

Dragonwyck Study Guide

Dragonwyck by Anya Seton

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Plot Summary

This novel is considered to be one of the great classic Gothic romances, falling into the same category as *Rebecca* and *Jane Eyre*. It is also the Cinderella story of a young girl from modest circumstances who realizes her dreams and also overcomes great tragedy after she marries a wealthy, powerful man.

Miranda Wells is a young farm girl filled with romantic notions that have little to do with her everyday life, and while both her parents love her, her mother, Abigail, is the one who is sympathetic to her dreams. Then one day, a letter arrives from Nicholas Van Ryn, a wealthy cousin whom they have never met, inviting her to come and stay at Dragonwick, his estate.

Once she is there, Nicholas decides that Miranda has much to learn, and he bluntly says that he will "make out a map of reading" for her. Then he takes her to meet his wife, Johanna, a dull, obese woman who is preoccupied with food. It is also obvious to her that Mrs. Van Ryn seems to classify her as an "upper servant", and that she will be caring for their daughter Katrine.

At the Fourth of July celebration, Miranda finds herself dancing with Nicholas, as she had hoped to do, when a guest falls on the slippery floor and the music comes to an end for her. Then, Jeff Turner, a young doctor who has nothing but contempt for the Van Ryn's way of life, arrives to take care of the count, and he and Nicholas take stock of one another as they talk.

One day, when Miranda takes Martine to the doctor's office, she walks into a down-renters meeting and she is appalled. Later, when she tells Nicholas about it, he brushes the information aside. On the way home, their carriage is surrounded by a band of tenant farmers disguised as Indians; a bullet shatters two windows and he draws her near as the shot rings out. Once the frightened horses are calmed, Jeff Turner comes to see if anyone has been hurt, saying that the down-renters don't intend to be violent and that the group will deal with the shooter.

Another time, Nicholas sends for the doctor to visit Johanna, who has a heavy cold. Jeff is invited to spend the night there. When Joanna dies a few hours later, he can only assume that acute indigestion has weakened her heart.

One night before the funeral, Miranda is awakened by the sound of Nicholas calling her name. Then, he kisses her passionately and she is frightened by what is happening. When they stand talking by the fire, he places a ring on her finger, the Van Ryn betrothal ring that Johanna never wore. He explains that she must hide the ring and go home for the traditional year-long mourning period, living for the future as he intends to do.

Nicholas comes in the spring as he has planned and Ephraim is amazed that his daughter knew all along that she and Van Ryn would be married and that the wedding ceremony, which will take place in their parlor, has been prearranged. After the wedding,



Jeff Turner writes to Miranda unexpectedly, telling her that he has joined the army and will be leaving for Mexico. She has no idea that he was stunned and angry when he heard about her wedding, and that he didn't want to think about her being married to another man.

The summer heat becomes oppressive, and Miranda and Nicholas travel up the Hudson to Pine Orchard Mountain House and she meets Peggy, a likeable Irish immigrant. Her bond with Peggy grows stronger, and Miranda is determined to have the woman as her maid and confidant when she and Nicholas return to Dragonwyck. When he ridicules the idea, she blurts out the fact that she is pregnant, and he is so elated that he is willing to give her anything she asks for.

After he returns from the war, Jeff finds himself summoned to Dragonwyck when Nicholas appears at his door to ask his help, and a baby boy is born the following morning. The doctor also determines that the baby will not live long because his heart is defective, and when he brings Nicholas the grim news, he is totally ignored and asked to leave without seeing Miranda.

One day, the Van Ryns are invited to dine with the Vandergraves and attend a performance of "Macbeth" afterwards. At the time, there is an ongoing feud between two rival factions staging two different versions of the play, one headed by an English actor, favored by the gentry, and another, led by an American actor, favored by the general public—and class warfare is brewing.

When Van Ryn foolishly confronts the demonstrators afterwards, a boy douses him with a bucket of water, and he retaliates by grabbing a soldier's rifle and shooting him. More stones are thrown as the crowd disperses, and one of them hits Nicholas in the chest, forcing him to the ground.

When Nicholas comes home earlier than expected from a trip to New York, Peggy sends to Dr. Turner for help, and both he and Miranda realize that Nicholas is carrying a gun. When Van Ryn draws his pistol and Miranda manages to knock it out of his hand, the two men struggle and Jeff ties him up with a bell rope.

Once they are on the Mary Clinton, Nicholas who is free again, makes the boat stop by hanging a red flag from the tower. Later, the center section of the boat bursts into flames and he carries Miranda to safety. She also contracts pneumonia as of the result of the tragedy, and when she is fully conscious, she senses instinctively that Nicholas is dead and discovers she is the heir to his estate.

Right before Christmas, Miranda and Jeff are married, and since the two are really a team, they decide to move to California, where doctors are sorely needed, both resolving to never look back.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

This novel is considered to be one of the great classic Gothic romances, falling into the same category as *Rebecca* and *Jane Eyre*. It is also the Cinderella story of a young girl from modest circumstances who realizes her dreams and also overcomes great tragedy after she marries a wealthy, powerful man.

The story begins one afternoon in May 1844, when a letter is delivered to the Wells' farmhouse in upstate New York, something that only happens about three times a year. Miranda, who is eighteen, is the first to read the letter, and its message has a profound affect on her.

Ideally, she would have been doing some chores or attending to her baby sister, Charity, at the time, but instead, she is in her secret "quiet place", the family burial grounds, devouring the romantic novel she is reading, *The Beautiful Adulteress*, as happily as a hungry man might eat a hearty meal.

Miranda is so absorbed in her book that she doesn't hear her mother call her the first time, but when her louder cry brings the girl back to reality, she picks up her little sister and hurries into the house.

Abigail, Miranda's mother, is neither annoyed at having to call her twice nor ready to scold her about what still needs to be done. Instead, she is sitting down, obviously puzzled, and staring at the letter that lies open before her on the table. Miranda quickly discovers that the letter came from Nicholas Van Ryn, Abigail's cousin, whom they have never met, and who is "a very grand personage". He writes that he would like one of the girls in the family to come for an extended stay at his home, Dragonwyck.

Not surprisingly, she tells her mother that she would like to go to Dragonwyck, but she is not encouraged. Instead, Abigail reminds her that Tibby, the girl's younger sister, is also a candidate for making the journey. Although she doesn't elaborate, Miranda quickly replies that her sister won't be the least bit intrigued by the prospect, and she senses that her mother is well aware of the difference between her two daughters.

Once they finish their supper that evening, the family gathers for Bible reading and prayer, led by Miranda's father, Ephraim. Along with his two daughters and Abigail, his sons Tom, Seth, and Nathaniel are also there. As usual, Miranda's attention is divided between the beauty of the scripture and her fascination with the prospect of going to Dragonwyck, both of which speak to her of beauty, mystery, and prosperity.

At the end of the prayer session, Ephraim says that he wants to speak to Miranda and her mother alone, and the rest of the family scatters. It becomes obvious that the man does not approve of the letter, but Abigail has the courage to say that Miranda might



benefit from spending some time in a "great house" and discovering the wider world away from the farm.

Ephraim seems totally closed to the idea of sending Miranda to Dragonwyck, but he is impressed when the girl tells him she feels that the journey is meant to happen since God seemed to reveal this to her as she prayed. Stern as he is, he promises to "sleep on the matter and pray over it". Then, she finds solitude outdoors, hoping that he will allow her to go in the end.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Miranda is the main character in the story, and she clearly feels that she isn't really meant to be where she finds herself and that life holds something better and different in store for her. There is no real hostility in the family, but a fair amount of misunderstanding and clash of temperaments can also be found there since she seems to be the only one who is discontent with her lot in life in this rural setting.

Along with Ephraim, Abigail is concerned about Miranda's delicate ways, impractical dreams and general discontent, and feels caught in the middle between this sensitive girl and her stern, no-nonsense father. She also has a great responsibility at this point and knows that she will be influential when Ephraim decides if his daughter will ever visit the Van Ryns.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

On June 14, Abigail awakens Miranda very early, knowing that the day will be a turning point in her life, and Miranda feels the misgivings one often has when starting out on new venture, along with the pain of separating from those she loves. At the same time, her mother is once more reminded of the special affection she feels for her eldest daughter.

Miranda dresses in her "Sunday best", a brown merino dress touched off with her favorite brooch and a brand new bonnet. She and Tibby share a warm, sisterly goodbye, and she kisses Seth, Nat, and the baby as they sleep. Then she takes a seat beside her father on the family wagon, and Tom goes along with them to meet the market boat headed for New York.

As they wait for the boat, a neighbor warns them of the dangers to be found in the city. By way of contrast, Tom admits to Miranda that he would like to be making the trip too, instead of going back to the farm. The boat ride goes smoothly, and she notices that her father has begun to relax.

As Miranda and Ephraim lose their way three times as they walk toward their destination, the Astor House, she realizes that their wicker baskets and their unstylish clothing in particular are clear signs that she and her father have come in from the country. In the hotel's magnificent lobby, they go unnoticed until he informs the desk clerk that Mr. Van Ryn will be meeting them there. After that, they are led to a three-room suite, and while he feels that its elegance is inappropriate, she is totally enchanted. Her father is ready to call a halt to this adventure, but she successfully reminds him that he must keep his word. They also disagree over the festive dinner that is brought to them, complete with fancy sauces and a French menu, but she is touched when he presents her with a Bible of her own to mark the occasion.

When Nicholas Van Ryn arrives, Miranda is quite impressed because he seems to be such a gentleman, and he is pleased to see that the girl has the potential to become a fine lady. Ephraim, on the other hand, is displeased by his "slimsy looks," and by the fact that he also has two hundred tenant farmers on his estate.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Miranda's self-awareness is impressive for a girl of eighteen, and it is also one of her strong points. While she has mixed feelings about distancing herself from her family and what lies ahead, she is also intrigued by the city and its people. Although her clothes are out of fashion, she carries them well and makes the most of what she has in her wardrobe, knowing instinctively what is "ladylike".



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Since her surroundings are so unfamiliar to her, Miranda finds it impossible to sleep that night. The noises of the city and the shouts of the town crier keep her awake, and she decides to get up at five o'clock. In the morning, her father leaves quickly after giving his usual admonitions to avoid evil, and she feels a certain sense of abandonment when he is gone. Then, she and Nicholas prepare to float up the Hudson on the Swallow (also known as the floating palace") to his estate.

As they ride, Miranda begins to enjoy the scenery, and Nicholas entertains her with his descriptions of the landmarks they pass and some legends related to the area. When they reach Poughkeepsie, the Swallow gets there ahead of the Express, and this makes her apprehensive because she feels that the race is some sort of omen she cannot fathom.

Nicholas decides that Miranda has much to learn in order to become a fine lady, and he bluntly says that he will "make out a map of reading" for her. At the same time, she realizes that he has his dark moods as well as his charming moments, not knowing that other people have come to the same conclusion. He also tells her not to be frightened of the tales she will hear from Zelig, one of his servants on the estate.

When they get to Dragonwyck, Nicholas takes Miranda to meet his wife Johanna, a dull, obese woman who is preoccupied with food. It is also obvious to her that Mrs. Van Ryn seems to classify her as an "upper servant," and when she sees her luxurious bedroom, she begins to long for the home she knows so well, and is even brought to the point of tears.

During supper, conversation is at a minimum, and when it is over, Miranda is introduced to Katrine, the Van Ryn's daughter whom she will be taking care of. After that, when she and Nicholas go to the music room, she discovers that he is an excellent musician, and he encourages her to sing while he plays the pianoforte.

Back in her room, Miranda enjoys the privacy and comfort of her surroundings, but she still thinks of her life back home. Then, her reverie is broken by a knock on the door, and the intruder turns out to be Zelig, the woman Nicholas had said might frighten her, who warns the girl that danger lies ahead.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Miranda discovers that there is quite a difference between Nicholas, who is such a noble figure in many ways, and his wife, who seems coarse and common. The void between these two people is something she can feel, and it may prove to be the source of the danger that Zelig has already predicted.



Katrine is a victim of her parent's mutual hostility, and her mother neglects the child while Nicholas resents the fact that she resembles Johanna. She feels more comfortable spending time with the servants, and it may be that Miranda will help provide the attention she needs



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Although she lives in a house with twenty servants and the Van Ryns themselves, Miranda discovers that she can still feel lonely. Nicholas is busy managing his estate and pursuing his hobby, horticulture, and while Johanna makes feeble attempts at what one would now call "arts and crafts", she also spends a great deal of time alone in her room. At the same time, she finds comfort in being attended to by the servants and living a privileged existence, along with making good use of the music room and the library. She is also provided with a complete, tailor-made wardrobe that brings out her natural beauty and bolsters her confidence.

As the Fourth of July approaches, Miranda discovers that the festivities on the estate will include a banquet and ball, followed by a garden party the next day. She also learns that the De Greniers, a French count and countess, will be among the guests. When they arrive, she is surprised by their physical appearance, which is far from majestic. While the count is witty and speaks English well, his wife speaks only French.

At dinner, the De Grenier concludes that Nicholas is "too polite" to his wife and senses the undercurrent of hostility that exists between them. He also learns that Miranda is a relative, rather than a servant, and senses that she may be falling in love with Nicholas. Then, he and his host discuss science and the fact that gas lighting has not been introduced at Dragonwyck. Nicholas then tells the count about his preference for "mystery and shadow", which explains why he likes Poe's writing. This seems to reflect his darker side, and the count finds it disturbing.

As they talk, Nicholas insists that Johanna will never bear him a son to inherit the estate and shows his disdain for her. The count resolves to counsel him about this the next day, but Nicholas avoids him after that because he feels that he has revealed too much about himself already.

Later, as Miranda works carefully and skillfully on some initialed handkerchiefs, she senses that Nicholas is watching her, and when they exchange glances for a moment, she imagines that things will never be the same because of it. She also has a disturbing dream that night as a result, and her fear is so powerful that she awakens from her sleep.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The distance between Johanna and Nicholas is underscored in this chapter, and the observations of the count tells the reader what the situation is at the time and how it is likely to evolve. One also learns more about Miranda's complicated status at Dragonwyck, a sort of hybrid between that of relative and servant.

It becomes obvious from his dealings with people that Nicholas is far more complex than an ordinary "lord of the manor". Only time will tell which of the many sides of his character will predominate and how that will affect Miranda and his wife and daughter.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The next morning the tenant farmers and their families begin to arrive at Dragonwyck, bringing produce and livestock as a tribute to Nicholas, their patroon. His bailiff, Dirck Duyckman, is also there with his ledger to record their payments as they pass by in line. Both Miranda and the count are impressed with the way Nicholas deals with the farmers, although the Frenchman detects some unrest in the crowd, and the holiday celebration also begins at the same time.

As the last few farmers approach to pay their rent, Klaas Becker says that he has no intention of doing so and creates quite a scene. Nicholas decides that the man must leave the farm the following day, and says that he will be given some gold coins before he goes. Then, he speaks to the crowd, reassuring them of his concern and reminding them that he is also ready to help solve their problems.

When she sees Johanna, Miranda notices that, on this particular night, the woman is impressive rather than crude, and she envies her status and advantages as well. When dinner is announced, a young man named Harmann Van Rensselaer introduces himself to her and explains that former president Van Buren is there. She is also seated next to Fenimore Cooper, the author, who angrily starts a discussion about tenant-farmer unrest in the area that seems totally out of place on such a festive occasion.

As she goes into the Red Room and the dancing is about to begin, Miranda has what one might call a panic attack, and her fear seems as threatening as any rising flood waters could be. When she finds herself dancing with Nicholas, as she had hoped to do, the count falls on the slippery floor and the music comes to an end for her.

Jeff Turner, a young doctor who has nothing but contempt for the Van Ryn's way of life, arrives to take care of the count, and he and Nicholas take stock of one another in the course of their conversation. He senses that the patroon is a lonely, unhappy man, and he begins to pity him. Then, his feelings change when he goes back to the Becker's farm to check on Klaas, who has cut the veins in his wrist with a scythe.

Chapter 5 Analysis

During the celebration, Miranda assesses where she fits in at such a gathering, and she realizes that Johanna is in a position that seems far superior to her own. There are also moments when she feels that she and Nicholas are growing closer, and other times when she wonders if this is really true.

Since the cast of character is much larger because of the celebration on the estate, it is obvious that some people resent the "feudal" system that tenant farming represents in this new, democratic country, and that some of them fear Nicholas, at least slightly.

Because of this, Van Ryn walks the fine line of a diplomat as he tries to show interest in and concern for the farmers and their families and maintain control through discipline at the same time.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

As the summer wears on, many guests come to Dragonwyck and are entertained with parties and picnics. Miranda accidentally catches a glimpse of Nicholas swimming early in the morning, and it is a picture she finds hard to forget. She is upset because Nicholas has avoided her since the ball, and he has also stopped defending her when Johanna becomes unpleasant. At this point, she spends most of her time with Katrine and seldom meets any of the people who visit the manor.

Miranda is also convinced that Nicholas hasn't really become unaware of her, and she is gratified when he presents her with a rose and a popular novel for her birthday. One evening, when the Van Ryns get into their carriage and are on their way to dinner, she notices that Nicholas is sitting next to the coachman, rather than with Johanna. She concludes, at last, that Van Ryn always manages to keep his wife at a distance.

Then, Miranda feels so desperate for company that she goes looking for Zelig in the kitchen quarters, telling herself that while the old woman might be mysterious, she is also interesting. She finds Zelig with Annetje, the chief cook, who is holding Katrine on her lap as she sings to her.

Katrine asks Zelig to tell the story of Azilde, a legendary figure, and while Miranda isn't interested in it, she has no desire to leave the group either, even as she listens to the tale of a woman whose life ended tragically because she felt unloved. When she goes back to her room and the candles are lit and the fireplaces are blazing, she finds Dragonwyck to be warm and welcoming, even though it seemed to be dark and dangerous when she went to look for Zelig earlier.

Miranda also determines that this is where she belongs, and that she won't be frightened by Zelig's ghost stories. Feeling reassured, she plays a song that reflects her mood when she gets to the Red Room. In her bedroom, she picks up the Bible and feels a tinge of guilt because she can't even recall the last time she opened it. No religious ceremonies ever take place in the mansion, and the family attends church on Sunday "when it was convenient".

Chapter 6 Analysis

Miranda's status at Dragonwyck seems to have deteriorated further at this point, if it was ever really established in the first place. She finds that some of the servants treat her as if she is unimportant, and the Van Ryns seem to forget her completely at times. She also feels that Zelig is deliberately trying to frighten her, but her encounters with the old woman have strengthened her resolve and convinced her that she is right in wanting to stay there.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Once the river freezes over and the guests stop coming, Miranda feels much happier, thinking that Nicholas is more aware of her presence once again. One morning the maid, Magda, summons her to Joanna's bedroom, which had never happened before. After criticizing the girl's appearance, Johanna tells her that she must take Katrine into Hudson to see Dr. Hamilton because of a sore finger. She is disappointed, because she had plans to go skating with Nicholas and is looking forward to it. When Nicholas comes in, he decides to go along on the trip because Miranda wouldn't be getting home until after dark and the threat from the tenant farmers is growing.

Their day in town with Katrine proves to be a magical one, and while Miranda feels very much at ease with Nicholas at her side, Katrine is puzzled because her father seldom spends time with her. As they ride, he tells Miranda about the scenery that surrounds them and she is glad that he has lost his dark reserve for once. He also urges her to take the child to Jeff Turner instead of Dr. Hamilton, feeling that this will cause the man to change his way of thinking about the tenant farmers.

When she gets to the doctor's office, Miranda finds that she has walked into a down-renters meeting, and she is appalled. She is also introduced to Smith Boughton, their leader, who is hostile and not easily intimidated. Jeff tells her that there is really nothing wrong with Katrine, and both he and Miranda are annoyed in their encounter with each other.

Miranda joins Nicholas at the Hudson House, and when she tells him about the down-renters' meeting, he brushes the information aside. After dinner, they walk contentedly through the town, and she feels that she has his complete attention. Later, when Nicholas says that it is time to go home, she tells him that Dragonwyck doesn't seem like home to her and that Johanna dislikes her. He becomes quiet and reserved after that.

As they ride, their carriage is surrounded by a band of tenant farmers disguised as Indians, and Nicholas bravely gets out of the carriage to confront Smith Boughton and his group. Seeing that Nicholas is not at all frightened and refuses to take them seriously, they allow the carriage to continue on its way. Then, a bullet shatters two windows and he draws her near as the shot rings out.

Once the frightened horses are calmed, Jeff Turner comes to see if anyone has been hurt, saying that the down-renters don't intend to be violent and that the group will deal with the shooter, who has harmed their cause. Overcome with emotion because of all that has happened, Miranda tells Nicholas that she feels she must go home. He urges her to be patient, saying that she will return to the farm "in due time".



Chapter 7 Analysis

At this point, the reader can see how Nicholas and Miranda interact with each other on a special day when they are away from Dragonwyck and Johanna, and the critical moment when a bullet is fired at their carriage is a turning point here. Jeff Turner is devoted to the down-renters' cause, but he respects Nicholas's courage as he faces the "calico Indians". As a doctor, he is totally against violence, and he realizes that the men who use such tactics will accomplish nothing in the end.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Miranda reconsiders her decision to leave Dragonwyck even though things go on as if the memorable day she enjoyed in Hudson with Nicholas and Katrine had never happened and he spends most of his time in the tower room. At the same time, the tenant farmers grow more rebellious as St. Nicholas Day draws near. According to the Dutch custom, children receive gifts on this holiday, and Katrine and her friends gather together at Dragonwyck. Her father comes in, dressed in the appropriate garb of the fourth century cleric, and entertains them. At this point, Miranda has begun to feel some sympathy for Johanna, and she does what she can to please the woman.

The pastor of their church expresses his regret that the down-renters have destroyed the canopy over the Van Ryn's pew, and Nicholas calmly tells him that he will replace it with one that is even more magnificent. Then, the minister responds by saying that taking such a step could place the Van Ryn family or his own in danger.

A few days later, on the Van Rennselaer estate, the county sheriff and a deputy attempt to evict two tenant farmers, and a crowd of three hundred "calico Indians," led by Smith Boughton, drive the officers off the property. Days later, the group, which has grown to a thousand, meets in Smoky Hollow, and many of them carry guns. They are further enflamed by whiskey, and a young boy is struck by a stray bullet. Jeff Turner, who is also there, is unable to save the boy's life, despite his best efforts.

Boughton is arrested and troops are brought in to prevent further violence. Jeff realizes that his friend's trial will end in defeat, and that it will take time to obtain justice for the tenant farmers which, he knows, should be done by peaceful means. He also sees that Nicholas remains complacent despite the unrest, and this also makes the patrol dangerous in his eyes.

After the New Year, Nicholas announces that the family won't be closing Dragonwyck and going to their home in New York as usual, and Johanna is not pleased because winter at the manor depresses her. One day, when Miranda is busy working with Katrine in the schoolroom, Nicholas comes in and says that he has sent for the doctor to visit Johanna, who has a heavy cold. Jeff, for his part, does not relish riding through the snow to get there, but he is also gratified that Van Ryn has asked for him despite their past differences.

Once he arrives, Jeff feels that Dragonwyck is frightening and totally without warmth, a place of "luxurious gloom", but he is never one to neglect a patient who need his care. He cautions Johanna that she should treat the cold as he recommends and eat lightly for a few days, and she indicates that she intends to eat whatever she wants.



When Jeff speaks to Nicholas about Johanna's condition, he finds that the patroon is not at all hostile to him, unlike Miranda. He is invited to spend the night, and he, along with Miranda, is entertained by Nicholas's tales of his adventures in Europe. Miranda is restless during the night, and at some point, she hears a commotion in the hall because Jeff has been called to Johanna's room and her condition has grown worse. When she stops breathing, he can only assume that acute indigestion has weakened her heart, and he decides that Nicholas's reaction to her death is strangely unemotional.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Throughout this chapter, there is the feeling that something momentous is about to happen, alternating with the thought that this couldn't possibly be true. For her part, Miranda has no idea what that "something" might be, and in general, the feeling may be related to the growing unrest of the tenant farmers that could affect everyone at Dragonwyck

As one would say today, Nicholas seems to be "unflappable", but it is also possible that he is in denial about what is happening. Throughout all this, Jeff is torn between wanting to help the tenant farmers and deploring the violent tactics that some of them want to use.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

As word of Johanna's untimely death spreads, a host of strangers come to Dragonwyck to pay their respects. She lies in state in her bedroom, and Nicholas orders Miranda not to join the mourners. He also locks himself in his room, leaving Magda in charge of all that is happening. Toward evening, the girl slips in with the crowd and finds that Johanna's face expresses a quiet dignity in death that surprises her, and she is saddened to realize how much she hated Johanna when she was alive.

After midnight, Miranda is awakened by the sound of Nicholas calling her name. Then, he kisses her passionately and she is frightened by what is happening. When they stand talking by the fire, he places a ring on her finger, the Van Ryn betrothal ring that Johanna never wore. He explains that she must hide the ring and go home for the traditional year-long mourning period, living for the future as he intends to do.

At the same time, Jeff tests remnants of the "tipsy cake" that Johanna had been eating for poison and finds that the results are negative. He is ashamed of his suspicions and resolves to forget them once and for all.

Chapter 9 Analysis

To some extent, Miranda is in shock because of the suddenness of Johanna's death and tries to make sense of all that is going on around her. In the end, though, she is thrilled at having the ring Nicholas gave her because of all that it symbolizes.

Once again, Nicholas seems very concerned about his public image as he isolates himself in his room and reminds Miranda about the expected twelve-month mourning period in order to preserve it. The mysterious, controlling side of his character is obvious in the way he speaks to her at times, and Jeff's uneasiness about Van Ryn may spring from what he senses about the man.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Johanna's funeral is, of course, an elaborate one, and while Nicholas walks alone behind her coffin, Katrine stays with her mother's relatives and Miranda finds herself just ahead of the servants. Zelig gives her a knowing, menacing look, but Katrine tells herself that the woman couldn't possibly know about the plans she and Nicholas have made.

Miranda spends the rest of the day in her room, and her journey home begins the next day. Katrine is indifferent as they say goodbye, and Nicholas fails to appear at all. Dick, the second coachman, prepares to drive the carriage, and she is accompanied by Greta, one of the chambermaids, as a chaperone. She feels desolate at leaving Dragonwyck and reaches for her betrothal ring for reassurance.

Greta gives Miranda a letter from Nicholas, that reminds her that the year leading up to their marriage will pass quickly, and she is no longer sad. She also wonders how she can keep their secret and prepare for the wedding at the same time. When she is almost home, she looks forward to seeing her mother, but is also dismayed to see how small and insignificant her home looks as they arrive.

Ephraim doesn't welcome her warmly, and she finds herself explaining why she has come home at that time. He is perplexed about finding accommodations for Dick and Greta, and Miranda explains that they have to go back to Dragonwyck immediately. Then, by way of contrast, her mother welcomes her with the hug she had been expecting. She senses that she will have to make quite an adjustment because her life at Dragonwyck was so different from her life at home, and she hasn't seen her family in a year. Her father quickly reminds her that since she has returned, she will certainly be expected to do her share of the chores.

Miranda begins to find everything around her to be oppressive and strange, and Tibby tells her that she will soon have their bedroom to herself because she is being married in a month. Then, she delights her sister by promising to give her a silk dress and listening to her plans for the future. Later, she thinks of Nicholas and the wedding that must be delayed and cries herself to sleep.

Chapter 10 Analysis

In this chapter, Miranda experiences the opposite of what happened earlier in the story. When she left her home and family, she learned to deal with the Van Ryns and the servants, and now the members of her family seem like strangers, with the exception of Abigail. The betrothal ring that she treasures is a reminder of Dragonwyck and a link to Nicholas as well.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Tibby is married at the end of May, and at the ceremony, Miranda is shocked when she notices that Abigail seems to be very sad. As the wedding party and their guests travel back to the farm to celebrate, Miranda wishes that she could break away from the crowd and go to her room. Later on, the young people start a game of Blind Man's Bluff, and Miranda is so angered when she is "caught" and kissed by one of the young men that she slaps him and creates a scene.

Abigail follows Miranda into the house, and when she notices the ring her daughter has been hiding, she asks for an explanation. The girl tells her that it was given to her by Nicholas, and that they plan to be married in the spring. Her mother has doubts about the situation, but she promises to keep her daughter's secret.

Miranda is happy that she has shared her secret with her mother because she wonders if the promise of the ring will ever come true, and sharing the secret seems to make it more binding. Abigail can see that her daughter is heartsick, and she wonders why Nicholas hasn't written to her. At that time, Miranda decides to write to him instead of waiting any longer, but her letter is never answered.

One day Jeff Turner comes to the farm, and at first, he assumes that Miranda is really glad to see him, but he finds that she is only hoping for news about Nicholas. He also explains that he has been to New York in search of a cure for cholera and had decided to stop at the farm on his way home.

Later, when Miranda asks about Van Ryn, he tells her that the patroon has been traveling and that Dragonwyck has been closed since June. He also knows that Nicholas will be coming down-river in April, which Miranda is happy to hear, and he is dismayed to see that she has virtually no appreciation for the things that life on the farm has to offer her.

Jeff ends up staying there for several days when the baby, Charity, contracts diphtheria, and he works with Abigail to save her life. After the doctor leaves, Ephraim is convinced that Jeff and Miranda will marry, and Abigail keeps the truth to herself, as she promised Miranda.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The relationship between Miranda and her mother is highlighted in this chapter, and their shared secret brings them even closer than they had been before. One can also see that Jeff has feelings for Miranda, and he is saddened when he realizes that she is only enthused about his visit because she thinks he might have news about Nicholas.

Ephraim is convinced that Jeff and Miranda will marry eventually, and he has no idea that she misses Nicholas terribly. As sometimes happens in families, Abigail finds that she is caught in the middle between her husband and her daughter.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Exactly one year after he has last seen Miranda, Nicholas comes to Greenwich and has a note delivered by a stable boy to Ephraim at the Wells farm, saying that he is coming to discuss something "of great importance". Miranda knows what the letter means and is convinced that Nicholas will be able to placate her father and arrange for their marriage in the end. Then, she goes and puts on her green silk dress in preparation for his arrival, wearing the betrothal ring on her finger.

When Nicholas gets there, he kisses Miranda's hand, seems delighted to see her, and later asks to speak to Ephraim privately (at this point, Abigail is impressed by Nicholas, but she also has some misgivings about him, although she can't quite tell why). Then, Ephraim calls Miranda into the parlor, amazed that his daughter knew all along that she and Nicholas would be married. He feels things aren't exactly what he would have expected in his daughter's life, but he also finds it impossible to make any objections to the wedding. Abigail simply tells him that they must "make the best of it".

The fact that Nicholas has prearranged the wedding ceremony is even more shocking to Ephraim, and the marriage is performed by their pastor in the parlor two days later. Although a special supper has been prepared, Nicholas says that they must leave at once, and in the carriage, Miranda has the feeling that she must be dreaming, that the wedding really hasn't taken place, and that she really doesn't know Nicholas at all.

As they ride, he tells her about his travels through the South, and how much he admires the plantation life-style. At the same time, Miranda senses that this is a precious moment in her life, one so sacred that she had not even been able to discuss marriage to him with her mother.

When they get to another Van Ryn home that Miranda has never seen before, Nicholas introduces her to the servants as his wife, and she feels overwhelmed. He also explains that he has dismissed all of the servants at Dragonwyck and that Zelig has died. Upstairs, Miranda finds that the room is beautifully decorated, but the candles and flowers also remind her of Johanna's room at Dragonwyck.

Since Nicholas treats her roughly, she awakens with a feeling of desperation, wanting to escape. When he wakes up, she tells him of her fears and feels reassured that he will really be the husband she had hoped for after all.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The events around Miranda's wedding show how controlling and determined Nicholas really is, and that he generally seems to assume the persona that suits the occasion, rather than revealing his true self. He writes to Ephraim and later speaks to him as if



each step were a mere formality or polite gesture. Because of this, the man realizes that he has never dealt with anyone like Van Ryn.

Abigail wants to protect her daughter in some way and perhaps bring the wedding to a halt, but she and Ephraim are carried along by the course of events and the sheer determination of Nicholas' will. In the end, Miranda tells herself that her husband's love for her and the good side of his nature will carry them through. Yet, the reader is told that Nicholas lost the qualities she needs in a husband when he was a boy and his mother died.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

For a while, Miranda seems to be happy in her marriage to Nicholas, and because he acts like the husband she hoped he would be most of the time, she begins to flourish. He also takes on the task of mentoring her for her role as Mrs. Van Ryn by supplying her with a lavish wardrobe, making sure that she is familiar with the news of the day, taking her to cultural events, and supervising her reading.

Since Miranda realizes that she has a great deal to learn she appreciates what Nicholas is doing and never questions his opinions. One notable exception is the time when he tells her that he is an atheist, commenting that "there is no god but one's self", and she refuses to accept what he says. Immediately, Nicholas treats her roughly and then, in a sudden shift of emotions, suggests that they spend the day seeing the sights of the city. She finds it hard to comprehend him and deal with his moods, which run the gamut from harshness to lack of concern to tenderness.

In order to please Miranda, Nicholas takes her to a P.T. Barnum show, and when the impresario recognizes him, he has General Tom Thumb offer to perform a dance for the couple. Since Van Ryn is only there to amuse his wife, they make a quick exit, and Miranda is humiliated because she didn't know that a sign reading "to the egress" meant they were headed for the door.

When they go home, Miranda is so frantic that she slips when she is getting out of the carriage and hurts her ankle. Nicholas is very concerned, and he takes such good care of that she is amazed. At the same time, she also realizes that he will not allow any person or thing to harm her but himself.

A week later, a select list of guests is invited to the Van Ryn's for supper, and Miranda naturally wants the evening to go well. She also writes to her mother, telling her how happy she is, but when Abigail reads it, she thinks that Miranda is trying too hard to make her point.

One day, Jeff Turner writes to Miranda unexpectedly, telling her that he has joined the army and will be leaving for Mexico. She has no idea that he was stunned and angry when he heard about her wedding and that he doesn't want to think about her being married to another man.

Count De Grenier is the first guest to arrive at their party, and he is struck by the change in Miranda, noting that she has morphed into a beautiful lady. As she introduces him to the author Herman Melville, he also sees that Nicholas has shrewdly marshaled the guests into three distinct groups. When Madam Albanese, an Italian opera singer, entertains the group, the count is surprised to see that Nicholas is an accomplished



pianist. Miranda's mood brightens when she chats with the diva briefly, and she remains in good spirits because her husband tells her that the evening is going well.

The conversation turns to Edgar Allan Poe and Nicholas is extremely interested in this tragic figure. He also surprises Miranda when he asks one of the guests, Mrs. Ellet, to arrange a visit and introduction for him with the poet.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Miranda, as always, is under Nicholas's spell, but their relationship is not an altogether happy one. She is constantly puzzled by him and finds it increasingly difficult to adjust to his heavy-handed tactics, although he tries to throw her off guard by acting more lovingly at times.

If this novel were a play performed on the stage, Jeff Turner would be an actor waiting in the wings, and the audience would somehow realize that he will make an appearance later on in the performance.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Along with Mrs. Ellet, Nicholas and Miranda set out to visit Poe on a very hot day, and when he begins to question her about her life as a poet, she obliges by reciting some "transcendental verses" of her own composition. Along with food for the family they are visiting, he provides wine and brandy, and when Miranda asks if that is a wise decision in Poe's case, he tells her that the liquor will make the poet more interesting.

Inside the simple home, they find the enigmatic author, his young, dying wife Virginia, and her mother, Mrs. Clemm. Although everything is neat and in order, it is obvious that poverty has taken a stand here. Miranda finds Poe unattractive, and because of the chaos in his life, the man appears to be much older than he really is. He is also not at all enthused to see Mrs. Ellet, who is known as a gossip, but the Van Ryns are a different matter. Then, Nicholas tells him how much he admires his work, especially the poetry, and that he has read everything the man ever wrote. Miranda turns her attention to Virginia, a woman so frail that she seems like a child.

Dr. Francis, who is caring for Virginia, finds her too weak to talk, and he guides Miranda into the kitchen. She sees that he is far from polished, but finds him likable at the same time. She has the feeling that she has met the doctor before and later remembers that he was with Jeff Turner when her baby sister nearly died. She is also amused when he seems to assume that she has always led a pampered life and surprises him by showing that she knows her way around the kitchen by preparing tea.

When Miranda asks the doctor if he knows Jeff Turner, he says that the young doctor has gone off to war, which disturbs him. When she tells him that Jeff has created problems for her husband and saved the life of her sister in the past, Frances comments that such things are typical of the man. Realizing that Nicholas has left her alone for some time, she tells herself that he must be intrigued by Poe's company.

Back in the other room, she finds that Mrs. Ellet is irritated at the lack of attention, and that Poe is obviously drunk, to the point of trembling and dropping a glass on the floor. When Mrs. Clemm joins them, she takes the brandy away and suggests that "Eddie" read his latest poem to the group. Poe obliges, and while he begins poorly, he goes on to exhibit the skills he has inherited from his parents, who were actors. Miranda finds the poem, the poet, and the entire atmosphere gloomy, and she is relieved when Nicholas stands to leave.

Chapter 14 Analysis

When Miranda asks her husband what he thinks of Poe, Nicholas says that he can only admire him for his dreams. He had hoped to find an "alter ego" in the man, and he despises him for his weakness. Yet Poe has also presented him with some avenue of



escape unrelated to alcohol, and he resolves to experiment in the future, whatever that might mean.

The coziness of the kitchen and her chat with Dr. Francis causes Miranda to think of Jeff, and after that, she is relieved whenever she finds that his name is missing from the latest list of war casualties.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

When the summer heat becomes oppressive, Miranda and Nicholas ride up the Hudson to Pine Orchard Mountain House. She had hoped that they would travel more extensively, but he is not receptive to the idea. On the way, she thinks about how much she has changed since she made the trip to Dragonwyck two years earlier.

When they reach their destination, Miranda finds that the hotel's most outstanding feature is the impressive view it offers of the entire Hudson Valley. She also feels a sense of spiritual renewal, along with a tinge of guilt because she has wandered away from the religious practices of her childhood. For his part, Nicholas adopts his remote persona and the other guests assume that the Van Ryns keep to themselves because they are on their honeymoon. He tells her that he is going away for three days, and she is quietly relieved at escaping the tension of their relationship.

Later Miranda finds that a ruffle on one of her robes had been scorched when it was ironed, and she sends for the maid, an Irish immigrant named Peggy O'Malley, who is new at the job. Finding that the girl is likable, she simply asks her to be more careful.

When they go for a walk, the Van Ryns encounter the Bentons, a couple from Boston with four lively children. When the youngest boy reveals that his puppy has disappeared, they see that the dog has fallen down a cliff and landed on a ledge below, and rescuing the animal seems to be impossible. Seized by his sense of adventure, Nicholas starts out to save the animal, despite everyone's protests, and he succeeds. Because he is fearless in doing this, Miranda is thrilled, but he shows no further interest in either the Bentons or their dog.

Miranda, who is not feeling well at all, is confined to their suite while Nicholas is away, and she finds it difficult to amuse herself. She rests for a while, orders a huge meal that she is unable to eat, and then sends for the maid to have it taken away. When Peggy answers the summons, the unwanted food leads her to tell her about the potato famine in Ireland, and Miranda is touched by her story.

Seeing that Miranda is feeling poorly, Peggy does what she can to help, and they conclude that she must be pregnant and suffering from morning sickness. Then the maid agrees to keep her company and entertains her by telling stories about her life in Ireland. The bond between the two women grows stronger, and Miranda becomes determined to have Peggy as her maid and confidant when she and Nicholas return to Dragonwyck. She knows that doing this will not be easy because he seems determined to keep her from having an intimate relationship with anyone.



When Nicholas is told what Miranda intends to do and ridicules the idea, she blurts out the fact that she is pregnant, and he is so elated that he is willing to give her anything she asks for.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Miranda feels quite suffocated by the life of controlled isolation that Nicholas prescribes for her, and this has nothing to do with the summer heat. Her longstanding wish to find someone she can confide in is granted in the form of Peggy, and their relationship grows strong.

Nicholas, a loner in his own way, rejoices that he will have an heir just as many wealthy men do, and his solicitude for Miranda from the moment he finds out that she is pregnant is mainly based on that.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

When the Van Ryns return to Dragonwyck, Miranda finds herself in a weakened state, and Nicholas watches over her patiently. She, of course, is brought to the bedroom Johanna used, and after finding it very much changed, she resigns herself to sleeping there. When she asks about Katrine, Nicholas tells her that it is best for the child to stay with relatives and that she would wouldn't be happy if she had to come back to the manor. Miranda is unaware that Johanna's family, along with their wealthy neighbors, are shocked at their marriage and that gossip about the two of them is flowing freely.

The fact that Nicholas is willing to read to her aloud and plays music for her in the evening makes Miranda content, and the letters she writes to Abigail reflect this. At this point, she gives little thought to the outside world, including the war in Mexico. Then, the quiet mood at Dragonwyck is shattered when his bailiff brings Nicholas the news that the state has a new governor and that the down-renters cause will prevail. He freezes at hearing this and is determined that his estate will remain intact, but Miranda is more philosophical about the change, thinking that the tenant farmers will be happier as a result.

Back in her room, she and Peggy share some time together, and they realize that her baby has definitely (if belatedly) begun to move. When the feast of St. Nicholas comes, only the tenants' children are invited to the party held at Dragonwyck, and they are dazzled by the celebration and the gifts they receive there.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The attention that Nicholas lavishes on Miranda during her pregnancy shows her chameleon-like character once again, and his main concern is for his future heir. His absolute refusal to accept the notion that the tenant-farmer system is coming to an end seems to indicate that he has taken on the role of the God he refuses to honor.

Miranda is puzzled by his attitude, and she senses that something mysterious is at work here. Also, having Peggy to confide in makes it easier for her to cope with life at Dragonwyck, just as she knew it would.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

On the day of the party, a troopship carrying Jeff Turner, who has been wounded in the war, docks in New York. Feeling the effects of his injuries, he finds a place to stay and then sends for Dr. Francis. When the older man arrives, he prompts Jeff to tell him how he was hurt, but he fails in his attempt to convince Turner to join his practice. As they talk, Francis tells Jeff that Miranda had been asking about him over the summer, and he also reveals that she is now pregnant and married to Van Ryn.

Not long after that, Jeff decides to marry Faith Folger, a woman he has known for some time. He also plans to propose to her on Valentine's Day, but finds himself summoned to Dragonwyck instead when Nicholas appears at his door to ask his help (someone named Dr. Brown has been treating Miranda, and Jeff has also been told that the man, while he is capable enough, is totally intimidated by Van Ryn).

By the time they get to Dragonwyck, Miranda has gone into labor and Jeff consults with Dr. Brown, who tells him that Nicholas has refused to let him resign from the case. When a baby boy is born the following morning, the entire household rejoices and celebrates.

After that, Nicholas stands guard over his son, giving Miranda no attention at all. Jeff, on the other hand, stays with her out of concern, and she finds comfort in his soothing voice. At this point, he realizes that he will never marry Faith Folger. He also determines that the baby will not live long because his heart is defective, and he decides that Miranda is not yet ready to be told that the baby will die. When he brings Nicholas the grim news, he is totally ignored and asked to leave Dragonwyck without seeing Miranda.

Jeff decides to speak to Peggy before making his exit, telling her to take care of Miranda and help her through the ordeal that is to come. As they talk, both of them are aware of their mutual love for her. Later, Peggy discovers that her mistress knows that the baby won't be with them for long, and their pastor comes to perform a hasty baptism at Miranda's request. When the inevitable happens, she finds what one would now call closure, but despite his wealth, her husband has no spiritual riches at his disposal.

After secluding himself in the tower room for three days, Nicholas reappears on the morning after the baby's funeral, and Miranda is totally shocked when he suggests organizing a skating party.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Jeff reappears now, and while he is a complex character—part soldier, part physician—he is never cold or unfeeling. This is exactly when he was meant to return, and he

manages to provide support for Miranda directly during the anguish of labor and indirectly by consulting with Peggy after the baby is born.

Van Ryn is totally incapable of coping with events whenever something dares to happen that contradicts his will, and his refusal to acknowledge that the baby ever existed shows clearly that he is "in denial", as the psychologists would say.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The Van Ryn's neighbors change their attitude when they hear about the baby's death, and a year of constant entertainment at Dragonwyck begins. Their many visitors include American aristocrats, English nobility, and veterans returning from the Mexican War. The entertainment, which begins early in the morning and lasts until midnight, is constant, dazzling, and exhausting, and Miranda is carried along by the momentum of all this activity, which seems to have no particular purpose.

Van Ryn programs events in such a way that no one comes to know his wife as an individual, and Abigail is still not invited for a visit. When all contact with Jeff Turner is forbidden, she realizes that Nicholas wants no reminders of the baby's death.

Peggy discovers that their relationship suffers because Miranda is so busy, and that there is something frightening about Nicholas as well. Dragonwyck itself makes her feel uneasy, and that emotion intensifies at one point when she goes into the Red Room.

One day the Van Ryns are invited to dine with the Vandergraves and attend a performance of "Macbeth" afterwards. At the time, there is an ongoing feud between two rival factions which are staging two different versions of the play, one headed by an English actor, favored by the gentry, and another led by an American actor, favored by the general public—and class warfare is brewing.

Nicholas is in good humor, and Miranda is also relaxed because Rebecca Vandergrave seems to regard her as an individual, rather than as Mrs. Van Ryn. When they get to the theater, the two couples are astonished to find an angry mob waiting outside, but Nicholas has no intention of turning back.

Once they are seated, the noise outside the theater intensifies, stones are thrown by the mob, and windows are shattered as well. Then the performance on stage becomes more frenzied, and the Vandergraves decide to leave. When the play ends, those who remain are asked to exit by the back door where they will be protected by the police. Nicholas removes the barricade from the front door to lead Miranda out, and they find that the military has been called in to restore order.

When Van Ryn foolishly confronts the crowd, a boy douses him with a bucket of water. He retaliates by grabbing a soldier's rifle and shooting him. More stones are thrown as the crowd disperses, and one of them hits Nicholas in the chest, forcing him to the ground. After determining that he is not seriously hurt, Miranda takes charge and arranges to have him taken home.



Chapter 18 Analysis

From the lavish entertainment he provides at Dragonwyck, Nicholas derives a pleasure similar to that of someone playing chess in his day or a video game today. Individuals as human beings do not interest him at all. His insistence on leaving the theater by the front door shows his love of danger and his foolish disregard for his own safety. When he realizes that that he is vulnerable and cannot control everything, he disposes of the boy who doused him with a bucket of water as readily as a saner person might dispose of a bug.

Miranda is usually carried along by events and the wishes of her husband, but when he is hit, there is an ironic role reversal and she takes control of the situation.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

As he recovers from his wounds, Miranda finds that Nicholas is withdrawn and unwilling to see anyone. She is also haunted by the cruelty that he showed in killing the boy outside the theater and thinks that he must be suffering from remorse over what he has done. For his part, Van Ryn is dismayed because he has proved to be vulnerable and needs the care and attention of Miranda and others in order to recover. Once they return to Dragonwyck, he locks himself in the tower, and she recalls that this is exactly what he did after the baby died.

A month later, when Van Ryn is isolated in the tower once again, Miranda becomes determined to find out exactly what is wrong, and he reluctantly lets her into the room he is using. She finds that this place is a simple one, and she knows that if she can discover why he goes up there, she will also understand him. Then, Nicholas reveals that he now smokes opium, which explains the strange, sweet odor that she and Peggy had noticed, and the change in his appearance and demeanor as well. Not surprisingly, he is using the drug to escape the realities that go against his will.

During this encounter, he grabs her wrist so tightly that it becomes swollen, and he finally allows her to leave. When Peggy sees what has happened, she arranges to send a note from Miranda to Jeff via Hans, her boyfriend. She also convinces Miranda to arrange a meeting with the doctor outside the manor house at an old mill and helps her to slip outside through a side door early the next morning.

Although Jeff is puzzled by these arrangements and Miranda seems flustered at having requested a meeting, he builds a fire for her and notices her sore wrist at the same time. She hesitates at first, and then explains that Nicholas is now smoking opium, a far more serious problem, describing the way he has been acting. The doctor is angry when he learns that Van Ryn won't allow her to go home and visit her family, but he also realizes that she doesn't want to abandon her husband. He also startles Miranda by kissing her, and she remembers how he comforted her when the baby came. She decides to leave, although nothing has really been resolved related to her concern for Nicholas.

The Van Ryns don't leave Dragonwyck that winter, and Miranda is satisfied with that when she recalls that their last trip to New York ended so badly. At this point, Nicholas avoids the tower, busying himself with caring for the estate, and Miranda takes on the task of managing the household. Van Ryn also becomes more even-tempered, and she sees this as a sign that things are also becoming more normal at Dragonwyck.

Chapter 19 Analysis

For some time, Nicholas uses opium as an escape from the baby's death, the farmers' unrest, and the injury he suffered at Astor Place, and he refuses to acknowledge that his



physical strength and bravado will only carry him so far. Miranda, of course is maturing at a steady pace, but she also finds it hard to see her husband as he really is and has an exaggerated sense of loyalty toward him.

Although Jeff has decided not to marry Faith and has strong feelings for Miranda, he is first and foremost a physician and becomes frustrated because he hasn't been very helpful to her in deciding how to deal with Nicholas.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

On a beautiful spring day when Nicholas is away from Dragonwyck, Miranda wakes up feeling especially lighthearted. After Peggy comes in, they discuss the maid's future with Hans and begin to plan her wedding together.

When they go up to the attic to retrieve some white muslin for the wedding gown, Miranda concludes that Nicholas must have had all traces of their baby's existence taken away, and she attempts to justify this to herself. At the same time, she finds some bedroom furnishings that Johanna used when she was alive, and she comes across the dead woman's diary. One startling passage reveals that, shortly before her death, Nicholas had told Johanna that Miranda would be leaving Dragonwyck "in a few days", and this seems unexplainable.

Realizing that she has to think things through, Miranda takes the book with her and sends for Jeff so that she can discuss it with him. Once he reads the diary, he realizes that Nicholas must have used poisonous oleander at a time when the symptoms could be masked by her cold, and calling on him, a relatively inexperienced doctor at the time.

He tells Miranda that, while the news is disturbing, he is concerned for her safety since Nicholas is completely unpredictable, and she sees that this is the fear she already knew which seemed to have no name. Both of them realize that they can prove what Van Ryn has done, and Jeff decides to contact Dr. Francis and Magda, Johanna's former housekeeper, for any clues that might help make their case.

Then, Jeff warns Miranda that her life is in danger and that she must not go back to the manor. He also advises her to go to Dr. Francis and gives her a note of explanation for him. She can't return to her family because it would be too easy for Nicholas to find her there.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Long before he fired a rifle at Astor Place in a fit of anger, Nicholas had carefully planned Johanna's death because she had not given him an heir, using a poison that would be hard to detect, and he has no idea that his dark secret has been uncovered.

Miranda has to face the truth, hard as that might be, and Jeff, who forces her to do just that, then comes up with some ideas for bringing Van Ryn to justice and keeping her safe. He also realizes that Nicholas used him as a pawn at the time of Johanna's murder, and is aware that no one will believe what he and Miranda already know unless he can find substantial proof to back up his theory.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

While Nicholas is in New York, Bronck, his business manager, persuades him to consider investing in the Mary Clayton, a new river boat scheduled to make its maiden voyage to Albany. Later, he feels uneasy at the changes he notices in Van Ryn, and he also considers his interest in boat racing to be dangerous.

Once he examines the boat and approves of young Captain Hall, Nicholas makes a secretive trip to buy opium and is disappointed that the Mary Clinton has outdistanced its only rival, the Rochester, with ease. Returning to Dragonwyck earlier than expected, he finds that Miranda isn't there and immediately questions Peggy. When she gets there, he can tell by her appearance that she obviously left in a hurry.

Miranda reveals that she has been to see Dr. Turner, and he panics when she alludes to his murder of Johanna. Sensing danger, she tries to summon Peggy, but there is no response until the maid manages to get her attention by throwing stones at her window from below because all of the doors have been locked.

Since the servants can do nothing to help, Peggy offers to send for Hans, and when Nicholas finds her in the dining room, he says that he has heard her "laughing and playing the piano". She tells him that he is hearing Azilde, the heroine of Zelig's grim legend about Dragonwyck, and that danger is imminent for them. Later, he ventures that he must have had a hallucination, saying that the doors are locked because she must never leave him.

Then, Jeff bangs on the front door, and once he is let in, both he and Miranda realize that Nicholas is carrying a gun. In the Red Room, Van Ryn draws his pistol and Miranda manages to knock it out of his hand. Then, the two men struggle and Jeff ties him up with a bell rope. After that, he and Miranda make their escape on his horse.

Miranda and Jeff hope to continue their escape by boarding the Mary Clinton, but when they pass Dragonwyck, they find that Nicholas is free again, and he manages to make the boat stop by hanging a red flag from the tower. Then, as Van Ryn walks up to Miranda, the captain announces that they will be racing the Ithaca to New York.

Excitement builds among the passengers over the race between the two boats, and the Utica breaks the rules by skipping a scheduled stop. The captain is furious when he sees this, and he is so determined to win the race that the boiler overheats and the boat shakes dangerously. The passengers' enthusiasm turns into panic, and one mother, Mrs. Edwards, who is traveling with her son, wonders aloud why this is happening. Soon, after the Mary Clinton passes its rival, the two boats collide.

Since Hall is dissatisfied with his victory, he is determined to reach New York long before the Utica, and the boat continues to build up steam. When a delegation of



passengers come to Van Ryn and asks him to speak to the captain about his recklessness, Nicholas is totally unconcerned and brushes their pleas aside. The center section of the boat soon bursts into flames, cutting many passengers off from safety, and in the midst of the turmoil, he carries Miranda in his arms.

When Jeff learns about the disaster from the newspaper, he reads that Van Ryn has rescued Miranda, along with Mrs. Edwards and her son, and is now missing. He makes his way to New York, meets up with Bronck, and searches for Miranda.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Nicholas feels his power slowly slipping away from him, and his addiction to opium is hastening the process. He also knows that he will pay the price for killing Johanna when the truth is revealed and he recognizes that he no longer has any control over Miranda whatsoever. She finds new strength throughout the ordeal of attempting to escape from her husband and surviving the shipwreck, but she will also need Jeff's care.

Jeff and Miranda work together as they subdue Van Ryn and escape from the manor and the evil it contains. Also, while he is preoccupied with bringing evidence of Johanna's murder to the governor, he also attempts to find Miranda when he senses that she needs him.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Miranda also contracts pneumonia as of the result of the Mary Clinton disaster, and she is taken to recover at the Van Ryn's home on Stuyvesant St. While she is under the care of Dr. Francis and Jeff, he also sends for Abigail, and Peggy arrives two days later as well.

Ten days pass before Miranda is fully conscious, and she senses instinctively that Nicholas is dead. Then she is told that, while Katrine has been provided for, she is the heir to his estate. She decides to deed everything to the child, have Dragonwyck demolished, and give the land to the tenant farmers.

Jeff tells Dr. Francis that even though Nicholas is a hero in the eyes of the public because he rescued three people from the shipwreck, he was also a murderer, and he comments that the disaster took place because Van Ryn was so fascinated by the boat's race with the Ithaca.

Right before Christmas, Miranda and Jeff are married, and even Ephraim, who is usually so critical, has to admit that he is proud of his daughter. The doctor also helps Peggy to get rid of her limp when he operates on her leg, and Miranda assists him by administering the ether, a new discovery.

At that point, the two are really a team, and they decide to move to California, where doctors are sorely needed, resolving to never look back.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Miranda is now truly free, not so much because Nicholas is dead, but because she has been able to escape the psychological control he had over her long before that. The reader can also see how weak Nicholas is, and he is totally defeated when he finds that he cannot always have his way. He tries to distract himself by focusing his attention on the race between the two ships, and his rescue attempts are more a matter of bravado than genuine concern for others.

Jeff is wise enough to know that Miranda needs to heal mentally after the trauma she has been through and that he should consult with Dr. Francis as well. Then, when the time is right, he and Miranda begin to build a life together.



Characters

Miranda

Miranda is one of the main characters of the story, and also its heroine. When she is sent to Dragonwyck as a young girl of eighteen, she is both excited and apprehensive because she knows that a new chapter of her life is beginning, but she doesn't know what her new life will be like. Since the house is a manor on her relatives vast estate, complete with servants, she finds that things are very different from the life on the family farm that she is used to. Once she is there, she finds that her status is a sort of hybrid, part relative, part servant. Johanna, the mistress of Dragonwyck, is intent on keeping the girl in her place, while Nicholas is sometimes attentive and sometimes not. After Johanna dies and a year goes by, she marries Van Ryn and finds that he is a man of many moods. Later, when their baby boy dies, she manages to go on in contrast to her husband, who is at a complete loss. When she finds that Nicholas is a murderer and Jeff verifies this, she has the courage to confront her husband, who dies in a shipwreck. She and Jeff support each other through various trials and eventually marry.

Nicholas

The owner of Dragonwyck is also a main character in the story, and he is to be both feared and pitied. He is intent on controlling both people and events in order to bend them to his will, and even his charm and acts of kindness are used to manipulate others. He cannot accept the fact that he also has limitations and is fascinated by things that seem dangerous and mysterious, which is why he decides to visit Poe. He is so furious that Johanna hasn't borne him a son that he murders her, and the addiction to opium that he develops shows that he is truly weak. At the same time, he seems to be in complete denial about the growing unrest among the tenant farmers and what it will mean for him and his way of life.

Johanna

As the story begins, she is the mistress of Dragonwyck, and not at all happy. At first glance, she seems to be a crude, obese woman whose only interest is food, but when Miranda sees her lying in state before her funeral, she realizes that the woman also possessed a quiet dignity all her own. She does not treat the girl kindly at all, but seems to feel threatened because Nicholas frightens her and she is insecure, but does not have any real dislike for her. Her only child is a girl, and she and Nicholas have grown apart to the point where he will not even ride in their carriage with her.



Jeff

This young doctor has no use for Van Ryn's way of life, and he is a staunch supporter of the down-renters movement and of its leader, Smith Boughton. He is also afraid that the acts of violence among the group will hurt the cause and feels that other means should be taken to reach their goal. In contrast with Nicholas, he is a man of great compassion who is genuinely concerned about his patients, helps to save the life of Miranda's baby sister, and goes off to serve in the army during the Mexican War. At one point, he finds conclusive proof that Van Ryn murdered Johanna, planning things so carefully that he felt certain he would never be found out. He and Miranda go through a great deal together after they confront Nicholas, and they eventually marry.

Abigail

Abigail is Miranda's mother, and the two women are very close. As the story begins, she is secretly proud of her daughter's ambitions and the efforts the girl makes to become a lady. As often happens, she finds herself caught in the middle in disputes between her husband and the girl, especially when Nicholas invites one of her daughters to stay at his manor. When Miranda returns home after Johanna's death, she can see that she misses Van Ryn terribly, and when their marriage takes place, she tells her husband that they will have to "make the best of it". Since she is never invited to Dragonwyck, she is also unaware of a great deal that happens to Miranda, but she sees that her daughter is happy when she marries Jeff later on.

Ephraim

He is a simple, religious man who can be harsh at times, but Abigail has more influence over him than he would ever admit. The simple life of a farmer is all he has ever known, and he is counting on his children to continue the tradition. He is completely amazed when Van Ryn arrives at the farm and announces that all the arrangements have been made for his wedding with Miranda, which will take place in their parlor in two days. Much later, when Miranda suffers the loss of her baby, shipwreck, and pneumonia he is truly proud of her.

Peggy

She is an Irish immigrant who comes to Dragonwyck. When Miranda takes a liking to her, she hopes to have the servant girl as her maid. Nicholas allows this after he discovers that his wife is pregnant and he is prepared to give her anything she asks. The two women become friends and confidants, and Peggy helps her mistress escape from the manor when Nicholas becomes dangerous.



Dr. Francis

This older, plain-spoken man is also good-humored, and he is used to acting as Jeff's mentor. The younger doctor often seeks his help and advice, and he sends Miranda to him when she has to flee Dragonwyck and needs a safe place to hide.

Tibby

Although she is Miranda's younger sister, the two girls are very different in their temperament and outlook, and Tibby is more content with her lot in life. Eventually she marries Hans, and she is prepared to spend the rest of her life with the people and surroundings that are so familiar to her.

Smith Boughton

This leader of the down-renters cause is also a physician, and he is not easily intimidated. While he and Jeff are friends, they part company when it comes to using violence for the sake of their cause. After one demonstration in particular, he is arrested.

Zelie

She is an old woman who lives in the servants' quarters and tells strange tales that some find frightening. Miranda finds her to be interesting as well as mysterious, and when she goes to find her one night, she hears that Dragonwyck will be facing danger and destruction.



Objects/Places

Dragonwyck

The manor house on the estate of Nicholas Van Ryn, a wealthy landowner.

Wells Farm

The farm where Miranda was born and lives with her family at the start of the story.

Betrothal Ring

The ring Nicholas gives to Miranda after Johanna dies as a pledge that they will marry in a year.

Mary Clinton

The ship Nicholas has an interest in that catches fire during a race with the Ithaca.

Jeff Turner's Office

Where Miranda takes the Van Ryn's daughter her for treatment and walks into the middle of a down-renter's meeting.

Pine Orchard Mountain House

This is where Miranda meets Peggy O'Malley and they soon become good friends.

Astor Place

Nicholas shot a young boy here when he feels that the boy has insulted him, and he is then injured on the spot.

Mexico

Jeff Turner goes here as an army doctor during the Mexican War, is wounded, and later returns home to care for his patients.



Bible

In his family's life, Ephraim gives scripture great attention and importance, and it is a lesson Miranda remembers as an adult.

Swallow

Miranda and Nicholas ride up the Hudson on this boat, which is known as the "floating palace".



Themes

Desire for a Better Life

Miranda is anxious to go to Dragonwyck because she feels that she will realize her dreams and wants to see what the world is like beyond the family farm. Once she gets there, she delights in her elegant bedroom, the beautiful wardrobe she is given, and the fact that she is waited on by servants. She is also glad that Nicholas is acquainting her with the "finer things" that should be a part of her life there.

When she marries Van Ryn, she finds that she has many new obligations, including entertaining the many guests that come to the manor. She also feels very lonely at times and is frightened by her husband's moods and demands, which she had not expected at all when she left the farm.

Miranda also matures over time, and she summons up the strength to cope with the loss of her baby, confront Nicholas about Johanna's murder, and recover from pneumonia. Eventually, she does find a better life when she marries Jeff.

Abigail wants a better life for their daughter, but both she and Ephraim have their doubts that she will accomplish this by going to stay at Dragonwyck, which is an unknown when they receive the invitation in the mail. They are even more dubious when Van Ryn arranges to marry their daughter later on, telling themselves that they will have to "make the best of it".

Peggy has left Ireland to find a better life, and Miranda helps her realize her dream by choosing her to be her maid. As a result, Peggy is also loyal to her mistress, and the two of them become best friends.

Smith Boughton wants to help the tenant farmers improve their situation and be treated fairly, but he crosses the line when his group resorts to violence.

Mystery and Danger

Nicholas is a man of mystery because no one really knows him well, and he displays an array of emotions, much like an actor on a stage. He endlessly tries to control people and events and is determined to have his own way, even going so far as to murder Johanna.

Van Ryn is also convinced that he has no limitations, that he is invincible and can accomplish anything he sets out to do. When he is doused with water, knocked to the ground, and found to be a murder he is totally undone. He also has a strange fascination with mystery and danger, which explains the reason for his visit to Poe's home and his enthusiasm for the race between the Mary Clinton and the Ithaca on the Hudson River.



The fact that Nicholas becomes addicted to opium is especially ironic because he considers himself to be godlike and master of all he surveys and ends up becoming addicted to a substance that controls his life. It is also an indication that he desperately is trying to escape reality, which makes him dangerous to himself and everyone around him as well.

Miranda finds something frightening about Dragonwyck, especially when she goes into the Red Room, and Zelig's ominous predictions help to create the same sensation. Both she and Jeff Turner face a real threat when they confront Nicholas about Johanna's murder and realize that he has a gun. Later, although she suffers the after-effects, she escapes with her life from the Mary Clinton, which catches fire while on the water.

Class Struggle

America is a relatively new democracy when this story takes place, and Van Ryn fails to get the message. He is totally clueless in not seeing that his days of receiving tribute from the tenant farmers on his land are coming to an end and that the middle class is starting to emerge.

The rise of the down-renters movement is another sign that change is in the air, and the fact that professional men like Jeff Turner and Smith Boughton take up their cause is a sign that society in general is becoming more complex and interrelated. Up to this point, farmers like Ephraim and wealthy men like Nicholas often viewed each other with equal disdain and lack of understanding.

Klaas Becker is a tragic figure who refuses to pay rent to Van Ryn, is told that he must leave the manor, and is given a small sum of money. After that, the man is so desperate that he slits his wrist with a scythe.

The demonstration that takes place outside the Astor Place during a performance of Macbeth, and the fact that Nicholas foolishly refuses to take a safe escape route and is injured after shooting a boy, shows that the winds of change are blowing in many areas of life. His actions also tell the reader that anyone who refuses to adjust to change, no matter how painful that might be, is sure to suffer the consequences.

As the story ends around the time of the California Gold Rush and Miranda and Jeff decide to go west, it is obvious that change is in the air. The move is also attractive to many people because the concept of equality can be established more easily in new, uncharted territory where outworn customs have never been established.

Style

Point of View

This novel is written in the third person, which enables readers to become as involved in what is happening as they would be when going to a movie. Hollywood must have picked up on this because *Dragonwyck* was made into a motion picture that was quite popular when it was released, and it has also been shown on television.

As events unfold, the reader is given many concrete details that bring the story home. One is also told what the individual characters feel and how those feelings change or endure with the passage of time. In addition, one can see how certain actions on the part of one person are interpreted by others, and what their individual expectations are as well. Then, there is also the frustration all feel occasionally when one wonders what someone else is thinking, and one wishes one could read that person's mind.

Setting

This story takes place in the middle of the nineteenth century, and there is sharp contrast between the Van Ryn estate and the Wells farm, the life of the rich and the common man, and the pace of city and country life.

The author also creates an atmosphere in which people's lives are affected by what is happening around them. These include the Mexican War, which reminds one that America will continue to grow for many more years, and not without a struggle.

When the tenant farmers demonstrate to obtain their rights, one can see that the concept of democracy is evolving, replacing century-old traditions. Van Ryn's estate, for example, is a remnant of the feudal system, and the tenant farmers would have been serfs at an earlier time.

Language and Meaning

There is something quaint about the language the author uses, including the frequent use of the outdated "amongst" instead of our contemporary "among". The effect is subtle, and it may help to transport the reader back to an earlier era.

The dialogue seems to be authentic because the various characters speak according to their personality and level of education, and the language is sometimes quite colorful. When an Italian opera singer and an Irish immigrant come on the scene, the author interprets their accents faithfully.



Regardless of what is happening at the time, there is never any doubt as to whether someone is speaking formally or informally or what emotion that person is attempting to convey to others.

Structure

This novel consists of twenty-two chapters, and each one is about sixteen pages long. The chapters are not given individual names, and it seems that the author wants the reader to consider the novel as one big epic. The plot of the novel is fairly complex, and one can see what happens in the lives of people in the course of a few years. The mansion itself seems to symbolize what is taking place, and it symbolizes the perennial conflict between good and evil.

The author keeps things moving at a steady pace. The subplots include the Mexican War, what happens when people are separated from one another, the struggle of the tenant farmers, and the new society that is forming in America as the democracy evolves.



Quotes

"I have had inquiries made and was gratified to find that you and your husband enjoy the honor and respect of your community." Chap. 1, p. 5

"Even when Ephraim outlined the religious observances which he would expect from Miranda and tried to extract a promise that she would be kept up to the mark, Nicholas remained smoothly gracious and reassuring, although he committed to nothing." Chap. 2, p. 28

"It occurred to her that at last she had a moment alone with him in which to ask about Zelig. She had seen nothing of the old woman since the inexplicable midnight interview, and time had erased the impression of eeriness—but she was curious." Chap. 4, p. 55

"The crowd of farmers who had been kept on the back lawn by a rope shuffled, and sheepishly arranged themselves in order." Chap. 5, p. 68

"Only two things sustained her: that instinctive certainty that he was not as unaware of her as he appeared, and his remembrance of her birthday." Chap. 6, p. 91

"I should think you'd be ashamed," she said to him hotly, 'stirring up people to do wrong.'" Chap. 7, p. 106

"By early December, everyone had a more vital interest than the placing of shrubs. The anti-rent wars were gathering momentum." Chap. 8, p. 116

"Miranda longed to go off by herself to the quiet of the little attic room which she would no longer have to share, but she dared not, knowing that her absence would anger her father." Chap. 11, p. 149

"The first weeks of Miranda's marriage were happy. Nicholas, during this period, was usually the husband she had dreamed of—tender and indulgent." Chap. 13, p. 177

"But this was not England, and America was not a kingdom, but a republic. Willingly or not, they were subject to the laws of the democracy in which they lived." Chap. 16, p. 237

"He saw a man whose invincible courage had been scathed by a chance blow, a man unconscious and impotent for the first time in his life, a man who had to depend on strangers for safety—strangers and Miranda." Chap. 19, pp. 279-280

"Miranda was no longer flighty; even her father admitted that. She had developed a quiet strength and seriousness of purpose in everything she did." Chap. 22, p. 334

Topics for Discussion

Discuss evil. Is Nicholas a completely evil man, or is he insane and someone to be pitied?

Explain the relationship between Jeff Turner and Smith Boughton. How do the two men differ and how are they alike?

Discuss Miranda. Is her development from a naïve young girl to a mature woman purely based on nature, or does her spiritual foundation play a role here?

Discuss the growing unrest among the tenant farmers. How does it relate to the growing American spirit of democracy?

Explain the significance of the betrothal ring. Why is it important to Miranda after she returns to her family and the farm?

Discuss Peggy. Why do she and Miranda become good friends even though their backgrounds are very different?

Discuss Dr. Francis. What is he like and why does Jeff Turner admire him?