

Fiela se kind (Engels)

The narrative begins on a farm in Wolwekraal, situated in the Knysna Forest of South Africa. Fiela Komoetie, a native black woman, spends much of her time tending to her farm and selling ostrich feathers to provide her family a comfortable living. On the farm, Fiela also milks goats, harvests aloe, raises chickens, and sells animal skins. Since race relations between blacks and whites are still volatile, owning a farm as a black African woman is no small feat. When Fiela isn't tending to the fields, she's keeping an eye on her children Kittie, Dawed, Emma, and Tollie. Fiela's ex-con husband, Selling, becomes too ill to help run the farm.

One day, out of nowhere, a three-year-old white boy shows up on Fiela's doorstep. Without a note or a clue as to how he got there, Fiela takes the boy in without a second thought. She begins to care for the boy intimately, as if he were her own flesh and blood. Fiela names the boy Benjamin, and proceeds to raise and educate him for nine years. Indeed, Benjamin never would have received the same open-minded education had he lived with a white family. Benjamin assimilates with his new family members and black community without a hitch. He becomes one of Fiela's own.

Nine years later, a pair of government census takers shows up at Fiela's farm. Already suspicious of a white boy living with a black family, an inappropriate dynamic given the racially segregated country, Fiela's greatest nightmare comes to fruition. The census takers rip Benjamin away from Fiela, placing him in the custody of the van Rooyen family, a white clan of backwoods lumberjacks. Elias and Barta van Rooyen claim that Benjamin is their long lost son, Lukas, who went missing in the forest nine years ago. Despite the skeleton of a small child being discovered seven months after Lukas' disappearance, the authorities still believe Benjamin could be the missing van Rooyen boy.

Although Fiela knows in her heart that Benjamin is not Lukas, she can do nothing but watch the government take her beloved child away from her. Fiela makes an impassioned plea to Mr. Goldsbury, the Landdroos (Magistrate), to allow Benjamin to remain in her care. Mr. Goldsbury denies Fiela, ordering Benjamin to live with the white van Rooyen family.

Now forced to adapt to a way of life he does not know, twelve-year-old Benjamin struggles with his sense of identity and place in the world. Bounded by the dark forest woods, starkly opposed to the open farmland of the Long Kloof region (Wokweraal), Benjamin can't quite adjust to his new environment. The van Rooyen's foist a new identity on the boy, calling him Lukas and forcing him to be someone he is not. Although the van Rooyen's whiteness is deemed superior, it becomes clear Benjamin's life has changed for the worse.

As time goes on, Elias becomes more abusive toward Benjamin. Elias greedily exploits his sons, including Benjamin, for his own personal enrichment. During a hunting expedition to procure ivory tusks, Elias is almost trampled to death by an elephant. After that, Elias lives in fear of elephants. Elias is also a misogynistic abuser that treats his wife and daughters ruthlessly. He berates his daughter, Nina for being stupid, feckless, and constantly nagging. Over the course of several months living with the van Rooyen family, Benjamin realizes he wants no part of their way of life. Benjamin longs for his old ways in Wokweraal.

Despite developing romantic feelings for Nina, who may or may not be his sister, Benjamin's sense of impropriety and displacement becomes too strong to ignore. Benjamin is ordered to visit a courthouse, where he sits among scoffing strangers and reflects on his own identity. All Benjamin wants is the freedom to choose his place in the world. This notion of choosing who and what to be plays to the theme of liminality. Benjamin takes up sailing at one point, learning how to row from a sailor named Kaliel September and works on ship for Captain John Benn.

Although raised by a population deemed inferior by white authorities, Benjamin (now a young man) comes to realize that this kind of institutional racism is immoral and fallacious. In the end, Benjamin breaks free from the imprisonment of the van Rooyen family and white society at large. Benjamin follows his heart, hews to the sense of morality instilled in him by Fiela, and returns to the place he knows best and loves most: the Komoetie family. Above all else, Fiela Se Kind exemplifies the triumph of love over racial difference.