

# **Handling Sin Study Guide**

## **Handling Sin by Michael Malone**

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## Plot Summary

Raleigh Wittier Hayes lives a solid but boring life in a suburban housing development named Starry Haven, a part of Thermopylae, North Carolina. He works as an insurance agent in the Forbes Building downtown, is married to Aura and has twin sixteen-year-old daughters. Mingo Sheffield, an obese clothing store clerk, has been Raleigh's friend since childhood. Vera, Mingo's wife, has lost a great deal of weight by having her mouth wired shut. Life begins to change for these characters once someone replaces the usually trite good wishes in fortune cookies at the Lotus House to bad wishes. Raleigh's fortune is to go completely to pieces by the end of the month. Mingo's warns that his wife is having an affair with his best friend.

Raleigh starts to unhinge when a little stumble turns into a compromising situation with Vera. Her wired mouth snags to Raleigh's crotch, and at the worst possible moment, Mingo comes home to see the apparent sex act in progress. He grabs Vera's handgun and threatens to shoot them both. Raleigh struggles to convince Mingo that Vera is not cheating on him and succeeds, somewhat. Then Raleigh's father, a man with a heart condition, buys a new Cadillac and heads for New Orleans with a young Black woman. On top of this, he has recorded a message for Raleigh requesting that he collect various objects, his half brother Gates and a man named Jubal Rogers. He must take all of this to New Orleans within a month.

Raleigh must hustle to make the deadline, but obstacles stand or jump in his way all along. He must steal a bust from the library; he endures Mingo's mistakes and paranoia; he steals a new Cadillac from his cousin, gets mugged on the highway and ends up stuck in a swamp. Finally he finds Gates at Raleigh's ocean shore rental property. However, Gates is in trouble with a man he had sold a fake Civil War era necklace to for fifteen thousand dollars. To raise the money and pay the man off, Gates traffics in cocaine, which draws the attention of a drug cartel that wants him dead. Raleigh locates Jubal, but he has no desire to go to New Orleans, and Raleigh must give up trying to convince the headstrong man.

Nevertheless, Raleigh collects all the desired items and enough people to form a rudimentary jazz combo. Mingo plays piano, an escaped prisoner named Weeper plays bass, and a man Raleigh met in Charleston plays excellent saxophone. After nearly dying while helping to handle Gates' problems, they arrive in New Orleans. Earley, Raleigh's father, introduces Billie, the young Black girl, who turns out to be Jubal and Raleigh's Aunt Victoria's grandchild. Earley arranges for the jazz combo to be filled out with a drummer, and while performing at a club, Jubal shows up with his clarinet and joins the combo. Earley, who plays trumpet, dies during the performance. Reunited with Jubal, Billie leaves with him, and the rest return home to Thermopylae, all changed for the better due to Earley's last desire to reunite the most interesting parts of his family.



# **Part 1, The Call: Chapter 1, In Which the Hero Is Introduced and Receives a Blow**

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapter 1, In Which the Hero Is Introduced and Receives a Blow Summary**

The story opens with the hero, Raleigh Hayes, reading a fortune cookie message at the Lotus House, the only Chinese restaurant in the small town of Thermopylae, North Carolina. Somebody had replaced the usual mundane fortunes with predictions of bad events, such as becoming ill with cancer. Raleigh's fortune predicts that he will go completely to pieces by the end of the month. Mingo Sheffield, Raleigh's friend since childhood, receives the warning that his wife is having an affair with his best friend. Neither man takes the fortunes seriously.

Raleigh is an insurance salesman who works on the twelfth floor of the Forbes Building in the center of downtown Thermopylae and has a secretary named Bonnie Allen. Mingo works at the Knox-Bury clothing store and has a special talent for creating tacky seasonal window displays. Both he and his wife, Vera, have trouble with their weight. Mingo is obese while Vera is voluptuous, but not obese since she had her mouth wired shut.

Raleigh learns from his wife, Aura, that his elderly father, named Earley, has left the hospital—where he had been under treatment for heart disease—with a mysterious young Black woman wearing a blonde wig. Jimmy Clay, Raleigh's cousin and son of Earley's sister, Lovie, gives more details, having sold a new Cadillac to Early and observed the young woman close up. Raleigh hears other stories about the odd couple from bank tellers, where Earley has withdrawn a large sum of money. The people in Thermopylae think that Earley has run off with an underage girl and plans to marry her.

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapter 1, In Which the Hero Is Introduced and Receives a Blow Analysis**

The first chapter presents major characters: Raleigh, Mingo, Aura, Earley and Jimmy. Other supporting characters help move the story into an absurd situation. First, the fortune cookies all have negative messages rather than the usual wishes for luck, fortune and fame. How this has occurred is not as important as the negative predictions. The implication is that they will come true, although the characters at this point have no reason to believe anything out of the ordinary will happen in their quiet little hometown.

However, Raleigh's father, known to be eccentric and having a strange sense of humor, flees the hospital in his pajamas with the mysterious young woman and buys a new Cadillac. This presages absurd changes to follow and is a major plot element in

humorous fiction. The everyday lives of a small town community, most notably Raleigh's and Mingo's, lives are about to be thrown into chaos that they do not understand. The questions at this point is whether Earley has a good reason to escape the hospital with the mysterious young woman and where they are going in the new Cadillac. This is an early twist in the plot that adds mystery to the absurd, thus raising reader interest without spending time on character backstories. The author adds this information later on, which is good form in modern fiction. A criticism can be made that much of the backstories are verbose and some of them irrelevant, but they are done artfully. The resulting story becomes heavier on character than plot. At times the reader may have difficulty following the setting changes and plot twists.



# **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 2-3, Which Treats of the Strange Message the Hero's Father Sent Him; Of a Misunderstanding between Our Hero and His Neighbors**

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 2-3, Which Treats of the Strange Message the Hero's Father Sent Him; Of a Misunderstanding between Our Hero and His Neighbors Summary**

While Raleigh drives home in his Ford Fiesta, probably a 1970s vintage since the story seems to be set in the late 70s or early 80s, a high school boy flips him off for dawdling too much. Raleigh goes by his father's house, which is now up for sale. He calls Aura from a pay phone in the hospital where his father had been kept to monitor his heart disease and learns that Earley had left a message on a cassette tape for him. Raleigh then sees his favorite aunt, Victoria Hayes (seventy-two years old), pushing one of his other aunts in a wheelchair. The other aunt had just come out of surgery to remove a leg due to diabetes, which much of his family suffers from due to diets high in sugar and fat. Raleigh avoids this diet and tries to live a decent, sane life because he does not want to end up like his other aunt or his father.

When Raleigh arrives home, his twin daughters, Caroline and Holly (sixteen years old), are engaged in activities out front. Caroline practices cheerleading, while Holly works on a car with a boy, the same high school student who had flipped off Raleigh. A typical non-communicative set of exchanges occur between the daughters, who have absorbed the valley-girl accent, and father. He goes inside to listen to his father's taped message.

The message asks Raleigh to collect certain people and items and meet with his father in New Orleans. The people include Jubal Rogers and Gates, Raleigh's half brother. The items include Grandma Tiny's trunk, the family Bible, a bust of Pee Wee Jimson located in the public library, his father's trumpet and a gun. Raleigh must also buy an old cabin and a plot of land from Pee Wee Jimson. A short time later, a Black teenager delivers a note from his father and ten thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills, both in a plain brown paper bag. His father has included a bottle of whiskey. Five thousand dollars are to be given to Jubal, and the other five thousand used to buy the land and cabin. Raleigh cannot believe his father would entrust a teenager with ten thousand dollars and scolds his father mentally.



In Chapter 3 Vera's wired mouth becomes stuck on Raleigh's slacks in a very embarrassing place after a little stumble. Vera is dressed in a shiny black leather swimsuit, a choker collar with spikes and red stiletto heels. She cannot unhook herself before Mingo comes home and sees this through a window: His best friend seems to be having a type of sex with his wife, just as the fortune cookie message had foretold. Mingo runs into the house, snatches up a handgun and threatens to shoot them. He changes his mind and runs away with the gun, leaving Vera, who succeeded in unhooking her wire after Raleigh had removed his slacks, and Raleigh, who struggles to put his slacks back on, now ripped in the crotch.

Raleigh finds Mingo in his backyard sitting on a swing chair. Mingo wants to commit suicide but doesn't have the heart to do so and asks Raleigh to do it for him. Raleigh tries to explain the awkward situation and assures Mingo that Vera is not having an affair. Vera comes along and embraces Mingo, which helps convince him that she is not cheating. Raleigh goes home and falls asleep on the couch, exhausted and fairly drunk from hitting on the whiskey that his father had sent. He wakes up in the evening and goes for a walk. While doing so, he discovers Mingo and Vera skinny dipping in the community pool. Raleigh loses his balance and falls into the pool, coming up near Vera. Mingo becomes agitated that an affair really is going on. Vera assures him that nothing of the sort is happening, and after all this, Raleigh returns home exhausted. Vera finds humor in his condition, soaking wet and his clothes more torn up than before.

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 2-3, Which Treats of the Strange Message the Hero's Father Sent Him; Of a Misunderstanding between Our Hero and His Neighbors Analysis**

The time setting for this story is the late 1970s or early 1980s. Cell phones are not in general use yet, and so communication has to be done through the old-fashioned long-distance calls on period telephones and pay phones. Raleigh's Ford Fiesta signifies a prudent purchase because it is small and gets good gas mileage. His twin daughters have adopted the valley-girl accent, made popular in a period movie. Most notable is the Old South dietary habits of swilling Coke and eating lots of fatty foods. The current health trend has not yet begun. Additionally, people in this time period still commonly smoke cigarettes. Raleigh stands out because he does not smoke.

Raleigh lives in a suburban community called Starry Haven next door to his childhood friend, Mingo and his wife, Vera. His main desire is to not be like the rest of his crazy family, and so he manages his life frugally and honestly in order to be a respected member of the community. However, his wife seems to be nurturing an interest in the liberal politics of the era, and his daughters seem to be moving quickly away from him. Mingo and his wife are overweight, although Vera has had her mouth wired shut to stop eating and has lost considerable weight. This sets up two protagonists, one of normal build and the other very fat, a classic comedic pairing that at times is exaggerated even farther, such as Laurel (skinny) and Hardy (fat). A more modern comparison can be





made to Steve Martin and John Candy in the movie: Planes, Trains and Automobiles (1987).

At the end of this chapter, Raleigh goes to Mingo's house with the intent of borrowing a car. He catches a glimpse of Vera in a sexy outfit admiring her new, more slender self (yet still quite voluptuous) in a mirror. She sees him looking through the window and opens the door. The stage has been set for comedic misunderstanding: first Mingo gets the evil fortune cookie message about his best friend having an affair with Vera, and now Vera, dressed as a dominatrix, and Raleigh, with the most innocent of intentions, are alone together. Nothing good can come of this situation other than humor for the reader.

In Chapter 3, Raleigh has lost control over his life. Within a single day he has been challenged to a strange scavenger hunt by his father. He has noticed his wife changing into something he does not recognize, a somewhat bawdy woman using modern slang and taking classes he does not understand. Then he falls into a highly compromised position with Vera just as Mingo comes home to witness the apparent sexual act in progress. The scene is funny for its own absurdity and becomes hilarious once Mingo threatens them with a gun (unloaded) and then claims he wants to commit suicide. Wrapping up the whole series of misunderstandings, Raleigh finds the couple swimming naked in the community pool, which Raleigh points out is against the rules.

Raleigh's character demonstrates that he is normally reserved and would never consciously put himself into these situations. However, he cannot avoid them. The pressure is on for Raleigh to change his ways against his will.



# **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 4-5, How Raleigh Received His Name; In Which Raleigh Blackmails an Enemy and Frightens the Kaiser**

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 4-5, How Raleigh Received His Name; In Which Raleigh Blackmails an Enemy and Frightens the Kaiser Summary**

Raleigh's first name comes from Sir Walter Raleigh and his middle name from his uncle Whittier. This naming, which Raleigh feels was unfortunate, helps shape his personality into being overly cautious about the world. Mention is made of Major General Goodrich Hays, C.S.A., who may have buried a shipment of Confederate gold near Thermopylae. The story is that Major General Hayes was to deliver the gold to Richmond during the final days of the Civil War. He ran into a force of Union troops and, rather than losing the gold to them, he buried it on the property that Raleigh is to purchase. However, many have looked for the gold unsuccessfully. The story is considered a myth.

In Chapter 5, Raleigh proposes buying the land and cabin, as his father has requested, from Pierce Jimson. Pierce is having an affair with Lizzie Joyner, wife of Boyd Joyner, and thinks that Raleigh is trying to blackmail him, but Raleigh has no idea that the affair is going on. During the lopsided price negotiation, Pierce settles for two-thousand five hundred dollars for the property, half of what Raleigh was willing to pay. Pierce leaves the negotiation feeling distraught that his secret is out and that Raleigh may want further favors for keeping quiet.

Raleigh then goes to his office and finds a note from Bonnie Ellen, his young secretary, notifying that she will be back soon. Unknown to Raleigh, she is actually knocked unconscious by her boyfriend, who has run away. The building janitor, Bill Jenkins (called Kaiser Bill for his large white mustache), misunderstands Raleigh's request to clean up his office. Bill thinks he must dispose of Bonnie's body, so he rolls her up in a carpet and puts her in a pit that had been dug at a defunct construction site.

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 4-5, How Raleigh Received His Name; In Which Raleigh Blackmails an Enemy and Frightens the Kaiser Analysis**

The short Chapter 4 gives backstory to Raleigh and exposes some of his attitudes toward the people in his hometown. He gauges his own behavior on that of others,



trying very hard not to emulate what he considers self-destructive tendencies, such as being too boisterous and uncaring about personal health and finances. This chapter does not at all advance the plot and is purely character development, although the mention of Confederate gold does set up a later plot element.

Chapter 5 sets two plot elements into motion. First, Raleigh buys the property that his father had requested, supposedly because Earley wants to be buried there after he dies. The humor builds from Pierce's suspicion that Raleigh is trying to work a better deal by blackmailing him regarding his affair with Mrs. Joyner and continues with Kaiser Bill's misunderstanding of what Raleigh wants him to do. In Raleigh's mind, not knowing that his secretary lies knocked out in a part of the office that he could not see when taking a quick glance around, simply wants the office cleaned up. Kaiser Bill is convinced that Bonnie is dead and does what he has been told, but very discretely. A key element in this misunderstanding is that Raleigh absentmindedly holds the gun that he had taken from Mingo the day before. Kaiser Bill sees the gun but does not mention it, fearing that Raleigh might do something drastic.



# **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 6-7, Of the Advice Given Raleigh by His Only Sane Aunt; In Which the Hero Commits a Crime**

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 6-7, Of the Advice Given Raleigh by His Only Sane Aunt; In Which the Hero Commits a Crime Summary**

In Chapter 6, Raleigh goes to visit his aunt Victoria at her house in Thermopylae. He learns that Tiny's trunk, one of the items he must collect, is in the basement of Victoria's house and that Roxanne Digges, mother of Raleigh's half-brother Gates, has his father's trumpet, another needed item. They speculate on what his father plans to do and who the mysterious girl is that he took with him in the new Cadillac. Raleigh then tells Victoria about the property he bought, known as Knoll Pond. The subject turns to the bust of Pee Wee Jimson, known among the Hayes family members as a swindler who had done immense damage to them. Victoria suggests that he gain entry to the library by way of a storm water tunnel to steal the bust. She tells him that Aunt Lovie, who lives in a nearby town, has the family Bible.

Raleigh steals the bust of Pee Wee Jimson from the library in Chapter 7. While on the way to the storm water tunnel, he encounters Mingo sitting on a slide near the public school. Mingo talks about suicide again, and Raleigh argues against the decision. Upset, Mingo accidentally slides down, something he had never been courageous enough to do. Raleigh gives him a ride home and secures the pistol that Mingo was going to use for suicide. Now Raleigh has two of Mingo's handguns.

The storm water tunnel is full of spider webs, which makes the going tough for Raleigh. He makes it to the manhole cover in the library, forces it open and takes the bust. He spots Pierce and Lizzie leaving Pierce's furniture store, where they had probably been having sex.

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 6-7, Of the Advice Given Raleigh by His Only Sane Aunt; In Which the Hero Commits a Crime Analysis**

Chapter 6 fills out the character of Aunt Victoria. She had left Thermopylae for a traveling career selling religious items all around the world. Victoria was the only family member who had done this, so she is far more experienced than the others, and for this



reason she is Raleigh's favorite relative. Victoria has little patience for the rest of her family and urges Raleigh to do his father's bidding regardless of what Earley might be planning. She had been an adventurer and wants Raleigh to take on these challenges, even if it means stealing the bust from the library. This goes against Raleigh's desire to be an upstanding citizen, yet he heeds Victoria's advice. Another function of this chapter is to point Raleigh toward the items he still needs to collect before departing for New Orleans.

Raleigh moves further away from his desired upstanding-citizen role by stealing the bust of Pee Wee Jimson in Chapter 7. He tries to rationalize this move without much success, feeling that he has performed an act so far out of his normal character that he would never be redeemed. Meanwhile, Mingo still contemplates suicide, but cowardice nurtured since childhood prevents him from doing something even mildly risky, such as sliding down the slide. He does this by accident, which is the first time Mingo has carried through. The event starts a chain of reactions that will forever change him. The implication is that Raleigh has his own chain of events that are changing him, and rapidly. The courses of these two characters come closer together at this point, but are not yet in parallel.



# **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 8-10, And Is Nearly Arrested; The First Sally Takes a Strange Turn; How Raleigh Was Confirmed in His View of the World**

## **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 8-10, And Is Nearly Arrested; The First Sally Takes a Strange Turn; How Raleigh Was Confirmed in His View of the World Summary**

On the way home in Chapter 8, Raleigh becomes spooked when a police cruiser stops. He panics and throws both of Mingo's handguns over a fence near the inactive construction site where Kaiser Bill had deposited Bonnie's body, rolled in a carpet but only knocked out, not dead. The police officer checks Raleigh's license and tells him that he had made an illegal U-turn. The officer had not seen Raleigh throwing away the guns and makes no comment on Raleigh's dirty and torn clothing.

Raleigh returns to his office, now cleaned up, and asks Kaiser Bill about Jubal Rogers, a man he must locate and bring to New Orleans. Bill has no idea where Jubal might be. However, Bill still thinks that Raleigh is a murderer and keeps quiet because saying anything about it, other than assuring Raleigh that his secret is safe, might be dangerous. The way Bill talks confuses Raleigh because he has no idea about Bonnie.

In Chapter 9, Aura demonstrates against war with a group she has recently joined, which surprises and upsets Raleigh. He receives a phone call from Earley and starts to look for his brother Gates with the knowledge that his mother, Roxanne, may soon die. Earley tells Raleigh to bring Gates to Roxanne first before New Orleans. He then learns that the police are looking for Bonnie's murderer, although all that they have found is a bloody carpet, a woman's shoe and the abandoned handguns—no body. Mingo thinks the police are looking for him, and when Raleigh borrows Vera's Ford Pinto, he has hidden in the back seat and pulls a gun on Raleigh.

Chapter 10 recounts a period in Raleigh's childhood when he interacts with Flonnie Rogers, Jubal Roger's mother. Flonnie influences Raleigh's development, which explains why he desires to be an upstanding citizen, doing all the right things. Flonnie has instilled this strong sense of appropriateness, responsibility and righteousness.



## **Part 1, The Call: Chapters 8-10, And Is Nearly Arrested; The First Sally Takes a Strange Turn; How Raleigh Was Confirmed in His View of the World Analysis**

Chapters 8 and 9 push the plot forward. Raleigh has to find Jubal Rogers and Gates, but by stealing the bust from the library, he has committed his first real crime. His nerves are naturally frayed to the breaking point when the police cruiser pulls him over for an illegal U-turn, but he manages to not look too guilty even with dirty and torn clothing from the heist. The ironic fact is that few people would notice the bust missing, and its value cannot be very high. However, he has obtained a key item in the scavenger hunt, and perhaps the most risky to obtain. Jubal Rogers may be impossible to contact because nobody knows where he might be, and Gates seems as elusive too. The call from his father puts pressure on Raleigh to get moving, and then Mingo pulls a gun on him while trying to get moving. Raleigh is making headway in the scavenger hunt, and something always gets in his way. The frustration starts to build because he would like to finish this foolish mission and be done with it. Then he could return to his normal life, which is starting to look less likely with each incident.

Mingo's fear of the police is entirely unwarranted. He has assembled bits and pieces of information, and with a natural paranoia, he convinces himself that the police are looking for him, while more circumstantial evidence points to Raleigh. Raleigh has no idea that he might be implicated in a murder that has not happened. However, if called to testify, Kaiser Bill could provide enough evidence for a trial. That would put an end to the scavenger hunt, which the reader understands and thereby tension builds. Chapter 9 ends with the two primary characters of Raleigh and Mingo charging off to someplace unknown in an old Pinto ready to breakdown at any moment.

Chapter 10 gives the childhood background of Raleigh and how it shaped his life. The main purpose is to provide backstory and bring the character of Flonnie Roberts into sharp detail. She is the mother of Jubal and remembers the days of legal racial segregation. Her character foreshadows the character of Jubal, who will not be introduced for some time but keeps a detached and haughty attitude once he shows up in the story, much as Flonnie but without the good intentions of keeping a small boy, Raleigh, from becoming spoiled like all the other Hayes children.



## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 11-13, In Which Our Hero Attends a Surprise Party; Raleigh Escapes; Wherein Is Continued the Account of the Innumerable Troubles Endured by Our Hero**

### **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 11-13, In Which Our Hero Attends a Surprise Party; Raleigh Escapes; Wherein Is Continued the Account of the Innumerable Troubles Endured by Our Hero Summary**

In Chapter 11, Raleigh convinces Mingo that stopping to pick up items for the scavenger hunt is a smart thing to do, and so they drive to Victoria's house, who accompanies them to Cowstream where Raleigh can obtain the trunk and family Bible from Lovie's house. When they arrive, a surprise birthday party for Lovie, who has just turned sixty, is in progress. Mingo decides that he should run away to South America to avoid the law, and when Victoria asks him what country, he cannot answer. Victoria is not aware that Mingo carries yet another handgun and has taken control of Raleigh. Raleigh is mystified that Mingo has so many guns. Mingo protests that the first gun, a small caliber revolver, was Vera's.

In Chapter 12, Raleigh learns that Gates is hiding out in Raleigh's rental property at Kure Beach, an investment he had made long before, and becomes outraged. He obtains the family Bible and settles down while Lovie explains that Gates is now out of prison on parole, trying to deliver something to friends at the beach, and gangsters are trying to stop him for some unknown reason. Needing to escape the party and ditch Mingo in the process, Raleigh manipulates a fight between Mingo and Jimmy Clay, Lovie's son, over a woman for whom Jimmy has romantic interest. Jimmy attacks Mingo, who seems to be moving in on Jimmy's love interest, and Raleigh snatches up Mingo's jacket, in which are the Pinto keys. He puts the trunk and Bible into the Pinto and takes off. The Pinto throws a rod (engine component) a few miles out of town, ripping a hole in the engine block and rendering the vehicle useless. He walks to a service station and rides back in the tow truck, but at the service station is Jimmy's new Cadillac that Mingo has driven out to track down his stolen Pinto.

In Chapter 13, Raleigh and Mingo argue about what had just occurred. Raleigh then puts all of his collected scavenger hunt items into Jimmy's Cadillac and steals that car





with Mingo riding shotgun. Before they depart, the service station buys the disabled Pinto for four hundred eighty dollars.

They stop along the way and discover that Mingo has accidentally pushed a button that locked all the doors with the keys inside. A rainstorm with a great deal of lightening starts as the sun goes down. Wet, miserable and desperate, they flag down a van hoping for a ride to another service station, but the van occupants are hoodlums. Raleigh fights with them, and they steal all of Mingo's money in his wallet. After having their fun, the hoodlums dump Raleigh and Mingo out of the van and drive away. Raleigh's money given to him by his father remains in the locked Cadillac, and Mingo has a hundred dollars stuffed in his shoes.

Fortunately, Raleigh and Mingo had been dumped out near a convent. The Sisters take them in and care for them while another group of Sisters retrieve the Cadillac. Raleigh calls Aura before he and Mingo spend the night in convent guest rooms. He learns that Aura's involvement with a political protest group has grown.

## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 11-13, In Which Our Hero Attends a Surprise Party; Raleigh Escapes; Wherein Is Continued the Account of the Innumerable Troubles Endured by Our Hero Analysis**

Raleigh succeeds in regaining control of his scavenger hunt from Mingo and now has a new Cadillac to drive. His purpose is to get his brother Gates and take him to New Orleans, one of his father's requests. Mingo still believes he is wanted by the police, but the belief must be suppressed for the more pressing need of shelter after the hoodlums' mugging and while in the rainstorm.

The hoodlums are depicted as a cross between devil worshipers and drug addicts who are not very competent criminals. Their violence comes from Raleigh's initial attack in the van, indicating more self-defense than sadism. They take the money, but not the men's other wallet contents, which reduces their evilness down to being petty thieves. This encounter foreshadows their appearance toward the end of the story, in which they become buffoons caught up in Raleigh's quest.

Maintaining the absurdity of the story, the Sisters at the convent are anything but typical nuns. The scene in which the men find the convent is reminiscent of the dark-and-stormy-night cliché in horror stories, and barking dogs add to the building suspense. The helpful Sisters immediately dispel the suspense and replace it with oddball humor, a comedic expectation-reversal technique.



## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 14-16, Sudden Impulses Overwhelm Our Hero; In Which Is Continued a Conversation Begun Thirty Years Ago; In Which Raleigh and Mingo Fall into a Swamp**

### **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 14-16, Sudden Impulses Overwhelm Our Hero; In Which Is Continued a Conversation Begun Thirty Years Ago; In Which Raleigh and Mingo Fall into a Swamp Summary**

In Chapter 14, Raleigh and Mingo have breakfast with the nuns, after which a group of them fetches the Cadillac. One of the nuns comes from a career in crime. She expertly opens the locked car and removes the radio for the convent. Raleigh and Mingo do not mind since the car is stolen anyway. Raleigh calls Jimmy, owner of the Cadillac, and asks him to arrange financing with Aura, thus turning the stolen vehicle into a purchased car. He offers a two-hundred dollar donation to the convent before he and Mingo depart.

In Chapter 15, Raleigh visits Flonnie Rogers in a retirement home. He tries to get information out of her about Jubal, but she has no information on his whereabouts or what he has been doing other than playing clarinet somewhere, probably on the street for passerby donations. The TV in the home carries a news report that features Aura at an anti-nuclear demonstration in Thermopylae. He fears that she will be arrested. Before leaving Flonnie, he buys her a radio so she can listen to ball games, one of her favorite pastimes in the home.

In Chapter 16, Raleigh and Mingo drive the Cadillac toward what they think is Route Fifty, which would lead them to the Carolina coast and Gates, but instead they find themselves stuck in a swamp. They try everything they can think of to move the car onto solid ground, but fail. A troop of Marines from Camp LeJeune, located a few miles inland from the coast, come by and hoist the car onto solid ground. Raleigh and Mingo stop by a tavern, where Raleigh calls Aura and learns that she has not been arrested, which relieves him of some worry, but that she is becoming even more involved in politics. After a fight breaks out in the tavern, Raleigh and Mingo speed onward toward the coast.



## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 14-16, Sudden Impulses Overwhelm Our Hero; In Which Is Continued a Conversation Begun Thirty Years Ago; In Which Raleigh and Mingo Fall into a Swamp Analysis**

The trip to the Carolina coast should have been a simple matter, but is not due to Mingo misreading the signs and navigating into the swamp. Additionally, Flonnie Rogers gives very little useful information about Jubal, yet enough that the reader can expect a meeting with him soon. While stuck in the swamp, the predicament looks hopeless. The car is hung up on a stump, night falls and snakes swim around Mingo's legs, which terrorizes him. Then the Marines show up to save the day. This scene is particularly funny with the sergeant ordering his men in various ways meant to demean and toughen them. They are not yet Marines but something else, lower body orifices common to both males and females, and they must say so with gusto, top volume and the mandatory SIR!

Raleigh saves a bit of his pride when he offers to buy the Cadillac from Jimmy. An underlying motive is to keep Jimmy from reporting the car stolen, thus saving a traffic stop and further delays on the quest. The ending scene with the nuns is both funny and touching when Raleigh discovers the Cadillac radio missing and offers a donation to the convent. He knows the nuns are having financial difficulty and at first tries to pay for the room and board. This is rejected, and so he restates the offer as a donation to the general fund. The nuns give him a receipt for tax purposes, and so the deal becomes acceptable on both ends. The irony is that this is the last square deal that Raleigh will be able to make until he reaches New Orleans. The humor is that he has no idea what extremes he will have to go through on his way there. So far the challenges have been minor in comparison. The story makes a sharp turn at this point as he drives as fast as he can to get his brother Gates, mysteriously dealing something on the coast and hiding from gangsters.

The tavern fight brings out Mingo's physical strength. He is a heavy man, so simply throwing his weight around helps protect Raleigh from what would have been a severe thrashing from several brawny men. However, Mingo also lifts some of these men and throws them in good bar brawl form this way and that, causing not a small amount of damage. The scene is a cliché, but also expands Mingo's character by demonstrating recently discovered courage. He has grown considerably on this trip and promises to be a good companion for Raleigh when the time comes.



## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 17-19, Raleigh's Confession; How Mingo Fared Alone at Myrtle Beach; In Which the Hero Finds Himself at Sea**

### **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 17-19, Raleigh's Confession; How Mingo Fared Alone at Myrtle Beach; In Which the Hero Finds Himself at Sea Summary**

Chapter 17 gives backstory for Raleigh and Gates. Raleigh tries to always think things through as a child, whereas Gates acts impulsively and sometimes illegally. Then their parents divorce and Roxanne, who is Gates' mother but not Raleigh's, takes the five-year-old Gates away from Thermopylae. Raleigh has not seen his half brother since.

Raleigh and Mingo arrive at the rental cabin where Gates is supposed to be. Loud jazz music issues from the cabin, so Raleigh pounds on the door, it opens and he sees Gates pretending to play a trumpet belonging to their father. Raleigh takes the trumpet and adds it to his scavenger hunt collection, and then he learns that Gates needs to make a delivery of something at sea.

In Chapter 18 Mingo, enjoys his alone time in the cabin while Raleigh and Gates sleep late. He reads, fixes breakfast and takes a walk on the beach afterward. He tries to strike up a conversation with a woman, but the woman is uninterested. When he returns, Raleigh is up and Gates has ridden away on his Harley Davidson motorcycle to make a phone call regarding his errand that is to be done at sea and during the night. Raleigh has discovered that Jubal Rogers may be in Charleston and lays out the plans to Mingo how they will proceed with Gates to first see his mother and then onward to New Orleans.

In Chapter 19, Raleigh and Gates take an old boat out on the ocean, and Mingo drives to meet them at Myrtle Beach. Gates tells Raleigh that he needs to make fifteen thousand dollars to pay off Mr. Calhoun for a fake antique necklace that Gates had sold to Calhoun, who later discovered the forgery. The errand involves the transfer of a large amount of cocaine from one vessel to another.



## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 17-19, Raleigh's Confession; How Mingo Fared Alone at Myrtle Beach; In Which the Hero Finds Himself at Sea Analysis**

The plot brings in Raleigh's brother, Gates, who lives his life of constant adventure and trouble, the opposite of the way Raleigh had decided to live his. The two characters are naturally in conflict and more so when Gates entraps Raleigh into helping with an illegal drug transaction. Gates is never fully honest with Raleigh but has the intelligence of a rogue and the courage to act without much thought to the consequences, a trait that keeps him out of trouble more than bringing him into it. However, selling paste jewelry as a genuine antique from the Civil War to Mr. Calhoun has put Gates' life in jeopardy.

While Mingo drives to Myrtle Beach, he visits a house of prostitution that is very low-class. It is in a trailer house and the prices are low. He had thought that the place was simply a massage parlor, and so the comedic interactions follow. Instead of hiring a prostitute, he plays cards with them. He does not fully understand exactly what the offered services are, having married Vera just out of high school and knowing nothing about other forms of sex than the usual. His innocence contrasts with the prostitutes' broader experiences. Mingo also makes an innocent mistake when he takes a motel and has the manager put WELCOME, RALEIGH & GATES HAYES on the outside sign. Gates sees this and rides away with Raleigh on the Harley. Gates knows that Mr. Calhoun will be looking for him, but this was not the right time to pay him off. Unknown to anyone but Gates, a drug cartel is also trying to kill him for competing against it.



## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 20-22, The Great Adventure of the Bass Fiddle Case; In Which Is Described the Famous Barbecue**

### **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 20-22, The Great Adventure of the Bass Fiddle Case; In Which Is Described the Famous Barbecue Summary**

In Chapter 20, Raleigh, Mingo and Gates go to see a tent revival meeting in which Simon "Weeper" Berg plays bass. He has been let out of prison for the revival meeting along with several other inmates. During the meeting, the inmates attempt to escape, and Weeper finds Gates, whom he knows from when Gates was in prison. Weeper hides in his bass fiddle case, which the others put into the trunk of the Cadillac and make a get-away. The other inmates are soon rounded up and put away, but the news media reports that Weeper, armed and dangerous, is still missing. They take a motel in Midway where Gates wants to see his mother, Roxanne, in the hospital.

In Chapter 21, all four men try to leave town, but the drug cartel has identified them by Gates' Harley at the motel. The cartel gives chase. With Gates driving, they turn and go through alleys and across lawns to avoid being caught. Gates finally loses the cartel by storming up a private driveway and into an extensive estate. The owners mistake the men for the band, which gives Gates an idea. He pretends to be a movie producer checking out the estate for a setting with his associates. The ruse works.

In Chapter 22, the four men leave the estate and drive to Charleston where Jubal Rogers might be. There Raleigh tries to find out if anyone knows Jubal and where he might be found, but without any success. He does see street musicians and suspects Jubal would do this too.

### **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 20-22, The Great Adventure of the Bass Fiddle Case; In Which Is Described the Famous Barbecue Analysis**

Weeper Berg is introduced, a comedic character because he wears different costumes to hide his identity and makes outlandish use of words that he has memorized from the dictionary while in prison. He has gone through A-C, which gives the author a chance to play with oddball words used within wrong contexts.



The chase scene is incidental to bringing the characters onto the newly constructed estate, owned by rich Texans. Here the stage is set for a good deal of humor. Gates pretends he's a French film producer scouting settings for his new movie about the Civil War. However, the estate only seems antebellum. Many of its details are out of place or wrong for the Civil War time period. Meanwhile, Gates charms the wife of the owner while stealing valuable objects to be pawned or sold later. She is an easy mark because she drinks bourbon as if it were water. The irony is that when the four men leave for Charleston, the estate owners do not miss any of the stolen goods.

The brief Chapter 22 is dedicated mostly to descriptions of Charleston, which is the fading beauty that Raleigh falls in love with. Not much happens with the plot other than Raleigh walking around the old section of town and talking with various people. He does get a lead to Toutant Kingstree, who may know where to find Jubal.



## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 23-25, The Very Extraordinary Adventures Which Ensued at the Inn; In Which Are Continued the Misfortunes That Befell Our Hero at the Ambrose Inn; Raleigh Leads His Followers South**

### **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 23-25, The Very Extraordinary Adventures Which Ensued at the Inn; In Which Are Continued the Misfortunes That Befell Our Hero at the Ambrose Inn; Raleigh Leads His Followers South Summary**

In Chapter 23, Raleigh meets Toutant, a saxophone player who lives on a piece of property crowded with abandoned vehicles that contain livestock. He claims the livestock is for his own use, but the truth is that he butchers and sells the meat to make a living. Raleigh learns that Jubal makes his living driving a mule-drawn carriage for tourists and occasionally plays his clarinet in local clubs. Raleigh finds Jubal in his carriage and tries to convince him to go to New Orleans. Jubal refuses and does not budge off his decision. Raleigh goes back to the hotel, meets a singer named Rusty and nearly goes to bed with her, but he is too drunk. He later finds Aura in his bed. She has come to see him in Charleston along with Vera. They discover later that Pierce, who is having an affair with the married Lizzie, both occupy a room in the same hotel.

In Chapter 24, the hotel becomes a comedy of errors and misunderstandings. During a power failure, Raleigh accidentally enters Pierce and Lizzie's room. Pierce thinks that Raleigh is still trying to blackmail him, and they struggle with each other. Then Raleigh enters his own room to find Vera in it. Mingo comes by and immediately suspects something sexual between them, but Aura assures him that Vera is only visiting because she was frightened by the electric storm that had knocked out the power. Many characters open and close many doors in this classic series of comedic encounters.

In Chapter 25, Raleigh tries to gather everyone together and go to Atlanta. Gates has been hiding with a young woman he had met earlier, so while Raleigh waits for his brother to arrive, he revisits Jubal and asks him about the young Black girl with Raleigh's father and what relationship he has to Victoria. A family secret starts to come out that Jubal and Victoria had been young lovers at one time, and the girl is their grandchild. However, Jubal still refuses to go to New Orleans to see his sixteen-year-old





granddaughter. His haughty air and impenetrable nature comes from his mother Flonnie, who was instrumental in Raleigh's upbringing.

Raleigh finds Gates on Toutant's property. Gates has been busy painting a semi truck bright red. They decide to put the Cadillac inside the rig, along with Gates' Harley. Toutant and Weeper accompany Raleigh, Mingo and Gates to Atlanta in the semi truck.

## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 23-25, The Very Extraordinary Adventures Which Ensued at the Inn; In Which Are Continued the Misfortunes That Befell Our Hero at the Ambrose Inn; Raleigh Leads His Followers South Analysis**

Besides the comedy in the hotel, these chapters bring together key players and objects that will become important in subsequent scenes. The semi truck serves as a rolling garage for the Cadillac and Harley. Weeper can hide in the trailer, and the collection of scavenger hunt items are stored there as well. The truck conveniently offers a single vehicle for driving to Atlanta.

Scenes in which doors open and close, and characters intermingle in odd configurations is typical of Shakespearean comedies and continues into modern comedy. The action is fast and full of sight gags—wrong room, wrong people, misunderstandings escalating into violence and then diffusing into another compromising situation. The technique is timeless and used often in popular television shows, movies and books.

The plot bombshell falls. During a time of segregation, a White woman (Victoria) and Black man (Jubal) had become lovers. Victoria became pregnant and in some manner, at this point unknown, gave birth. That baby grew up to either father or give birth to another child, the Black girl who is with Raleigh's father. This explains why Earley wants Jubal in New Orleans on the surface, to reunite granddaughter and grandfather. However, this does not explain the need for a plaster bust, a family Bible, a trunk and the trumpet. Since music has become a major part of the story, an assumption can be made that Earley may want to form some sort of band, likely a jazz combo, in the very appropriate setting of New Orleans.



## **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 26-27, In Which Our Hero Enters Atlanta with More Passengers Than He Expected; Why Raleigh Took His First Communion**

### **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 26-27, In Which Our Hero Enters Atlanta with More Passengers Than He Expected; Why Raleigh Took His First Communion Summary**

While on their way to Atlanta in Chapter 26, they come upon a stalled bus for a dance troupe and one of the dancers. The dancer tells the men that a Klu Klux Klan group has captured the rest of the troupe and could be in the process of murdering the Black members, if not all of them. Gates and Raleigh slash all the tires of the Klan members' vehicles. They then impersonate FBI agents on a raid while the rest of the crew blow off fireworks that Mingo bought, and thereby simulate gunfire at Gates' signals. This show makes the armed Klan members surrender and give up the dance troupe. Gates helps them revive the bus after tying up the Klan members.

Chapter 27 fills in detail about how Jubal and Victoria became lovers. It gives backstory for Raleigh, his rejection of religion at a young age, and a subsequent fall into a well that made him frightened enough to pray. His questioning of religious principles and God's interactions with a crazy world continue, but he does understand that when things go very badly for people, they will look to God for help.

### **Part 2, The Quest: Chapters 26-27, In Which Our Hero Enters Atlanta with More Passengers Than He Expected; Why Raleigh Took His First Communion Analysis**

Elements of the segregated South live on through the Klu Klux Klan scene. The drama opens with high danger for the dance troupe, but quickly becomes a farcical comedy as Gates masterminds a grand ruse. A time disconnect occurs when Gates gives the signals to blow off large firecrackers, and they do so instantly with no delay for fuse burn. However, the humor depends on convincing the Klan that they are surrounded by FBI agents, ready to blow their heads off. Ignoring the detail of handling time delay is a minor offense that may or may not be noticed by the reader. The scene foreshadows further spur-of-the-moment acts that Gates performs in Part 3.



The reader learns how Jubal and Victoria had fallen in love and what Earley did about Victoria's pregnancy. He tells her to leave town with the excuse of going elsewhere to college. She gives birth and puts the infant up for adoption. A parallel story about a pregnant young woman that Mingo had met in Charleston and met again while she was hitchhiking brings the drama of birth into the story. The woman gives birth inside the tractor trailer to a healthy infant, and Mingo immediately bonds with the child. He and Vera do not have children of their own.



## **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 28-30, Of a Discovery Made by Raleigh; How the Glorious Battle of Stone Mountain Was Won; The Consequences of a Remarkable Scene**

### **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 28-30, Of a Discovery Made by Raleigh; How the Glorious Battle of Stone Mountain Was Won; The Consequences of a Remarkable Scene Summary**

In Chapter 28, Raleigh, Gates and Mingo go to a big mall in Atlanta known as the Omni. While in the outrageously posh food court area, they see Mr. Calhoun and one of his thugs. This leads to a misunderstanding by the also present drug cartel members that Mingo is Gates. Mr. Calhoun and Gates decide to have a duel to settle things between them at Stone Mountain, a nearby tourist attraction. This conforms to the Calhoun family's sense of honor. Gates wins the choice of weapons via a simple card cutting competition, in which Mingo, who had been instructed by Gates earlier, palms an ace and that beats Calhoun's jack.

In Chapter 29, the duel takes place. Gates chooses the weapons, rapiers, and the fight is to the first blood, not death. Gates wins the duel, but members of a drug cartel members who still think Mingo is Gates, attack and capture Mingo, who is in a paddle boat. The drug cartel members are in a power boat. Gates rushes to protect Mingo on his Harley while Raleigh tries to keep up with the power boat in a golf cart. He abandons the cart for a parked van that has the engine running. It turns out to be the same van that had stopped to rob him and Mingo when they were locked out of the Cadillac. The van ends up stuck on a set of railroad tracks for a train that circles the tourist attraction. Two of the drug cartel members chase Raleigh and Mingo to the top of Stone Mountain. Gates rides his Harley there. He shoots one cartel member on the mountain and wounds another who is a passenger in a helicopter. Both he and Raleigh struggle to pull Mingo from falling off a shear cliff, and they finally succeed.

In Chapter 30, the group has traveled to Montgomery. Toutant plays his saxophone while instructing Mingo how to play blues and jazz piano. He already knows how to play standard tunes outside the genres.



## **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 28-30, Of a Discovery Made by Raleigh; How the Glorious Battle of Stone Mountain Was Won; The Consequences of a Remarkable Scene Analysis**

The dual, chase and gunfight scenes wrap up the drama around Gates and his illicit dealing in drugs. Mr. Calhoun accepts the money he paid for the fake necklace, but demands a dual because it is a family tradition. Gates wins the dual, but whatever this might mean becomes irrelevant when the drug cartel captures Mingo. The chase scene brings Raleigh absurdly back into contact with the people he had fought and who had stolen Mingo's money earlier in the story. This, along with Gates' charging ride up Stone Mountain on his Harley add excitement to the scene. After shooting the cartel members and saving Mingo, Gates deals out a good portion of rapid-fire inventive storytelling that convinces the police that he, Raleigh and Mingo had nothing to do with the events atop Stone Mountain. The police let them go, which ends the thriller scene in humor.

Chapter 30 sets up the ending of the story. Toutant plays excellent blues and jazz saxophone. Mingo plays passable piano in accompaniment, while Toutant coaches him on syncopation and drawing back behind the beat rather than staying on or, as is more common among new genre players, pushing ahead of the beat. The beginnings of a jazz combo are now in place.



## **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 31-33, What Passed between Our Hero and His Father; How Raleigh Was Ordained in The Cave; What Raleigh Decided about Death**

### **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 31-33, What Passed between Our Hero and His Father; How Raleigh Was Ordained in The Cave; What Raleigh Decided about Death Summary**

In Chapter 3,1 the group makes it to New Orleans. Raleigh delivers everything and everybody his father asked for, except Jubal Rogers. They go to a jazz club where a band is playing and the young Black woman named Billie, and who Earley had taken with him from the Thermopylae hospital, sings extraordinarily well. Earley tells Raleigh that Victoria is in town. Raleigh meets with her, and she admits that Billie is her granddaughter.

In Chapter 32, Early explains the importance of the items that Raleigh had collected in the scavenger hunt. The plaster bust contains a coded message that, unknown at this time, maps to the family Bible by chapter, verse and word. The resulting message might be a treasure map to find the Confederate gold buried on the property that Raleigh had bought. The contents of the trunk help explain to Raleigh why Victoria had decided to give birth away from Thermopylae, and Earley plans to play his trumpet at a jazz club called The Cave.

In Chapter 33, the jazz combo forms and plays. Mingo is on piano, Toutant on saxophone, Earley on trumpet and Billie sings. A local drummer drives the beat, and Weeper plays acceptable bass, simplified at Toutant's insistence. They perform sets of jazz and blues standards, and in the middle of a song, Jubal Rogers shows up with his clarinet. He simply watches for a few numbers, then joins in, which delights his granddaughter. Raleigh has his trumpet and joins his father on stage. While playing, his father sits and leans against a column, and dies.



## **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 31-33, What Passed between Our Hero and His Father; How Raleigh Was Ordained in The Cave; What Raleigh Decided about Death Analysis**

The entire point of the story comes together in these chapters. Earley has recognized the Black girl in Thermopylae, while he was in the hospital for a heart condition, as Victoria's granddaughter. He came up with a plan immediately to rectify many wrongs and bring this part of the family, the most interesting and talented part, back together. As a reward for doing his part, Raleigh inherits a treasure map.

Chapter 33 stands as the emotional climax of the story. The impromptu jazz combo plays very well and Billie sings as good as the greats. The appearance of Jubal brings the happiness to an exciting high point, and as the band plays, the happiness is tempered by Earley's death on stage. The drama is presented from Raleigh's viewpoint and shows only Earley's trumpet bell rolling back and forth, having been released at death.

The reader learns more about what caused Victoria to be who she is. Her presence in New Orleans adds to the emotional height of the climax, a family brought together within the context of great music and within the city known around the world as the cultural center of jazz. Earley dies a happy man, and his death leads Raleigh into the final part of the story: hunting buried treasure. He must dig a grave on the property for his father anyway, which is probably what Earley had planned. Might as well dig for treasure at the same time.



## **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 34-37, Showing Our Hero's Return Home; In Which Raleigh Inherits a Fortune; Wherein the Story of Raleigh W. Hayes Draws to a Close; Why Raleigh Married Aura**

### **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 34-37, Showing Our Hero's Return Home; In Which Raleigh Inherits a Fortune; Wherein the Story of Raleigh W. Hayes Draws to a Close; Why Raleigh Married Aura Summary**

In Chapter 34, Jubal and Billie leave New Orleans for Charleston, where she is to begin a career in music. Victoria and Jubal argue a little over a letter he sent to Earley that he had never given to Victoria, but the fight sputters out before it can gain momentum. Meanwhile, Raleigh and Mingo puzzle over the code and finally figure out the treasure map.

In Chapter 35, Raleigh and Mingo dig up the treasure, but all of it is gone, except for one gold bar. They find a letter from a Confederate sergeant who had taken the rest of the gold. In Chapter 36, everyone returns home. Raleigh decides to make gold amulets for all major participants out of the gold bar. Chapter 37 describes how Raleigh and Aura had courted and married. He married her because he loves her.

### **Part 3, The Return: Chapters 34-37, Showing Our Hero's Return Home; In Which Raleigh Inherits a Fortune; Wherein the Story of Raleigh W. Hayes Draws to a Close; Why Raleigh Married Aura Analysis**

The ending chapters are anticlimaxes. Jubal and Billie are finally together; Victoria forgives Jubal for not trying to keep in touch; Raleigh finds the treasure and buries his father. The troubles that were haunting and hunting Gates have been resolved, and the final chapter gives the simple explanation of Raleigh's marriage to Aura—he loves her. She has changed too, having entered politics and may run for public office. The big change in Raleigh is that he learned how to go out into the world, lose control, take risks



and have adventures. His likely next step will be to seek out some other profession than insurance, being that life is too interesting, and insurance too boring.



# Characters

## Raleigh Whittier Hayes

Raleigh is the chief protagonist in the story. He lives in a housing development named Starry Haven, a part of Thermopylae, North Carolina. His wife is Aura and they have sixteen-year-old twin girls. The quiet and controlled suburban life appeals to Raleigh, but he must change due to the request of his father, Earley, who wants him to collect certain objects and gather certain people, and bring them all down to New Orleans within a month.

Almost immediately, Raleigh finds himself in compromising and dangerous situations. He must deal with Mingo, his friend from childhood, who constantly makes mistakes and suffers from cowardice and paranoia. Yet Raleigh changes for the better during his reluctantly faced adventures. He becomes more like his father and half brother Gates, both risk-takers and adventure lovers.

Raleigh learns about life, love and the blues during his journey from Thermopylae to the North Carolina coast, Charleston, Atlanta and New Orleans. He picks up a little about religion and what it means to be compassionate and loving of his fellow people. Mostly he finds a level of risk-taking that he would have never discovered had his life's course not been disrupted by his father's last wish.

## Mingo Sheffield

Mingo is Raleigh's sidekick throughout the story, except during short periods when they are separated. Mingo is grossly obese, a coward and paranoid. He obsesses over his wife, Vera, and the possibility that—after she has lost a great deal of weight and has become a voluptuous, sexy woman—she is cheating on him, especially with Raleigh. Compromising situations push Mingo over the edge to where he wants to commit suicide, but lacks the courage to do so.

Mingo's first experience with adventure is small but significant for him. He accidentally goes down a slide that he has feared since childhood. Later in the story, he comes to Raleigh's defense during a tavern fight. Then, when the jazz combo starts to form, Toutant coaches Mingo's piano playing, and he learns the blues/jazz styles. Mingo's character transforms from a pathetic failure at life to a dynamic, fun-loving and interesting human being. Throughout he maintains a heart of gold and the love of Vera.

Mingo also becomes the focal point in a thriller scene. The drug cartel thugs have mistaken him for Gates, whom they want to kill and thereby eliminate the competition. An extended chase ensues and ends with Raleigh and Gates dragging Mingo from the edge of a cliff, a cliché symbol of a changed life that works within the context of this story.



## Vera Sheffield

Vera is Mingo's wife. She is a voluptuous beauty after losing weight by having her mouth wired shut. She loves Mingo deeply, despite his obesity, and becomes a central focus in the early scenes in the story. Her wired mouth becomes snagged on the crotch of Raleigh's slacks, and this sparks off Mingo's paranoia and brings up his suicidal tendencies. The gag is repeated briefly later in the story during the comedic hotel scene. By the end of the story, Vera has had her mouth unwired, and the implication is that she will continue to watch her weight.

## Earley Hayes

Earley is Raleigh's and Gates' father. He has a heart condition and is not expected to live long. While in the hospital, he recognizes a sixteen-year-old girl named Billie as the possible granddaughter of his sister, Victoria. Once he is sure, he takes Billie and leaves the hospital to buy a new Cadillac and drive to New Orleans. Earley dreams up the scavenger hunt that brings his family together while changing them for the better.

## Aura Hayes

Aura is Raleigh's wife. She becomes involved in politics while Raleigh goes on his father's scavenger hunt. She pops in to visit Raleigh while on his journey and lends humor to the story.

## Victoria Anna Hayes

Victoria is Raleigh's favorite aunt, well traveled and smart. She helps him on his scavenger hunt and goes to New Orleans. There she meets Billie, her granddaughter, and Jubal, the Black man who was once her lover. She had given birth to a child fathered by Jubal.

## Jubal Rogers

Jubal plays excellent jazz clarinet. He is one of the people that Raleigh must bring to New Orleans, but he refuses to go. At the climax of the story, he shows up and meets Billie, his granddaughter, who sings beautifully.

## Gates Hayes

Gates is Raleigh's half brother. At the start of the story, he is the direct opposite of Raleigh—wild, irresponsible and constantly in trouble. By the end of the story, he has helped Raleigh tremendously and gained an amount of responsibility.



## **Flonnie Rogers**

Flonnie is Jubal Rogers' mother. She was instrumental in forming Raleigh into a responsible and respectable citizen of Thermopylae. Flonnie also helps Raleigh to locate Jubal.

## **Bonnie Ellen**

Bonnie is Raleigh's secretary. She becomes the focus of a murder investigation, the victim. However, she still lives and the investigation is dropped. Her role in the story is to make Mingo believe that the police are after him.

## **Jimmy Clay**

Jimmy is Raleigh's cousin. Raleigh steals Jimmy's Cadillac after Mingo drives out to find his wife's Pinto, which Raleigh had stolen earlier to continue on his quest.

## **Bill Jenkins (Kaiser Bill)**

Bill is the janitor in Raleigh's office building. He mistakenly thinks that Raleigh has shot and killed Bonnie. Bill then disposes of the unconscious Bonnie while she is rolled into a carpet.

## **Pierce Jimson**

Pierce sells the land where the treasure is supposed to be buried to Raleigh. Pierce mistakenly thinks Raleigh is blackmailing him.

## **Toutant Kingstree**

Toutant plays excellent jazz saxophone. He helps Raleigh to find Jubal, teaches Mingo to play blues/jazz piano, and plays with the combo during the climax of the story.

## **Simon**

Weeper is an escaped prisoner who plays terrible bass. He adds humor to the story because he constantly changes his disguises and uses unusual and inappropriate words that he memorized from the dictionary while imprisoned.

## **Billie Rogers**

Billie is the granddaughter of Victoria and Jubal. She sings as well as the greats in the jazz and blues genres. She is the daughter of Joshua Rogers, the son that Victoria had given birth to and Jubal adopted.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Thermopylae, North Carolina**

The story starts in Thermopylae, the home town for most of the characters.

### **Starry Haven**

Starry Haven is where Raleigh and Mingo live, a housing development in Thermopylae.

### **Lotus House**

The Lotus House is the only Chinese restaurant in town and where the negative fortune cookies give dire predictions to Raleigh and Mingo.

### **Forbes Building**

The Forbes Building is in downtown Thermopylae and where Raleigh works.

### **North Carolina Coast**

The North Carolina Coast is where Raleigh and Gates meet. They do an illegal drug transaction while at sea and during the night.

### **Charleston**

Charleston is where Raleigh finds Jubal and Toutant.

### **Atlanta**

Atlanta is where Gates and Mr. Calhoun work out their duel and where the drug cartel thugs misidentify Mingo as Gates.

### **Stone Mountain**

Stone Mountain is a Civil War themed tourist area near Atlanta and where the thrilling capture and rescue of Mingo occurs.



## **New Orleans**

New Orleans is where the jazz combo performs, family reunion occurs, and Earley Hayes dies.

## **Pee Wee Jimson's Bust**

The bust is part of Raleigh's scavenger hunt. When the bust was cast, a coded treasure map had been put into it. The bust is made of plaster.

## **Trumpet**

Earley wants his trumpet taken to New Orleans so he can play it in the jazz combo he envisions bringing together.

## **Tiny's Trunk**

Tiny's trunk contains evidence that Victoria had given birth to Jubal's son.

## **Bible**

The Bible is needed to decode the treasure map cast into the bust.

## **Gun**

Earley wants the gun so he can shoot himself, which becomes unnecessary because he dies while on stage with the jazz combo.

## **Civitans**

Raleigh belongs to the Civitans, similar to a chamber of commerce, in Thermopylae.

## **Mothers for Peace**

Aura joins the Mothers for Peace and begins her political career by protesting with them.

# Themes

## Morality

The overarching moral issue has to do with Victoria and Jubal. They became lovers during the segregated South, a time when Blacks and Whites were not supposed to share restaurants, public toilets or even drinking fountains, let alone have children together. Earley understands the ramifications of Victoria's pregnancy. Abortion is out of the question because of the illegality of the procedure, and more so the immorality of it. She must bring the child to term and give birth, but she cannot do this in Thermopylae due to the town knowing everyone's personal lives. Instead, he recommends that she go away and have the baby in an environment that is not so prying and judgmental. The next moral problem is what to do with the baby. Putting the boy, Joshua, up for adoption works out because Jubal takes on the responsibility of parenting. Victoria cannot be the boy's mother whether she wants to or not, and so dedicates her life to travel and the sale of religious items. Earley performs as the handler of this sin, and the core of the story is him setting right the decisions of the past. He must bring Jubal to Billie and have Victoria and Jubal reconcile before Earley dies. The emotional climax happens when he succeeds in his task.

Raleigh stands as the perfect example of a moral person by Thermopylae standards. He has married, raised children, built a successful and safe career, and serves the community. However, the moral standards of Thermopylae include extramarital sex as long as this is kept secret. The morality keeps people in place and does not encourage adventure and growth. Raleigh avoids taking risks as a result, while Gates embraces risk. Earley also knows that these two sons need to take the goodness from each other while rejecting the self-destruction that can come from too much risk taking. This is why Earley insists that Raleigh should bring Gates to New Orleans. Something exciting has to happen with these two opposites traveling together.

Weeper escapes from prison and Toutant raises livestock illegally. These two moral dilemmas exist, but are not acknowledged. From Weeper's point of view, he needs to keep in disguise to avoid recapture but has no feelings that what he has done is wrong. Toutant is trying to make a living and does not think this is wrong either. He also must keep up an act to avoid prosecution, saying that the meat is only for his own consumption. Gates knows that what he does is wrong but does not care until the end of the story. The only main characters concerned about the moral implications of their actions are Raleigh, who does so because this is what he decided early on, and Earley. Aura has taken up her moral fight within politics, perhaps out of a sense of right and wrong, but also for her own ambitions.

The story presents morality as an issue of situation. Oftentimes what is right or wrong is not clearly demarcated, which leads to compromised decisions for Raleigh. He must steal to move the scavenger hunt forward. To save Mingo, he must use violence. Other compromises involve drug running and representing himself falsely as an FBI agent.





## Small Town versus Cities

Thermopylae represents a typical Southern small town for the period. Children tend to stay there or close by once they are adults, distrusting the cities around them. The danger in this is presented by the Hayes family, members of which keep losing limbs from diabetes and dying from heart disease due to diets high in sugar and fat. On the other hand, the family remains tightly bound, which many value whether this means becoming stuck in a rut all their lives or not.

The story uses the oddities of small towns to advance humor. Conversely, cities are presented as dynamic and interesting places. Raleigh falls in love with Charleston. Atlanta provides the mall and hotel settings. The climax is set in New Orleans and its jazz heritage. By the end of the story, Thermopylae seems far away and small, the influences irrelevant to the characters who have taken the quest and grown along the way. The well-traveled Victoria encourages Raleigh to do his father's bidding and has the wisdom to understand how this will help Raleigh to break out of his small-town rut. Mingo does not exactly follow Raleigh's lead, but does well for himself regardless because circumstances force him into various situations.

Many people enjoy small-town living and may find the presentation of Thermopylae insulting. Certainly the author uses stereotypes for the minor characters, but these should be considered symbolic and not an attempt at perpetuating oversimplified generalities. For example, Raleigh's Cousin Jimmy is not very smart and has not matured since high school. They have an argument about this, which exposes the fear that some people have about the world. Raleigh uses this fear to manipulate Jimmy into a fight with Mingo over a woman, a scene that moves the plot forward and enhances the humor. Had the author given Jimmy more dimensions, the trick would not have worked, and so the stereotyping is actually a technique of plot development, not a statement on small town inhabitants.

A similar reaction might be taken by city dwellers who find Toutant a stereotypical character. The same justification holds for this character. Had he been made more complex, he would not have been able to teach Mingo how to play blues and jazz piano, nor would he have been so eager to join in the adventure.

The theme holds up that both small towns and cities have their advantages and disadvantages. In the end, everyone returns home to the environments with which they have grown familiar. None of the environments are superior; people tend to gravitate toward the familiar. Still, shared adventures change people significantly. As this story closes, another opens for Raleigh, Aura, Mingo, Vera, Gates and Billie. Thermopylae has probably become too small for them.

## Pride

Raleigh prides himself as being a good, upstanding citizen of Thermopylae at the beginning of the story. The downside of this is that he has also developed a superiority



attitude. Raleigh is good; everyone else has tremendous problems. This brings in the irony that people with superiority complexes are often the ones with the most problems, and Earley sees this. Earley realizes that Raleigh needs to be knocked off his high horse to become fully human.

Contrasting to Raleigh, Mingo has no pride whatsoever when the story begins. He fears everything, including the suicide he keeps talking about. Above all, he fears that Vera, now with her slimed down but still voluptuous body, will cheat on him. What Mingo needs is to nearly fall off a cliff, which he does physically, and to jump off cliffs figuratively. By the end of the story he has shed much of his fear, having gone on adventures and survived.

Gates has the most pride of all. He constantly takes risks, one after another until his life is in serious jeopardy. He does manage to pull out of his mess but has been humbled. His irresponsible life has almost brought Raleigh and Mingo to their deaths, and he knows this. He decides that he cannot go on the way he has and expect a very long life, so he vows to be more like Raleigh.



# Style

## Point of View

The story uses an omniscient (all-knowing) third-person point of view (POV) with a narrative voice that makes comments on the story and life in general. Oftentimes, as with chapter titles, the voice takes on a satirical quality, such as referring to Raleigh as Our Hero. This is a technique often used in humorous fiction, especially those novels written in the 1970s and 1980s. It also harkens back to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, considered by many literary historians to be the first novel of its kind, the first modern novel because the style is still in use with variations and improvements made over the centuries. *Don Quixote* was first published in 1605 with a second volume published in 1615.

The POV shifts from current events to backstory often, which can leave the reader unsure of plot settings and character interactions if too quickly skimmed. The narrator mostly concentrates on the primary protagonist, Raleigh Hayes, but in certain parts the narrator features other characters. The ability to shift from one character to another is one of the primary advantages in using the omniscient third-person POV. Another is the ability to enter into character psyches and pull out information that the character would never tell anyone else. An example of this is Chapter 27, *Why Raleigh Took His First Communion*. The third-person narrator delves into Raleigh's childhood and his distrust of God. What Raleigh would never admit to anyone is that he had to pray to God while trapped in a well. In other chapters the influences of Aunt Victoria and Flonnie Rogers over Raleigh's childhood development come out with details that Raleigh does not realize himself.

A third advantage of the omniscient third-person POV is to move from grand overviews to specifics during action scenes. This technique is especially effective for describing the scenes in Chapter 29, *How the Glorious Battle of Stone Mountain Was Won*.

## Setting

The setting moves quickly from place to place, and the characters are plopped into odd settings that increase the humor in the story. Thermopylae is supposed to be a safe place for Raleigh and Mingo, but Raleigh must leave to meet his father's desires, and Mingo believes he must run from the police to South America somewhere. Of the odd settings, the most hilarious are the convent in which the nuns behave nothing as expected, the swamp in which the Marines have to rescue Raleigh and Mingo, and Stone Mountain where a small war is fought atop the largest piece of solid granite in the South that has large Southern Civil War hero sculptures.

Raleigh finds himself with Gates in another absurd setting, on a rickety old boat out in the Atlantic Ocean for a rendezvous with drug traffickers. The humor in the story rests



largely on the absurd settings in which ridiculous or dangerous things happen to the protagonists. Possibly the most funny setting is the hotel that brings rapid action and misunderstandings together.

New Orleans becomes a setting in which the story draws together in a musical and emotionally satisfying manner. Here, Billie Rogers is reunited with her grandfather, Jubal, and her grandmother, Victoria. Additionally, very good jazz and blues fill the scene as the sad event of Earley Hayes' death occurs. The sense within the jazz club setting is bittersweet, like the blues.

This story uses more lighthearted settings in its anticlimactic scenes. This helps the reader to cool down after the climax in New Orleans and brings the story to a happy ending.

## Language and Meaning

The author has used this story to demonstrate the proper use of unusual words, a feature that may be poking fun at other authors who use unusual words in contexts not calling for them. The character of Weeper, who is always whining about his terrible digestive problems, emphasizes this possibility. Weeper has memorized the dictionary from A to C, but does not understand how to properly use the words he knows. An implication is established that he, like some other authors, bites off more than he can assimilate. These tricks with language bring out sarcasm in an indirect and implied way, which is more kind than bluntly stating that some writers do not know what they are doing. Any darn fool can use a thesaurus, the author seems to be demonstrating. The best writers use unusual words to clarify and compress, not to confound.

Many of the passages in the book contain beautifully constructed prose with rich sensory and philosophical meanings. If the author intended poking fun, he also demonstrates the right way to do things. Perceptive readers who also want to write well could use this book as a guide in word selection and creative writing by taking the most pleasing of passages and analyzing them for how the author might have approached their construction. Then, as a reverse exercise, extract Weeper's mistakes and fix them.

Casual readers will likely need to consult a dictionary often in order to understand the author's intent. Some readers find this enjoyable, a challenge for building their own vocabulary. Others find this kind of writing annoying, preferring authors who occasionally employ unusual words in contexts that reflect their meanings, thus allowing a full read without any runs to the dictionary.

## Structure

The book is divided into three parts: The Call, The Quest and The Return. The parts are subdivided into thirty-seven chapters, each with a descriptive and enticing title. The plot moves chronologically and has several backstory sections that help describe Raleigh's character. Backstory up front bogs a novel down, but backstory given within the story at



appropriate junctures fills out characters into three-dimensional beings, making them more like real people. Raleigh is undoubtedly a real person, although still fictional. He could be any person on the street because he has a past, faults, qualities, family and is need of transformation.

The plot of the story concentrates on Raleigh's transformation, but a hidden story involves his Aunt Victoria, Jubal Rogers and Billie Rogers. The connection of Victoria to Jubal comes as a plot surprise, an abrupt twist that changes the entire meaning of Earley's requests.

Story structure moves from a heroic quest in the first part, adventure and thriller in the second, and a treasure hunt at the end. Intermingled are scenes that evoke different emotions, from childbirth drama to victory over the Klu Klux Klan, and the quest itself provides elements of a mystery story.



## Quotes

"Raleigh Hayes always walked fast, even if he was only walking to the bathroom, even if he was only walking along the beach. He hurried because forty-five years had already gotten away from him, because life was always two uncatchable steps in front of him, running away like a burglar with satchels full of all the things that should have belonged to Raleigh Hayes—like money, position, a home in which nothing was unrepaired, and, in general, a future, and, mostly, his just deserts."

Chap. 1, In Which the Hero Is Introduced and Receives a Blow, p. 8

"At the baptism party, in the rectory of Thermopylae's tiny Episcopal church, his father gave him a small sip of muscatel wine, and his seventeen-year-old godfather, his uncle Whittier Hayes, gave him a small copy of The Poetry of John Keats, which he didn't want either."

Chap. 4, How Raleigh Received His Name, p. 43

"When Pierce Jimson looked in a mirror, he saw his voice."

Chap. 5, In Which Raleigh Blackmails an Enemy and Frightens the Kaiser, p. 56

"Tunnels themselves did not bother Hayes. He was not claustrophobic; why should one so capable of holding himself by the bonds of character in such circumscribed inertia that he had survived the last two days without ripping out his hair, why should such a man fear caves and tunnels?"

Chap. 7, In Which the Hero Commits a Crime, p. 89

"The Buddhas laughed like fools, as if Christ had just told them a big joke, at Raleigh's expense."

Chap. 10, The First Sally Takes a Strange Turn, p. 117

"Murder, however, would not keep the rain off—unless he slit Mingo open and crawled inside."

Chap. 13, Wherein Is Continued the Account of the Innumerable Troubles Endured by Our Hero, p. 167

"Eternity was too much to get through. Life was hard enough."

Chap. 14, Sudden Impulses Overwhelm Our Hero, p. 191

"A thin boy in a Marine uniform, his hair shaved to a nub, his pimples scrubbed to a



flame, was now fidgeting behind Raleigh, slapping his coin loudly from palm to palm."  
Chap. 16, In Which Raleigh and Mingo Fall into a Swamp, p. 221

"It was shocking today to hear Betty Hemans tell him business was going on as usual; it was shocking to hear Aura tell him that, while of course they missed him enormously, life was going on as usual, except more dramatically now that she had rediscovered, like an old forgotten bank account, a rich world of interests she'd set aside to raise the twins."

Chap. 19, In Which the Hero Finds Himself at Sea, p. 266

"Yes, Mingo was laughing his head off out there. The indiscriminate fool could apparently get along with anybody. How odd that Sheffield had sat through twelve years of public school too terrified to open his mouth and now should be incapable of shutting it in the presence of every total stranger who crossed his path."

Chap. 21, In Which Is Described the Famous Barbecue at "Wild Oaks", p. 305

"This man appeared to be immune to the normal human need for sleep, and impervious to surprise at seeing Raleigh emerge from a room not his own, and a man who (in his messy black jeans and black Orlon shirt, with his black bloodshot eyes and rumpled slicked black hair—for Boyd had been driving all night with a pint of Seagram's to his lips, and wasn't at his best) did not look anything like a guest of the Ambrose Inn."

Chap. 24, In Which Are Continued the Misfortunes That Befell Our Hero at the Ambrose Inn, p. 355

"Raleigh did have a reason for deciding to join the church, and he knew very well what it was. He had drawn up a private contract with God in which he was prepared to offer dutiful faith in exchange for two favors: (1) that the Almighty stop his mother from being sad, and (2) that He invest Raleigh himself with superhuman physical strength, just as He had earlier done for Samson (and Raleigh had no worries about doing anything so ridiculous as allowing a silly girl to get near enough to cut his hair)."

Chap. 27, Why Raleigh Took His First Communion, p. 433

"Earley's warm, reedy laugh sang out over the square."

Chap. 32, How Raleigh Was Ordained in The Cave, p. 544

## Topics for Discussion

Why does Earley Hayes ask his son Raleigh to collect things and people, and bring them to New Orleans?

What changes in Mingo's character once he gains courage?

Describe Raleigh Hayes' attitude toward life at the beginning of the story.

What prompts Aura Hayes to engage in politics?

Why might Jubal Roberts be so withdrawn and haughty toward Raleigh? Compare and contrast Gates Hayes to his half brother Raleigh?

Of what significance is the plaster bust that Raleigh steals from the Thermopylae public library?

Describe Stone Mountain.

Why does Earley select New Orleans as Raleigh's destination?

What prompts Mingo to suspect his wife Vera is having an affair with Raleigh?