

## **Blindness**

By Jose Saramago

Reviewed by Maisem Jaloudi

Blindness strikes a man while he is at a cross light. Suddenly he can no longer see. A white blindness saturates his sight. There is no explanation for his blindness. His eyesight was perfectly fine moments before while he was waiting for the light to turn green. What has happened to his sight?

A thief takes advantage of the suddenly-turned-blind man. After escorting the blind man home, the thief steals his car. It isn't long before the thief goes blind. Is this blindness contagious?

The blind man goes to an ophthalmologist's office to get his eyes checked out. The doctor doesn't find anything wrong with the man's eyes. Is he really blind?

A girl with dark glasses, a young boy with a squint and an old man with cataracts were also at the ophthalmologist's office the same day the blind man received his check up. Did he infect the other patients?

They go blind soon after.

In an effort to thwart the blindness epidemic, the Ministry of Health contains infected individuals in an asylum. People that were in contact with the individuals that turned blind were also brought to the asylum. The number of people in the asylum rapidly increases over time. Soon there are not enough beds for everyone to sleep on.

The ophthalmologist also goes blind. He is sent to the asylum after contacting the Ministry about the patient who suddenly went blind. His wife goes with him after claiming that she is blind as well. However, the doctor's wife did not go blind.

Soldiers guard the doors to the asylum. They provide food for the blind and make sure the blind do not escape. They live in constant fear of contracting the white blindness.

Problems occur within the asylum. There is not enough food for the blind prisoners. The blind fight among themselves. Where is the justice?

The doctor's wife plays an important role in the asylum. As chaos starts to take over within the asylum, the doctor's wife helps her group as best as she can with her precious sight.

In Jose Saramago's symbolic novel *Blindness*, an uncommon discrimination is described that closely resembles the discrimination of the real world. The suffering the blind go through in the asylum mirrors the suffering experienced by people today. Discrimination occurs in many different forms in today's society and Saramago's white blindness story eloquently sheds light on how oppressive and harsh people can be to one another.

More blind people are brought to the asylum. An unforgivable group of thugs start to stir things up in the asylum. They take control of the food supply because they have a gun. The thugs demand

valuables in exchange for food at first and then demand women. The thugs rape the women brought to them. This chapter in *Blindness* might be hard to read for some people because it is completely raw and inhuman:

“She raised the suddenly dislocated body, the legs covered in blood, her abdomen bruised, her poor breasts uncovered, brutally scarred, teeth marks on her shoulder where she has been bitten.”

The story becomes more chaotic when the asylum gets burned down and the blind escape into the world of the seeing. Any form of organization that was once established in the asylum is broken. The doctor's wife witnesses the state the city has gotten itself into. Everyone has turned blind. The people struggle to survive by trying to find food and shelter. The blind raid houses and shops in search of anything edible.

The doctor's wife experiences the horrors in full detail. She often wishes she could be blind so she didn't have to see how the blind struggle to live.

Throughout the novel, questions arise in the reader's head. What is this blindness? Why are the blind treated this way? Saramago does not explain why or how the white blindness occurred. Many readers may want to know the cause of the white blindness and may become disappointed when the last page is turned. The white blindness is not explained because it would avert the main reason of the novel, to not simply look but to truly observe the world: “We are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see.”

In the novel that evokes many questions, *Blindness* will not disappoint readers interested in opening their minds to the harsh reality of the world.