he did not appreciate Anand's joke and suggested he might "look in the mirror if you want to see a portrait by Picasso." Everyone laughed but "Anand felt betrayed," ridiculed despite eagerly agreeing with Owad on everything. Anand apologized; Owad accused him of "conceited selfishness and egocentricity." They were partners in the game, and Anand started playing horribly, losing it for them. Owad blamed him, Anand cried, Owad slapped him in the face, and the whole family watched them fight in silence before dispersing.

By refusing to laugh at Anand's lighthearted joke, Owad reveals his vulnerability. Owad is so attached to his newfound preeminence among the Tulsis that he seems threatened by Anand's wit and feels the need to put him down. Of course, among the Tulsis, Anand is the best positioned to follow in Owad's footsteps and study outside Trinidad. Here, Anand painfully learns that Owad takes everyone's loyalty for granted, but it is Owad who ironically accuses Anand of being selfish and egotistical—Owad certainly seems to be projecting his own pretentiousness onto his young nephew.

Anand visited Mr Biswas, who was calculating travel expenses in a rare jovial mood, and demanded to move out. Anand refused to eat lunch or visit the sea with the family, and his three sisters joined him briefly. Shama asked him to apologize but he refused, and then he walked downstairs, waited for Owad the verandah, and apologized solemnly before returning to his mother and again refusing to eat (until everyone else finished dinner).

As in his childhood (and Mr Biswas's early life), Anand responds to conflict by withdrawing and sulking; while Mr Biswas is too blinded by his own joy to recognize his son's distress, Shama is too concerned with maintaining order among the family to recognize Anand's mistreatment.

Mr Biswas got home from his evening walk and could not sleep because of the dining room light; he asked Shama and Anand to block it with cardboard, but they failed, and he grew furious—at which point the light promptly went out, and he went to bed. But soon, chatter started up again downstairs and Mr Biswas yelled out, which started a shouting match between him and Owad, which Mrs Tulsi interrupted by telling Mr Biswas to "go to hell." Eventually, Owad declared that he could not stand "what I've come back to" and walked out of the **house**. Mr Biswas declared, "Communism, like charity, should begin at home." Govind burst into his room in a rage, then he and Mrs Tulsi argued over who was giving the other notice that he was to move out. The house grew silent and everyone fell asleep.

Mr Biswas loses his final battle for the house that was once briefly his. Owad cannot stand the challenge to his ego and eventually ends up shunning the whole family as a result of this minor argument. While Mr Biswas's ego is comparably inflated, he is also indirectly standing up for Anand. After their tensions reach a boiling point and Owad walks out, his declaration that "communism, like charity, should begin at home" is his crowning achievement in his lifelong war against the Tulsis; he points out Owad's hypocrisy and critiques the Tulsis' bizarre disconnect from the world beyond their family.

In the morning, everyone was uneasy, avoiding one another before learning that Owad had gone for holiday to Tobago. Mr Biswas was anxious and afraid; he felt especially bad for Shama, whom all the sisters blamed for his actions. At school, Anand quickly switched to deriding Owad's Communist and literary heroes.

Surprisingly, Mr Biswas now recognizes the damage he has caused and even takes Shama's feelings into account; the fact that the sisters blame Shama shows that she has grown closer to her husband than the other Tulsis.

Mulling over deleted words from one of his earliest articles ("that conundrum—the housing question—"), Mr Biswas went to a downtown café and asked friends and acquaintances about **houses** for rent. Someone mentioned a man named Billy who swindled prospective renters out of their money, and Mr Biswas wanted to leave—but he was too drunk to drive, and it was too rainy outside to go anywhere. A man he knew to be a solicitor's clerk tapped him on the shoulder, said it was much easier to buy a house those days, and bought him a drink. The solicitor's clerk said that had gone through the same thing.

Mr Biswas again lives his life through writing, but this time the words are his own. His acquaintances' mention of the swindling Billy foreshadows the solicitor's clerk who is about to scam Mr Biswas in a similar way. Mr Biswas's vulnerability to charm, attention, and flattery leads him into yet another confidence trick, and the events set out in the prologue set off on their inexorable course.

Over lunch, the solicitor's clerk explained his situation: he and his mother were living in a two-story **house** in the neighborhood of St James, but she was too old to climb the stairs (which "strain the heart"), so they needed to move. He could only afford to move elsewhere with his mother if someone bought their current house, which had "all modern conveniences and full and immediate vacant possession." Mr Biswas agreed to visit even though he knew he only had 800 dollars.

The solicitor's clerk foreshadows Mr Biswas's future—he too gets a heart condition and can no longer climb the stairs. From the prologue, the reader already knows that Mr Biswas will end up buying this house and drowning his family in debt; although most of the novel proceeded spontaneously, fate now seems to have set in.

As the rain continued to pour, the solicitor's clerk took Mr Biswas to Sikkim Street in St James and pulled up in front of the **house**; Mr Biswas immediately noticed its height, walls, and white trim, and "knew that the house was not for him." He was enchanted with the clerk's courteous mother but felt deceptive, as whenever he went out in his suit and elegant car. It was worse because the house was "so desirable, so inaccessible." He had tea and a cigarette, took in the house's modern and polished interior, and followed the clerk upstairs to see the luxurious bathroom and bedrooms. "Just for a moment he thought of the house as his own," but he quickly gave up and returned downstairs, hoping the house would be inaccessibly expensive.

The reader knows that water indicates bad luck for Mr Biswas—which he seems to always forget—and so it multiplies the sense of impending doom and dramatic irony in this scene. Although he immediately recognizes that the house is too sophisticated for his budget, Mr Biswas's greatest weakness is so often his attraction to unachievable excess and penchant for impossible fantasies. Visiting the deceptive house in his own deceptive suit, Mr Biswas allows himself to start believing that he might properly belong there.

The solicitor's clerk said the **house** was "not bad for six thousand" and quickly lowered the price to 5,500 dollars; Mr Biswas thought of a French story about a woman stuck in debt and despaired at her plight. He said he would "think about it" and, on his way home, could not have imagined that the house would "become familiar and even boring" in his five remaining years of life.

Although he rationally understands the horrible risks of debt, Mr Biswas is flattered, not put off, by the clerk's suspicious and immediate price drop. The two dimensions of his social striving pull him in opposite directions: one says that debt will destroy everything he has worked for, and the other says that the house is precisely what he has always worked for.

Mr Biswas returned home with a headache and fell asleep; the narrator laments that, had Mr Biswas seen the **house** under different conditions and walked around it to see its "absurd shape," incomplete roof, and shoddy staircase, he might have understood its imperfections. But "he had only a picture of a house cosy in the rain, with a polished floor, and an old lady who baked cakes in the kitchen." With everything happening so fast, 5,500 dollars started to seem "less inaccessible."

As when he married Shama or jumped on a random bus to Port of Spain, Mr Biswas begins to ignore his conscience and lean toward impulse instead, banking on hope and feeling proud to have found an opportunity that is obviously too good to be true. Of course, this time the reader already knows that luck will not be on his side.

The next evening, Mr Biswas awoke to Shama announcing a guest outside: it was "a respectably dressed Negro of the artisan class" who wanted to buy his **house** in Shorthills and gut it for materials. The visitor gave Mr Biswas 400 dollars. While 800 dollars "are petty savings," 1,200 dollars means "real money;" Mr Biswas put a deposit on the house the next day and even remembered to request an official stamped receipt. Shama cried when he told her, and when their niece Suniti criticized him, he told her to go look after her goats (which he made up to annoy her).

With no warning or expectation, Mr Biswas suddenly has thousands rather than hundreds in his bank account. This cosmetic difference, insignificant in relation to the house's full price of nearly 6,000 dollars, nevertheless inflates his ego and leads him to make bad financial decisions over Shama's protests and other criticisms from the family. All the while, he believes he is being prudent by getting the stamped receipts whose absence defrauded him at The Chase.

Mr Biswas and Shama argued about the **house** and, although he began to worry, "he lacked the courage to go back yet found the energy to go ahead." He decided to visit Tara and Ajodha; his aunt was excited for him to finally leave the Tulsis, and his uncle loaned him the money "as a petty business transaction" at eight percent interest over five years. After eating with them, he drove away and realized he was now indebted and deceiving Ajodha about his unpaid car loans and inability to pay back the house on his civil servant's salary.

Although Tara continues to show affection and concern, Ajodha never breaks out of his business mindset and insists on profiting what should be aid to his nephew. Meanwhile, Mr Biswas sees that he is doing precisely what he most feared just a few pages ago, but prefers as always to maintain his pride and defer consequences into the uncertain, foreboding future in order to get one closer to his fantasy in the present.

Mr Biswas could have rescinded his offer when the family visited the **house** that Friday, although Shama refused to get out of the car and was "overcome by anger and dread." The children were charmed by the solicitor's clerk's mother and the house's luxurious furnishings—in the dark, they too missed "the crudity of the construction." They were thrilled to have "something so new, so clean, so modern, so polished."

When he has an opportunity to deliberate about action, Mr Biswas insists on suppressing his conscience and blindly following his impulses instead; because he has financial control over his family, there is nothing Shama can do to stop him, even though she understands the gravity of his mistake.

When Owad returned from Tobago, Mrs Tulsi grew tearful, spinning "a lengthy tale of injustice, neglect and ingratitude" for her daughters. However, she failed to win Owad's attention, and "almost as suddenly as it had started, talk of the revolution ended."

Mrs Tulsi's sob story seems much like Mr Biswas's own self-indulgent laments about his fate and bad luck—or, perhaps, the novel itself.

PART 2, CHAPTER 7: THE HOUSE

The solicitor's clerk moved out as soon as he received payment, and in three days Mr Biswas brought his family back to Sikkim Street. In the afternoon sun, the **house**'s interior was sweltering, and the house no longer felt spacious nor cosy. The Biswases realized that the staircase was "too plain," supported by rotten pillars and prone to swaying in the breeze. There was no back door or drainage in the yard; the windows could not close, and the front door blew open in the wind; another door would not open at all, and the lattice work was uneven and broken. Mr Biswas cursed the solicitor's clerk as Shama suggested possible repairs.

Moving in during normal weather conditions, the house's imperfections are immediately apparent; its cosmetic beauty hides its rotten construction, but as usual Mr Biswas does not allow himself to feel regret until it is already too late. While Mr Biswas casts blame for and despairs over the house's condition, Shama is astonishingly practical and composed even though she vehemently opposed his purchase from the start.

Eventually, the Biswases stopped reporting the numerous new imperfections they discovered; they were still living at the Tulsi **house** as they fixed up their new one. They had to pay rent on the land and the rediffusion radio set, in addition to the interest and cost of repairs; Mr Biswas "was discovering commitments almost as fast as he discovered the house." They had to hire painters and sanitary engineers—borrowing money from the widow Basdai to pay for them—but finally the house was ready and they brought in their furniture, which suddenly looked "unfamiliar and shabby and shameful" on the back of the moving lorry. They unpacked and ate in near silence that night; when he went upstairs to bed, Mr Biswas felt the floor shaking and worried that it might start to sink.

Unlike in his fantasies, finally having his own house does not relieve Mr Biswas of all his financial obligations nor even, at first, his dependence on the Tulsis. With all their furniture exposed on the back of a lorry, finally poised to reach its final home, they realize not only that they have accumulated it nearly at random, but also that it is all they have accumulated—the only mark they have made on the world until now. Just as the house was made attractive by context (the lack of sun, the solicitor's clerk's furnishings, his mother's cakes) the furniture is suddenly hideous on its own, without context.

When Mr Biswas finally approached their "impassive and sleepy" Indian next-door neighbor, the man mentioned Mr Biswas's repairs, and Mr Biswas in turn complemented the man's **house**. The man revealed that the solicitor's clerk built the whole house himself, and "the man was a joke, man. I don't know how the City Council pass a house like that." The man, proud of his "solid, well-made house," responded to Mr Biswas's insistence that his own was a "strong little house" by pointing out that the pillars were made of hollow bricks. In fact, the solicitor's clerk was a hobbyist who had done the same thing elsewhere, all over Port of Spain. But he couldn't get anyone to buy the St James house for the hefty price of "four five." He pointed down the street, at "a new neat bungalow" that also sold for "four five."

The narration implies that the solicitor's clerk might have been able to get his shoddy construction approved due to his position in the legal system; as with the opportunistic insurance policies and dishonest lawyers that play so grand a role in Mr Biswas's dealings with the Tulsi businesses, here the law figures more as a tool for people to gain power and wealth than an institution to ensure the just distribution of them. Mr Biswas was swindled because of the law, not in spite of it, and eagerly paid a whole thousand dollars above the house's actual price.

The Tuttles visited soon thereafter, and the Biswases frantically arranged the **house**'s interior to make it look as it had when they first saw it. With their efforts, "the Tuttles were taken in!" They were clearly jealous of the Biswases' house and explained that their own house was old but "full of room." Shama called her family's new house "small and nice," and W.C. Tuttle underhandedly replied that it was "nice and small." Since it was night, the Tuttles did not notice the staircase's weakness, and the Biswases soon "forgot the inconveniences of the house and saw it with the eyes of the visitors."

Just like the solicitor's clerk did for Mr Biswas's first visit, the Biswases carefully groom the house to prepare for the Tuttles—it again briefly becomes a status symbol rather than an adequate place to live, and despite their ongoing rivalry with the Tuttles, the Biswases remember how well they appear to live when they are forced to view the house from an outsider's perspective.

The Biswases planted a garden; the children soon learned to forget their previous **homes**, although occasionally something sensuous reminded them of their past's now distant pleasures. Mr Biswas dreamed about hurting the solicitor's clerk, who showed up unannounced on their doorstep one day. The clerk did not respond to Mr Biswas's insults and instead talked calmly about his mother and new building project in the empty lot next door. Eventually, he told Mr Biswas to "mind your mouth!" and threatened to send him to jail. After he left, Shama brought a ruler and helped Mr Biswas measure the lot; in fact, their deed went twelve feet beyond the fence, and they planted a tree in the extra space.

After all, the family's old houses did turn out to be more or less temporary, at least in retrospect; it is as though all of those other residences were all leading up to this house on Sikkim Street, like steps along the family's path to independence and freedom (even if in some of the old houses were certainly more comfortable and sturdy). Mr Biswas cannot retaliate against the dishonest solicitor's clerk—like when he tried to sue Mungroo, his attempts to demand justice actually have the opposite effect, putting him in danger instead.

EPILOGUE

Owad married Dorothy's cousin. Later that year, the new couple moved to San Fernando, a city in the South of Trinidad.

Originally, Owad criticized Dorothy's cousin for her Canadian education; by marrying her nonetheless, he demonstrates his hypocrisy. Since he is the Tulsis' new patriarch, it is understandable that the Epilogue opens with his fate.

Influenced by the Americans, popular opinion on the island started to prioritize self-improvement over Community Welfare, which led to the abolition of Mr Biswas's department and his return to the *Sentinel* at a lower wage than even before; his car was paid off, but now he could not even pay the interest on his **house.** He tried and failed to sell the car.

The American intervention in Trinidad ends up spreading the Samuel Smiles ideology of personal responsibility and hard work far and wide, replacing government provisions with capitalist industry.

Mr Biswas soon began to realize Shama's "great powers of judgment," although she falsely predicted that the debt would take care of itself while he watched it stagnate as his five-year deadline approached. He lost interest in his work, feeling that he had waited for something better all his life and now lacked anything to wait for—"except the children." Savi and Anand both went abroad for school, which eliminated any possibility of repaying the debt in five years. Mr Biswas also worried about Anand, who occasionally wrote sardonic letters, and awaited his return.

Astonishingly, in the closing years of his life, Mr Biswas finally begins to respect and appreciate Shama, which he seemed incapable of for so long. Now that he has obtained the house he was always waiting for, Mr Biswas does not know what to do with himself—it feels as though, like his mother after his own marriage, his life's work is complete and he might be entitled to die with satisfaction and dignity in the coming pages.

One afternoon, Shama rushed to the Colonial Hospital to meet Mr Biswas, who had collapsed at work—not because of his notorious stomach, but because of his heart, "about which he had never complained." After a month, he returned to a **house** more luxurious and pristine than ever, although he could not climb the stairs—which was a problem because the bathroom was upstairs, and it was invariably sweltering downstairs in the afternoons. He worried about his heart, his five years, and Anand.

Curiously, Mr Biswas's hospitalization is introduced from Shama's perspective and not his own: his story is now a collective enterprise, carried on by others in his life, no longer self-narrated. Curiously, his injury is precisely what the solicitor's clerk had worried about for her mother: a heart problem, likely related to climbing his house's stairs.

Mr Biswas eventually returned to work (although for half-pay) and started climbing steps again; he became puffy and dark, as though dying from the inside out. Soon, he was back in the hospital, his condition much worse than before. Savi promptly wrote to announce her return, and Anand sent another "strange, maudlin, useless letter." After six weeks, he came home to no warm welcome as before; he quit smoking but put on weight and started looking worse and worse, getting "more and more irritable."

Mr Biswas's dying does not seem to take place in his moments of acute crisis but at home, in the times between his hospital visits, as he gradually deteriorates and diminishes physically and emotionally. As an aside, V.S. Naipaul's own correspondence with his father—no doubt the model for Anand's letters to and from Mr Biswas in the latter's final years—have been published as a volume and are an interesting companion read to this novel's final pages.

Then, Mr Biswas got fired, with three months' notice, and felt that Anand was the only person who could possibly understand him or assuage his pain. He wrote to his son—with no reply—and then to the Colonial Office, which led Anand to reply with a short request to come home. However, he changed his mind soon thereafter.

When he loses the only job that ever rose to the level of a vocation, Mr Biswas turns to the distant son who promises to carry on his writerly ambitions; if Naipaul is Anand, this passage suggests that this novel may be his way of honoring his father and repenting for his absence at this crucial stage of life.

"Everything seemed to grow bright" at the very end: Savi came back to an outpouring of love from Mr Biswas and a job that paid far more than any of his. In a letter to Anand, Mr Biswas asked, "How can you not believe in God after this?"

Savi's return fulfills Mr Biswas's dream to see his children succeed; her job both promises to save the family from their crippling debt and demonstrates that Mr Biswas's investment in his children's education has paid off.

Mr Biswas always felt guilty about the "grotesque story" he wrote about a dead explorer for the *Sentinel*. He asked that he would be memorialized with the headline "ROVING REPORTER PASSES ON," but the *Sentinel* went with "JOURNALIST DIES SUDDENLY." Shama's sisters and other mourners flocked to the **house** on Sikkim Street, testing its limits but not knocking it down. Mr Biswas was cremated next to a muddy stream, and then everyone returned home.

Fittingly, the reader does not learn exactly how or when Mr Biswas dies; while his birth is recorded only in the local register of village rumor, his death is announced through the formal channel of the media. His family, finally seeming complete in the final days of his life, comes together from around Trinidad to honor his memory and demonstrate his belonging to their social world, before returning to his greatest gift to them: a home of their own.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Jennings, Rohan. "*A House for Mr Biswas*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 25 Sep 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Jennings, Rohan. "*A House for Mr Biswas*." LitCharts LLC, September 25, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-house-for-mr-biswas.

To cite any of the quotes from *A House for Mr Biswas* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Naipaul, V. S.. A House for Mr Biswas. Vintage. 2001.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Naipaul, V. S.. A House for Mr Biswas. New York: Vintage. 2001.