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Michael K, the simple-minded son of Anna K, is raised in a state institution and finds work as a gardener in the city of Cape Town. When his mother becomes ill, he quits his job and tries to move her back to her birthplace in the country, Prince Albert. After failing to untangle the bureaucracy required to get a travel permit (and with his mother's health declining), "K" builds a cart out of scrap and begins the journey on foot (pushing his frail mother in the cart). After being turned back once at a checkpoint on the edge of the city, K succeeds in getting out of town, but his mother dies soon afterwards. K is given her ashes and he proceeds towards Prince Albert. En route, he is detained for not having travel papers and he is assigned to a work detail on a train. When the job is finished, K leaves and continues on to Prince Albert.

This study guide includes the following sections: Plot Summary, Chapter Summaries & Analysis, Characters, Objects/Places, Themes, Style, Quotes, and Topics for Discussion.

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