This is a book describing the experiences of a woman who cares for individuals with HIV and AIDS. She is a worker for a program called Urban Community Services, UCS for short. It is her duty to visit these individuals and care for them in their last stages of the disease. This care includes cleaning, cooking, washing, and general supervision. She is not allowed to administer drugs, only the visiting nurses can provide medical assistance.

The real story behind this book lies not within her general duties but rather her role as she develops relationships with many of her patients. The condition of her patients varies widely however one factor remains constant, they all have a disease for which there is no cure. The narrator struggles with this as she works to make the last days of her patients lives more comfortable. As she cares for individuals and becomes closer to them she knows that they will inevitably pass on. Some of their conditions include loss of appetite, open sores, bed sores, and just general deterioration and weakness of the body. Many individuals are on long waiting lists for a room in a hospice, a place that will provide 24 hour supervision for AIDS patients. The realization that a room at a hospice means they will never return home, and never recover is something many characters struggle with. When the time comes to move into the hospice many refuse to go or make excuses why they can’t leave their homes.

She describes the living conditions of many individuals in their last days with this disease; however it isn’t until the very last few pages that she actually describes the passing on of one of her patients. For all the previous characters it is simply implied or assumed that the character dies, but the last few pages provide the reader with an emotional climax. It describes the final minutes and a woman’s life as she is surrounded by family and loved ones. It is a beautiful depiction of the gathering of all people affected by the disease, not simply the infected individual. As the infected individual dies the rest of those affected are also cured of the disease and able to begin recovering emotionally.

This book provides a name, face, environment, and emotional impact behind the countless statistics of AIDS in the US. For many people such as me, AIDS seems rather distant; I personally have never seen or known anyone go through this debilitating disease. This book describes the struggles of the families as well as the subjects as they cope with AIDS. She talks about current AIDS treatments and seems pessimistic about not only their efficacy but also their purpose. It is her duty to care for individuals in their final stages of the disease. These final stages are prolonged with treatment but the outcome is still the same, death. It would be easier on her emotionally if her patients lived for 6 months as compared to 2 years. She would have developed a much stronger relationship with them after 2 years making it more difficult on her when they pass.

With all the death and illness throughout the book there is an undeniable silver lining. There is the hope that the suffering of the patients will cease as the disease consumes the patients’ physical body. There is also the hope that in the future care will continue to be provided for AIDS patients by families, loved ones, volunteers, and programs such as the UCS.