

# **Bird Study Guide**

**Bird by Rita Murphy**

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## Plot Summary

*Bird*, by Rita Murphy, is a story about a wispy little girl who finds herself caught in a brush after a strong wind storm landed her near Bourne Manor on Lake Champlain. Miranda has few memories of her past when she is found by Wysteria Barrows, the solitary, dark owner of the Bourne Manor and widow of Captain Barrows. Bourne Manor is a large family home on the harbor on Lake Champlain with an ominous appearance and spirit to it. It is rumored by the local townspeople to be cursed.

The story begins with Miranda learning to live under Wysteria's direct control. Wysteria makes her money aiding local fisherman and sets Miranda to the task of fixing their fishing nets, a task that often injures her. She is also charged with the responsibility of lighting the lantern near the top of the house. Further, she is trapped near the house as she is not supposed to go far away from the Manor and must wear metal shoes that keep her close to the ground.

As the years drag on, Miranda learns more about the Manor and finds her way into the dead Captain's study and the attic which holds his beautiful kites. She starts to fly a kite she calls Red Dragon when it gets away from her and is returned to her by a boy named Farley who she befriends behind Wysteria's back. The story becomes more complicated when Wysteria comes down with pneumonia. The townspeople have little sympathy for her and so only the local doctor, Dr. Mead, would come visit her while she was too unhealthy to move to the hospital. During that time, Dr. Mead and Miranda became increasingly acquainted and he filled her in on the history of the Manor (once owned by his family) and Captain Barrows (a dreamer and romantic seduced by Wysteria and likely killed by her). But Dr. Mead is drawn into the evil of the house, obsessed with finding the Captain's legendary fortune.

When Wysteria is taken away from Bourne Manor, Miranda is left to herself and their dogs, the Hounds. She starts spending more time with Farley, who teaches her how to fly with the help of the Captain's kites. Miranda learns that she is meant to fly, that she is "a bird," and that she can never return to life with Wysteria. When Miranda learns that Dr. Mead was corrupted by the Manor and that Wysteria had certainly killed Captain Barrows, she searches the house for messages from Captain Barrows and finds his plans to build a kite that could take him flying. She builds the kite, the Great Heron, with Farley's help and they discover that the Captain's fortune is built into the kites out of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Before Wysteria and the Doctor return her to the Manor, Miranda and Farley take the kite into the air and fly across Lake Champlain where they hope to start a new life and find people like Miranda. The Manor tries to stop Miranda by mesmerizing her but she ends up breaking the lantern, which burned the Manor to the ground as the story ends.



# Chapters 1 & 2

## Chapters 1 & 2 Summary

The main character, a small, wispy bird-like girl named Miranda, is picked up by Wysteria Barrows, a woman who lives in a large mansion known as Bourne manner. She did not care where the bird had come from but only that she stay with her on Lake Champlain. Miranda came to Bourne manner in February, after being knocked hard by a gust of wind, tangled in an elm, remembering only faceless relatives before she was removed by two of Wysteria's dogs. Miranda finds Bourne Manor enormous, four stories high with two balconies. It had twenty-two rooms. She had a grand room all to herself. But it was lonely, set apart from many other houses. Some said it was cursed, as it was built from ill-gotten riches generations before. The Manor invited lost spirits, including Miranda.

From an early age, Miranda could spin and make lace. Wysteria helped her learn to craft nets and her fingers easily learned the trade. This meant mending nets for the fishing fleet out of St. Albans, which was how Wysteria made her living. With Miranda's help, Wysteria could tend to the accounting for the business. And so Miranda became invaluable and realizes that at that time Wysteria would not have let her go. Miranda will never know if anyone came searching for her. Se never saw anyone in those early years. She was allowed outside the Manor during her stay at the Manor but she had to wear boots with a steel plate in each sole so she would not fly away or be blown away by the wind. Miranda was the cause of gossip at the Manor due to her small size and unusual clothing. Wysteria did not mind the gossip, as she saw the locals as beneath her, inheriting this attitude from her late husband, Captain Lawrence Barrows. Miranda heard that she only married him for his fortune and never gave him children, which made him very sad. Wysteria was unmoved by his death. But Wysteria still needed company and Miranda believed she provided it to her, which is why she stayed longer than she should have.

Wysteria did not allow Miranda to show fatigue or weakness, despite her steel boots. She educated her herself but Miranda would study only what Wysteria was interested in. So Miranda had to learn to do arithmetic as Wysteria loved money more than anything. Miranda also had to learn how to tend to the hounds. She often wondered about the history of Bourne Manor, though Wysteria would never have told her. Miranda wished she could have gone to a local school but would not have been allowed due to her association with Bourne Manor. She was referred to as its heir. She cared little for the Manor's value save from a secret it kept.

## Chapters 1 & 2 Analysis

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the main characters, Wysteria and Miranda. Miranda is a small, bird-like girl. Initially she may even seem to be a bird, as the author does not



make this clear. On the one hand, it appears that Miranda flies but on the other she seems to have human level intelligence as she can learn to sew, communicate with Miranda verbally and think for herself. She can also learn arithmetic and has some awareness of her social surroundings. Setting this temporary mystery aside, we can learn from the first two chapters that Wysteria is a morally corrupt woman who came by her riches by tricking a rich man, the owner of Bourne Manor, into marrying her. Her poor reputation led her to be disliked by the local townspeople but she thought herself above them and did not care. In general, the story is shaping up to be a tale not only of Wysteria's oppression of Miranda but of the secrets hidden away in Bourne manor.



# Chapters 3 & 4

## Chapters 3 & 4 Summary

Wysteria had the odd habit of locking every single window in Bourne Manor at night and opening them all in the day. She claimed that it helped her avoid air drafts, which she hated. But this left her with an elaborate and seemingly irrational window locking habit that Miranda later found bewildering. At first Miranda simply obeyed and trusted Wysteria but as she spent more time inside over the years she started to wonder what was in the rooms. At the start, however, Miranda was focused on mending nets while Wysteria was gone. It would take Miranda awhile, as many of the nets had rusty hooks in them and they could get stuck in her palms. Wysteria would offer no sympathy, claiming that Miranda must simply develop callouses and get over it. She would also be responsible for lighting the lantern, which she quite enjoyed. When she reached the top of the Manor during the lantern lighting, she could view the stars and the moon. At those moments, the oppressive nature of the house could be forgotten.

One day, while tending to the nets, Miranda happened upon a skeleton key which she discovered could unlock all the doors on her floor, the third floor, but much to her disappointment found nothing but empty rooms save the Captain's study. It was warm and full of his life. Wysteria never spoke of him, so Miranda spent all the time she could in that room in order to learn all she could about him. The captain had sailed the world twice and had many adventures. It was through his room that she discovered an entrance to the attic and his many kites with pictures of birds on them.

Each morning before Wysteria woke up, Miranda would use the skeleton key to go to the attic, which she had to unlock via a hairpin and file. She loved its appearance and would sometimes take the kites to be viewed in the light. Wysteria thought she went there only in the evening to light the lantern as she had no business up there before. She would have been upset to know the truth.

Wysteria valued her looks and had her own sort of vanity. She frequently admired herself in her mirror. She had once been very attractive, but Miranda could not see her as beautiful due to her coldness. But Miranda cared more for her own experiences, mostly those deprived from her by Wysteria because she could no longer fly in the air. Some nights the wind would lift her up a bit off the ground and other times she would bring the kites upstairs but she could not take the chance to fly them so she only flew her favorite kite, the Red Dragon, far from her window. She took careful care of the Captain's kits and became expert in charting the weather in taking care of them. She also had to care for her coats that Wysteria had placed on her, so she could not fully expose herself to the wind. She was not ready for that journey. She needed time and someone named Farley.



## Chapters 3 & 4 Analysis

Chapters 3 and 4 continue to develop the plot. We are introduced to Wysteria's strange habits and oppressive controls. Her habits involve always locking all the windows in the Manor every night. She was oppressive because she confined Miranda to fixing nets that was a sometimes dangerous task. She would have no sympathy for Miranda when she would accidentally hurt herself. Miranda was not allowed any real gifts and had little recreation time for herself. As a result, she would have to sneak some in. Her favorite thing to do other than lighting the lantern was to fly one of the Captain's kites out of view of Wysteria. Wysteria loved being outside and loved the feel of the wind. But she was not yet ready to fly, as she wanted to. She needed help over the years to get ready to lift off into the air in a controlled way and beyond Wysteria's knowledge. This means appealing to someone named Farley. Clearly the plot coming together is how Miranda comes to free herself from the controlling, oppressive Miranda.



# Chapters 5 & 6

## Chapters 5 & 6 Summary

The seventh year that Miranda lived with Wysteria ended her isolation as she was introduced to a boy named Farley. The winter had been cold and the spring had been financially lean, leaving both Miranda and Wysteria leaner and with more work to do. The work made Miranda ache for time in the wind and flying Red Dragon. One day while flying the kite she accidentally let go of the line and the kite flew away. She could not rescue it without Wysteria knowing. That said, Miranda had been venturing further from the Manor, this time going away to get seaweed. Wysteria was aware of some of these outings, and trusted that Miranda's boots would keep her around. This led to her getting trapped in a bush and Wysteria gave her new and heavier boots and would not let her leave the Manor without Wysteria near her, despite her many requests. Miranda obeyed, though, partly because she feared the wind.

One day while looking in the sky, hoping to see Red Dragon, Miranda spotted a boy far away with a red cap, though he was hard to make out. She saw that he had recovered Red Dragon and would fly it himself. She was completely delighted. The same day the boy came to the door with the Dragon. The boy was thin and wiry. He knew nothing about them apparently, but still pointed out Miranda, "the pretty girl" and claiming that the kite is for her. Miranda feigns ignorance and the boy says he will find its owner. Wysteria was very upset by the disturbance as no one came to knock on the door. It made Wysteria nervous. This fact made Miranda happy and lifted her feeling of oppression, knowing that she would see Farley again.

In Chapter 6, after waking up from a nap, Miranda finds Wysteria still annoyed by Farley's visit. Miranda hoped for his return and found that he was causing a disturbance in the elm near their house. She did not know how he got so far high in the tree. Miranda quickly found her way up to the glass window by the elm. The boy was happy to see her and had Red Dragon strapped to his back. He calls her "miss" and introduces himself as Farley. Miranda responds in kind. Farley asks if she can accompany him to the beach to fly the kite but she explains that she's not allowed. Just then Wysteria rings her bell which Miranda must respond to. She invited Farley to return but advises him to avoid Wysteria, the Hounds and strangers.

When Miranda reached Wysteria, she was clearly unaware that anything was odd, though Wysteria was in her bedchamber. Miranda had never seen her there. Wysteria had black dresses, which she wore to signal that she was a widow even though her husband had been dead twenty years. It was likely to keep suitors away. Wysteria tells Miranda that she can hardly breathe. Her bad physical state scared Miranda, as she was the only family she had, despite her oppressiveness. Miranda brought her bowls of hot water over the night to ease her breath, lasting until morning. In the window Miranda could see a small fire far away and hoped it was Farley. She hoped that he would come





help her with Wysteria and signaled to him by moving her hand in front of a flame inside the house. But the fire died down and the night ended.

## Chapters 5 & 6 Analysis

Chapters 5 and 6 introduce a third main character, Farley, who seems to be a young boy interested in getting to know and interacting with Miranda. Miranda one day sees him far from the Manor and observes, much to her surprise, that he has found Red Dragon. She is glad someone is enjoying it. But that same day, he boldly comes to the Manor and asks to return the kite to Miranda. His presence upset Wysteria greatly, as it was a highly unusual thing to happen. At the same time, Miranda is happy to know someone else and interacts with him behind Wysteria's back soon thereafter. Their interactions are slowed when Wysteria becomes ill, however, as Miranda must attend to her. The reader will notice a complex ambivalence within Miranda's heart. On the one hand, she resents Wysteria's oppression. On the other hand, Wysteria is the only family she has and her caretaker. She is drawn to fly once more and to get to know Farley, but when Wysteria becomes ill, she immediately cares for her the entire night. She hopes that Farley will come help her with Wysteria, bringing the two into (hopefully positive) contact.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Miranda remarks that Farley has not returned since his last visit, returning the kite. While Miranda was used to her isolation before, she now finds it harder to bear without the social companionship that Farley provided. At the same time, Wysteria is becoming increasingly sick. Her fever is making her delirious and eventually Miranda simply has to leave Bourne Manor to find a doctor for her, despite Wysteria's protestations. She took two of the Hounds with her.

As soon as Miranda is out of view of Bourne Manor, she is overwhelmed by the beauty of the hyacinth and elderberry trees and is filled with the aroma of Spring. She must move slowly, due to her steel boots, but she yearns to be free of the Manor, despite Wysteria's illness. On the way, she is stopped by seven boys who jeer at her. They call her the "Bourne Mouse" due to her small size. They claim that she is Wysteria's slave (they call Wysteria "the Witch") and ask whether she is ill. One of the boys claims that Miranda is only fooling herself to think that she is the heir of Bourne Manor. Miranda denies being Wysteria's slave or the heir. She is not in danger of being overrun by the boys, however, as she has two of the Hounds with her. But she nonetheless tells them of the Bourne curse and one of the boys agrees, noting that the curse is due to the great riches within and that the house kills anyone who tries to keep it. He then claims that the house caused Captain Barrows to throw himself off a cliff.

Eventually Miranda stops the conversation by threatening to release the Hounds. As she walks away she assures herself that the boys spoke nonsense. She reaches town and tracks down the doctor's office. The doctor (Dr. Mead) has a secretary who tells Miranda that he is on an island tending to another patient and that he will not be excited to return to the Manor, where he apparently had a fairly unpleasant experience. Miranda pleads for Dr. Mead's help and the secretary says that she will receive it that night.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 considerably complicates the plot. Farley has seemingly disappeared and for the moment his place in the story is overshadowed by Wysteria's illness. It gets much worse, forcing Miranda to leave Bourne Manor to track down a doctor (Dr. Mead) for her. But on the way, Miranda runs into seven boys who quickly give her a different perspective on the house and its inhabitants. She is referred to as both the "Bourne Mouse" and as the Heir of the manor. She is believed to be Wysteria's slave. The boys also mention that the house is cursed. And when Miranda reaches the doctor's office, she learns that he had an unpleasant experience there. Thus, everything new Miranda encounters suggests increasingly negative things about both Wysteria and Bourne Manor.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Dr. Mead arrives and immediately tends to Wysteria. Dr. Mead is clearly an excellent physician and shows great concern for Wysteria. He quickly diagnoses her as having pneumonia, and he tells Miranda that this disease could kill her. She must first recover enough to be moved to St. Elias's, a hospital. Until then, Miranda must tend to her daily and Dr. Mead will return each morning. He notes that his nurse will refuse to come and that almost anyone would. Many believe that the house has been unkind to its inhabitants and that something strange is associated with it.

Over the next few days, Dr. Mead becomes increasingly comfortable in Bourne Manor, comfortable enough to stay around to chat with Miranda. He inquires about her schooling and is not surprised to learn that while she has learned much she knows nothing of the history of the Manor. It turns out that Dr. Mead had grown up with Captain Barrows and knew him well. He notes that the Captain was an impractical dreamer, just as with his father and his father before him. He believed that the Manor was cursed and also thought that through true love for his wife he could break the curse. But it required something more, that Wysteria love him back. And so when he would return from his voyages, he would court her, but to no avail. Dr. Mead notes that she seems incapable of love, and Miranda agrees sadly. Dr. Mead had tried to convince him not to marry Wysteria, as she was clearly only interested in marrying into money and owning the Manor. But he married her anyway. She had grown up believing that she knew she would live there, as she grew up in poverty and let her obsession with getting out of it cloud her mind.

After they tend to Wysteria, Miranda asks Dr. Mead to tell her more about the captain. He is surprised that she has learned as much as she has and is excited to learn that she has access to his study. Dr. Mead has Miranda take him there and he is impressed by the Captain's possessions, style and knowledge. Miranda tells Dr. Mead that she has learned much from his books and enjoys watching the weather from on top of the manor. Next, however, the Hounds start barking indicating that Wysteria had awakened, though she had not. They returned to her and Dr. Mead asked about Miranda's boots, regretting them without saying as much. He reiterates his wish that he had convinced Barrows not to marry Wysteria. He tells Miranda that she has done well and that Wysteria can now be transported to the hospital (whether she likes it or not). Miranda says she will stay to watch the Manor and the Hounds. Dr. Mead leaves but tells Miranda that he would be delighted to revisit the Captain's study.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 continues to complicate matters. The reader learns much, much more about the house and Wysteria's relationship to it and Captain Barrows. Dr. Mead had grown



up with the Captain and had tried to convince him not to marry Wysteria, who had only married him for his fortune. Barrows was a romantic and thought he could break the curse of the Manor by loving Wysteria and she loving him in return. But she proved unwilling and incapable of loving him back and so he died a victim of the curse. Dr. Mead does not believe in curses, but he believed that the inhabitants of the Manor were affected by believing in them. Dr. Mead is also fascinated to encounter the Captain's study and would like to return. Dr. Mead proves to be an outside window on Miranda's predicament and on all the things she wishes she knew more about.



# Chapters 9 & 10

## Chapters 9 & 10 Summary

Miranda grows lonely while waiting for Wysteria's recovery. She must tend to the Manor by herself and take care of the Hounds. She grows lonely and feels the gloom of the Manor closing in on her. It makes many noises in Wysteria's absence. Dr. Mead was not able to visit regularly, so Miranda often had no one to talk to at all. However, one day Dr. Mead sent his nurse, Miss Moreland, to check on Miranda and bring her some food. Miss Moreland refused to enter the Manor and explained to Miranda, on Miranda's request, that the House was indeed cursed and that its purported fortunes had taken hold of many in the town. She claimed that Captain Barrows had no killed himself, as many in the town wanted to believe. Miss Moreland believed that Wysteria had killed him and that Dr. Mead had looked the other way without realizing it due to his own obsession with the Manor. It turns out that generations ago, the Meads had owned the Manor. It was named after Dr. Mead's great-grandmother. Dr. Mead himself had been obsessed with it, but his obsession had waned over the years, that is, until Miranda brought him to return. Then Miss Moreland begs Miranda not to let Dr. Mead back in so as to save him and she advises Miranda to leave as soon as possible.

Over the next several days, Miranda spends much time in contemplation. She cannot figure out how to fit together everything she had experienced with what she learned from Dr. Mead and Miss Moreland. At the same time, she started to wonder whether spirits indeed inhabited the Manor and found Wysteria's keys and started performing the same nightly and morning rituals of locking and unlocking all the doors and windows. She passed her time in the Captain's study, hoping for a clear day when she could leave the Manor, feeling as if she could not resolve the mystery of the Manor from its inside. Eventually a clear day came and the Hounds returned bearing Farley.

In Chapter 10, Farley happily greets Miranda and brings her a small gift. His liveliness encourages Miranda but when he invites her to leave with him for a while she hesitates. This hesitation surprises her and she theorizes that it is the effect of the Manor on her that keeps her from her former desire to leave. She realizes that she does not want Farley to come in, for the happiness he brought her would be enough for the Manor to treat him badly. But Miranda still agrees to leave and to take two kites with her to fly with Farley.

Miranda would fly kites with Farley many times, but the first time that she flew a kite brought a shock. Farley tells her many tales of creatures around the countryside. He is stunned to learn that she has never seen the ocean and wants to take her there. He tells her that there are many beings "like yourself" there, by which he means birds. Miranda is unsure of what he means and he tells her that she is a bird "for sure" though she denies it. He points out that she may have forgotten but that inside her she has a draw to fly somewhere far away. She admits a desire to fly past the lake. Farley claims



that she only needs some wings and that she can use the kites if she cannot fly on her own.

## Chapters 9 & 10 Analysis

Chapter 9 brings Miranda to an especially gloomy place in her life at the Manor. She spends much time alone, now that Wysteria was gone, and ponders that many things that Dr. Mead and Miss Moreland told her. Wysteria learned from Miss Moreland that Dr. Mead was also obsessed with the house and that his family had owned it generations ago. She also claims that it led Wysteria to kill Captain Barrows and that he had not killed himself. Miss Moreland believes that the house is cursed and drags on the souls of its inhabitants. She begs Miranda not to let Dr. Mead reenter and continue to reignite his old obsession with the Manor. Over the next few days, Miranda feels this tug of the house against her life energy.

But at the same time there is a glimmer of hope. Farley returns and invites Miranda out to fly kites with him. He is full of life and ideas about how to have fun with her. He tells her, much to her surprise, that she is a bird and that she is meant to fly and not to be trapped in the Manor. This is of great significance because it brings to a climax Miranda's slow realization of who and what she is and what she is meant for.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

In Chapter 11, Miranda wakes up having dreamt of all flying things and of flying herself, just as Farley had said she would. When she woke up, she made her way to the beach where Farley was building a sand castle which turned out to be a version of the Manor. Miranda and Farley begin to talk about Farley's work. He mentions that he will likely not go back to Ireland but that he would not be in the area much longer, as his ship was setting sail. He will be gone in a few days. Miranda is not sure how she will survive without him. Farley is the only person that knows who she is and the only person she can trust. Without him, she will have only the Hounds and the Manor.

But they set aside sad things, as Farley tells Miranda that he has prepared kite wings for her and that she can today fly for the first time. She has a hard time trusting him at first, but he still wraps a string to her belt and equips her with the wings he made for her. After Farley convinces her to resist her fear that she will be taken over by the wind, he gets her to take her steel boots off for the first time since Wysteria placed them on her. Then she runs down the beach until the wind picks her up in the air. Once she lifts into the sky and realizes that she is safe, with Farley holding the line, her entire world opens up below her. She can see everything, including the Manor, which she realizes has no real power over her. Instead, she understands that she was always meant to be a creature of the air, that indeed she was meant to fly and that she could never see herself in the same way again. The realization of her true nature helps her to break the Manor's power and Farley is delighted to see this realization in her while she is high in the air.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 is the tale of Miranda's awakening and liberation. Farley has inspired her enough to convince her to try to fly. He has even made wings for her out of kites. While there is some sadness that Farley will be leaving in a few short days, he is determined to help Miranda realize that she is a bird of a sort and that she was meant to fly high into the air. When Miranda takes off her steel boots, the reader should understand that she has willingly removed the restraints that Wysteria had placed on her. And when Miranda flies she realizes that she had been held back from what she was meant for, that she was a naturally flying thing and that no one could ever tell her otherwise again. This chapter is therefore a crucial moment in Miranda's character development. It remains to be seen what she will do with her newfound freedom.



# Chapters 12 & 13

## Chapters 12 & 13 Summary

In the morning, Miranda awakes on the beach, with Farley. Miranda had fallen asleep talking to him about flying. She was so excited about the previous day and at the prospect of spending another day with Farley, her only friend and confidant. But she had not returned to the Manor and realized that she had much to attend to. On her way back, she ran into Dr. Mead, who tells her that Wysteria is nearly better and will be coming home from St. Elias's soon. Miranda is disappointed and concerned and can barely conceal it from Dr. Mead. She then shows Dr. Mead the small bottle that she had found in Wysteria's bedchamber. It turns out to be laudanum, a sedative that Dr. Mead prescribed for Captain Barrows while he was still alive. Dr. Mead is disturbed when he realizes that apparently Wysteria had used it for other purposes and now, given that Miranda's name was on the bottle, she may have intended to use it on Miranda. He promises that he will prescribe no more for Wysteria.

But then Dr. Mead asks Miranda if she will let him into the Manor to look around. She remembers Miss Moreland's pleas not to let him in but does not know how to convince him otherwise. So she lets him in the Manor, hoping that Farley will not appear and expose her secrets. But once in the Manor, Dr. Mead becomes singularly focused on finding his family's lost fortune in Barrows's office. As he rifles through the drawers in the office, he gets increasingly more frustrated. Eventually he begins to browbeat Miranda for more information and eventually starts to violently shake her to get her to tell him where the fortune is. When he puts her down, Miranda opens the latch keeping them in the room, runs out the door and gets the Hounds who freeze Dr. Mead with fear. He then comes to his senses and Miranda demands that he leave. He does so.

After the doctor leaves, Miranda quickly returns to the Captain's study and looks in his dictionary to learn about laudanum. It is a small form of opium that when used in large quantities could cause hallucination and death. She concludes that the doctor had probably only prescribed it in small quantities but that Wysteria had surely used it to kill her husband. Miranda realizes that she is not safe and that she must leave before Wysteria returns. But before doing so, she decides to search for Captain Barrows's treasure for herself. She surmises that she, like he, had grown up alone in the Manor and that she might be able to divine his thinking. Eventually she decides to look at the scraps of paper in the walls that she always thought had been Wysteria's manner of insulating the room. But all the pieces of paper (fifty in all) had Barrows's scrawling on it, with calculations and weather predictions and pictures of the kites. Perhaps he had meant to fly as well. Miranda then tries to leave the Manor but many of the doors are locked. She feels certain that the Manor means to trap her and is concerned that it has succeeded until she is able to leave a glass window and use an anchor line to reach Farley and the Hounds below. She takes some food with her, lights the lantern and escapes, realizing that the Manor had meant ill for her after all.





In Chapter 13, Miranda and Farley puzzle over the sheets of paper that Barrows' had left behind in this life. They realize that he had designed a great flying kite that was to be composed of the other kites so the wearer could fly like a heron, and so the kite was called the Great Heron. They also discovered that the Captain indeed had a fortune and that it was built into the kites. The kites, it turned out, were composed of hundreds of thousands of dollar bills intricately wrapped together. Only someone fascinated with his kites, that shared his love of flying, could have seen it, and so only Miranda could have noticed. But now they must quickly prepare the Heron and send Miranda across the lake to find more of her own kind. Farley must leave due to his work and she cannot come with him. Further, she could not wait for Dr. Mead and Wysteria to return, for it would be too dangerous. They have only a day to build the Heron, practice flying it, and to send Miranda away forever.

## Chapters 12 & 13 Analysis

In Chapters 12 and 13, the plot of the book is fully revealed and the pace substantially quickened. First, Miranda has survived the Manor. While Dr. Mead nearly hurts her when they return to the Manor from the beach, she is able to fend him off and find Barrows's plans for the Great Heron. Further, she is able to escape the Manor which tries to stop her by locking its doors. When she escapes, she and Farley unravel the plans for the Heron and discover Barrows's fortune - which is built into the kites. It is clear now that the clock is ticking and that Miranda and Farley had only a limited time in which to help Miranda escape. She cannot wait for Dr. Mead and Wysteria to return, nor can she go with Farley. The best plan they can come up with is to build the Great Heron and teach Miranda to fly it over the lake where she can hopefully find more of her own kind. Farley makes a cryptic remark to himself at the end of the chapter, which suggests that there is another part to the plan of which only Farley is aware.

In this chapter, Miranda has fully embraced her nature and has rejected the shackles placed upon her. She knows that Wysteria is much more dangerous than she imagined and that Dr. Mead would easily succumb to the Manor if she were not careful. She also receives further validation of her nature and aspirations because she realizes that in many ways she shared them with Captain Barrows.



# Chapters 14 & 15

## Chapters 14 & 15 Summary

In Chapter 14, Farley and Miranda complete the Great Heron. Farley leaves to attend to some final business and warns Miranda not to return to the Manor, no matter what, and that they would face it together. Miranda agrees until the Manor begins to lure her back, giving her the impression that it had not asked to be built where it was, that it needed her and that she simply wanted to return to its warm embrace. She was mesmerized and walked back slowly to the Manor until she stood before its gates. Then she remembered Farley's words, that they would face it together, so she returned to the beach.

Eventually Farley arrives and they take the Heron to the Manor and bring it inside. Farley helps Miranda avoid the trappings of the Manor as they open all the doors to let the wind come through. Farley tells Miranda that the Manor feeds on fear and that she need only master her fear and they would fly away. As they reach the roof, the wind is howling and Miranda wants only to light the lantern one last time. After she does so, they are about to take off until the lantern crashes and threatens to light the Manor on fire. She begs Farley to let her tend to it, drawn into her former duty of tending to the lantern. But Farley demands that she stay. He has donned that Great Heron and she will fly next to him. Farley has packed all his wages and plans together. They will reach across the lake and use the kites to live with great wealth. As they pull away, the Manor begins to burn and groan. In the distance, Miranda sees a carriage approach the Manor and a woman in black appear with a man in a top hat (Wysteria and Dr. Mead). They rush towards the Manor as it bursts into flames and collapses in on itself. And Miranda is free with Farley, gliding in the wind.

In Chapter 15, Miranda notes that the Manor was destroyed and that it would no longer lure anyone coming into the harbor at Lake Champlain. Wysteria and the Manor had forever lost their grip on her, for she had returned to the wind with Farley, her friend. The book ends as Farley and Miranda reach the western shore of the lake.

## Chapters 14 & 15 Analysis

In Chapter 14, Farley and Miranda reach the climax of the book. Miranda must survive the final temptations of the Manor. She must first resist its call when Farley leaves to gather his wages and belongings to fly away with Miranda. And she must then resist its call when she and Farley are opening its doors and getting ready to fly away from it. It finally calls her through caring for the lantern, the thing she most enjoyed doing in the Manor, but she is able, with Farley's help, to escape it. And the Manor, appropriately, is burned to the ground before Wysteria or Dr. Mead could reach it. Farley and Miranda escape and everyone who had ever been snared by the Manor would be free from it forever. In Chapter 15, Miranda and Farley fly over Lake Champlain and reach the other

shore. Farley has donned the Heron, as Miranda does not need it, for she can fly freely and safely in the Heron's wake.



# Characters

## Miranda

Miranda is the main character of *Bird* and the perspective from which the story is told. Miranda's origins are a mystery, but to the reader and to herself. She is a very small, wispy, bird-like girl who begins the story bewildering and stuck in some brush. She is then found by Wysteria Barrows and her Hounds and taken into the Manor to work for Wysteria largely as a slave. Miranda is a slight, quiet character who takes pleasures in small things, like lighting the Manor's lamp each night. However, she is very lonely, as Wysteria does not permit her to leave the Manor and no one visits the Manor at all. Miranda is thus delighted when she is fortunate enough to meet a boy named Farley who immediately takes a liking to her and helps her to find Red Dragon, the kite that she loved.

Miranda gradually realizes that she was born to fly in the air and that Wysteria was using her in order to fix her nets and planned to likely kill her if she got out of line. When Farley takes her flying, she is almost entirely freed from Wysteria's grip, who had become ill and left the Manor for several weeks. However, Miranda is still partly mesmerized by the evil Manor which almost stops her from leaving on the Great Heron with Farley in order to cross the lake and hopefully find her home.

## Wysteria Barrows

Wysteria Barrows is the antagonist of *Bird*. She is the owner of Bourne Manor and the widow of Captain Lawrence Barrows, whose family she married into for its wealth. Apparently she grew up knowing that she would one day become rich by marrying into the Barrows's family and that she did what she could to bring that about. However, Captain Barrows, preoccupied with travel and romance, believed that his love of Wysteria and her love in return could break the curse of Bourne Manor. When he realized she would not love him in return, he wanted to sell Bourne Manor, but Wysteria would rather have poisoned him than let the Manor go, and so that it was she did, concealing it from anyone else.

Under these conditions, Wysteria found Miranda in some bushes by the Manor and made her wear steel boots so that she was not blown away by the wind. She then supported Miranda on the condition that Miranda would fix fishing nets for her. Wysteria continually keeps Miranda in the dark about herself and the Manor until she comes down with pneumonia. In her illness and delirium and, later, her absences, she loses her control over Miranda. Miranda uses this time to get to know Farley and finally escape Wysteria's clutches. The book ends with Dr. Mead and Wysteria running toward the Manor as it catches fire and Miranda and Farley fly across Lake Champlain.



## **Farley**

This is the young Irish boy who helps Miranda to rediscover her nature and escape Bourne Manor with the Great Heron.

## **Captain Lawrence Barrows**

Wysteria's dead husband, Barrows was a romantic and traveler who left enough clues behind after his death for a kindred spirit to locate his fortune and escape the Manor.

## **Dr. Mead**

The man who tends to Wysteria's illness who was also obsessed with finding the lost riches of Bourne Manor which, apparently, had once been owned by his family.

## **Miss Moreland**

This is Dr. Mead's nurse who pleads with Miranda not to let Dr. Mead into Bourne Manor again.

## **The Hounds**

These are Wysteria's four dogs that Miranda befriends.

## **The Townspeople**

The townspeople downwind of Bourne Manor believe that the Manor is cursed and that Wysteria is evil.

## **Sailors**

Many sailors came through the harbor over which Bourne Manor stood and some did business with Wysteria.

## **The Barrows**

This is the family who owned Bourne Manor and which Wysteria married into in order to become wealthy.

## **The Meads**

This is the family from which Dr. Mead came and who once owned the Manor. The Manor is named for one of Dr. Mead's ancestors.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Bourne Manor**

This is the cursed Manor where Miranda and Wysteria live and where Captain Barrows's fortune is kept.

### **The Captain's Study**

This is the room within Bourne Manor where the Captain worked and where his secrets were hidden.

### **Lake Champlain**

This is the lake on which the Manor was located and which Miranda wishes to fly over.

### **St. Elias**

This is the hospital where Dr. Mead took Wysteria to recover.

### **Fishing Nets**

At the Manor, Miranda's job was to fix local fishermen's fishing nets.

### **Red Dragon**

This is the kite of Captain Barrows's which Miranda flew and lost to Farley, which allowed them to form a friendship.

### **The Great Heron**

This is the large kite composed of smaller kites that Captain Barrows designed and that Miranda and Farley rebuilt and used to escape Bourne Manor.

### **The Barrows's Fortune**

This is the legendary fortune eluded identification until Miranda and Farley discovered that it composed Captain Barrows's kites.



## **The Lantern**

The Manor functions as a kind of lighthouse. Miranda lit its lantern each night, one of her favorite activities. The lantern breaks at the end of the book and burns down the Manor.

## **Miranda's Shoes**

Steel shoes that Wysteria placed on her to keep her from flying away and which Miranda eventually grew courageous enough to remove.

## **Pneumonia**

Wysteria comes down with pneumonia, which gives Miranda the time to grow and escape.

## **Laudanum**

This is the opium-derived sedative that Wysteria used to kill Captain Barrows and may have intended to use to kill Miranda.

## **Wysteria's Keys**

Wysteria had a massive set of keys she used to unlock and lock every window in Bourne Manor each morning and night.





# Themes

## The Curse of Bourne Manor

While the apparent antagonism in *Bird* is between Miranda and Wysteria, the true antagonism seems to be between Miranda and her home, Bourne Manor. Bourne Manor has existed for several generations, having been named for Dr. Mead's great grandmother. The Barrows family acquired the home long ago and the home led several generations of Barrows's to their deaths, including Captain Lawrence Barrows, Wysteria's husband. It is said that the Manor is cursed and that many believed it to be so in the town. The Manor is thought to drain the life out of its inhabitants and to keep them close inside. It undermines any threats to its integrity and mesmerizes those who live within it long enough. The Manor is also said to have a legendary treasure which obsesses both Wysteria and Dr. Mead. It can get a grip on almost anyone, including Miranda, which almost leads her to her doom on two separate occasions.

The curiosity of the curse is the extent to which the Manor is a genuine, evil agent or whether it is simply imagined as such. The book does not seem to decisively settle the question, though it certainly seems to lean in that direction when Miranda is mesmerized into returning to the Manor without Farley towards the end of the book. Nonetheless, Farley emphasizes that the curse is mostly in the mind of Miranda or that, at least, even if the Manor is an evil agent, it can only have power over Miranda if she allows it.

## Fear

But the curse of Bourne Manor and its power suggests a deep theme, that of the nature and power of fear. Miranda has no idea where she comes from or who she is. There are even points in the book where Miranda is not entirely sure what type of creature she is, fully human or part bird. Miranda lives under the near complete control of Wysteria, who employs her and controls her comings and goings. Miranda is most directly imprisoned by her steel boots, which keep her close to the ground. She fears that without them she would fly away into the air and lose herself just as she did just before Wysteria found her. Wysteria keeps her afraid. Whenever she hopes to reach out and indulge her dreams of flying, Wysteria either thwarts her or she must pursue such matters behind Wysteria's back.

Over the course of the book, Wysteria gradually overcomes her fears and recovers her true self, the self that belongs in the air and that is able to make her own decisions about her life. She is led out of her fear through Farley, who always encourages her to step out of her shell and to take risks. He teaches her to fly again and has her take off her boots for the first time. He also helps her to conquer her fear about the Manor and to avoid being mesmerized by the Manor and draw into its lures and quiet lies.



## Freedom and Human Nature

There are many in present-day literary and philosophical circles who see the idea of human nature as restricting human freedom. Those who make claims that human nature is such and such are essentializing behavior in ways that entrap those who inevitably do not fit those conceptions of appropriate, natural human behavior. Bird has precisely the opposite view. Human freedom is achieved when one's nature is recognized and when one can freely act on what one was meant for. This lesson is demonstrated through Miranda's experiences throughout the book. Wysteria takes control of Miranda by playing on her insecurities, by convincing her to give into her fears about being controlled by the wind and to suppress her dreams about learning to fly despite the dangers of the wind.

Farley helps to free Miranda from Wysteria by helping her to have the courage to explore who she is, by helping her to find her place in the sky despite the wind's power. In fact, Farley so helps Miranda explore who she is that it is he who uses the Great Heron to fly, while she follows on his wake all on her own. It is only through recognizing and accepting her nature that Miranda is truly free. While she is free of Wysteria's control and the Manor's manipulation, she is most free because she recognizes her nature and acts accordingly.

# Style

## Point of View

Bird is written from the first-person point of view, specifically from Miranda's perspective. All of Miranda's thoughts and concerns are open and clear to the reader. The reader will never encounter the inner thought lives of others. In fact, Bird keeps the thought processes and personal information of all other characters somewhat of a mystery. Part of this is to further developing Miranda's character. She is in many ways naïve and suffers from significant memory loss. She has also been trapped within the Manor and its nearby vicinity for years and has learned little of her surroundings. Consequently, the point of view of Miranda is rather narrow.

Bird is a simple story for young adults. As such, the point of view is pretty transparent and focused. Miranda is quiet and cautious. She is inventive and has a lively imagination. She is also curious and longs for social connection with others. The book depicts her as largely solitary though not by choice. She is also unaware of her true nature, which she uncovers as the story progresses. Miranda's point of view shows some wisdom but it is largely the point of view of someone who knows little and has forgotten much, of someone naïve but who is open to learning more and who has a kind of dignity despite being willing to change her mind when prompted. Miranda is rather peaceful and able to amuse herself.

## Setting

The year and exact location of Bird is never revealed. There is no indication of electricity in the book but there are complex cities, mass emigration (Farley is from Ireland) and the use of kites in the West. It is likely set somewhere in the United States or Canada on the East Coast. The specific location of the book is in the town and area surrounding Lake Champlain. On Lake Champlain sits Bourne Manor, which is where almost all of the book occurs. Bourne Manor is several generations hold, having been built by Dr. Mead's family four generations prior.

But one focal idea of the book is the Bourne Manor is cursed and has a kind of shadow personality. In other words, the Manor has basic desires and powers that it can use for ill against inhabitants of the house. It is said in the book that the Manor drained the life of its residents over time and kept them close within its walls. It lures people, like Wysteria, into a life inside of it. And it penalizes those who resist it or attempt to break its curse. Arguably, the story implies that the Manor so corrupted Wysteria that she was willing to kill her husband, Captain Barrows, in order to preserve the Manor from being sold. Further, it exerts a power of Dr. Mead, making him obsess over the legendary fortune found within.



Most significant is the effect of the setting - Bourne Manor - on Miranda, who serves it in many ways and feels its tug. But when she is close to escaping it, it attempts to mesmerize her and it seizes on her fear when she tries to fly away from it.

## Language and Meaning

Bird is told from the perspective of Miranda, a small, wispy girl who has forgotten her past and who grows up within the walls of Bourne Manor. The story is meant to explain her character development, from a weak, servile slave of Wysteria Barrows to the bold woman willing to fly high in the air with her friend in order to escape servitude. As such, the language and meaning of the text is almost in complete service to this end - of elaborating Miranda's character and showing how she develops. Further, the language does so in a way that is accessible to younger readers.

For this reason, the text is composed of relatively short sentences many of which are simply descriptive. While there are important bits of dialogue, much of the book simply describes Miranda's memories, thoughts, fears, plans and activities. The language therefore has a kind of soft, introspective feel reflecting the solitary, but kind spirit of the book's main character. Further, many of the conversations are pretty simple, reflecting the simplicity of the mind - Miranda's - engaged in said conversations. But the language also suggests a deeper theme of character development that occurs, in many ways, without Miranda's awareness. As a result, there is a deeper meaning to the text because it tracks Miranda's development in ways that seem to go beyond Miranda's present ability to understand. The meaning of the text then functions both at the level of Miranda's awareness and just beyond it to thoughts that would likely be accessible to her on reflection in her future.

## Structure

Bird is a short book divided into fifteen relatively brief chapters. The story progresses in chronological order that slowly develops the plot. The core problem of the book is the development of Miranda as a free and self-determining being from her servile status doing the bidding of Wysteria and trapped to the ground in her steel boots. The story begins in chapter one with Wysteria finding Miranda in some bushes after she was lifted off the ground during a wind storm that she cannot remember well. The story then explains how she came to live in Bourne Manor and her relationship with Wysteria. The reader also discovers how Miranda copes with her far from ideal circumstances and the activities that she enjoys.

The book becomes more complicated with the introduction of Captain Barrows's kites and Miranda's friend Farley, both of which present an opportunity for Miranda to escape the life that Wysteria and the Manor have decreed for her. She is able to find through Wysteria's pneumonia and her association with Dr. Mead that her future is probably quite grim if she is not able to escape from the Manor, so much of the later part of the book is spent with Miranda trying to figure out the Captain's mysteries and how to

escape with Farley's help. The book climaxes at the very end as Miranda and Farley escape Bourne Manor on the Great Heron as they watch the Manor burn down. Wysteria and Dr. Mead look on, helpless to stop it.



## Quotes

"Wysteria did not care where I had come from or where I had been. Nor did she care that I was small and delicate in nature and easily carried off by the wind. She cared only that I stay with her in the great house she occupied on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain." (Chapter 1, p. 1).

"The lost and aimless: to these Bourne Manor gave its shelter." (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"The Manor's only value came from the secret that lay within it." (Chapter 2, p. 11).

"From that height, everything seemed possible, and the oppressive and mournful nature of the house fell away from me." (Chapter 3, p. 17).

"Try as I might, I could not see Wysteria as truly beautiful, for she possessed a cold, hardened quality. I certainly could not see her hair set free and roaming down her shoulders." (Chapter 4, p. 23).

"From now on, it is the safety of the fireside for you." (Chapter 5, p. 34).

"I did not feel the same oppression that normally accompanied such an exchange, for in my mind I could see clearly the boy's cap tipping in my direction, and I knew that regardless of Wysteria's dislike of intrusions, I would see him again." (Chapter 5, p. 41).

"The Manor in which you live harbors a great and cursed fortune, and anyone who tries to claim it is driven mad. That house kills all that come to it. It keeps them bound until they suffocate inside its walls, or sends them hurtling over the cliffs, like the captain." (Chapter 7, p. 59).

"Captain Barrows believed that if he married for love—and he did love his wife, though I could never understand why—he would break the curse that hung over this wretched house." (Chapter 8, p. 71).

"The Meads were the original owners of this Manor. It was named after the doctor's great-grandmother Sylvia Bourne." (Chapter 9, p. 87).

"You're a bird, for sure." (Chapter 10, p. 98).

"It's more than sad, I wanted to say. It was full of something I didn't understand, something that drew me and at times made me want to run from it and never return." (Chapter 11, p. 102).

"I was a creature of the air. This I knew now with certainty. I was not bound to any substance of earth, including that forbidding dwelling upon the cliff. I must always stay close to the wind, I told myself, as I caught an updraft and soared ever higher, pulling tightly on the line. No matter what happened, I must always stay within its embrace." (Chapter 11, p. 112).



"I knew, perhaps for the first time, its real intentions. It would try to destroy me before it ever let me go. I knew with certainty that this was true, and I vowed never again would I be caught inside its walls." (Chapter 12, p. 129).

"The house senses your fear and plays upon it. That is the only thing that will stop us. When the fear presses upon you, remember that it is not real. Remember the feeling of the wind. That is real." (Chapter 14, p. 143).

"I know only in the arms of the wind, both Wysteria and the Manor lost their grip upon me and I feared them no more, no more than a starling would fear the temporary entrapment of a barn gate, knowing that its true nature is not bound to earth." (Chapter 15, p. 150).

"Fear is a strange thing. It can creep unnoticed into your mind, seize hold of your reason and take root." (Epilogue, p. 159).



## Topics for Discussion

While Miranda seems to be human, she is unusually bird-like in a number of ways. Explain what this means.

How does Miranda's attitude about flying change throughout the book? What is the symbolic significance of flight?

To what extent is the Manor's power real and to what extent is it imagined by the townspeople and the Manor's inhabitants?

What was the Captain's fortune? How did Miranda happen upon finding it?

Explain the antagonism between Farley and the Manor and what it symbolizes.

How does Miranda's understanding of Wysteria develop as the book progresses?

Explain how Miranda finally triumphed over Bourne Manor.

Who was Miranda's greatest enemy? Wysteria? Bourne Manor? Or herself? Explain your reasoning.