

# **Bastard Out of Carolina Study Guide**

**Bastard Out of Carolina by Dorothy Allison**

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# Plot Summary

*Bastard Out of Carolina* spans the life of a young girl named Ruth Anne, but dubbed Bone when an uncle speculated that the new baby was, “no bigger than a knucklebone.” The book focuses on Bone’s life from the age of five through thirteen.

The story takes place in Greenville County, South Carolina, and centers around the Boatwright family: Granny, Anney, Raylene, Alma, Ruth, Earle, Beau, and Nevil. They are dirt-poor, hard drinkers, fiercely loyal to one another, and known for their quick, violent tempers.

Anney is Bone’s 16-year old unwed mother. Bone is born after a car accident initiates an early labor. Because Anney is unconscious after the birth, and because her family can’t name the father of the child, Bone’s birth certificate is issued with the word “Illegitimate” stamped across the bottom in large red letters. Anney spends years trying to get the offending word removed but with no success.

At 17, Anney marries Lyle Parsons and gets pregnant almost at once. They are happy together and Lyle vows to adopt Bone. Unfortunately, Lyle is killed in a car accident. Anney is left with two small girls she cares for by working as a waitress at the White Horse Café.

Glen Waddell enters Anney’s life a few years later. The black sheep of the Waddell family, he woos and wins Anney with his persistence, his interest in her girls, and his open devotion to her. As a side incident during this time, the courthouse burns to the ground and Anney celebrates by burning Bone’s birth certificate.

Anney gets pregnant again, and the night she goes to the hospital, Glen begins to show his true colors. He molests Bone while they sit in the car waiting for the new baby to be born. While she isn’t sure what has taken place, she knows it hurt and made her feel bad. Anney loses the baby, a boy, and is told she can never have more children.

Glen seems to decline from that point; he goes through a number of unimpressive jobs, they move constantly to stay ahead of bill collectors, and Anney has to go back to work to help supplement the family income. Glen continues to touch Bone when Anney isn’t around. Bone never says anything about Glen’s behavior because she is ashamed of it and blames herself for what is happening.

Bone begins to hate herself, her life, and many of the people in her life. She has no self-esteem which leads her to befriend Shannon Pearl— probably the only person in the town with less self-esteem than Bone. They spend a good deal of time together, but after a major falling out, Bone severs all ties with Shannon. Shannon finally calls and begs her to join them for a barbeque. Bone is horrified when Shannon is killed while adding fuel to the charcoal grill. It is Bone’s first real encounter with death and she spends a lot of time speculating what her death will be like.



The relationship between Bone and Glen is deteriorating. His self-loathing, fueled by his relationship with his father and brothers, and his inability to keep a job drives him to strike out at Bone. The smallest things set him off and he vents by abusing Bone. While Anney fights with him about the beatings, he always justifies them and Anney accepts his excuses. Bone interprets this as Anney taking his side and that feeds her own feelings of inadequacy and anger.

When one of the beatings puts Bone in the hospital, Anney sends Bone to stay with her aunts—both to keep her out of Glen’s way, and to give her time to heal—but Anney forgives Glen and takes Bone back home. The cycle continues until Bone’s uncles see her bruises and welts. They beat Glen severely and Anney finally moves the girls (Reese and Bone) to an apartment. Anney is so miserable that Bone eventually tells her to take Reese and go back to Glen but that she (Bone) won’t go with them.

Before Anney returns home, Glen comes to see her at Alma’s. Bone is home alone when he arrives. Bone tells him that she told Anney to go back home to him but that she (Bone) isn’t going with her. Glen goes crazy, and in a rage he beats Bone and then brutally rapes her. Anney comes in afterward and drags Bone to the car with Glen trailing behind crying and begging Anney to kill him. As Bone loses consciousness, she is disgusted to see that Anney is focusing her attention on Glen and not on her.

Bone awakens in the hospital. Raylene tries to help Bone recover both physically and mentally, but the fact that Anney never came to see her at the hospital eats at Bone constantly. Bone is raging inside, but she appears silent and calm on the outside. When Anney finally shows up at Raylene’s house, she tries to apologize to Bone for all that has happened. She explains she never thought Glen would hurt her, but that she loves him and just can’t see the bad in him. Bone realizes she has lost her mother... she is a stranger. Anney lets Bone cry until she has no more tears, then she tells her how much she loves her, and drives away. She leaves an envelope with Bone which she opens after Anney is gone. Inside is her birth certificate—without the hated word on the bottom.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

Written by Dorothy Allison in 1992, *Bastard out of Carolina* was first published in 1993 by Plume, a member of the Penguin Printing Group.

### Chapter 1.

Anney Boatwright, a single, 16-year old dropout gives birth to “Bone” whose real name is Ruth Anne Boatwright. Injured in a traffic accident, Anney is unconscious during the birth and awakens to find her mother and sister have bungled the information for the birth certificate. The result is a birth certificate with “Illegitimate” stamped across the bottom in bright red ink. Anney wages a losing battle with the courthouse to have the word that would forever brand her and her daughter, removed.

Anney marries Lyle Parsons and has another daughter (Reese) with him. Lyle is killed in an automobile accident shortly after her birth. Eventually, Anney’s brother Earle introduces her to Glen Waddell, the black-sheep, youngest son of a wealthy townsman. Glen is attracted to Anney but also sees her as a way to irritate his father and his more successful brothers. Anney sees Glen as a potential father for her girls and a way to fix the birth certificate.

### Chapter 2.

Anney is part of a large, close-knit family. She has four sisters and three larger-than-life brothers. The brothers are rugged, hard-drinkers and hard-partiers that are popular with women. The women are over-worked care-takers, accepting of their lot in life. Granny, the matriarch, seems to favor her boys over her girls; and while she is critical and harsh in her comments, she is intensely loyal to her children. Bone admires Granny and feels safe with her.

Bone, at this juncture, is about five years old. She admires her uncles and the fact that they can get away with anything, and wishes she had been born a boy. Anney won’t speak of Bone’s father, so she gains her knowledge of him by listening to Granny curse him. She learned that he had come to see her shortly after she was born, but had never returned.

Bone is told she looks like her father and she tries to come to terms with the fact that she doesn’t look like anyone else in the family. Where the Boatwright’s are fair, Bone has black hair, and she sees none of her mother’s features in her own face. Anney assures her she looks like her great granddaddy who had Cherokee blood. When Bone asks, point blank, if she looks like her father, Anney gets angry and ignores the question. Bone is jealous that she can see so much of Reese in Anney’s face.



## Analysis

In chapters 1 and 2 we meet many of the members of the Boatwright clan and Bone, the character telling the tale. This is a large, hardscrabble family living in rural South Carolina in the 1950's. The members of the family are uneducated, rugged, poor, but intensely proud. They like their liquor, but they are also hard workers; and they love their children.

Anney wants a better life for her girls than she had, but when she turns up pregnant, her dreams unravel. These chapters focus on the urgency Anney feels to rectify the offending birth certificate, and her efforts to set it right. A second theme is about Bone trying to figure out where she fits in this family. She is very aware of the fact that she doesn't look like any of them, and because no one will talk about her father, she can't gain any connection there either. This is the start of her feelings of inadequacy and being an outsider.

## Vocabulary

Accordioned, knucklebone, scribbling, bluffed, shiftless, canted, illegitimate, pleurisy, flushed, pursed, righteous, proclaimed, diverted, settlement, bastard, collard greens, gristly, notorious, pig sticker, disarming, guile, boll, palming, banter, britches, retribution, Chifforobe, scuppernog vines, katydids, crawfish, croupy, rambunctious, indulgent, puissant, liling, legendary, towheaded, croup, arduous, insinuating, astringent.



# Chapters 3-4

## Summary

### Chapter 3.

Glen declares his love for Anney and her girls and proposes marriage. He says he wants them to be a family and asks Bone to call him Daddy. Bone and Reese are glad to see their mama so happy, but Bone doesn't trust Glen. Granny, too, thought there was something not quite right about him, and Uncle Earle—who had seen Glen's violent side—thought his well-to-do family was snooty. Despite their misgivings, everyone believes he loves Anney.

To win the Boatwright's over, Glen suggests a picnic. Granny refuses to go, but Alma gets her to come out on the porch for pictures. Alma takes several photos including one of Anney and Glen, and one of them with the girls. Glen doesn't like having his picture taken and in most of them he either turns his head or puts his hands in front of his face.

### Chapter 4.

Glen and Anney get married at the courthouse—none of his relatives attend. Bone cries when she finds out that she and Reese aren't going on the honeymoon with Daddy Glen and Mama. The morning after they leave, she gets up before everyone else in the house and looks through Aunt Alma's photo album for the pictures Alma had taken before the picnic. As Bone looks at Daddy Glen's face, she thinks that it look flat and empty. She thinks about a conversation she overheard at the picnic where she learned Anney is pregnant. When Glen and Anney return, Glen is happy because he is convinced Anney is going to give him the son he's always wanted.

When Anney goes into labor Glen leaves the girls in the car while he gets Anney checked at the hospital. Eventually, he returns to the car to smoke. The girls are sleeping, but Glen takes Bone into the front seat telling her that her mama is going to be just fine. He pulls Bone onto his lap, lifting her skirt as he sits her down. Bone doesn't realize what is happening as Glen molests her through her clothing, but she knows it hurts and she is frightened. When he is finished, he laughs and sends her to the backseat with Reese. Bone drifts into sleep and wakes up to find that the baby has died and that Anney can't have any more babies. When Glen Jr. is buried, none of Glen's family attends. After the funeral, Glen moves them to a house near his work and far away from Anney's family.

## Analysis

These chapters start to reveal the source of some of the vague misgivings members of the Boatwright's have about Glen. Most of them distrust him, but many of them liked him, too. At home, Glen begins to show occasional signs of favoritism for Reese and



disregard for Bone. He tells Bone to call him Daddy; she doesn't want to, but is afraid to say so. Bone and Reese are glad to see their mother happy, but they are leery of Glen. Glen starts sexually abusing Bone while Anney is in the hospital, and because of her youth Bone isn't sure what has taken place. From this point forward, Glen begins a campaign to put space between his family and the Boatwright's.

## Vocabulary

Conveyor, concentration, tarmac, vibration, incongruous, conviction, harried, tremolo, continuation, brambles, hesitant, desperation, impatiently, flourished, insistently, evidence, ambitions, teetotaler, harrumphed.





# Chapters 5-6

## Summary

### Chapter 5.

Glen talks about adopting the girls when they can save enough money. Bone wants to love him and wants him to love her, but she keeps remembering the night at the hospital and just can't. Glen continues to try to drive a wedge between the girls and the Boatwright's. He tells Bone Granny is a liar and tells her to stay away from her. While Bone knows the Boatwright's are storytellers, she also knows many of the stories they tell are true.

The girls go to visit Mrs. Parsons, Reese's paternal grandmother. Bone likes her and her nice house with the small gardens. She can't help but compare her to Granny and thinks Mrs. Parsons is probably the better grandmother. Glen sees opportunity in Mrs. Parsons and tries to blackmail her into giving Anney money. He threatens to keep Reese from her if she doesn't pay, so Mrs. Parsons gives Anney \$250, her son's insurance settlement. As Bone compares Reese to Anney and Mrs. Parsons, she envies the way they resemble each other and is sad that she doesn't share any of their features.

Bone hears Earle talking with some of her other uncles about Glen's violent temper. The Uncles said women loved Glen because he was good in the bedroom. Bone didn't like Glen's big restless hands that the uncles described as "big as pickaxes"—she hated how they curled and flexed while he was watching her. Bone now knew that what Daddy Glen had done to her at the hospital that night was sexual. The incident is the catalyst for Bone to start masturbating and fantasizing about fire. In her fantasies, when she finally escapes the fire, she has an orgasm.

The family moves frequently now because Glen can't hold a job and the bills are piling up. Anney and Glen fight about money especially when Earle loans Anney money. Glen starts to sulk about his sad lot in life.

### Chapter 6.

Daddy Glen's unemployment starts to take a toll on the family. While Anney can make a meal out of almost nothing, they reach a point when there isn't even flour to make biscuits. Anney feeds the girls crackers and ketchup while telling them stories about how little she had growing up. When Glen returns they fight about his lame efforts to get a job. She tells him how she swore her kids would never go hungry. Anney is furious; she is so angry that she ignores Glen and goes out to earn money for food. As she leaves the house, Anney tells Bone to call Uncle Earle to come pick her and Reese up. Afraid of Glen, Bone runs to find Reese and the two of them hitchhike to Aunt Alma's house instead of waiting for Earle. When Anney picks them up, after midnight, she takes



them home and cooks them a huge meal by way of apology. They move again the next week—each house is a little worse than the last. Glen begins to feel sorry for himself because he can't afford a nice house like those his brothers have.

## Analysis

These chapters deal with some of the big issues of being poor in the south, in the 50s—lack of money, no food, ramshackle housing, bill collectors that come to the house, and being forced to live with coloreds. It looks at the weaknesses demonstrated by some of the men in the family, and the lengths that a mother will go to in order to put food on the table.

These chapters also explore some of the jealousies that can occur in families and what triggers them. We learn more about Glen's dark side through his attempted manipulation of Mrs. Parsons, the stories Bone's uncles share about his violent temper, and his own self-pity about his status in life.

## Vocabulary

Reputation, plausible, persuasions, caustic, fascinated, pulpy, galvanized, reflection, intersection, emphatic, brusquely, instinctively, irreversibly, stucco, blithely, astonishing, exposed, corroded, rupture, enormous, pretense, parboiled, mayonnaise, tarmac, methodically, phantom, speckled, biscuits, dollop, particular, abandoned, resemble, jalousie, chiggers, expressionless, sarcastic, fascinated, determined, indignant.



# Chapters 7-8

## Summary

### Chapter 7.

Bone steals some candy. Anney discovers the theft and insists Bone approach the store owner to apologize, to return the uneaten candy, and pay for the candy she's already eaten. Bone is humiliated, but disliking the store owner's attitude, her shame soon turns to anger. While the storeowner sets conditions for her return to the store, Bone silently vows never to come back.

Glen suffers a great deal of criticism from his family. They also criticize Anney for working. Glen complains about his family but no one else is allowed to say anything negative about them. They make monthly visits to Glen's father's house. The girls are kept outside while Glen's brothers' children have the run of the house. Bone overhears Glen's brothers making derisive comments about their car and Anney and she hates them for it. Glen's father seems to take pleasure in making Glen feel insignificant and ineffective.

### Chapter 8.

Bone is now 10 years old. The family moves to West Greenville so Glen is closer to his work and the family is further away from the Boatwright's. Now they only see their aunts and Granny on Sundays. Daddy Glen's new job pays less than the last so Anney has to work extra hours. While she's away Glen continues to touch Bone and she thinks he seems attracted to and repulsed by her at the same time. When Daddy Glen catches Bone running in the house he drags her to the bathroom and beats her with his belt. Anney rushes in and comforts Bone when Glen finally opens the door. Glen tells Anney that he did it because he loves Bone. Later Bone hears Daddy Glen telling Anney Bone had been cursing and calling him names. Anney accepts his lies and soon they are making love.

When Glen is touching Bone he's also telling her how much he loves her. He doesn't order Bone not to tell Anney about the touching, but she never does because she is ashamed. The beatings continue, but never when any of Bone's aunts are visiting. After one severe beating Bone has to go to the hospital and the doctor presses to find out who is abusing her. Anney is irate and Bone is embarrassed by the accusations. On leaving the hospital, Anney refuses to go home with Glen and takes the girls to stay with Alma.

## Analysis

The many abusive incidents in Bone's life are filling her with confusion and rage. When Daddy Glen touches her, she almost likes it because this is the only time he is gentle



with her. She masturbates and fantasizes about having people watch the beatings he doles out. In the fantasies she stands up to Glen and refuses to cry. She likes the fantasies because they're the only place she feels proud of herself. She likes to sneak into Glen's closet and caress the belts that he uses to beat her, but it causes her shame. The fact that Anney questions her about what "she" did after the first beating, and her later acceptance of Glen's explanations, demonstrates Anney's priorities.

We see that Glen's insecurities stem from his associations with his family. His overbearing father criticizes Glen at every turn, and he is jealous of his two brothers because they have money and position. These things have taken a toll on Glen's self-esteem over the years. Glen really wants his father's approval and love, but has no idea how to gain it. Glen's inability to hold a job—even though he is always the one at fault—adds to his frustration.

## Vocabulary

Commanded, lectures, nonsense, mention, rummaging, fortunate, flickering, bantam, contempt, berserker, binges, barrettes, christening, raucous, mocked, eyelet, impervious, unimaginable, hassock, dizziness, fluorescent, terrified, whimpered, recoil, determination, discipline, clenched, fantasies, triumphant, heroism, spongy.



# Chapters 9-10

## Summary

### Chapter 9.

After two weeks with Aunt Alma, Anney and the girls return to the house and Daddy Glen. He swears he will never hurt Bone again, but Bone knows sooner or later he will justify his actions and the beatings will resume. She begins going to Alma's after school to avoid being around him. While there she tells horrible stories to her cousins—all dealing with children killed in violent, gory ways. The kids love it, but when Aunt Alma hears the tail-end of one of them, she mentions it to Anney telling her that Bone is getting “mean-hearted.”

Anney, worried about Bone, asks her to go stay with her ailing Aunt Ruth. Bone doesn't see the urgency as Ruth has been ill forever, but she agrees. The two of them spend their days on the porch listening to gospel music while Ruth reminisces about her husband and brothers and sisters. When Ruth tells her she can talk to her about anything, Bone decides to tell her she thinks Daddy Glen hates her. Ruth agrees he doesn't seem to take to her too well, but she thinks it's because he is jealous of the time and attention Anney gives to Bone instead of him. Then she asks Bone if Glen has ever touched her in her private parts. Bone denies it. She wants to tell Aunt Ruth everything, but she can't.

Uncle Earle shares stories about his father with Bone, and tells her how all of the Boatwright kids are like him. During the day Aunt Ruth tells her stories about the family, too. She tells the bad with the good and they laugh together over some of them. Ruth tells her that the Boatwright men don't see anything wrong with drinking and going to jail occasionally. Ruth has practically raised all of her brothers and sisters, and Earle teases her. Bone is envious of their closeness and wishes she could share moments like that with Reese. During a visit, Anney tells Ruth how confused she is. She knows Glen loves her but he and Bone have issues. Ruth tells her she thinks Glen is just jealous.

Bone starts attending the Revivals—she goes down and sits by the big tent and listens to the music. Touched by the music, she begins to cry and asks Jesus to forgive her. She feels the music has the ability to make her love and hate herself at the same time.

### Chapter 10.

After the experience at the revival tent, Bone vows to become a gospel singer. Unfortunately, while she has the enthusiasm, she doesn't have the voice. Still, she entertains Ruth and the music makes both of them happy. Uncle Travis tells her that her voice is awful, but she doesn't care.

A week before school starts, Anney comes to take Bone home. Ruth's daughter DeeDee moves in to care for Ruth. DeeDee doesn't like being home and thinks Ruth



isn't sick enough to warrant her care. Bone starts spending time at the diner, listening to music and dreaming of being a singer. Glen hasn't bothered her since she got home and she begins to relax a bit. She even starts to think maybe she just imagined Glen touching her.

Aunt Alma, Anney, DeeDee, and Bone have an animated discussion about how the Boatwright women all find religion at one time or another. They talk about doing right because the world doesn't make sense if you don't. Bone feels no one takes her faith seriously, and there isn't really anyone she can talk to about it. She does like the way Earle explains Jesus because he makes him sound so real.

Bone visits 14 different churches over the course of the summer following a desire to be saved. She gets caught up in the music and the message and wants to be baptized. What she really wants is for the good feelings she is experiencing to last, and for her life to change. Each time the preacher asks her to come forward to be saved, she runs away. Anney finally has her baptized at the Bushy Creek Baptist Church.

## Analysis

Bone is relieved to have the summer away from Glen. She learns a lot about her family by listening to the stories her relatives tell, and she finds religion at a tent revival. The music and frenzied excitement make Bone feel there is something better for her. Her determination to become a gospel singer is both touching and funny. She can't sing, but keeps thinking with practice and divine intervention she can still become famous. She wants to be saved because she thinks it will change her life, though once baptized, the event doesn't live up to her expectations.

## Vocabulary

Embrace, haggard, gruesome, exchange, continuously, afghan, appropriate, audience, lurched, parchment, reminiscing, penitentiary, recruiting, chenille, revival, invocation, volunteered, charity, chariot, smirked, embroidered, heathen, obnoxious, mystery, imperviously, communion, perversely, blasphemy, pronouncements, absolution, salvation, marvelous, insulin, arbiters, congregation, enthralling, intensity, confusion, concentration, revelation.



# Chapter 11 -12

## Summary

### Chapter 11.

Without fully understanding why, Bone decides to take a schoolmate under her wing. The girl's name is Shannon Pearl and she is ostracized by the other students. Probably an albino, with her pale skin and pink eyes, her mother swears she was just born prematurely. Shannon is an only child. Her father books acts for the gospel circuit. Bone thinks because Shannon is so ugly on the outside, she must be beautiful on the inside.

As Bone's friend, Shannon is insulated against insults from other students since they fear Bone and her rough and tumble cousins, Garvey and Grey. Shannon's parents dote on her, and Bone is jealous of their relationship.

Bone begins to travel with Shannon's family while her father looks for new talent. Through Shannon, she has a chance to hear gospel music and meet many of her idols like the Carter Family, the Smokey Mountain Boys, and even Johnny Cash. Shannon tells hideous stories, most of which center around children suffering violent deaths. Over time, Bone comes to realize that Shannon hates everyone around her and that she holds deep grudges against anyone who has ever crossed her. Bone can see the hate raging in Shannon's eyes and she wonders if people see the same glint of hatred in her eyes.

Shannon makes fun of nearly everyone, and most particularly her parents, while Bone envies Shannon's family—their money, the fact that they're safe, and their love of the world around them. Shannon recognizes Bone's desire to experience the good life the gospel singers lead, and she sympathizes with her because she knows what it's like to want something unattainable.

On one of the trips with Shannon's family, Bone and Shannon have a falling out over Mr. Pearl's work. Bone hears a beautiful voice singing Amazing Grace when she and Shannon happen upon a small church. Bone suggests that Shannon tell her father about the singer. Shannon is insulted and tells Bone, "He don't handle colored." The two argue and Shannon makes the mistake of insulting Bone's family and calling them bastards. Bone gets so angry she takes a swing at Shannon, but slips and falls without connecting. Attacking with words instead of fists, Bone drives Shannon off by telling her she is so ugly that even her mama can't love her.

### Chapter 12.

After the rift with Shannon, Bone tries, unsuccessfully, to bond with Reese. They seem to do nothing but fight anymore. Bone discovers that Reese is masturbating. While they never speak of it, they intuitively respect each other's private time (and keep Anney and Glen away).



Anney suggests Bone go stay with Aunt Raylene, the quietest and most private of the Boatwright sisters. Bone's cousins like visiting Raylene because she lets them do as they please. Her house is on the river and offers lots of places to explore. Raylene gives Bone the task of picking up the trash along the river—anything salvageable she takes back to the house. On one visit she finds two large, shiny hooks. Aunt Raylene locks the hooks in her cellar, but Bone manages to sneak one out and hides it under the porch.

## Analysis

Bone's desire to befriend Shannon is confusing. She doesn't like Shannon—is even repulsed by her—but feels the need to protect her from cruel classmates. There is a kinship that is rooted in Bone's lack of self-esteem. She is envious of Shannon's relationship with her family, and confused by Shannon's obvious hatred of them—particularly her mother. Like a teapot building up steam, Bone and Shannon's relationship eventually explodes in a screaming match with each of them insulting the other, using the words they know will hurt the most.

In these chapters, Bone begins spending time with her Aunt Raylene. This gives the two of them time to observe and learn about the other. Bone admires her Aunt Raylene's independence and self-reliance. She also likes her easy-going relationship with Bone's cousins. Bone is again considering her own looks and how they compare to those of her female relatives. She notices how old they look. She overhears Raylene tell Anney that Reese and Bone are full of anger.

## Vocabulary

Circuit, embossed, stolidly, retching, contemptuous, ridicule, gossamer, affliction, nauseous, insightful, decapitation, mutilation, ostracized, devastating, consciousness, sufficient, distinctions, tactic, tedious, indignation, mechanic, heroine, immediately, contemptuously, vengeance, convinced, carnival, astonishing, trousers, figured, reclusive, enthusiasm, mosquitoes, discourage, accumulated, convinced, maudlin, protection, retrieved, intention, adamant, launched, gouged, trawling, morticians, concentrating, suspicious.





# Chapters 13-14

## Summary

Chapter 13.

Bone takes the hook home and hides it in the rafters over the washing machine. Anney notices changes in Bone; she tells her she is standing straighter and that she can see her face once in a while. Bone doesn't tell her it is because she is always looking up trying to see if the hook she hid in the rafters over the laundry room can be seen from below. The hook makes Bone feel strong, and tall, and dangerous.

About this time, Shannon begins trying to work her way back into Bone's life. Anney encourages her to think about talking to Shannon. When Bone finally answers the phone, Shannon acts as though nothing has happened. She invites Bone to come to her house for a barbeque. Bone doesn't commit, but agrees to think about it.

On Sunday she heads toward the Pearl house carrying a bucket on the pretense that she's going to pick muscadines. As she nears the house, she sees a miserable-looking Shannon near the barbeque grill. Bone is still undecided about actually approaching Shannon until she hears some of Shannon's cousins taunting her. It brings out Bone's protective instincts and she remembers how much she admired Shannon's pride when she first met her. Bone climbs the fence and starts toward Shannon just as Shannon empties a can of lighter fluid on the hot coals. The liquid explodes and Shannon is quickly engulfed in flames.

Bone goes to the funeral with her mother even though Anney doesn't want her to attend. Daddy Glen calls the whole thing nonsense and leaves to get drunk with Bone's uncles. During the funeral Bone reminisces about Shannon and wonders how many people might be at the church if Bone was the one in the coffin. Finally she feels she understands Shannon and as she cries into her mother's side she lets go of all her anger against the girl.

Chapter 14.

Bone is having a hard time coping with Shannon's death. She feels too tired to care about how she looks or what people think of her. Her throat feels tight all the time—like she might want to cry. Anney isn't particularly sympathetic as she has other things on her mind. Uncle Earle has been sent to the county farm (prison) for fighting with his best friend and Aunt Alma lost her job.

Bone is very depressed and even thinking about the hook hiding over the utility room doesn't bring her any comfort. She is afraid of Daddy Glen and shakes when he looks at her. She spends a lot of time in front of the mirror trying to determine what others see when they look at her. She is growing up and feels the awkwardness of her age, but she doesn't see any outward changes in her appearance. She is unhappy that she doesn't



have soft features like her sister. She decides she looks like the other Boatwright women—with straight bodies built for hard work and childbirth. When she reads *Gone with the Wind* she likens herself and the rest of the women in the family to Emma Slattery, the poor white trash girl that lived near the slaves' quarters rather than to Scarlett or Melanie.

Daddy Glen wants to ask his brothers to Christmas dinner although they have never been invited before. Anney tells Bone she doesn't understand why Glen's father treats him so badly and says she thinks it's eating at Glen. She asks Bone to be very careful around him for the time being. Bone feels a lot of rage inside. She daydreams about ways to hurt Daddy Glen, and sinks beneath the water in the bathtub to scream her frustration. Bone thinks it feels good to hate him, but at the same time she wants him to love her and for them to have a normal family. She thinks his love will make her beautiful.

Playing with her cousins at Aunt Alma's house, Bone is able to act out some of her emotions. She gives all the girls strong roles to play and even lets them defeat the boys sometimes. When the girls and boys are separated for fighting, Bone makes up a game called "mean sister" (the girls are the sisters of famous men). Bone decides to be Jim Bowie's sister and uses a butcher knife to punch holes in the porch rail wishing she was stabbing Daddy Glen instead.

## Analysis

Bone gets some harsh life lessons in these chapters. When she sees Shannon die and attends her funeral, she starts to recognize some of Shannon's traits in herself. She also has to confront death. She begins thinking about her own death and wondering if people will pay their respects to her. Her anger at the people around her intensifies, and she quits caring about her personal appearance. Her bottled up anger is growing, even as her enthusiasm for life wanes.

Bone is going through a growth spurt that has her worried about what kind of woman she will become. She looks for physical signs she is becoming a woman, but can't find any. She feels ugly; and between her own self-doubt and the harsh criticisms she gets from Daddy Glen, she has almost no self-esteem left.

Daddy Glen is impatient with Bone. He criticizes her and snaps at her for no reason. Bone is afraid of the way he looks at her. Anney is unwilling to confront Glen about his moods, and just warns the girls to be careful around him. Bone's hatred for Glen grows stronger every day and she wants revenge for the way he treats her.

## Vocabulary

Zucchini, talisman, securely, quarreled, stupidity, rummaging, explaining, muscadines, womanizing, magnolia, precious, intricately, amusement, constitution, invariably, fortunate, hoarse, exhausted, sympathetic, obstinate, descendants, gawky, delicate,

indignation, hesitated, straightened, complicated, colonist, moccasins, inspiration, handkerchief, humiliated.



# Chapters 15-16

## Summary

Chapter 15.

Bone and Grey decide to stage their raid on Woolworth's using the hook Bone retrieved from the river near Aunt Raylene's. They wait until dark, and then creep out of Alma's house and run to town. Bone is distressed and angry when she discovers Grey painted her beloved hook, but she accepts it and they go to work. Bone climbs on the roof of the Woolworth store, and lets herself in through the fan vent. She loses her footing and tumbles into the store breaking things as she and the hook fall. She lets Grey in the front door and he fills a pillowcase with cigarettes and other treasures.

When they leave, Bone takes nothing but the hook. As they run through town on the way back to Alma's she yells at a group of men that the doors to Woolworth's are standing wide open. The sound of them running toward the store makes her very happy.

Chapter 16.

Bone wakes up many times worrying that someone will find out they vandalized the store, but no one comes. When she gets up and looks around, none of the adults are at home. Cousin Temple comes by to make breakfast and sends the kids to school. She tells Bone to stay put till Anney comes for her and Reese. When Anney finally arrives, she tells the girls that Aunt Ruth is dead. While everyone knew Ruth was sick, no one really seemed to expect her to die. Bone recalls how frail Ruth had been over the summer and realizes she knew she was dying even then.

Anney shares some stories with Bone about her childhood. She tells her how Ruth raised her because Granny was busy with the other kids. She says Ruth knew she wasn't pretty but when she started having babies she thought it at least proved she was worth something. She says she hopes Ruth knew how pretty she was.

## Analysis

The episode at the Woolworth Store shows us Bone holds a grudge. The incident with the stolen candy had taken place years prior to the break-in, but she still remembered the face of Mr. Highgarden and his smug attitude. Bone wanted revenge, but once she got in the store she questioned why she was really there. She left the store without taking anything. She did feel some measure of vengeance however when she told the men on the street the store was unlocked and heard them run off in that direction.

Aunt Ruth's death takes Bone by surprise at first; she thinks about the last times she saw Aunt Ruth and realizes somehow she knew Ruth was dying. She cries as she listens to Anney's stories about Ruth—about how she worried over her looks—and



Bone compares that to how she feels when she looks in her own mirror and knows she isn't pretty.

## Vocabulary

Decorated, stenciled, engraved, satisfaction, irritation, crystalline, grimaced, swallowed, shinnying, lattice, ceiling, insulation, humiliation, revelation, tangibly, midriff, exhilaration, harmonica.



# Chapters 17-18

## Summary

### Chapter 17.

Bone is lost in memories of Ruth when Glen calls her. She is thinking about how Ruth tried to get her to open up and talk. She is remembering she wanted to tell her about Glen touching her and hurting her, and how she just couldn't do it. And she is thinking about how Anney keeps telling the girls to be patient and loving with Glen. When she doesn't respond to Glen's calls, he comes looking for her. He is enraged and accuses her of ignoring him. He drags her to the bathroom for yet another beating. This time, although Bone is scared, she is also angry and she promises herself she won't make a sound—and she doesn't. Afterward, Anney comforts Bone as she cleans the blood off her legs; but instead of asking what's wrong with Glen, she keeps asking Bone why she makes him so angry.

The funeral is the next day and Bone makes an effort to stay out of everyone's way. She and a cousin get into the beer and whiskey and Bone gets drunk. Later, as she makes her way to the bathroom, she has trouble navigating, but finally finds the right room. While she is sitting on the toilet her Aunt Raylene comes in. When she realizes Bone's state she tries to help her get herself together. When she lifts Bone, she notices the blood on her panties then looks at her backside. When she sees all the cuts and bruises, she calls Earle and his brothers. After seeing Bone's injuries they drag Glen outside and beat him severely. All this time Bone is crying and insisting the beating was her fault and she keeps apologizing to Anney. Anney, in turn, is telling Raylene she tried to stop Glen, but couldn't. She also says he did it because he loves Bone.

### Chapter 18.

While Glen is in the hospital Anney and the girls pack up their things and move to an apartment. Anney is trying to keep Bone safe, but she can't (or won't) talk to her. Bone knows Anney will eventually go back to Glen—she always does. She hears Raylene tell Anney she needs to forgive herself, but Bone doesn't know what she means because she doesn't think Anney has done anything wrong.

When Anney finally leaves Bone a note saying she's ready to talk, Bone walks to Raylene's so she won't have to have that conversation. Raylene tries to distract Bone by talking about Uncle Earle and his womanizing. Bone loves her Uncle Earle fiercely and defends him by saying he loves all the women in his life. Raylene thinks Bone is confused about love and tells her so. Anney doesn't call for 3 days—not until it is time for Bone to go back to school. Bone then has to either enroll in the county school near Raylene or go back to Anney's. She returns home.



## Analysis

Bone does a lot of thinking in these chapters. Before the beating she is thinking about Ruth and how she had given Bone a chance to talk about Glen. She thinks about how Anney seems to be under Glen's spell and how she really believes that they could be a normal, loving family if the girls just loved him enough. During the beating, Bone thinks she has to keep silent—not because Glen tells her to, but because it's important to her not to make any noise.

When the others find out about the beating, Bone—like so many abuse victims—takes all the blame. She tells them it is her fault and keeps apologizing to Anney. Bone feels very guilty for everything that has happened. She spends a lot of time trying to think what she might have done differently in order to prevent the whole chain of events. She also tries to analyze why Glen hates her so much, and thinks maybe she really is all the things he accuses her of...evil, nasty, willful, and ugly.

Bone wonders why she was so determined not to scream during the beating. She knows it didn't change the outcome. She also wonders if Glen had had an orgasm during the beating, and the thought makes her sick. Bone is certain of one thing, that Glen's actions had little to do with her—they were just an animal thing...and she knows she hates Glen.

## Vocabulary

Porcelain, trembled, casseroles, funeral, silhouettes, staccato, conversationally, attention, embarrassment, irritable, disgusted, canopy, cursive, stiffened, surreptitiously, caterwauling, knuckles, retrieve, deliberately, straddled, expression, persuade, intersection, tongue, hesitated, shuddered, scrunched, trousers, purifying, collapsed, squirmed, deliberately, glittered, hesitantly, reluctantly, development, stubbornness.



# Chapters 19-20

## Summary

### Chapter 19.

After the death of her baby, Alma has an emotional breakdown. She trashes her house and everything in it. When Anney and Bone arrive to help, Alma is still struggling and threatening to kill Wade. Anney finally gets her to calm down a bit and talk about what happened. Alma says she asked Wade for another baby and he told her she was too old, and fat, and lazy for another child. He said he would never give her another child then left. Alma has a razor she swears she is going to use to kill him. When Anney tells her Wade is a good man and he loves her, Alma says that's why she has to kill him. She says if she didn't love him, she'd let him live forever. Bone thinks the Boatwright women have a dangerous side—even the girls, like her.

After Alma goes to sleep Anney asks Bone what she thinks about all the time. Bone initially ignores Anney but finally admits she's waiting for Anney to go back to Glen. Anney is upset with herself because it's true, and angry with Bone for saying it out loud. Bone tells Anney she loves her and that she can (and probably should) go back to Glen. But she also tells her she will never go back to live with Daddy Glen. She is tempted to take her words back when she hears Anney crying later, but she doesn't back down.

### Chapter 20.

Glen comes to talk to Bone while she is at Alma's. Bone is home alone and is intimidated by his presence. When he tells her he wants them to be a family again, Bone uses her new-found courage to tell him she isn't going back. When Bone stands her ground and tells him to leave, Glen snaps. He hits Bone, but this isn't a beating like she's had in the past—this is a full-scale assault. Glen uses his fists and kicks her. When Bone struggles against him he becomes more frenzied and the assault turns sexual. Glen rapes Bone, all the while telling her that everything that had gone wrong in his life is all her fault. He says that Anney loves him but he is confused by her guilt and her feelings for Bone.

Bone's thoughts range from wishing she could die, to wishing Glen would die. She is sickened by what has just taken place. As she rolls into a fetal position, Bone senses rather than sees Anney enter the room. Anney flies at Glen hitting him with everything at hand, and all the while Glen whines and begs Anney to understand. He says he just went a little crazy.

As Anney leads Bone from the house, Bone is in a murderous rage. She asks Anney to take her to Ruth's, planning to get Travis's shotgun and kill Glen. Anney gets Bone into the car and all the while Glen is begging Anney to forgive him. When Anney hits him again, he changes his tactics and tells her to kill him. With Bone in the car, Anney tries





to get behind the wheel, but Glen holds onto her and keeps begging her to kill him. Bone watches as Anney is torn between her need to protect her child and her love for Glen. In that moment, Bone realizes she hates her mother.

## Analysis

Alma's meltdown shows the vulnerability of all the Boatwright women. They love deeply and are willing to overlook the faults of their men. We see that trait in Anney as she battles with her conscience about whether to protect Bone or go back to Glen. Even though Anney's not sure she'll go back to Glen, Bone is sure and she finally takes a stand in her own defense. She gives Anney permission to return to Glen, but she refuses to go back with her.

When Glen rapes Bone, he vents all his anger and frustration on her. He blames her for everything that has ever gone wrong in his life. He admits he's thought about killing her and how he wishes she were dead because then everything would be alright. When Anney appears after the rape, Glen grovels, trying to make things right with Anney. It is obvious Anney is waging an intense inner struggle—trying to deal with the love and guilt she feels for Bone and fighting the love she still feels for Glen. Bone sees the struggle, but has no sympathy for Anney and hates her for her weakness where he is concerned.

## Vocabulary

Accident, fiercely, accented, venetian, cuticles, imaginable, noticed, pronounced, prodded, resignation, refrigerator, bandaged, destruction, transfixed, eunuch, hypersensitive, intensity, silhouetted, Magazines, liable, khaki, reasonable, desperately, gouged, destroy, audibly, retching, leisurely, rhythm, flailing, enormous, canisters, knotted, clarity, memorized, justifiable, mewling, realigned, punctuating, sibilant.



# Chapters 21-22

## Summary

Chapter 21.

Anney gets Bone to the hospital, but disappears as soon as the nurse takes over. After the doctor and nurse finish with Bone, the Sheriff comes in to ask her some questions about what happened. Bone wishes she could tell him, but she doesn't know where to start. As he continues to press her, she decides he is like Daddy Glen, calm and reassuring, but not to be trusted. He tells her her family is outside, and she asks for Anney only to be told that no one has seen her. About that time, Raylene bursts into the room and tells the sheriff she is taking Bone home.

Chapter 22.

At Raylene's, Bone is silent and allows Raylene to tend to her, but she won't speak. Raylene tries to help Bone understand why Anney is acting the way she is. She tells her people do foolish things for love, things they normally wouldn't do, but they just can't help themselves. By way of example she tells Bone her long hidden secret about having a female lover while she was traveling with the carnival. She tells Bone she tried to make the woman choose between her (Raylene) and her child—the woman chose to stay with her child. Bone listened with interest, but she wasn't able to digest all of what Raylene was saying.

Eventually Anney comes to see Bone. Bone wants to tell her she loves her and that everything will be alright, but she doesn't speak. Anney tells her how much she loves Bone and what a good girl she is, but Bone feels like she's listening to a stranger. She no longer feels a connection to Anney. Anney kisses Bone and leaves. Bone discovers an envelope Anney left in her lap. It is Bone's birth certificate—"Father: Unknown" but there is no longer a red stamp on the bottom. Bone realizes who she is right now is who she will always be, and she wonders where she will be at twenty or thirty. Where ever it is, she hopes she'll be as strong as Anney.

## Analysis

These chapters bring Bone to some conclusions about herself and her family. She sees in Uncle Nevil a need for vengeance she feels will last forever; in Raylene she sees understanding for Anney even though she couldn't condone what Anney was doing to Bone. She also finally comes to terms with Anney and with herself. She mentally separates herself from Anney admitting they seem like strangers now. And she knows she is now a Boatwright and acknowledges she will remain a Boatwright, forever.



## Vocabulary

Talcum, shoulder, uniform, weighted, complexion, deacon, complicated, concussion, tongue, figure, wrestling, inevitable, reassuringly, familiar, assault, investigation, interrupted, awesome, biblical, contemptuously, exhaustion, photographer, fragile, obstruction, contemptible, grudgingly, adamant, indentations, parchment, desperate.



# Characters

## Ruth Anne Boatwright (Bone)

Bone is the central character in the book. The story spans her life from age 5 to 13. She is born to a 16-year old unwed mother and is branded a bastard when the word “illegitimate” is stamped on her birth certificate. Bone is angry, insecure, has no self-esteem, and is constantly hoping someone will love her. She works hard to gain love and affection, but often misinterprets hurtful—even violent—acts, for love. She fears Daddy Glen, but she also craves his love and acceptance.

## Anney Boatwright (Mama)

Anney is Bone’s mother and the youngest of the Boatwright children. She is attractive and wants to better herself. She makes a valiant effort to get the stigma of bastard removed from Bone’s birth certificate. She marries Lyle Parsons, with whom she has another child, in hopes that he will adopt Bone. Lyle is killed before that happens. She then marries Glen Waddell with the same intent, but they never seem to get the resources together to do it.

Anney is weak and has low self-esteem herself, so she thrives on the love and adulation that Glen showers on her. She turns a blind eye to the abuse he subjects Bone to by telling herself that he loves Bone, too. When the abuse is finally undeniable, she tries to stay loyal to Bone and protect her, but she inevitably goes back to Glen.

## Lyle Parsons

Lyle is Anney’s first husband and father of Reese. He is killed in an automobile accident before he and Anney can officially adopt Bone.

## Reese Parsons

Reese is Lyle Parson’s daughter with Anney. She is Bone’s half-sister. Bone loves her, but is reluctant to let it show. They reach a point in the story where they are at odds, like most adolescent girls. They share a dark secret in that both of them masturbate regularly. Bone is jealous of Reese’s looks and her relationship with Anney and her paternal grandmother.

## Glen Waddell (Daddy Glen)

Glen works with Uncle Earle who introduces him to Anney. He is immediately taken with her and pursues her until she agrees to marry him. He is attracted to Anney, but he also



knows that marrying her will embarrass his snobbish father and brothers. He is initially kind to Anney's girls, but he develops an obsession for Bone and begins to molest her. His frustration with his life, his relationship with his father, and his obsession with Bone drives him to take that frustration out on Bone in the form of ever-escalating beatings and sexual abuse.

## **Aunt Ruth (Boatwright)**

Anney's oldest sister. She is married to Travis and they have 8 children. Ruth has cancer and grows increasingly weak throughout the story. When Daddy Glen breaks Bone's collarbone, Ruth has Bone come stay with her to help around the house and keep her company.

Ruth's Children: Tommy Lee, DW, Dwight, Lucius, Graham, Butch, Mollie, and DeeDee (the youngest girl who grudgingly comes home to care for Aunt Ruth when Bone returns home).

## **Granny**

The matriarch of the Boatwright clan - Granny is strong and opinionated. She's not cold, but she isn't demonstrative, either. She tells things like they are and tries to make people face reality. Bone likes spending time with Granny, but has little opportunity to have her to herself as there are always lots of cousins around.

## **Uncle Earle Boatwright**

The oldest Boatwright son - Earle has a hot temper that gets him into trouble. He is sent to the county farm for injuring his best friend in a fight. Like all the Boatwright's he is a hard drinker, but he is intensely loyal to his family. He has been married and has children, but his wife left him and he focuses all his attention on his nieces and nephews. Bone loves and admires Uncle Earle and wants to be like him.

## **Aunt Raylene Boatwright**

Aunt Raylene is unmarried and lives alone by the river. Bone spends a lot of time with her as she tries to stay out of Glen's way. After Bone is raped, Raylene is the one who takes Bone home with her and tries to help her heal. She tells Bone a well-kept secret about herself to help her (Bone) make some sense out of what she has just been through.



## **Aunt Alma (Boatwright)**

Another of Anney's sisters—married to Wade. Bone is close to Alma's twins, Grey and Garvey. Alma struggles trying to keep her marriage together while managing a house full of children. Wade is a philanderer and at one point Alma leaves him because of it. Eventually she returns to him knowing that this is just the way life is.

Alma's Children: Grey and Garvey (twins), Temple, Patsy Ruth, Tadpole (the baby with a heart condition).

## **Uncle Beau Boatwright**

Anney's brother. Like Earle, Beau is a hard drinker with a hot temper. He is not as volatile as Earle, but they are very similar in personality and actions.

## **Uncle Nevil Boatwright**

Anney's brother. Uncle Nevil is the quietest of the Boatwright boys, but he seems to be the most intense. After Bone's rape, Nevil visits her at Aunt Raylene's determined to get revenge. He says only two words to Bone, "I promise." Bone understands that he plans to hunt Glen down and exact that revenge.

## **Mr. Bodine Waddell**

Glen's father - he doesn't approve of Glen's wife and children, and is frustrated with Glen's inability to make a name for himself like his brothers have. He is critical and harsh with Glen and is probably the root of many of Glen's problems. He constantly belittles Glen in front of others and shows his disappointment in Glen's life choices.

Mr. Waddell's Children: Glen and two other sons—Daryl and James—both successful professionals.

## **Shannon Pearl**

The homely girl Bone takes under her wing. Bone learns that the quiet, shy persona Shannon shows the world is totally different from the outraged, obscene girl she really is. Shannon's hate is deeper and more volatile than Bone's. Bone can't understand this since Shannon has a family that loves her and provide money for nice things. Shannon is the first person Bone knows who dies, and the death gives Bone a lot to think about.



## Mr. Tyler Highgarden

The manager of Woolworths - The man Bone had to apologize to when she got caught stealing Tootsie Rolls. Bone feared him initially, but by the time he was through humiliating her, she hated him. She got her revenge on him years later when she and Garvey broke in to the Woolworth Store and then told others in town to help themselves to the goods in the store.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Greenville County, South Carolina**

Greenville County, South Carolina is the poor, rural area where the Boatwright family lives.

### **West Greenville**

Daddy Glen moves the family to West Greenville, ostensibly to be nearer his work, but also to get them further away from the Boatwright clan.

### **Bone's Birth Certificate**

Bone's Birth Certificate is the document that caused Anney so much grief. With the word "Illegitimate" stamped in large red letters across the face of the certificate—it branded Bone a bastard.

### **The White Horse Café**

Anney Boatwright worked at The White Horse Café. It is also where she first met Glen Waddell.

### **The Waddell House**

Glen's daddy's large and elaborate house made Glen jealous because he couldn't provide a home like that for his family.

### **The Sunshine Dairy**

Glen's daddy's dairy, called The Sunshine Dairy, is where Glen worked as a route man.

### **The Sunrise Gospel Hour**

The Sunrise Gospel Hour is the gospel music radio show Bone discovered while visiting Aunt Ruth.





## **Lake Greenwood**

Lake Greenwood is where Bone and Shannon fought over Shannon's father's stand on hiring "colored" singers.

## **Greenville River**

The river that ran past Aunt Raylene's place near Eustis Highway was the Greenville River. This is where Bone found the hook that was the catalyst for many of her daydreams, and the tool she and Garvey used to break into Woolworth's.

## **Bushy Creek Baptist Church**

Bush Creek Baptist Church is where Shannon Pearl's and Aunt Ruth's funerals were held; and where Bone was baptized.

## **The County Farm**

The County Farm is where Uncle Earle is incarcerated for fighting with his best friend.

## **Woolworths**

Bone stole candy from Woolworths, and then later returned with her cousin Garvey to break in and steal things.

## **The Greenville News**

The Greenville News is the local newspaper that printed a story and published a picture of Bone after the rape.

# Themes

## Abuse

The book was about Glen's ever-escalating sexual attraction to Bone. Though he abuses Bone, there is no indication in the story that he ever abuses Reese. There is no real discussion as to why she attracts his unwanted attention. While Bone feels there is something "off" about Glen from the start, the real abuse doesn't start until the night that Anney's son is born. While she is in the delivery room, Glen uses Bone to relieve his sexual tension. From that point on, he finds reasons to touch her, criticize her, and beat her when he needs to feel better about himself.

The players have different reactions to the abuse. Anney ignores it. She is convinced that Glen loves Bone, and that he wouldn't really hurt her. When the hurt is undeniable, she thinks it is an accident or that Bone has driven him to it. Bone feels the abuse is her fault—that if she were prettier, or smarter, or kinder, Daddy Glen would love her. She tells others that she provokes Glen, and that is why he punishes her. She never speaks of the sexual abuse, but begins to masturbate to increasingly violent daydreams that are linked to her encounters with and fear of Glen. She feels her daydreams give her the chance to be proud of herself, because she stands up to him in the dreams. Glen doesn't see what he is doing as abuse. He convinces himself and Anney that he does it because he loves Bone and wants her to turn out well. He can't see that he is driven by his dysfunctional relationship with his father and brothers and his own inability to succeed.

## Family Relationships

We see both functional and dysfunctional family relationships throughout the book. For all their faults, the Boatwright's are a loving, close-knit family. They believe that blood is the strongest bond there is. They fight among themselves, but they always make up and their fights are without malice. When one of them is down, they come to each other's aid and are always supportive even when circumstances are against them. When Uncle Earle is put in the County Farm for hurting his best friend, the family members visit him there; when Raylene returns home after a stint with the carnival she is welcomed with open arms, and when Aunt Ruth's cancer escalates, they rally round her to provide love and support.

On the dysfunctional side, we see Glen's relationship with his father and brothers. They are critical, never show any love or regard for him, and the brothers seem to gloat in the fact that they are successful while Glen can't keep a job. We also get a glimpse of dysfunction in Shannon Pearl's family. Her mother totally ignores the little girl's pleas for help. She sees only what she wants to see, and Shannon grows to hate her because of it. Shannon lives in her own world—all alone until Bone befriends her. Shannon's hate is



palpable, and Bone doesn't understand how someone can seem to have it all, yet be so very unhappy.

Bone's family with Daddy Glen is also totally dysfunctional. Anney doesn't see what is happening to Bone because she is so besotted with Glen; the girls both masturbate to find escape; Glen can't hold a job or sustain a relationship with his own family, and Bone's ever-roiling rage with herself and those around her are all indications that this is a family in trouble.

## Self-image

Bone spends a lot of time speculating on her heritage. She hates that she doesn't look like the other members of her family. She is particularly jealous when she sees strong similarities between Reese and Anney yet can't see any of Anney in her own face. Granny tells her she looks like her Grandfather, but that doesn't help Bone to feel like she belongs.

Shannon Pearl also suffers self-image problems. An extremely homely child teased by other children and openly pitied by some adults, she recedes into her own world. She and Bone are very similar in a lot of respects as they are both filled with hate for themselves and the people that make them feel so insignificant and unwanted. Shannon is very vocal with Bone about her hatred, whereas Bone keeps her feelings locked inside.

Bone has heard all of the women in the Boatwright clan talk about their looks. They are all resigned to a certain look that brands them Boatwright's. It is a combination of exhaustion, age, resignation, and hopelessness. They agree they aren't ugly, just not pretty and they are willing to accept that.



# Style

## Point of View

There are 22 chapters in all, and the chapters average 15 – 20 pages each. The story is told from the main character's perspective—and spans the time between Bone's 5th and 13th years. Her feelings, thoughts, and observations take us through the tragedy that is her life. The reader can empathize with her, and even sympathize with her at times as she faces some tough situations.

The main story line is about a young girl's abuse at the hands of her step-father and her confusion over her mother's devotion to him even as she wants to protect her daughter. The raw emotions and deep damage that is being done to this girl on many levels is the foundation for the story. While she actually has a strong maternal family structure, her immediate family is a lost cause. The sub-plots are supportive and help flesh out the dynamics of the family. There is no sugar-coating to the story, but the author is able to tell her tale—and horrify her readers—without offending. The book is about reality, and there is no happy ending, just resignation to what is.

## Setting

The story takes place in South Carolina during the 1950s. The area is rural but with some industry to support the population. There are references to a mill, Glen's father's dairy, the White Horse Café, a bottling plant, and other places where Glen finds work. Glen's father's house makes it apparent that there is a "right side of the tracks" section of town; most of the action in the story takes place in the poor sections of town. The author paints a picture of houses that are ramshackle, but that are kept neat and clean. The people don't have money for things like fancy clothes, but they are proud and don't take handouts either. They help each other.

## Language and Meaning

A lot of the story is done in dialogue. As you might expect, most of the characters have limited education. While they aren't totally ignorant, they use words like "an't" and most of their conversations are interwoven with a fair amount of profanity. There are many colloquialisms used in the book that readers may not understand. Words like scuppernog, shinnying, knucklebone, and katydid may leave readers perplexed, but they add flavor and depth to the story. The language of the storyteller is easy to follow, and draws the reader into her thoughts and emotions. The story is straightforward and tells enough about each character as to make them seem real.

## Structure

The book is 21 chapters long. The early chapters introduce the characters and the setting where the story takes place. These are large families, so there are a lot of names thrown about early in the book, but the story soon focuses on about a dozen primary characters. It is written in first person with Bone telling the story of her life as it unfolds.

There are several subplots throughout the book, and some are easier to link to the primary plot than others. For example: It was clear why Alma moved to an apartment when she caught Wade having an affair, but the references to the black neighbors in the apartment house just seemed to muddy the story line.



## Quotes

Now you look like a Boatwright. Now you got the look. You're as old as you're ever gonna get, girl. This is the way you'll look till you die. (chapter 1)

Earle looks like trouble coming in on greased skids. (chapter 2)

You're a Boatwright, Bone, even if you are the strangest girl-child we got. (chapter 2)

I'll tell you what's true. You're mine now. (chapter 5)

He gets crazy when he's angry. (chapter 5)

I was never gonna have my kids know what it was like. Never was gonna have them hungry, or scared, or cold. Never, you hear me? Never! (chapter 6)

What'd you expect? Look what he married. (chapter 7)

She's my girl, too. Someone's got to love her enough to care how she turns out. (chapter 8)

You're right girl. Glen don't like you much. He's jealous of you, I think. (chapter 8)

A man belongs to the woman that feeds him. (chapter 10)

Child, you are the ugliest thing I have ever seen. (chapter 11)

...that old man takes every chance he gets to make Glen look like a fool. It just eats Glen up, eats him up. (chapter 14)

You think 'cause your aunt died you can mouth off to me? You think you can say just anything you damn well please! You got another think coming. (chapter 17)

I don't want to live with you no more. Mama can come home with you. I told her she could, but I can't. I won't.

If it hadn't been for you, I'd have been alright. Everything would have been alright. (chapter 20)

We do terrible things to the ones we love sometimes. We can't explain it, we can't excuse it. It eats us up, but we do them just the same. (chapter 22)



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

Why does Bone befriend Shannon Pearl? Are there similarities between them? If so, what are they? Does Bone really like Shannon?

## Topic 2

What was Raylene's secret? Why was it a secret? What were the implications if the secret had gotten out in the 1950's? What was her reasoning for sharing the information with Bone? What did Bone learn from the conversation?

## Topic 3

What were the demons that drove Glen? How did his relationship with his family influence him? How did his relationship with Anney's family influence him? Who did he admire? How did he show that he loved Anney?

## Topic 4

What leads us to believe that the Boatwright's have a strong family structure? How did they show love and support for one another?

## Topic 5

How do the Boatwright women feel about their positions in life? How do they feel about their looks? Why did it bother Bone so much that she didn't resemble her mother or the other female members of the family?

## Topic 6

Why did Anney leave Bone with Raylene? How do you think this action will affect Bone's future? What was the semblance of the birth certificate Anney left for Bone? What are the chances that Bone will ever reconcile with Anney?