

# **Gap Creek Study Guide**

## **Gap Creek by Robert Morgan**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Gap Creek Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapter One.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Two.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Three.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Four.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Five.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Six.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Seven.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Eight.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Nine.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Ten.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Eleven.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twelve.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Thirteen.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">43</a>



# Plot Summary

Gap Creek is the story of a young couple's first year of marriage struggling against harsh terrain and poverty in the 19th century South Carolina countryside.

Ever since she was a child, Julie Harmon's life has been plagued with tragedy. She grew up in a hardworking farm family. She is the third daughter in a family of five children. The youngest child, a boy named Masenier, died when Julie was a teenager. Since her father was battling chest consumption and was too weak to carry the sick boy down the mountain himself, Julie helped with the journey and was present when her brother passed away after vomiting up a stomach full of worms. Unfortunately, Papa's consumption got the better of him soon after his son's death and he became bedridden. Just as Julie was the only one physically strong enough to tackle Papa's fieldwork, she was also the only one strong enough to deal with the emotional trauma of caring for Papa as he died.

After Papa dies, the majority of the hard labor falls on Julie who has the strength to work "like a man." At the novel's opening, she is seventeen-years-old, working hard in the fields and fearing that married life will never come her way. Out of the blue, eighteen-year-old Hank Richards stops by to ask for directions and he and Julie fall in love. After their first time courting - he meets with Julie's family for church on a Sunday afternoon - he and Julie are engaged. A month later, they are married and Julie's dreams of moving away from her mother's house come true. She and Hank move down into the valley to a place called Gap Creek where Hank's arranged free room and board in exchange for tending to an old man's home. The old man, Mr. Pendergast, turns out to be a terrible landlord, always meddling in the married couple's business and critiquing everything Julie does, from the way she cooks biscuits to the way she sweeps the floor. Additionally, Hank's mother, Ma Richards, comes down from her side of the mountain and she's just as miserable as Mr. Pendergast. Julie wonders if she's strong enough to deal with demanding, negative personalities.

After slaughtering a hog one afternoon and rendering the fat into lard, Pendergast sees that a fire has broken out in his kitchen. Even though it isn't safe, Pendergast runs back into the house to save his pension money and is badly burned in the fire. Although Julie does her best to nurse him, he dies from his injuries that night. With the landlord dead and with no way of reaching his heirs, Julie and Hank take over Gap Creek as if it's their own home. They fix it up, tend to the crops, feed the animals, and care for the property. Twice, swindlers come into town and steal from the couple, leaving them destitute. A freak flash flood kills the cow, ruins their corn crop, and rots most of the meat in the smokehouse. Hank and Julie are suddenly without any money or food. Around this time, Julie also discovers that she's pregnant. Despite their many hurdles, the couple joins together to fight back and reclaim their lives. They manage to eke out enough meals of cornbread and grits to live through the harsh winter, but barely. Julie gives birth to her baby, a daughter, a month early, but the baby is too weak to survive. Soon after, Pendergast's heirs arrive to reclaim their property and the back rent Hank owes. With no money, no food, and no future on Gap Creek, Hank and Julie pack up their few

belongings and start climbing the mountain. Even though they have lost everything, the young couple feels overwhelmed with hope as they begin their new lives together.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

The novel opens with the line, "I know about Masenier because I was there. I seen him die." Masenier is the only son born into a family with four daughters. Although Julie is the second born, everyone, even her older sister, looks up to her. Masenier is spoiled by all his sisters and his parents. Someone boils him an egg every morning, even when eggs are scarce, and Momma bakes him biscuits with molasses. He has always been such a healthy boy that when he starts to look peaked, everyone begins to worry. Everyone thinks Masenier has colic, so they brew him special tonics and tea, hoping something will take away the pain in his belly. Papa comes down with a cough, too, so most of the hard labor outside falls to Julie, who is as strong and determined as a man. All through the winter, Papa lies in bed with consumption and Masenier fluctuates between having healthy mornings and horrible, screaming evenings. Meanwhile, Julie cuts wood and grinds corn until her hands are chapped and calloused, but she never complains. Without her hard work, Julie knows that her family will starve.

One evening, Masenier wakes from a horrific nightmare, drenched in sweat. Fever has swelled his body and left him delusional. Julie and her sisters quickly strip Masenier's clothes off and plunge him in an ice bath. They wrap him in quilts to make him sweat. They force him to drink hot water with squeezed lemon, but nothing helps. Papa, even though he's still weak with consumption, knows that they must carry Masenier down the mountain to the doctor, and Julie will have to help carry the load. Papa gets winded almost immediately after leaving the house. Despite Julie's pleas to carry Masenier herself, Papa refuses. When they finally reach the doctor's house, both Masenier and Papa are near death. Dr. Prince diagnosis Masenier with typhoid and gives him a dram of medication. Julie carries her brother back up the mountain, with Papa lagging behind. Halfway up the climb, they stop to give Masenier his medicine. He coughs and vomits, foaming at the mouth. Julie is horrified to see her brother vomit up gobs of squirming white worms. He vomits huge wads of worms and when his stomach is empty, the boy quietly dies. Julie carries the body back up to the house where her mother is waiting for news.

## Chapter One Analysis

The opening chapter of the novel prepares the reader for the harsh reality of life in Appalachia during the late 19th century. Julie and her family live a hard life, in a constant battle to survive against nature. Everything the family has, they've forged for themselves: they built their house, they farm their food, and they sew their clothes. Almost nothing is store-bought. The stark contrast to modern day America is apparent from the opening lines of the novel. The reality of the times was that people, particularly children, died from preventable causes for many reasons: sanitation wasn't very good, few families had regular access to doctors, and doctors themselves were relatively



uneducated compared to today's specialists. Masenier's doctor, for example, misdiagnosed his stomach worms as typhoid because he failed to give him a proper physical inspection. He also fails to assess Papa's weakening state even though the man is nearly crippled with consumption on his doorstep. Although it seems harsh, it's not the doctor's fault. Chances are that he's a local medicine man, that he's overworked, or that he doesn't have the supplies to properly treat their illnesses.

Julie's hard life has turned her into a very hard worker, and this is the key to her character. No matter what she is faced with, Julie has a special grit and determination that makes her a classic literary heroine. No matter what she is faced with, the reader knows she will prevail, even from the opening chapter. It is interesting to note that in the moments before Masenier dies, Julie notes that the night is particularly beautiful. When Masenier passes away in her arms, that beauty morphs and Julie realizes for the first time that, "human life didn't mean a thing in the world. People could be born and they could suffer, and they could die, and it didn't mean a thing ... The world was exactly like it had been and would always be, going about its business" (p. 15). This realization will be important as Julie faces many more disasters in her young life, often as a result of nature's uncaring power.



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

After Masenier dies, Papa's health continues to decline. His lungs are so weak he can barely maneuver around the house, leaving all the outdoor work, from plowing the fields to cutting firewood, to his daughters. With Carolyn now being the youngest child, she's spoiled by her sisters the way they used to spoil Masenier. Rosie, the eldest daughter, takes over the majority of the housework, claiming that since she's the eldest, she shouldn't have to work in the fields. This leaves all the outdoor work for Julie and Lou, although Lou isn't as skilled with an axe and isn't as strong as Julie is. When they need more firewood after a terrible snowstorm and the snow is too deep for the horse to wade through, Lou and Julie cut down a tree, chopped it into pieces, and dragged it on the sled themselves.

Not only do most of the outdoor chores fall on Julie's shoulders, she's also the only one emotionally strong enough to care for their dying father. One evening, Papa can barely fill his lungs with oxygen. He pants and coughs and wheezes. Julie offers to make him a variety of teas and tinctures, but none of them help. He coughs until his eyes nearly pop out of his head and Julie fears he'll choke. She tries to feed him some throat calming syrup, but he vomits it straight up, coughing the whole time. Julie knows her father is dying and she begs the Lord to let him go peacefully. Suddenly, the fire she's built in his room kicks up and a huge, green flame begins dancing and popping in the hearth. Julie fears it's a ghost and she rushes out of the room. As she bolts from the room, Mama yells at her to get back in there and take care of her Papa, but Julie runs outside, into the freezing, snowy night, and starts chopping wood. She swears she hears someone calling her name in the distance, but she can't quite make it out. Refusing to watch another beloved family member die, Julie chops and chops and chops, as tears slide down her face. Soon after, Rosie calls out that their father is dead.

## Chapter Two Analysis

After Masenier's death, all attention turns to Papa whose health is seriously declining. It's interesting that Julie would take on the task of caring for her dying father, rather than her mother or her older sister. Through Julie's own narration, it appears that none other is emotionally strong enough to deal with the fact that Papa is dying, but when he finally passes away, Rosie, in particular, seems quite calm. Critics of the novel have complained that Morgan presents far too many tragedies for Julie to endure and that the very number of tragedies in her life undermines their emotional impact. Still, there is no denying that Morgan has created an emotionally tough and resilient woman in Julie.

When Papa nears death, something strange happens to the fire in his room: it begins to spark green flames. At first, Julie dismisses this strange occurrence as a result of young, wet persimmon branches, but eventually, the presence spooks her. She feels as



if a portent, or spirit, has entered the room to take Papa's soul from him. The presence of ghostly spirits is a common theme in the novel, particularly around times of death. In the previous chapter, keen readers might have noticed an eerie howling in the woods thought to be the call of mountain lions. The Appalachian population, which Julie belongs to, was largely uneducated aside from the religious education they received at church. Spirituality, with all its angels and demons, was relied on to understand the balance of the world, so it makes sense that Julie would interpret ghosts and demons into her everyday life, particularly when faced with the finality of death. This is an important and reoccurring symbol readers should note as the novel progresses.





# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

Life doesn't change much on the farm after Papa dies. The girls continue to complete the hard labor of fieldwork. One afternoon, while chopping down a tree with her Mama and sister, a man rides up on his horse asking for directions. Julie is seventeen-years-old and never thought she would fall in love, but immediately, she feels herself falling for this dark-haired stranger, Hank Richards. Julie is impressed by the way Mama handles the guest the way Papa would have, friendly and confident. When the man tips his hat in greeting, he looks Julie square in the eyes, which makes her blush. Soon, it becomes clear that Hank isn't really lost but has come calling for Julie's benefit. Sensing that some innocent flirtation might be happening, Mama invites Hank to join the family at church on Sunday. Hank happily agrees.

The very next Sunday, Hank shows up at church wearing a brand new suit and hat. He sits in the back of church, but Julie can feel his eyes on her. When the service is over, Julie dreads walking outside because she has no idea what she'll say to Hank. Besides the Willard boys next door, she's never spoken to boys her own age before. Hank doesn't even let her speak before asking permission to walk her home. Still unable to speak, Julie just nods and takes his arm. Hank chats the whole way home, with Mama and Julie's sisters listening a few feet behind them, but Julie remains mute. Hank stays for dinner and impresses the entire family with his pre-meal blessing. Julie stands to serve the coffee but her hands are shaking so terribly, she spills the whole pot of hot coffee into Hank's lap. Julie is mortified, but Hank laughs it off, asking Julie to accompany him down to the well where he can clean up. Down by the well, Hank takes Julie by the shoulders and kisses her passionately: "Everything was turning as Hank kissed me. My eyes was closed and I floated with the turning" (p. 43). They kiss for a few glorious minutes before walking, hand in hand, back to the house. On their way back, Hank asks Julie to marry him and she agrees. Mama isn't happy about the arrangement, particularly because she needs Julie's strong hands and back on the farm, but eventually, she agrees.

## Chapter Three Analysis

Because Julie never went to school and lives on a secluded farm, Hank Richard is one of the first men her own age that she's ever set eyes on. It's no surprise that she immediately develops a crush on him and that she is flustered in his presence. It's immediately clear that Hank has come to Mount Olivet in search of a wife. The reader is never given a physical description of Julie - she lived during a time when there were few mirrors. However, based on Hank's unwavering gaze, it is safe to assume that she is attractive. What he is likely drawn to, however, is Julie's unique work ethic. When he first meets her, she's sawing a tree in her bare feet. Hank Richards is a man who desperately wants to get out from under his mother's thumb and build a new life for



himself, and Julie seems like the perfect partner for that journey. At the time, it was not unusual for teenagers to get married, and Mama's apprehension likely has more to do with the fact that she will be losing a hard working daughter than Julie's age.

It's unclear what exactly Julie is attracted to in Hank other than the fact that he pays her some attention. Although Julie does find Hank attractive, he's poor, uneducated, and from the other side of the mountain (which means Julie will have to leave her family if she wants to live with him). The fact that Julie would agree to marry a man after spending only an afternoon with him shows how naïve and vulnerable she is. Julie is heavily influenced by her emotions, particularly her "healthy" sexual appetite, leading her to think with her heart rather than her head. It's interesting to note that when Julie worries the neighbor boys will rough Hank up after seeing them kiss in the field, Hank says, "Don't you worry. Worry never made anybody live a second longer" (p.44). As their marriage progresses and the tragedies keep coming their way, both Julie and Hank character's change dramatically. It will be interesting to remember Hank's early mindset as the novel continues.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

Hank arranges a rental home in Gap Creek for after the wedding. He and Julie get married on a Saturday, almost a month after they first met. On their first night as husband and wife, they sleep in separate bedrooms at Mama's house. The next day, they walked down the mountain to Gap Creek. Hank has arranged free room and board in exchange for tending to Mr. Pendergast, their landlord's, house and personal needs. Julie is in charge of cleaning the house and cooking all Mr. Pendergast's meals. The couple arrives in the evening and quickly makes their way up to their marital bed. They make love for the first time and it is much more pleasurable than Julie imagined it would be. Their lovemaking is so fierce, they break the bed, much to Mr. Pendergast's perverse pleasure. The next morning, Hank leaves early to work in the fields and Julie sets about making Mr. Pendergast's breakfast. The old man doesn't get out of bed until afternoon, and spends the next few hours complaining about everything - from Julie's cooking to the cold coffee to how slowly Julie sweeps the floor. Julie can see that she'll have her work cut out for her dealing with Mr. Pendergast's bad mood.

Julie works hard on her first real day as a married woman. She fixes the broken bed, unpacks her belongings, and washes all Mr. Pendergast's stinky clothing. As Julie works, Mr. Pendergast mutters and moans under his breath. Washing clothes is an all day chore, and Julie is frustrated that Pendergast waited until afternoon to ask her to start. Still, she enjoys the process of making things clean, feeling like the steam from the washtub is also cleansing her soul. After doing the laundry, Julie starts making dinner, picking her way through Pendergast's decrepit potato pit. When Hank arrives home, he hears Pendergast chastising Julie for putting the milk in the springhouse when he needs butter churned. Hank doesn't like Pendergast's tone of voice and starts a fight with the old man, threatening to move out if he ever speaks to Julie that way again. A few days later, a drunk man starts banging on the door, screaming for Pendergast to come out, to make it right, to pay him the money he's owed. Julie is terrified and Pendergast cowers in the kitchen, refusing to acknowledge the man's presence. With all the courage she has, Julie approaches the drunk man and orders him off her land. When Hank hears about this encounter later, he's outraged that Pendergast would let Julie deal with a drunkard; that's a man's job.

## Chapter Four Analysis

This chapter of the novel showcases the tough daily life women in the late 19th century endured. Through Morgan's descriptive style, the reader is transported to late 19th century America - both physically and emotionally - when young couples fought to survive in the rugged terrain. This transportation wouldn't be as accessible without the rich layers of language used to create the landscape. The details for Julie's daily chores are well researched and engaging. This style of writing continues throughout the novel.



Whenever Julie feels overwhelmed - as she does when she first moves into Mr. Pendergast's house - her instinct is to start cleaning. On her first day in the home, her hands don't stop working. For Julie, cleaning is a calming, almost therapeutic practice. Although Mr. Pendergast is terribly annoying and somewhat perverted as he listens to the couple making love upstairs and whittles naked women in scraps of wood while ogling Julie, Julie is determined not to let him ruin her good mood. She is a married woman now and in charge of a house. For most girls her age, that would be a dream come true.

Two interesting facets of Hank's character are revealed during his fight with Mr. Pendergast. First, it is made clear that Hank has a temper. Although his main fury is aimed at Mr. Pendergast (and he is arguably protecting his wife's dignity), it appears that Hank does not like to be told what to do, by anyone. Although it is a minor spat in the kitchen, the reader can expect Hank's temper to get worse as the novel progresses. The strict gender roles of the time are also revealed during the fight. In Hank's mind, there are specific tasks for men and specific tasks for women. He is outraged at the thought of Julie performing "men's work." This is a clear contrast to Julie's perspective. To her, there is simply work that needs to be completed. Gender roles are also hinted at when, during the fight, Hank shouts that he is the only person who should be giving orders to his wife. Julie would have preferred that Hank say she shouldn't be ordered around, full stop, but his desperate desire for power within their marriage is already being revealed.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

A few weeks after the wedding, Hank's mother, Ma Richards, writes to say that she's coming down for a visit. Julie is excited and nervous to meet her mother-in-law for the first time, and hopes that they will get along. While Hank picks up his mother, Julie does whatever she can to clean the house, making it presentable for Ma Richards. Wherever she goes, Mr. Pendergast hovers around her, watching. Julie asks about his family but Pendergast has none. His wife has been dead for four years and he hasn't seen his stepchildren since the funeral. Doing what she can to pass the time, Julie kills and plucks a chicken for dinner, bakes biscuits, and prepares an apple pie. When Ma Richards finally arrives, Julie's nerves threaten to get the better of her. Ma Richards is tiny but fierce. Shrewd black eyes search out dust and dirt as Ma Richards makes it very clear that no woman is good enough for her precious Hank. Ma Richards is rude, curt, and demanding, and she has no desire to befriend her new daughter-in-law. All she wants to do, it seems, is critique Julie's housekeeping and every aspect of dinner: the chicken, the pie, and the biscuits. As she eats, Ma Richards talks about her husband's death, and how the family ignored the warnings of a portent that came to say it was his time to go.

The next day, rain starts to freeze the ground letting Julie know it's a good time to butcher a hog. She and Mr. Pendergast start the dirty, backbreaking work, with Julie finishing most of the duties herself. Pendergast shoots the hog and helps haul the carcass up onto the butchering table, but Julie scrapes all the hair off the hog skin, ties the legs, pulling the bar skin taut, and slices the meat into sections. She slices the hog's belly and pulls out the hot entrails, cuts off the hog's head so she can fry the brain later, and salts the huge hunks of meat she's removed from the bones. She works from first sunlight until well after dinnertime. By the time she's finished, she's exhausted, but she still has dinner to make and lard to render. All the while, Ma Richards critiques everything Julie does - saying there's too many streaks in the lard, that she's wasting bacon, that the grits she's made for dinner are too watery. Rather than burst out into tears, Julie focuses her anger on her work, motivating herself to work harder, faster. Julie makes a lovely dinner of fresh pork tenderloin, cornbread, grits, and hot coffee. She, Ma Richards, and Mr. Pendergast sit together enjoying their dinner. They share a pleasant conversation and momentarily, Julie wonders if she was too hard on her mother-in-law.

After dinner, it's time to render the hog fat into lard. As Julie boils down the fat, she accidentally knocks one of the lard pans and it spills hot grease onto the stove. As Julie searches frantically for something to throw on the fire, Ma Richards panics, grabs a bucket of water, and throws that on the flames. Immediately, the fire explodes and nearly Pendergast's entire kitchen catches fire. Ma and Julie rush from the kitchen and knock into Pendergast, fighting his way back into the house searching for his pension money. Julie grabs the old man and tells him it's too dangerous, but Pendergast won't



listen. He dives into the house and grabs a jar of money before Julie pulls him back out to safety. Julie gasps when she sees him: his face and hair are terribly burnt. Knowing there's nothing she can do for Pendergast right now, Julie soaks flour sacks with water and rushes back into the house, hoping she can save at least part of Pendergast's property. She nearly passes out from the smoke, but manages to put out most of the fire. Before she passes out, Hank arrives and carries her outside to the fresh air.

It takes all three of them to carry Pendergast up to his room. Of course, Ma Richards blames Julie entirely for the fire, even though she was the one who spread it. Julie tries to put butter on Pendergast's burns but he's in too much pain. He screams and shouts as burnt skin falls off his body in strips. Julie knows Pendergast is dying and that there's nothing she can do but help ease his pain. She digs around in the medicine cabinet and finds laudanum, a high-alcohol painkiller. She forces some down his throat and soon, he's misty eyed and silent. Hank rushes up the mountain to find the doctor and Ma Richards goes to bed, once again leaving Julie alone with a dying man. Pendergast sees the devil in the moments before he dies, sure he is going to hell for the sins he committed. Julie does her best to comfort the man, but he dies an agonizing, painful death. Immediately after, Julie sets out to prepare the body. She strips him of his clothes and washes every inch of him, then douses his body in alcohol. She asks Hank to build a casket in the meantime and he resents being given orders from a woman. Although she asks around in town, no one seems to know how to get a hold of Pendergast's stepchildren - a stepson in California and a stepdaughter in Columbus - so Pendergast's funeral is pitifully empty.

## Chapter Five Analysis

In this, the longest chapter in the novel, many major events happen. First, Ma Richards arrives. She is nothing like what Julie was expecting and it appears Hank may have inherited some of her unsavory qualities. Like Hank, Ma has strict ideas about what a woman should do in the house (and how she should do it!) and what a man should do. Although Julie is disappointed by her mother-in-law's attitude, she is not put off by it. There are things, like butchering the hog, that simply need to be done, no matter how unpleasant. It's interesting to see the dynamic relationship Hank has with both his mother and his wife. It's clear that Ma's meddling makes Hank uncomfortable, but he seems completely unable to stand up to her. When he hears Ma critiquing Julie's work, he says nothing, a stark contrast to his reaction to Mr. Pendergast's critiques the night before. Ma's presence will have a lasting effect on Julie and the way she runs her home. It will also continue to damage her relationship with Hank as she feels undermined as a woman by Ma's constant critiques. Because Ma doesn't think Julie is good enough for Hank, she seems bound and determined to portray Julie as a ninny. It seems as if she wants Hank to leave his new life and return to Painter Mountain with her. Although Julie and Ma share a pleasant evening together after the hog is slaughtered, the house fire tears them apart again. As soon as Hank arrives, Ma tries to blame Julie for everything. There is no praise for the work Julie did preventing the fire from spreading or saving Mr. Pendergast from the flames, Ma's insecurity in Hank's love for Julie causes her to point fingers and place blame.



Despite Julie's best efforts, both during the fire and after, Mr. Pendergast dies as a result of the injuries he sustained trying to rescue his pension money. The moments before his death are particularly gripping because he imagines the devil himself has come to collect his soul. Pendergast knows he has been an unpleasant man, but in the moments before his death, he argues that he is not evil. Interestingly, in the same chapter, Ma Richards describes the ghostly presence that made itself known before her husband died. Ghost stories are perpetuated in Appalachian culture and soon, the stories become legend. If you are raised in a culture that expects spiritual presence, particularly at death, your psyche will be trained to search spirits out. Anything, even the sound of a rat in the wall, can morph into a spiritual presence: "Wind shoved against the wall of the house and a mouse or rat scratched in the wall behind Mr. Pendergast's bed. It sounded like the rat was gnawing a nut or chewing a piece of wood. Something swished inside the wall and then overhead, in the ceiling. I didn't know if it was a rat running. It sounded like a big snake sliding over paneling. It sounded like something ten feet long sliding dry scales over wood" (Page 107). It's unclear exactly what message Morgan is sending to his readers about spirituality, but there seems to be a parallel between good works and a blessed life. Because Mr. Pendergast had been a sinful man, by some spiritual law, he deserved to have a painful death. The novel suggests that Pendergast descended into hell in his final moments. Although Gap Creek isn't a religious story, there are spiritual themes and allusions throughout the novel.





# Chapter Six

## Chapter Six Summary

After Mr. Pendergast's funeral, Ma Richards announces that Julie is expecting and that she is going to stay to help take care of the baby. Julie is mortified. She wasn't sure she was pregnant in the first place, and she certainly doesn't want Ma Richards staying until the baby is born. Hank, too, is shocked by the news but tells Ma that Julie will manage on her own. Julie knows he's said this for her benefit, and she falls in love with him all over again. A week later, Hank hitches up the buggy and drives Ma back up to Painter Mountain. While he's gone, a lawyer knocks on the door to speak to Julie. He says that he represents Mr. Pendergast's estate and that since he had no will, Julie's claim on the property could be just as valid in court as his heirs. He says that Julie can claim the property by "right of occupancy," which means that since she lives on the property and has been taking care of it, she can own it. All she has to do is pay the interest due to the bank on the loan, and the property could be hers, as long as the courts approves it. Julie is overwhelmed with happiness. She wishes Hank were here to talk to the man, but this is something she can do to save the property and create a better life for her unborn child. After much contemplation, Julie hands over Mr. Pendergast's fruit jar of pension money. She figures that even if the heirs come back to claim the property, the debt will already be paid. She's doing them, and herself, a favor. The man counts the money (\$47.86) and writes Julie a receipt.

When the lawyer leaves, a strange feeling settles in Julie's bones, and when Hank comes home, she understands why. Hank sees immediately that they've been scammed, and he's outraged that Julie would give away all that money. He calls Julie "a dumb heifer" and slaps her across the face (p. 129). Julie is shocked and embarrassed that Hank would raise a hand to her, especially because he doesn't apologize afterward. He storms out of the house and leaves her alone, wallowing in her shame, for the next few hours. When Hank comes home, Julie is already in bed, but he sits down and tells her that he's just been fired. She reaches out in the dark to touch him. They make love passionately and Julie thinks, "in the dark, what mattered was we was together and naked ... We would always find a way to live, a way to get back, as long as we could love" (p. 137).

## Chapter Six Analysis

This chapter is arguably the turning point in the novel. First, Julie discovers that she is pregnant, so she is no longer living her life for herself, she is also living it for her unborn child. All the financial struggles the couple was feeling are heightened now that they have to worry about another mouth to feed. For the past few weeks, Hank and Julie have been struggling to connect, and Hank dips in and out of affection and depression. He momentarily redeems himself in Julie's eyes by bringing Ma back up to the mountains rather than letting her stay with them, but her illusion of a happy family is





shattered the moment she tells him about the stolen money. His temper reaches its boiling point when he not only calls Julie an abusive name, he slaps her across the face in anger. What is most shocking to Julie is not that Hank raised his hand to her - although this is shocking enough in itself - but that he never apologizes for his actions. For the rest of the day, Julie goes through a wide range of reactions. She considers threatening to shoot Hank if he ever hits her again. She considers moving back up to the mountain with her mother. She considers apologizing for her bad behavior. In the end, she never has the chance to do any of these things because the fear that her husband may not be the man she thought he was is simply too terrifying to admit. Many readers will be shocked to see Julie passionately love Hank that night, but it's clear that this is her final attempt to salvage the image she had of marriage. If she confronts Hank about his abusive behavior, she will be admitting to herself that her marriage has failed. She is too young and too vulnerable to admit that yet. Her mother's promise that marriage is hard work echoes in her ears. Julie decides that rather than be angry, she will face the troubles in her marriage the same way she faced the mountain on the night of Masenier's death: "It weakens you to feel proud of [or sorry for] yourself. Better use your breath to fight against the trail, to fight against the mountain" (p. 13).



# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Seven Summary

Despite their passionate lovemaking the night before, tension still bubbles between Hank and Julie the next morning. When she innocently suggests that he walk over to the next town in search of work, Hank snaps that his job isn't her concern. Instead of searching for work, Hank takes his shotgun into the woods to hunt wild turkeys. With no money coming in from wages, Julie searches Pendergast's property for all the edible food that might sustain them through the winter. She starts in the potato pit, sorting out salvageable sweet and baking potatoes from rotten ones. In the corncrib, she sorts out enough corn to make six bushels of meal. She finds a few good jugs of molasses, moonshine, and a string of dried peppers. In the hayloft, she finds feed for the animals, ten huge summer squash, and pile of horse apples. To her delight, she also discovers brown paper bags of labeled seeds. Mrs. Pendergast must have sorted them before she died. Julie decides that if they're allowed to stay on the property long enough, she'll plant all the seeds she can next spring. When she finishes searching the property, Julie takes a long walk in the woods, savoring the beautiful surroundings. She'd never had time to explore the scenery before, and she finds it breathtaking. She lays in the grass and stares up at the beautiful, blue sky, letting the beauty of nature wash over her. When she returns home, she's embarrassed to tell Hank what she's been doing in the woods, so she says she was searching for chestnuts. Hank is moody and short throughout dinner, even though he managed to catch a turkey.

Two days later, there's another knock at the door. A man and woman walk into the house; the woman is in tears. She says that she's Caroline Glascock, Mr. Pendergast's step-daughter. She's beside herself crying, looking around the house at all her old memories. Caroline says that she couldn't bear to move back into the house and that she would happily sell it to Hank and Julie if they could come up with the money. All they have left between them is five dollars and Hank hands it over to Caroline as a down payment. She asks if the couple has anything they could pawn for rent until springtime, when she'd be more than happy to let Hank work off the rent. Julie hands over the gold necklace her mother gave her when she got married. Before she leaves, Caroline walks through the house collecting items of "sentimental value" that had belonged to her mother. She takes all the china and silver, a lamp, and some jewelry.

## Chapter Seven Analysis

Since Mr. Pendergast's death, Hank and Julie's future on Gap Creek is precarious. It is known that Pendergast has two heirs - a stepson and stepdaughter from whom he was estranged - yet no one knows where the heirs are or how to contact them. Until the couple knows what the heirs plans for the estate are, they have no idea what their future holds. In the best-case scenario, the heirs will allow Hank to work off the debt owed on the property. In the worst-case scenario, the heirs will force the couple off the property



effective immediately. The heirs could show up at any time, which makes planning for the future tricky. Despite her uncertain future, Julie feels a sense of calm. Her husband is miserable and depressed, and they have no money, but Julie finds joy in the beauty of nature. When she is away from Hank's depressive mood and the constant chores of keeping up the house, Julie escapes to the wild and feels free. She's in tune with nature and in a way, being outside is a religious experience for her. It's interesting to note that Julie feels unsafe sharing her joy with Hank. She's sure he'll view her afternoon as frivolous and be angry about the way she's spent her time.



# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Eight Summary

A few weeks pass with no receipt from Caroline Glascock, and Julie realizes that they've been swindled again. This time, Hank had been there, and he is devastated to acknowledge that he fell for the lies too. From then on, something changes in Hank. He becomes moodier and more depressed. He rarely speaks to Julie and storms in and out of the house, slamming doors. Weeks pass and the couple runs out of coffee and sugar. Julie knows they have no money, but she saw some dried ginseng roots in the attic and wonders if they'll let her trade them for supplies in the general store. She walks a mile and a half to town carrying 30 ginseng roots. George Poole, the shop owner is a kindly man who clearly wants to help the young couple. Even though the roots are dried and the price for ginseng has gone down, he lets her trade the roots for the coffee and sugar she needs. He also gives her twenty-seven cents to spend in the future. Julie is overjoyed. Her joy only grows when George tells her that Mama wrote to say Lou is getting married. She, her husband, and Carolyn are coming down to Gap Creek for a visit. Julie rushes from the shop and races home. By the time she arrives, her sisters are already there. The sisters are a welcomed surprise to Julie, who had been feeling lonely in the three months since she left home. Lou and Carolyn come bearing smiles and gifts from home, including a ham, jars of jelly, and one of Rosie's famous coconut cakes. Julie and Lou set about cleaning the house, since Julie hadn't been expecting visitors, while fourteen-year-old Carolyn flirts with the men in the sitting room.

Julie and Lou bounce right back into their old habits, gossiping about boys and complaining about how spoiled Carolyn is. Interestingly, Lou has a lot of questions about marital intimacy, but Julie is too embarrassed to answer them. The five family members share a lovely dinner together, and the next morning, Lou and her husband Garland set off for their honeymoon leaving Carolyn behind. Julie hopes that she can spend the next few days bonding with her youngest sister, but Carolyn is spoiled and selfish. She has no desire to help Julie around the house and would rather spend time flirting with Hank. Julie tries to ignore the jealousy she feels watching Hank laugh and joke with Carolyn. He hasn't laughed and joked with her in weeks. Carolyn spends her days working at Hank's heels, down in the potato pit, gathering chestnuts in the woods, she is like his shadow. One afternoon, the threesome decides to burn the old fields, making the ground fertile again. Carolyn tries to help but catches her dress on fire. That night, Julie wakes to a banging and moaning in Carolyn's bedroom. When she rolls over, Hank is gone. She discovers the two of them in the kitchen later, Hank leaning over Carolyn, his mouth close to her ear. Carolyn says she isn't feeling well, so Julie tells Hank to leave and she nurses the girl herself.



## Chapter Eight Analysis

Once again, the couple let their eagerness to stay on Gap Creek cloud their better judgment when they are conned by Caroline Glascock and her husband. It's clear the Glacocks hoped to take the Richards for more than they were able to (they were hoping to steal the full value of the house), but the result of the swindling is no less devastating. While Hank and Julie were in dire straights before, their financial situation now is debilitating. Additionally, the sting of being swindled has further damaged Hank's emotional state and the reader can expect his mood to continue to decline with this new revelation. While Hank continues to sink deeper into his depression, Julie is overjoyed by the surprise visit of her sisters. A stark contrast is made between Lou and Julie's marriages, the most obvious difference being the love-lost between Hank and Julie in the early months of their marriage. They are no longer doe-eyed and naïve about marriage and the infatuation of their puppy love has quickly worn away. However, the fact that Garland admits to fathering a child out of wedlock with another woman shows that each relationship has its own hurdles to overcome. Lou shouldn't expect her married life to be any easier than Julie's has been, which is the harsh reality of the time.

Hank's relationship with Carolyn in this chapter is particularly interesting. It is unclear whether he has a brief affair with the frivolous fourteen-year-old girl, but a sexual relationship between the pair is certainly hinted at. To start with, Carolyn is outrageously flirtatious, a trait Julie forgives due to Carolyn's age. But Hank is an adult with no excuse for constantly sneaking away with Carolyn, away from his wife's view. The incident in the chestnut field is particularly telling, as Hank and Carolyn actively persuade Julie to leave them alone and when she does, they frolic away together like young lovers. A few nights before Carolyn leaves, Julie awakens to hear the sound of Carolyn's bed knocking against the wall and a variety of sounds like "a groan or a moan" (p. 199). Hank is not in bed with Julie, and his side of the bed is cold as if he hasn't been there all night - clearly he has been with Carolyn. When Julie discovers Carolyn and Hank in the kitchen later, they are visibly startled to have been discovered. It's insinuated that Carolyn has just gotten her first period, but her pains and spotty bleeding could also be the result of having just lost her virginity.

While Hank is burning the fields back, Carolyn catches her dress on fire. Julie conjures a somewhat sexual theme when she says fire leaves the earth "naked and fertile" (p. 196). In literature, mud or dirt is often viewed as a symbol for sin. The fact that Carolyn's beautiful dress is muddied and soiled could be symbolic of the fact that her innocence has been soiled, particularly with the line, "I lifted the muddy hem and seen her legs were not burned" (p. 199). It's unclear why Morgan chose to include such a powerful question in the novel, particularly because once she leaves at the end of the chapter, Carolyn does not appear in the story again.



# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

After Lou and Garland pick up Carolyn again, Hank's mood changes back to depressed and moody. Not even the prospect of Christmas coming cheers him. Julie decides that she's going to decorate the house with or without Hank's help, so she sets out in search of a Christmas tree. After a few hours in the woods, she finds a tree, chops it down, and drags it back to the house. Because they don't have money for decorations, she uses candles in the trees, torn bits of aluminum foil, and strings of popcorn. That night, it starts to sleet and the weather carries on through the night. In bed that night, she wakes to the sound of tree limbs cracking under the weight of the ice. The next morning, the sun comes out and all that ice starts to melt. It also starts raining, pouring hard the whole afternoon. Julie starts to worry when water seeps under the doorway and into the kitchen. It's Christmas morning, yet all the couple can do is worry about the water leaking through the roof and the tiny pools starting to collect on the floors. Julie suggests going up the mountain to visit her family, but Hank doesn't want to leave the farm animals during the storm. A few hours pass and the rain doesn't let up. Julie walks to the back porch and is horrified to discover that it's totally flooded. She realizes that all the rainwater is rushing down the mountain and they're moments away from a flash flood. She hollers to Hank to round up their belongings and says that they need to head to higher ground, no matter how dangerous. They race toward the barn through waist-deep water hoping to climb high into the hayloft. For a moment, Hank and Julie are separated and she fears that he is dead. She finds him in the hayloft threatening to kill himself: "I have ruint your life," he says (p. 220).

When the flood waters slow, Hank and Julie silently make their way down from the loft. Julie is shaken from Hank's suicide threats and wonders how she could be stronger than her husband. Immediately, they see the flood's destruction. The cow has drowned. The interior of their home is mess, like a pack of wild animals has been set loose in every room. Wooden doorframes, floorboards, and furniture are warped and already beginning to mold. Much of their food supply has been washed away, and the potatoes, corn, and meat has begun to rot. When Julie feels all hope is lost, the pastor stops by to invite her to church. Without hesitation, Julie accepts his offer.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

Julie has begun to create a life for herself on Gap Creek even without Hank's support. At times it seems Julie is creating an ideal childhood for her baby even though it isn't born yet. This child has given Julie a reason to live, to continue moving forward and finding joy in life despite Hank's depression. This determination is clearly seen during the flash flood. Hank grabs his shotgun and threatens to kill Julie and himself while Julie continues to fight for survival: ""It was strange to think that I was stronger than Hank. He was wore out and I was still fighting" (p. 224). In Hank's mind, all the tragedy that has



befallen them is his fault. The guilt is so extreme he cannot see a way out of it. There's no doubt that Hank's guilt comes from the abusive way he treated his wife, but keen readers might also question if some guilt comes from an illicit affair with Carolyn. If he hasn't had a new inciting incident (like an affair) it seems unlikely that his reaction today would be so extreme.

Hank and Julie's peril is paralleled by the peril of the animals in the barn - the horse and cow. The horse (symbolic of Julie) is frightened but calm during the flood while the cow (Hank) bawls and panics. When the flood water recedes, the cow has killed itself, much like Hank was threatening to do. This symbolizes that a part of Hank's spirit died on the night of the flood. For the rest of the novel, he trudges around the farm like a lost soul, a walking dead man. His life is not restored to him until the day he accepts Jesus in his life at church. Religiously, Hank is given new life, he is "born again." This theme is hinted at with the sudden arrival of Preacher Gibbs at the end of the chapter, and the prayer Julie cries out when Hank threatens to kill himself in the loft: "Please, Lord. Help us" (p. 220). Earlier in the chapter, when Julie is decorating the Christmas tree, she suddenly feels the presence of angels in the room, another echoing of the religious themes from earlier in the novel: "The air was filled with black angels falling in the dark, thick as snowflakes...but the lighted candles pointed upward" (Page 213). This imagery, which appears before the flood, ominously foreshadows the emotional darkness the couple will soon face. The fact that the candles point upward, arguably toward heaven, again suggests that peace can be found through the Lord.



# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

Julie and Hank work tirelessly to save what food they can from their supply. Julie thinks constantly about the preacher's offer to join them for a Sunday service. She realizes how lonely and isolated she feels in the valley, but Hank doesn't want to go: "It was the fact that he had lost his job, and was worried about the baby coming and the loss of his money, and embarrassed by the way he had acted in the flood, that made him standoffish. I had to help him out. The night of the flood had took away his confidence" (p. 240-241). Julie decides to accept the pastor's offer whether or not Hank agrees with her. When she joins the congregation, she feels a warmth and love that has been missing in her life. The music is beautiful and it feels so good to sing. The pastor's message is particularly moving to Julie, who hasn't heard a man of God speak in many months. When he asks if there's anyone in the congregation who would like to dedicate their life to the Lord, Julie feels herself rise out of her chair as if another spirit possesses her body. She realizes that the Lord has chosen her to be his servant, and she kneels before the altar. The entire congregation welcomes her with warm handshakes, hugs, and looks of love, but Hank pouts in the back of the church, refusing to make eye contact with his wife. For the first time in her life, Julie doesn't care what Hank thinks about her. She is fully and happy with the spirit. She continues attending church every Sunday from then on. Hank joins her and eventually, joins the church himself, however begrudgingly.

## Chapter Ten Analysis

Julie decides to attend church on New Year's Day, not only a fresh start in the new year, but today, a fresh start to the new century, 1900. During the service, Julie is powerfully moved by the Holy Spirit and drawn to commit her life to Christ. She moves as if she's possessed, but unlike the other spiritual presences in her life, she doesn't find this experience frightening: "I have heard of women that fainted, and I've heard of women that danced and shouted and spoke in tongues...But I didn't know what to expect. Something was moving me, but I could do whatever I wanted to. I was free to do what I chose, and what I wanted was to rededicate my life" (p. 247). Four weeks later, Hank also joins the church and his rebirth is a bit more dramatic. When he walks up to the pulpit to receive the preacher's blessing, he faints, knocking himself unconscious. Because Hank had been so possessed by his depression, he needed a physical alteration for his spiritual rebirth to be complete. Now that the couple have invested their life in the church, joined a religious community, and put their faith in the Lord, the reader can expect their lives to change. In his sermon, Preacher Gibbs reads a verse that says, "I have commanded you and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world," (p. 244). Keen readers will remember Hank's cry in the hayloft during the flood that surely this was the end of the world. Even then, Preacher Gibbs says, the Lord was with them.



The Lord promises that he has a plan for his believer's lives and that he will set them free in their darkest hour.



# Chapter Eleven

## Chapter Eleven Summary

Both Hank and Julie begin to suffer in the cold winter with their lack of food supplies. Hank worries that Julie isn't eating enough to sustain the growing baby, but there simply isn't enough food to last the winter. If she doesn't stick to the strict rations, they'll all starve. The one thing Julie craves throughout her pregnancy is fruit jam. Her sisters had brought a few jars when they visited earlier in the year, but those have long been eaten. Two women from church stop by with gifts for Julie's baby - used clothing, booties, and blankets. No one in the valley has much money, so these gifts are a touching gesture of community. Julie feels near tears as she accepts the gifts, and is overwhelmed with joy when one of the women produces a small jar of fruit jelly as her last gift: "The world wouldn't have lasted this long if women didn't help each other," she says (p. 257). A few days later, Timmy Gosnell comes by the house again, throwing rocks at the windows and threatening Mr. Pendergast. Fed up with the drunken man's behavior, Julie confronts him on the porch, ordering him off her property. This time, Hank comes with her and when Timmy pulls a knife on his pregnant wife, something snaps in Hank. He wrestles Timmy to the ground, punches him repeatedly in the face, and throws him into the freezing river. Julie knows Timmy will die in the water, so she wades in to try to save him. Even though Hank's behavior was appalling, her family can't survive if he's arrested. Together, they pull Timmy out of the water, warm him up, and send him on his way. Despite this moment of bonding, Hank and Julie continue to bicker about everything, from their food supplies to where Hank should look for a job. Julie has tried to stay quiet about Hank's work situation so as not to rattle his temper, but times are dire. They will die if they don't make some money soon. Finally, Hank admits that he was fired from his job at the brick kiln because he punched his boss. Word has spread and no one will hire him, here or in any other city nearby. Tragedy continues to strike when a weasel gets into the henhouse and kills all eight of the couple's chickens.

## Chapter Eleven Analysis

When Hank and Julie begin to lose faith - religiously and emotionally - women from the church show up with clothes for the baby and jam for Julie's cravings. Although it's a small gesture, the message seems to be that the Lord provides - even for small desires - when you put faith in him. Religious themes and symbolism abound in this chapter, particularly with the return of Timmy Gosnell. Today, Timmy arrives covered in mud, again, symbolic of the sin and evil in his life. When Hank throws him in the river, it is a rough baptism of sorts, for both Timmy and Hank, as that dirt is washed away. After, Hank admits a flaw to his wife. It was his temper that got him fired from the brick kiln, not a lack of work. The fact that Hank can now admit his mistakes to his wife shows that he is beginning to change. Recognizing the errors of his ways also shows that Hank is aware of his shortcoming, which is the first step to resolving them.



# Chapter Twelve

## Chapter Twelve Summary

By carefully rationing out food, Hank and Julie survive the winter, even without the benefit of fresh eggs from the chickens. At the first sight of spring, Julie heads into the woods in search of greens to boil into soup. As she is foraging, she feels a sharp pain in her stomach. Thinking it's gas because her baby isn't due for at least another six weeks, Julie continues picking. The pains come from time to time, but she manages to ignore them. When the pain becomes more severe, she goes home and tells Hank that she's suffering from terrible gas. She has trouble sleeping through the night, so Hank decides that it's time to fetch Ma Richards. The baby is coming, he says, whether or not Julie likes it. Determined to prove that Hank is wrong, Julie sets about her normal morning routine making breakfast and cleaning the house. At times, the pain in her stomach becomes unbearable, but she's still convinced that the baby is safe inside her. Hank has been gone for a few hours when Julie finally realizes the truth: she is in labor. The nearest doctor is miles away and Hank won't be back with Ma Richards until the evening. It is a sickening realization, but Julie knows she will probably have to deliver the baby alone. She prepares fresh towels and boiled water, lays a quilt on the kitchen floor, and begins pushing. When the contractions are strongest, she grabs the table legs for leverage. The baby's head emerges and with all her strength, Julie gives one final push. The tiny baby, nearly two months early, slides out like a bean from its pod. With no scissors in sight, Julie bites the umbilical cord in half, severing the baby from the afterbirth. Moments later, she passes out.

Hank arrives soon after and wakes Julie by saying that something is wrong with the baby. It's a girl, grey as clay and very skinny. Her skin is so thin and sensitive that it rubs raw when touched. Immediately, Hank sees that Julie is in serious distress. She has a sweltering fever and she's delusional. He gives her water to drink and carries her up to bed, but Julie doesn't want to be separated from her baby. She passes out again and doesn't wake until two days later. The baby is still alive, but barely. Hank has been keeping her alive with bottles of sugar water. Julie tries to nurse the baby but it's too late, her milk has dried up. Julie's fever gets worse and she slips in and out of consciousness. While she is in the throes of fever, she is visited by Papa's spirit. He says that she is going to live. When Julie asks about the baby, Papa disappears. Julie wakes a few days later, shivering.

## Chapter Twelve Analysis

Julie's resolve and strong work ethic is tested one final time when she is forced to deliver her baby alone, a daunting task for any woman, particularly an educated one. The birth itself is primal and animalistic, but Julie pushes through by imagining the pain as a mountain she must climb. She is well practiced when it comes to climbing mountains - both figurative and literal - and it appears every tragedy up to this point, the



death of Masenier, the death of Papa, the flash flood, the fire, have all been leading to this moment. Now, her suffering makes sense: she is suffering not for herself, but her unborn child. When Julie descends into her feverish delirium, she is surrounded by religious imagery, from King David playing his harp, to baby Moses in the basket, to flocks of doves flying around her. In her mind, she's transported to a beautiful, lush field and a bright light in the distance surrounded by white, fluffy clouds. It's obvious that Julie is near death and envisioning herself in heaven, a far cry from the images Pendergast faced in the moments before his own death. In the distance, she hears a voice calling her, much like she heard a voice calling her on the night Papa died (p. 31). Papa - who could also be interpreted as a "Heavenly Father" delivers a message foreshadowing Julie's survival and the baby's death. Through the message, Papa insinuates that Julie will be allowed to live - and enter Heaven when she dies - because she has loved others more than she has loved herself.



# Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Thirteen Summary

Ma Richards arrives from Painter Mountain to help care for the sick baby since Julie cannot get out of bed. As soon as Julie is well enough to rise, she reaches out for her baby. Ma Richards is in the kitchen folding diapers when Julie steps out of bed the first time. Almost immediately, the two women get into a fight about the Lord's will for baby Delia's life. When Julie says that she hopes the Lord spares her baby, Ma Richards says, "We can ask, but that don't mean the Lord has to answer" (Page 302). Julie is angered by the woman's callous words when her baby is sick and near death. All she wants is support. All she wants is a mother's love, but Ma Richards seems incapable of giving that to her. For the first time in her life, Julie stands up for herself. She tells Ma exactly what she thinks of her - that she's a selfish old woman who only cares about herself, and Ma shouts back exactly what she thinks of Julie - that she's a selfish, young woman unfit to run a household. Hank walks into the middle of the fight and orders both women onto their knees. They pray together as a family, begging God for grace and forgiveness. When the prayer is finished, both Ma and Julie are crying. They embrace and say they love each other.

Meanwhile, baby Delia grows sicker and sicker. They give her a variety of medicines, from tea to whisky, but none seem to help. It's clear that she wants her mother's milk but there's simply none to give. That night, Julie gets out of bed to check on the baby and it's clear she's dead. Devastated, Julie cradles the baby for a few moments by herself before breaking the news to the rest of the family. After the funeral, Julie puts all her efforts into preparing the farm for the upcoming year. She plants all the seeds she found in the loft. Throughout the summer, she cans and harvests a wealth of crops, planning to donate most to the church since they still don't have money for tithe. At the end of the summer, Timmy Gosnell returns to harass Hank about the money. Now that Mr. Pendergast is dead, Timmy is certain Hank has stolen the money. Rather than fight Timmy, as he might have expected, Hank gets on his knees in front of the man and offers to pray for him. It's clear that Timmy came in search of a fight, and when he doesn't get one, he leaves in frustration.

Soon after, there's a knock at the door. Neither Hank nor Julie is surprised to learn that Pendergast's true heirs have finally come forward. The couple is surprised to learn, however, that the heirs are demanding back rent for the entire time the couple lived on Gap Creek, over \$100, an unfathomable amount of money. Hank and Julie plead with the heir's lawyer, citing all the work they've done and the way they saved the property not only from fire but from flash flood damage as well, but the lawyer is unmoved. Knowing they have no other option but to pick up and leave, the couple packs their belongings in the night. Taking only what they can carry on their backs, they leave Gap Creek forever. As Julie searches the property for valuable belongings, she finds a twenty-dollar coin hidden in a rusty can. She knows that this coin is God's gift to her family as they create a fresh start far away from Gap Creek. As she and Hank walk



away from their home, she hears mountain lions in the distance, as she did the night Masenier died, and she reveals that she is expecting again.

## Chapter Thirteen Analysis

Ma Richards arrives to help care for the baby during Julie's sickness. While she brings physical support to the family, she also challenges Julie's newly formed religious beliefs. So far, the Lord has cared for Julie in her times of need because, she believes, she put faith in him. Ma Richard's religious stance is far harsher: "We can ask, but that don't mean the Lord has to answer" (p. 302). Julie is unable to digest these words because it means that even though she begs the Lord to save baby Delia, he still might take her away. Even though there is truth in Ma Richard's words, their effect is cold and unsympathetic. When Hank walks in on the fight, he orders both women to their knees and once again, the Holy Spirit's presence is made known. Both women burst into tears and admit that under their anger and competition for Hank's affection, they love each other. Although they don't transform into a blissfully happy family, their damaged relationship is greatly repaired by this admission. Similarly, Hank shows that his character is beginning to change in the way that he treats Timmy Gosnell on his final appearance at the house. Rather than attack the man, he prays for him, resolving yet another problem through faith. At the end of the novel, the preacher's promise that the Lord will set believers free in their darkest hour is made clear. Hank and Julie are in their darkest hour when forced to leave Gap Creek forever. They have literally lost everything and must begin their life anew. When Julie finds the twenty-dollar coin in the jar, she knows it is a gift from God, in a way, a reward for their faith: "The Lord had kept the twenty dollars for us until the last minute, when we needed it most. It was a sign. We was free and we had something to start over with" (p. 322). The Lord provided them a seed with which to start their new Christian lives. They set out into the woods with nothing but promise - a promise that the Lord will provide for them wherever they end up. They have money to start a new life and Julie is newly pregnant. As they leave Gap Creek, Hank and Julie feel overwhelmed with hope for their futures.



# Characters

## Julie Harmon

Julie Harmon is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. She is seventeen years old and in her first year of her marriage. She is doing all that she can to survive the harsh conditions of farm life on Gap Creek. When the novel opens, Julie has just witnessed her five-year-old brother die from a horrific case of stomach worms. Soon after, Julie nurses her father as he dies from chest consumption. Both deaths have a strong impact on Julie as she realizes life is fragile: the Lord gives and then the Lord takes away. After Papa's death, Julie takes over his role on the farm, working hard, like a man, to ensure her family's survival. One afternoon, a teenage boy stops to ask for directions and he and Julie fall in love. A month later, they're married and Julie moves off the mountain down into the valley, Gap Creek. Married life is more difficult than Julie expected. While she had spent most of her time at home working in the fields, now she's expected to keep the house and do the cooking as well. Julie is a hardworking woman, determined to show her husband she cares through the sweat off her back and her strong, calloused hands. Julie works hard through a tumult of tragedies. Julie saves the house from the terrible fire that claims Mr. Pendergast's life, she survives the abuse of her husband, the uncertainty of a harsh winter, the danger of a flash flood, and the heartbreaking of losing her firstborn child. Through Julie's story, the reader learns the value of hard work, and the definitions of love, faith, and perseverance.

## Hank Richards

Hank Richards is Julie's husband. Hank grew up in a household of boys reared by a strong single mother, Ma Richards. When he is eighteen-years-old, he travels to the Harmon home in search of wife. It's love at first sight when Hank meets Julie, the hardworking young woman he soon marries. Hank loves the church, loves singing, and loves his wife. Eagerly, and perhaps a bit naively, Hank arranges to move into Mr. Pendergast's home down in Gap Creek. In exchange for free room and board, Hank will tend to Pendergast's fields and Julie will tend to his house. Hank works long hours baking bricks a few miles hike from home, and he soon realizes that adult life is more difficult than he expected. A string of tragedies change Hank's optimistic outlook. He loses his job at the brick kiln after a fight with his boss, his house nearly burns down, and his wife is tricked into giving away a jar full of money. Hank snaps and slaps Julie hard on the face. From then on, their relationship seems damaged. Hank is depressed and struggles to moderate his emotions. As he slips further and further into his depression, Hank even considers suicide on the night of the flash flood. All Hank's self-worth is tied into his hard work. He feels like a failure for not being able to provide a fancy life for his wife. All the aggression and anger he demonstrates is symptomatic of his own self-loathing. When Hank joins the church at the end of the novel, however, his attitude about life begins to change, and when his daughter is born, Hank is humbled by his own ineptitude. There is nothing he can do to save his frail child, but he can save



himself and he can save his wife. When all is lost at the end of the novel, Hank feels overwhelmed with hope as he starts his life afresh, far away from Gap Creek.

## **Ma Richards**

Ma Richards is Hank's mother. She lives on Painter Mountain and only comes down to visit when Hank truly needs her. Ma Richards is described as small but fierce, armed with harsh retorts and cutting criticism that makes Julie feel worthless in her own home. It seems that all Ma Richard wants to do is make Julie's life miserable. At the end of the novel, before baby Delia dies, Ma and Julie reconcile their relationship through prayer, and admit for the first time that they actually love each other.

## **Delia Richards**

Delia Richards is Julie and Hank's firstborn child. She's born a month early and is too weak to survive, but Hank does his best to keep the baby alive as long as he can. She dies roughly a month after she is born.

## **Lou Harmon**

Lou Harmon is one of Julie's older sisters. Unlike the rest of the sisters, Lou doesn't mind helping Julie with the fieldwork after Papa dies. She marries when she is a bit older than the other girls and comes down to Gap Creek for her honeymoon.

## **Rosie Harmon**

Rosie Harmon is the eldest of the Harmon sisters. Not much is known about Rosie's character except that she favors housework over fieldwork and that she bakes a delicious coconut cake.

## **Carolyn Harmon**

Carolyn Harmon is Julie's youngest sister. After Masenier dies, Carolyn is spoiled as the youngest child, and as a result, she is more prim and fanciful than the rest of the girls. She visits Gap Creek when she is fourteen-years-old and spends the entire vacation flirting with Hank. It's unclear whether or not Hank has an affair with his young sister-in-law, but Carolyn leaves soon after accidentally lighting her dress on fire in the woods.

## **Masenier Harmon**

Masenier Harmon is the only son born to Julie's parents, after they already had four daughters. Because he was the only boy, the entire family spoils him. He is their pride





and joy until he falls mysteriously ill at the age of five. When fever threatens to take his life, Julie helps carry her brother down the mountain to the doctor. He dies before the journey back, after vomiting up a stomach full of white worms.

## **Mr. Vincent Pendergast**

Mr. Vincent Pendergast owns the house on Gap Creek that Hank and Julie rent after their marriage. Mr. Pendergast is described as having a huge head of gray hair, squinty eyes, and a somewhat perverse sense of humor. He is a demanding, crotchety old man whose sole purpose in life seems to be making Julie's miserable. Not only is Mr. Pendergast unbearable to live with, he's also tight with his money. During the house fire, he risks his life to run inside and save his money. He is terribly burned in the process and dies from his injuries.

## **Timmy Gosnell**

Timmy Gosnell is the town drunk. He comes around Mr. Pendergast's home regularly, accusing Pendergast of stealing from him. It appears that the two men once sold ginseng together but Pendergast shorted Gosnell what he was owed. Now, Gosnell hates Pendergast and won't stop harassing him until Pendergast has made things right. When Pendergast dies, Gosnell turns his rage on Hank until Hank prays for the disturbed man's lost soul. After that, Gosnell doesn't bother the couple again.

## **George Poole**

George Poole runs the general store at the crossroads near Gap Creek. He is only of the only people to visit after Mr. Pendergast dies, and the man who buys the ginseng root from Julie to help her make ends meet.

## **Jerrold James**

Jerrold James is the fake lawyer who stops by after Mr. Pendergast's death. He tricks Julie into giving him the fruit jar full of pension money, saying he will put the money toward the house so that Hank can buy it one day.

## **Caroline Glascock**

Caroline Glascock is the woman who pretends to be Mr. Pendergast's stepdaughter in the hopes of collecting money due on his house. When she discovers that Hank and Julie have no money, she raids the house of any silver, claiming she would like to take the items for "sentimental reasons."



## Preacher Gibbs

Preacher Gibbs is the pastor at Gap Creek church. He is a kind, giving man who acts as source of inspiration and strength for both Julie and Hank throughout their tragedies.



# Objects/Places

## Gap Creek

Gap Creek is where the novel is set, and where Hank and Julie live on Mr. Pendergast's farm. When Julie first arrives in Gap Creek, she thinks it's one of the prettiest places on earth, like a picture out of a magazine: "The valley floor was flat, winding peaceful back into the steep mountains. It was still green in the slender cove, though it was already fall on the higher slopes" (p. 51). The newly married couple's new house is nestled in the valley between two steep mountains, making their surrounding land beautiful but secluded.

## Cold Friday

Cold Friday is the day when the sun doesn't come out and the world is swathed in black for a full 24-hours. It is the coldest day anyone in South Carolina had ever seen and the day when hundreds, including Papa and Masenier, took sick.

## Stomach Worms

Stomach Worms is what kills Masenier when he is five-years-old. His parents and the doctor misdiagnosed his illness, saying it was croup or typhoid, but when he vomits up a stomach full of wriggling white worms, his family knows the truth.

## Hogs

Hogs are the main source of meat for families living in the valley. Even though it's considered men's work, Julie is skilled at butchering hogs, and has done it since she was a teenager. Once the hogs are killed, their meat is cut up into joints, salted, smoked, and hung to dry in the salt house.

## Ginseng

Ginseng is a valuable root that grows in the valley near Gap Creek. Mr. Pendergast made a living selling ginseng root, but may have done so illegally. The town drunk, Timmy Gosnell, comes around regularly to accuse Pendergast of stealing from him. After Pendergast dies, Julie finds ropes of ginseng hanging in the attic and sells them in town.



## **Painter Mountain**

Painter Mountain is where Hank grew up and where Ma Richard lives. It's located on one of the tall mountains framing Gap Creek.

## **Mount Olivet**

Mount Olivet is where Julie grew up and where her mother and sisters live. It's located on one of the tall mountains framing Gap Creek.

## **The Fruit Jar**

The Fruit Jar is where Mr. Pendergast stores all his pension money. When his house goes up in flames, Pendergast runs back into the house for his money, sustaining horrific injuries that eventually take his life. He dies with his eyes on the money jar beside his bed, symbolizing the evil love man has for money.

## **The Flash Flood**

The Flash Flood is the natural disaster that nearly cripples Hank and Julie during their first year of marriage. It destroys their home, waterlogs their potato and corn crops, molds their belongings, and rots their salted meat. During the flood, Hank reaches his breaking point and threatens to kill himself.

## **South Carolina**

South Carolina is the state where Julie and Hank live. Technically, they live in Appalachian Mountains, although the novel never states this explicitly.

## **A Twenty Dollar Coin**

A Twenty Dollar Coin is what Julie finds in a spice jar in the back of the cupboard at the end of the novel. After having nearly all of Mr. Pendergast's money stolen from them, and with his heirs kicking the couple off the property, this twenty dollars will help the couple start their new life far away from Gap Creek.



# Themes

## The Power of Nature

Gap Creek is not only a story of a young couple's first year of marriage; it is also a love song to nature. Nearly all of the novel's descriptive passages and winding exposition create beautiful and sometimes disturbing, images of the South Carolina wilderness. Even when faced with death and destruction, there is a reverence to nature in the narration. The reader first sees this on the night that Masenier dies. Even though she knows her brother doesn't have long for the world, Julie looks around and thinks, "It was the prettiest night you ever saw, with the moonlight slanting on the creek and dew sparkling in the grass. The mountains rose like shadows ahead of us" (Page 12). When Masenier dies a few moments later, Julie realizes that the beauty and power of nature comes from its consistency. She realizes that in the grand scheme of things, one human life doesn't matter to nature. Nature is larger and more powerful than humanity. After Masenier dies, the night is just as beautiful as before. The earth hasn't been stirred by the loss. This mentality sets up the theme for the rest of the novel, which on some level is an ode to the struggle between man and the earth he tries to tame. No matter how hard Julie and Hank work in Gap Creek, their efforts have no effect on the power of nature. They cannot quell the destruction of the fire, they cannot stop the force of the flood, they cannot combat the brutal winter that nearly claims their lives. Nature takes what it takes without favoritism or discernment. The moral of the novel is that nature is more powerful than man and we are foolish to think we can control it.

## Spirituality (Death and Demons)

One interesting theme in the novel is the theme of spirituality, particularly the presence of death and demons. Every time a character dies, there is a strange spiritual presence in the moments before that life is lost. When Masenier dies, Julie hears a strange howling in the woods. Before Hank's father dies, Hank sees a ghost of his father dressed in his Sunday suit walking toward him in the fields. When Papa dies, green flames shoot from the fire like a portent. Perhaps the most chilling presence of a demon is when Mr. Prendergast dies. It seems that the devil himself has come to claim the old man's soul: "Wind shoved against the wall of the house and a mouse or rat scratched in the wall behind Mr. Pendergast's bed. It sounded like the rat was gnawing a nut or chewing a piece of wood. Something swished inside the wall and then overhead, in the ceiling. I didn't know if it was a rat running. It sounded like a big snake sliding over paneling. It sounded like something ten feet long sliding dry scales over wood" (p. 107). The presence of ghosts is not solely negative. When Julie battles childbirth fever, her father's spirit joins her and gives her comfort by telling her that she is going to live. When Julie joins the church, she feels a strong spiritual presence, as if the Lord has overtaken her body and made it holy. Appalachia has a long history of ghost stories and spiritual tales. The Appalachian population, which Julie and Hank belonged to, was largely uneducated aside from the religious education they received at church.



Spirituality, with all its angels and demons, was relied on to understand the balance of the world, so it makes sense that Julie would interpret ghosts and demons into her everyday life, particularly when faced with the finality of death.

## Hard Work

To survive in the Appalachian wilderness, individuals must be armed with one characteristic: they must be hard workers. Ever since Julie was young, she's taken on the workload of a man. When Papa fell ill with chest consumption, it was up to her to chop firewood, plant and harvest the crops, butcher the hogs, and a thousand other manual chores that, at the time, were considered "men's work." As a direct result of Julie's hard work and determination, her family survived after Papa's death. Julie took this determination to her new life on Gap Creek. There, she worked tirelessly in the house, prepared the meals, butchered hogs, planted crops, and more. She says of herself, "I could never talk fast, and I could never say what I meant to people, or tell them what they meant to me. My tongue was never loosened by my feelings. It was with my hands and with my back and shoulders that I could say how I felt. I had to talk with my arms and my strong hands" (p. 122). Not only is the hard work of farm life necessary, it is a cathartic, purifying experience for Julie. She enjoys the pride in finishing a project, the ache of muscles that have seen a hard day's work, the control of taking something soiled and making it sparkle again. The character's lifestyle in Gap Creek is a far cry from the daily lives most American readers are used to. Through Morgan's descriptive style, the reader is transported to late 19th century America - both physically and emotionally - when young couples fought to survive in the rugged terrain. It seems the moral Morgan hopes readers walk away with is that life is a struggle, both physically and emotionally, and one needs to work hard if they want to survive. Humans are capable of much more strength than they give themselves credit for, and Julie's story is a prime example of that strength.



# Style

## Point of View

Gap Creek is told in first-person and limited omniscience narration from Julie Harmon's perspective, which means that the readers are held very close to Julie's thoughts and emotions throughout the novel. The point-of-view is reliable, as Julie does not have the education or the motivation to manipulate the audience. Although the narration deals with incredibly emotional and powerful themes, it is interesting to note that the narration is extremely stark and straightforward holding the reader at arms length from the emotion of the story. This represents the isolation Julie feels in the valley, particularly after realizing that her husband is not necessarily the loving man she married. Through this point of view, the reader is given access into Julie's thoughts, fears, insecurities, and hope. This point-of-view is important to the novel as a whole because it creates a strong bond between the reader and the protagonist, which is integral to the success of the story, which focuses on the hardships of farm life on a 19th century South Carolina farm. Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that Julie is not a talkative person. She says of herself, "'I could never talk fast, and I could never say what I meant to people, or tell them what they meant to me. My tongue was never loosened by my feelings. It was with my hands and with my back and shoulders that I could say how I felt. I had to talk with my arms and my strong hands'" (p. 122). Therefore, it is vital that the reader have full access to Julie's thoughts and emotions. Because she rarely speaks, her emotional struggles are internalized. One of the most important themes in the novel is Julie's strong work ethic, particularly in times of trouble. If it were not for the specific point-of-view of the novel's narration, the reader would not be privy to her thoughts and emotions, which make up a bulk of the narration.

## Setting

The majority of the novel is set in Gap Creek, in Mr. Pendergast's home, which Hank arranged to rent after his marriage to Julie. When Julie first arrives in Gap Creek, she thinks it's one of the prettiest places on earth, like a picture out of a magazine. She says, "The valley floor was flat, winding peaceful back into the steep mountains. It was still green in the slender cove, though it was already fall on the higher slopes" (p. 51). The newly married couple's new house is nestled in the valley between two steep mountains, making their surrounding land beautiful but secluded. The benefits of living in the valley include shelter from harsh winds and fertile grounds, but the negatives seem to far outweigh the positives. When there is a freak rainstorm, all the water from the mountains rushes into the valley, flooding Gap Creek and demolishing the home, their crops, and most of their smoked meat. Through the various medical emergencies in the novel - from Pendergast's horrific burns to Julie's premature labor - the nearest doctor is miles away, leaving the young couple to fend for themselves, often to devastating results. In addition to these struggles, Julie must also deal with the crippling loneliness that comes from living far away from town. Months pass when she doesn't



speak to anyone aside from her husband, and she misses her family greatly. When Hank loses his job at the brick kiln, he walks miles everyday, in every direction, searching for work, but there isn't any. While Gap Creek is beautiful, at the end of the novel, Hank and Julie feel freed when they are forced off the land. Even though they have lost everything, they feel overwhelmed with hope starting life afresh, far away from Gap Creek.

## Language and Meaning

As this novel is written in first-person narration, it is conversational in style and should be easy for most readers to follow. The novel is set in the late 19th century and the language reflects that era. Julie is an uneducated farmwoman, which means her language is elementary, grammatically incorrect, and somewhat broken. Although somewhat intimidating, once the reader gets used to the style, it is not a hindrance to the comprehension of the novel. This language, in fact, adds a depth to the novel that allows the reader a glimpse into a world that is made believable through the language. It is interesting to note that although Julie claims to struggle with words, she creates beautiful daydreams. Using simple language, she creates stunning images of life on the farm, and bold depictions of emotions, spirituality, faith, and grief. Through Morgan's descriptive style, the reader is transported to late 19th century America - both physically and emotionally - when young couples fought to survive in the rugged terrain. This transportation wouldn't be as accessible without the rich layers of language used to create the landscape.

Although the text itself is only 300-pages, they are filled long, descriptive passages of farm work and South Carolina landscape, and may therefore feel much longer to some readers. If readers struggle to enjoy the world Morgan creates on the page, there is little substance to the novel. At times, it seems as if Morgan is constructing a historical document of the times rather than a story. That said, most would argue that the crowning success of Gap Creek is its vivid description of farm life. Morgan painstakingly describes the brutal work families completed to survive. From slaughtering hogs, to preparing bodies for burial, to chopping trees, to delivering a baby, to rendering lard to fat, the language is well-researched and fully engaging. Any unfamiliar historical terms or phrases should be easily understood with Morgan's ample contextual clues.

## Structure

Gap Creek is comprised of thirteen chapters, averaging 25 pages in length. The longest chapter in the novel is Chapter 5 (46 pages), which deals with Ma Richards' arrival, butchering hogs, the house fire, Mr. Pendergast's injuries and death, and the funeral. Although the novel isn't technically episodic, the narration of each chapter tends to focus on one major event (Masenier's death, Hank courting Julie, Delia's birth, etc). By focusing on one event a time, Morgan has the freedom to create long passages of vivid imagery, building a realistic family set in a historic time. However, the novel is composed almost entirely of exposition, which leaves some readers feeling that it reads long. The





entire novel takes place in Julie's head while she's isolated in the valley. Without other people to bounce thoughts off of, nature becomes a secondary character. Readers with an aversion to long descriptions of the woods will likely feel that the novel is slow. Others will argue that the exposition beautifully creates the vivid historic world of American nature in the late 19th century.

The plot of the novel is fairly simple and straightforward. There are no back stories or flashbacks to contend with. The narration creates a timeline of events from when Julie moves to Gap Creek to when she leaves a year later. During those twelve months, Julie survives a house fire, a flash flood, a depressed and sometimes abusive husband, and the death of her child. The novel is quite easy to read and the story is engrossing once the reader is immersed in the landscape being painted in its pages.



## Quotes

"It weakens you to feel proud of yourself. Better use your breath to fight against the trail, to fight against the mountain" (p. 13).

"I sat thee on the cold ground feeling that human life didn't mean a thing in the world. People could be born and they could suffer, and they could die, and it didn't mean a thing" (p. 15).

"Nothing ever worked out that perfect in this world. And if I wanted it too bad it would never happen. The world was made so people never got what they wanted most. Or maybe they wanted most what they could never get" (p. 44).

"When you're tired, it's like all the force in the world works against you. Takes extra effort just to do little things. You feel it takes willpower just to breathe" (p. 86).

"I could never talk fast, and I could never say what I meant to people, or tell them what they meant to me. My tongue was never loosened by my feelings. It was with my hands and with my back and shoulders that I could say how I felt. I had to talk with my arms and my strong hands" (p. 122).

"In the dark, what mattered was we was together and naked. Wind shoved the side of the house, way down on Gap Creek in South Carolina. We would always find a way to live, a way to get back, as long as we could love" (p. 137).

"I seen why people liked to burn off their fields so much. It was a purifying thing, a sweeping away of the old clutter so things could start again and sprout again, down where the old weeds had been a mess and tangle. The fire turned the banks to bare ground. The fire made the ground naked and fertile" (p. 196).

"It was strange to think that I was stronger than Hank. He was wore out and I was still fighting" (p. 224).

"It struck me that he didn't say Christians enjoyed work more, or had it any easier. But saying that their work meant more sounded more than just talk. It sounded like the truth, or at least the truth he seen it" (p. 240).

"I seen how I had to do everything for the baby. It didn't matter about me. If I was finished I was finished. But the baby had to be saved. The baby had to be protected. But I was near helpless on my own" (p. 283).

"I seen Hank was right. The Lord had kept the twenty dollars for us until the last minute, when we needed it most. It was a sign. We was free and we had something to start over with" (p. 322).



## Topics for Discussion

At the opening of the novel, Julie is living a difficult life. Even though she has two older sisters, most of the hard labor falls on her shoulders. Why? In what ways is Julie stronger, both physically and mentally, than the rest of her family? When she thinks about the work, Julie says, "I didn't have any choice" (Page xx). Is that true? What choices does Julie have? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

On the night that Masener dies, Julie notices "it was the prettiest night you ever saw." What message is Morgan sending the readers about the beauty and indifference of nature? Choose one more example of this relationship from the novel and describe it here. What is Morgan saying about the cycle of human life in the broad scope of nature? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the change Hank undergoes from the time he is courting Julie and throughout their first year of marriage. What causes this change in Hank? How does Hank change yet again after baby Delia is born? In your opinion, is he a good husband to Julie? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How is Julie's daily life at Gap Creek different than your own daily life? Which of the many tasks Julie undertakes seems most difficult to you? Why? Describe the difficult task in detail. Do you think you could handle this chore if you had to? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

When Hank and Julie first get married, neither of their mothers thinks they are ready for the hard work. What hard work accompanies a new marriage? How do Julie and Hank work, both independently and as a couple, to complete that work? Is married life what Julie expected it to be? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does Julie survive the harsh winter and cold relationship she has with Hank? What sustenance does Julie find to keep her motivated, to keep her working hard through the tough times? What role do other women such as Ma Richards, Julie's sisters, and the women from church play in this sustenance? What do these women give Julie to motivate and sustain her? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What role does spirituality play in the novel? Choose at least two instances when demons, ghosts, or spirits are present in the novel and describe them here. What does this tell you about spirituality in Appalachia? How does church and prayer affect Julie's life - through her daily chores, her marriage, and her fight for survival? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your argument.



At the end of the novel, Hank and Julie are kicked out of their home and forced to start over somewhere new. In your opinion, is the end of the novel depressing or hopeful? Why? In what ways is the end of the novel similar to the beginning, when Masenier dies? Do you think Hank and Julie will survive another harsh winter in the mountains? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.