

Hattie Big Sky Study Guide

Hattie Big Sky by Kirby Larson

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Hattie Big Sky Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 and 2.....	4
Chapters 3 and 4.....	6
Chapters 5 and 6.....	8
Chapters 7 and 8.....	10
Chapters 9 and 10.....	12
Chapters 11 and 12.....	14
Chapter13.....	16
Chapter 14.....	18
Chapter 15.....	20
Chapter 16.....	22
Chapter 17.....	24
Chapter 18.....	26
Chapter 19.....	28
Chapters 20 and 21.....	30
Chapters 22 and 23.....	32
Characters.....	34
Objects/Places.....	42
Themes.....	44
Style.....	46
Quotes.....	48
Topics for Discussion.....	50



Plot Summary

Hattie Big Sky by Kirby Larson is a novel that takes place beginning in 1917 and follows the adventures of a sixteen-year-old orphan for approximately one year, telling her story from her own perspective. Hattie lost both her parents by the time she was five and has been reliant on a series of relatives for shelter and care, never really knowing a home of her own. At the age of thirteen, she is taken in by her Uncle Holt, who is really a distant cousin, and his wife Ivy. From Aunt Ivy's perspective, Hattie is inconvenient and should be placed somewhere useful as soon as possible. She finally accomplishes her goal when a local boarding house requires help, and though Hattie is sixteen and only months from finishing school, Ivy doesn't care. Uncle Holt is more inclined to let Hattie decide her future. He is one of her few supporters. The other is Charlie Hawley, who became her friend at thirteen and remained so, even giving her the old tomcat she calls Mr. Whiskers. Before Hattie is forced to make a decision about Iantha's boarding house, Uncle Holt gives her a letter. The postmark is from Montana, so she knows it can't be from Charlie, who left two months earlier to fight in the war. Opening it, she finds two letters. One is from a woman named Perilee Johnson Mueller, who says she promised the enclosed letter would be sent to Hattie as requested by her uncle when he passed. She claims that if Hattie accepts, she and her husband Karl will help in any way they can. The second note is from Hattie's Uncle Chester - her mother's only brother. He tells her that he has thought of her often, and though a scoundrel for most of his life, he had just begun to settle down when he discovered the cough he had was going to kill him. Now, his property of 320 acres in Montana is hers if she wants it. She only has to meet the remaining homestead requirements in order to keep it. Hoping she has some of her mother's backbone, he tells her, she is welcome to the house, a horse named Plug and a cow named Violet,. He suggests she dress warm and bring a cat if she decides to take him up on his offer, which he sincerely hopes she will. Ivy is beside herself, but Hattie is excited and answers Perilee's letter with one line - "I will come".

The next eleven months are an account of Hattie's adventures as a homesteader or 'Honyocker' in Montana. She had no idea what to expect when she left Arlington, Iowa and boarded the train, but Hattie's life changed forever when she made the decision to go. Spurred on by a feeling of finally belonging somewhere, Hattie takes on the challenge of proving up her Uncle Chester's land claim by cultivating one eighth of the 320-acre property, setting 480 rods of fence and then paying the final fee of just under thirty eight dollars for the free land. She tackles the challenge despite her initial fears, learning how to do all of these tasks and many more besides. In letters to Charlie and Uncle Holt, she relates her exploits as she learns how to care for her livestock, deal with a harsh and unforgiving Montana winter, cook, bake, wash, quilt and become a part of a community in an area that is wild and untamed. She finds friendship, learns the meaning of community, and discovers more about herself in the process than she believed possible.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Hattie Big Sky by Kirby Larson is a novel that takes place beginning in 1917 and follows the adventures of a sixteen-year-old orphan for approximately one year, telling her story from her own perspective. Hattie lost both her parents by the time she was five and has been reliant on a series of relatives for shelter and care, never really knowing a home of her own. At the age of thirteen, she is taken in by her Uncle Holt, who is really a distant cousin, and his wife Ivy. From Aunt Ivy's perspective, Hattie is inconvenient and should be placed somewhere useful as soon as possible. She finally accomplishes her goal when a local boarding house requires help, and though Hattie is sixteen and only months from finishing school, Ivy doesn't care. Uncle Holt is more inclined to let Hattie decide her future. He is one of her few supporters. The other is Charlie Hawley, who became her friend at thirteen and remained so, even giving her the old tomcat she calls Mr. Whiskers. Before Hattie is forced to make a decision about Iantha's boarding house, Uncle Holt gives her a letter. The postmark is from Montana, so she knows it can't be from Charlie, who left two months earlier to fight in the war. Opening it, she finds two letters. One is from a woman named Perilee Johnson Mueller, who says she promised the enclosed letter would be sent to Hattie as requested by her uncle when he passed. She claims that if Hattie accepts, she and her husband Karl will help in any way they can. The second note is from Hattie's Uncle Chester - her mother's only brother. He tells her that he has thought of her often, and though a scoundrel for most of his life, he had just begun to settle down when he discovered the cough he had was going to kill him. Now, his property of 320 acres in Montana is hers if she wants it. She only has to meet the remaining homestead requirements in order to keep it. Hoping she has some of her mother's backbone, he tells her, she is welcome to the house, a horse named Plug and a cow named Violet,. He suggests she dress warm and bring a cat if she decides to take him up on his offer, which he sincerely hopes she will. Ivy is beside herself, but Hattie is excited and answers Perilee's letter with one line - "I will come".

Ivy is dead set against the idea, but Hattie is soon on the Great Northern Railway headed from Arlington, Iowa, to Vida, Montana, with little more than her cat Whiskers, a bag of clothing and what little remained of the inheritance Hattie got when her mother passed away. She writes to Charlie again on the train, sharing her adventure with him. By the third day, Hattie is ready to arrive, sore and tired of the travel. The general attitude on the train seems to be against the idea of anyone who is homesteading, but Hattie manages to have the last word as she disembarks. Fearful to the point of shaking, Hattie gets off the train with Mr. Whiskers and resists the urge to climb back aboard and forget the whole thing.



Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Hattie is an orphan. She has spent most of her life shuttled from one relative to another, working for her keep where she could, and relying on the generosity of more distant family all the time. Now, at the age of sixteen, she is living with her Uncle Holt and his wife Ivy. Ivy has made it abundantly clear that she would be happier to be rid of Hattie and is impatient and unforgiving with her. Hattie has been with them since the age of thirteen, when she arrived with little more than the clothes she carried. Painfully shy, Charlie Hawley immediately took her under his wing, walking her to school, and giving her the old tom cat Mr. Whiskers for company. Hattie nurses a private crush on Charlie, but knows that he is sweet on Mildred. Still, Hattie feels as though Charlie is one of the nicest things that ever happened to her, and when he boarded the train to go off to war, life in Arlington went flat for Hattie. Still, she wrote to him frequently.

Aunt Ivy has been unexpectedly nice to Hattie of late, and when Hattie answers her call to the parlor, she discovers the reason. Aunt Ivy has finely found a way to get rid of Hattie. Iantha Wells needs help at her boarding house, and Ivy recommended Hattie immediately. Uncle Holt, sensitive to Hattie's feelings as always, suggests they sleep on the whole idea and hands Hattie the letter from Montana that came in the mail. Inside, Hattie discovers that for the first time in her life, she has a home. Her Uncle Chester, a man she has never met, has died and willed Hattie 320 acres in Montana that he has begun homesteading. He tells Hattie that he is sure she has enough of her mother's backbone to make a go of it. That instant, Hattie makes up her mind to go. Ivy is not pleased and refuses to even see her off at the train station, but Uncle Holt tells her that he is sure she will be fine and hopes to hear from her now and then. Hattie strikes out on her own, bound for Montana with her cat, Mr. Whiskers, and little more than her clothing. Perilee had responded immediately, pleased that Hattie accepted and promising to meet her at the station when she arrives.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Hattie begins her first letter to Uncle Holt as she waits in Wolf Point, Montana, for the rest of her journey to begin. Perilee and Karl had arrived with three children in the back, and after making cheerful introductions, announces that it is too late in the afternoon to head home so the night would be spent in Wolf Point. Perilee tells her that they will be home by suppertime the following day. The family settles into the only hotel while Hattie goes to Mr. Ebgard's to discuss the details required for her to prove out her claim. Then Mr. Ebgard steers her to the local Grocery and Bakery to stock up. As she is leaving, she meets another of her neighbors, Jim Fowler, or Rooster Jim, as he is known locally, who cheerfully announces his intention to continue his neighborly chess games with her, undaunted by the fact that he will have to teach her how to play. Then Hattie goes to Hanson's and buys the necessary goods to get her through. Perilee shows up just in time to remind her to add feed for Violet and Plug before they head back to the hotel where after dinner, Hattie's head filled with the wonderful thoughts of belonging and having her own place, sleeps better than she can remember.

Three miles north and west of Vida, Montana is Hattie's new homestead. Perilee leaves Hattie with some good homesteaders advice, along with a stew and a fresh baked strudel for supper and Hattie gives her a bag of coffee beans to thank her for their kindnesses. After they've left she builds a fire, heats supper and makes coffee. Mr. Whiskers quickly catches his first mouse, providing his own dinner. She eats, pulls her bed down from the wall and makes it up with the only sheets she owns. Then she dons almost every article of clothing she owns before finally feeling warm enough to sleep. The next morning is cold and she learns her first homestead lesson - get water from the well the night before for morning coffee. She manages to pump a bucket, but her bare hand adheres itself to the pump handle and Hattie would have been in a pickle had it not been for Chase, who arrives on horseback leading Plug and Violet home. He frees her and Hattie makes them both breakfast before sending her young knight home. She follows his advice to wrap a mitten around the handle. That night she prays that all of her education is not gained the hard way.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Hattie writes Uncle Holt from the hotel and tells him about her wait at the train station, fearful that something had happened to Perilee and Karl when they weren't there to meet her, and adds how happy she was that she was resourceful enough to have scouted out the nearby Hotel and resolved to hike there as Perilee and her family rode up in the wagon. Karl says little, embarrassed by his lack of English language skills, but the children make up for his lack of conversation. The oldest of Perilee's three children, eight-year-old Chase tells Hattie that he's been feeding Plug the horse and Violet the cow at his place for her. Hattie soon learns that she has until just November to cultivate



a minimum of one-eighth of her claim — forty acres, and to set four hundred and eighty rods of fencing. Normally, three years are allowed, but Chester had staked the claim in November of 1915 and had used his time to build the house and barn. The final fees required by the coming November would be thirty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents for the free land.

Hattie heads for supplies. Perilee joins her and attempts to trade her homemade strudel for a small amount of coffee, but Hanson tells her that German goods simply aren't selling because of the war. He offers her the coffee on credit, which she proudly refuses. Hattie buys the family dinner for their kindness.

Calling what Chester has built a house is a bit exaggerated as it is more like a one-room shack, but Perilee is cheerful and regales her with stories of sod houses and worse that some have endured to stake their claims. She tells Hattie she can use the snow that has drifted in through the keyhole for her coffee and warns her to leave Mr. Whiskers inside for a few days to deal with the mice that have no doubt moved in. It is about all of the new advice that Hattie can cheerfully take, and Perilee immediately takes to the plucky young girl. Her lessons in homestead life begin immediately, and Hattie learns quickly, but resolves to maintain a cheerful outlook. She talks to Mr. Whiskers and carries on regular conversations with God, remembering to thank Him for her many good fortunes before asking for any extras. She does, however, pray that all of her lessons are not learned by difficult trial and error and is grateful for her neighbors who are quick with help and advice.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Hattie's letters to Uncle Holt and to Charlie continue as she humorously describes her new home and surroundings, and riding by on his way to Vida, Rooster Jim offers to mail them for her. She begins to settle into a routine of sorts, feeding the animals first, and soon learns their quirks and quarks, discovering that Plug is as gentle a soul as Violet is ornery. It is a daily challenge to milk her without injury or loss of milk. One morning she turns them out but is alerted to a new danger by Mr. Whiskers. She spies the wolf stalking Violet and runs to her aid without thinking of anything past the necessity of saving her milk giving cow. She manages to scare the wolf off by lobbing stones at it, but not before it takes a good chunk of Violet's tail off. She gets Violet back to the barn and rides Plug over to Perilee's to ask her advice to treat her wound. Perilee is upset herself by the fact that Karl has been made to go to Vida to register himself as an alien enemy. Hattie assures her Karl will be fine and heads home to put a poultice on Violet's tail.

By mid February, Hattie is settling in. Her letters regale Charlie and Uncle Holt with her exploits. She spends her spare time going over seed catalogs and praying that the snow leaves early so that she can begin the requirements necessary to keep her homestead. Violet was the first to warn Hattie that something was coming, but Hattie doesn't recognize it. She turns out Plug as usual and goes back to the cabin. Not long after, a vicious storm begins and Hattie finally understands why her uncle Chester left the rope coiled on the floor. She gathers it up and ties one end to the metal eye outside the cabin door. Then, with her head down, she pushes her way back to the barn. It takes everything she has to get there through the wind and secure. She can only hope that Plug will find his way home. Hand over hand, she pulls her way back to the cabin and concentrates her efforts on keeping warm. Even Mr. Whiskers doesn't want to be outside. Not long after, she hears her name being called outside. To her surprise, Perilee's two oldest children are outside the door sitting on Plug. She brings them in and warms them up, giving them coffee with milk and some of her homemade bread with jam. That night the storm rages on, so Hattie insists they stay with her. The next morning, nearly frantic with worry, Karl arrives at the door. He is half frozen and his cheeks and toes show the beginnings of frostbite. She she does all she can to warm him up before he takes the kids back to Perilee with much gratitude.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Hattie rights to Uncle Holt describing the life filled with grandeur and glamour, all tongue-in-cheek. She tells him about the snow piled higher than she's ever seen it and describes winter as Goliath with her as David. She makes a point to thank him for the boots he gave her before she left, telling him that filled with newspaper they fit fine. Then she finishes her letter to Charlie as well and heads outside to do her morning



chores. She has been in Montana long enough now to understand that it is her obligation to invite Rooster Jim in for coffee when he shows up. She does so but he declines, instead offering to take her mail into town. When he leaves, she decides he will be an interesting neighbor.

Violet is every bit as stubborn as her reputation. She takes great pleasure in making even the simplest chore difficult. Hattie, in one of her conversations with God, thanks Him for her, but still describes her as more devil than cow. When the wolf takes off a large section of the tail that has whipped her mercilessly, she laughs and thinks that God does indeed work in mysterious ways. It is just one of many challenges Hattie now faces without qualm or question. She is disturbed by her conversation with Perilee, who admits that Karl has to register himself as an alien enemy. The very sentence makes Perilee angry and afraid for him, and has the same effect on Hattie, although she doesn't reveal that. Instead, she assures her that Karl will be fine.

Hattie is ready for spring to start by February, but Montana still has a few surprises for her. A wicked storm brings whiteout conditions revealing the reason Uncle Chester kept a length of rope near the barn, with metal eyes fixed on both the house and the barn. Hattie barely manages to tie the line and make her way home, hand over hand. The next challenge is keeping warm, and she wonders if the shack will withstand the Montana winds. She stokes the fire and hangs her only spare blanket over the door before Perilee's two children, Chase and Mattie, arrive riding Plug. Chase and Mattie had been released from school early because of the severity of the storm, but hadn't made it home. Hattie wastes no time getting them warm and settled in, and she assures them that their mother knows how smart they are and will know that they are safe. Night falls and the storm rages on, so the children all climb into her bed and Hattie climbs in behind them. When morning comes, Karl arrives, frozen almost solid and near panic, but Hattie assures him the children are fine. She tends to the parts of him that are frozen, filling him with hot coffee, bread and jam before he bundles the kids up and takes them home to a likely frantic Perilee.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Another letter to Charlie reveals Hattie's newest challenge — fence building. She is grateful that all of the materials necessary were stacked up behind the barn. November looms. There is little time for anything but work. She dons her work clothes and goes outside to continue where she left off the day before to find that nearly forty rods have been planted in her absence. She marvels again at the generosity of Karl and Perilee. When she heads back for dinner, strange sounds come from the barn. Leafie Purvis steps out to greet her. Leafie pulls out a trunk that Chester had asked her to set aside for Hattie. Their visit is interrupted when a group of men ride into the area, pushing a cow hard ahead of them. Leafie fires her weapon into the air to stop them and they leave the cow alone. Leafie promises to return the cow to Perilee and recognizes that her friends and neighbors are being victimized. The next day Hattie is picking rocks to prepare for planting when Traft Martin rides up and introduces himself. He helps her pick rocks from her field for an hour before heading home again, brushing off her gratitude by announcing the adage that neighbors should help each other.

Tuesday is ironing day, and Hattie has her underthings laid out and ready when Traft comes calling. Embarrassed that her intimates are on display, she quickly throws them into an empty lard bucket and makes him coffee, bread and jam. He also brings Hattie her mail and offers to take her to church on Easter Sunday. She is beginning to enjoy some of the simple routines, including Chase and Mattie stopping in on their way home from school, and she bakes biscuits in anticipation. One day they run on by in the distance. A group of boys is chasing them, and Hattie runs to intercept and intercede. Chase has obviously been fighting, and Hattie immediately hones in on the largest boy and demands an explanation. What she hears saddens and depresses her, changing her outlook somewhat. Chase and Mattie are targeted because their step-father is Karl — a German. The boy calls Hattie a hun lover, but Hattie stands her ground and manages to diffuse the problem. Unfortunately, even biscuits and help to clean his wounds won't convince Chase to even consider attending school again.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Hattie learns from her neighbors and friends, and slowly the fence begins to take shape. Her hands ache every night. Hattie tells Charlie how confused she is by the trend toward hating everything German and can't understand why good folks who have nothing to do with the war now come under scrutiny and worse. Her confusion only deepens when she sees men driving Perilee and Karl's cow in front of their horses, intent on running it to death. Neighbor Leafie Purvis is there at the time, and walks the cow home after they settle it down. The next day, Traft Martin shows up to introduce himself, and Hattie is caught off guard by how handsome he is, and more so by his willingness to pick rocks with her for over an hour. After he leaves, Hattie is reminded



that she is alone, and for a brief moment feels sorry for herself, but that soon dissolves as she remembers the work required in order for her to prove her claim.

Hattie continues her letters to Charlie, this time discussing the new Daylight Savings Time plan that is to be initiated in an effort to help decrease the use of coal. Traft comes to visit and tells Hattie how to improve on the quality of her bread by putting a sponge over the water reservoir on the stove when she is baking - a tip she greatly appreciates. Hattie tells Traft she'll attend church on Easter Sunday if she can, but will make her own way there. Hattie was raised to see a man escorting a woman to church as courting, and that was something she simply isn't ready for. When Chase and Mattie run by instead of stopping, Hattie realizes they are being chased and intervenes. The group of boys accuse her of being a hun lover and challenge her, but she stands her ground. It is deeply disturbing to her that even the children are joining the cultural bias happening in the community and she resolves to attend church on Easter Sunday and bring the matter up. After she helps Chase clean up and tries to lighten the mood, the children still go home and Hattie returns to fence building, saddened and confused.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Hattie, making good on her decision, cleans herself up and takes special care and attention with her grooming before mounting Plug and riding him to church on Easter Sunday. She is greeted enthusiastically by Grace Robbins, who even brought extra knitting needles and wool for Hattie to knit with after the service for the soldiers. They discuss the merits of Daylight Savings Time and Mrs. Martin announces that Reverend Tweed has agreed to start a church choir. Hattie, thinking of Perilee and her lovely singing voice, says she knows just the person who should join and brings up Perilee Mueller's name. Mrs. Martin is not the only person in the room who becomes silent at the suggestion before telling Hattie that Perilee doesn't attend church. Hattie is determined, insisting that it would be a good time for her to start again, but the reception is icy and followed by a less than veiled threat the the Council of Defense would find it interesting that she was on Chester's claim alone at her age. Grace warns Hattie to silence herself, and Hattie can't get out of there fast enough. She rides Plug home, feeling shell-shocked to find that in her absence someone had been there and left a note on the table suggesting she join the Montana Loyalty League to help other like minded folks "hunt home huns, check class conflicts, and promote pure patriotism".

By April 2nd, Hattie is still unable to plant as the soil is so wet that the seeds would rot before they grew. Traft Martin stops by again to deliver Hattie's mail, though she wishes he wouldn't, and offers to help her lay fencing, but she declines. Hattie is somewhat abrupt with Traft, but as he readies to leave, he asks her if she would consider attending a dance at the Vida Community Hall. When Hattie declines, saying she doesn't dance, he insists it is her patriotic duty as the dance is to raise money for the Liberty Bond drive. Hattie comments about the Loyalty League notice she found in her home after church and Traft asks if she has said anything against the war. She assures him she hasn't, and Traft mentions that her friendship with Karl might be a problem as Karl had made comments about free speech that could be construed as seditious. When Hattie bristles, he covers by saying it was likely just kids playing a prank. As he leaves, he calls out that he'll see her at the dance. She works the rest of the afternoon, saving her mail as dessert for after dinner, and is later surprised and pleased to find a check for fifteen dollars in Uncle Holt's envelope. He claims her letters amused him so much he passed them on to the local paper, which began printing them with hopes that they would be a monthly installment. Hattie tallies the profits she would see for her homesteading stories and realizes she will have enough to pay out her claim, with room to spare.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Hattie's friendship with the Mueller's seems to be a growing problem for some as is made evident at church on Easter Sunday. Hattie suggests that Perilee's angelic voice



would be a lovely addition to the newly proposed choir. Her suggestion is met with resounding silence, followed by distinct disapproval. It is clear that Perilee and her German husband are not welcome with most in the area. In fact, when Hattie is openly supportive of them, she is warned that her solo attempt at homesteading at her age might be an issue that would be of interest to the Council of Defense. Distressed, she leaves and rides home, stunned and discouraged by their attitude and demeanor. When she arrives, she finds a note on the table that invites her to join the Montana Loyalty League, which is little more than a band of bigots who are out to rid the area of any German residents.

By the beginning of April, Hattie still isn't able to plant, but is told by locals that she still has lots of time, so she concentrates her efforts on fencing and rock pulling. Traft stops on his way home with her mail again, and the subject of her loyalty to the war effort comes to the surface again. Invited to a dance with him, when she declines he suggests it might seem unpatriotic of her to refuse. Hattie bristles, still disturbed by the note from the Montana Loyalty League, and Traft asks her if she has made comments that might be construed incorrectly. Hattie is adamant that her behavior has been without reproach, but Traft delicately insists that her friendship with Karl could be the issue. Hattie again finds herself stubbornly defending her neighbor and friend. Traft leaves and she continues to build fence until dinnertime. Reading her mail after dinner, she is thrilled to discover that her stories to Uncle Holt will net her enough money to survive and pay out her claim. She even resolves to forgo a much needed pair of boots in favor of purchasing Perilee the rocking chair she saw in the catalog recently and showed Hattie.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Rooster Jim picks Hattie up for the dance, and as they enter, they are immediately met by Leafie. Hattie helps to set up food and asks if the Martins are coming but Leafie warns her that Traft is Trouble. Still, when he arrives with a group of his cowboy friends, she is unable to resist his request for a dance. It is finished way too soon for Hattie and they are all called to dinner, after which Mr. Saboe announces that it is time to purchase the Liberty Bonds. To reach Montana's quota of three million dollars, he tells them, every man, woman and child in the state would have to contribute just thirty dollars — a goal not unattainable. Hattie joins the line up and gives him her five dollar down payment. Traft wants to look at the names to see who isn't contributing, but Mr. Saboe refuses. When Traft's friends join him, Mr. Saboe begins to get nervous and Hattie steps in to diffuse the situation by asking Traft to dance. Unable to refuse her for the ladies choice selection, he accepts, warning her at the end that she should never play poker. The dance continues until dawn, and when Rooster Jim takes Mattie home, she realizes that Mattie has forgotten her doll — a crisis to Mattie for sure. As first light is breaking, she decides to ride Plug over to return it. When she reaches the bottom of the cutback, she smells smoke.

Praying the house is not on fire, Hattie rides Plug hard until she gets there to find the Mueller family trying hard to extinguish the barn. Chase is carrying buckets Perilee fills for him and Hattie joins in, but the fire is too advanced, and finally Karl signals his defeat. Chase tells Hattie that he and Karl managed to pull the horses out, but the cow and her calf perished in the fire. It is a loss that will cost the Mueller family milk, cream and so much more. When Hattie finally goes home, discouraged, she sees a tall rider in the distance and recognizes Traft's mount. She can't believe he could be responsible. She goes out to milk Violet and finds one of her own hay bales smoldering. Horrified, she manages to put it out before it does damage. The next day she leads Violet to the Mueller household and announces her gift is for the baby. She also unveils the package of cloth pieces left for her in Uncle Chester's trunk and tells Perilee they should begin a quilt for the baby as well.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Hattie goes to the dance to support the troops, as do Perilee and Karl, along with the children. The tension mounts a bit when the war bonds are being sold and Traft wants an accounting of who is and who isn't participating, but Hattie helps to diffuse things and the rest of the night is fine. At one point, Hattie offers to hold Fern and give Karl and Perilee a much needed opportunity to dance and watching them twirl around the floor happily, Perilee heavy with the next child, and the smell of baby Fern in her nostrils, Hattie concludes that nice as Traft can be, he is not what she wants from life. She is looking for the kind of solid love that Perilee and Karl have. She wants a relationship



that is as solid as the 320 Montana acres she is working so hard to make a go of. They wrap things up at dawn, and once home again, Hattie realizes that she has Mattie's doll, Mulie. Knowing the young girl will be distraught without her, and since she will have to milk Violet in an hour or so anyway, she gets on Plug and rides over. The open prairie makes her a bit nervous, but she forgets all about that as she gets closer and smells smoke in the air.

After doing all she can for Perilee and family, Hattie goes home and sees Traft in the distance, leaving her place. She finds it hard to believe that he could be responsible, but the evidence is overwhelming and she resolves to avoid him in the future. She goes out to the barn to milk Violet, and finds her own small fire starting. She puts it out quickly before it can spread. Then she opens Uncle Chester's trunk and as for guidance telling herself that she will let the first thing her hands touch lead her in the right direction. Opening her eyes, she smiles in agreement.

The next morning, she leads Violet to the Mueller house as a gift to the family, telling them it will give her an excuse to come regularly for milk. Unwrapping the cloth pieces, she tells Perilee that it's time to make a quilt for the new baby too, and Perilee accepts graciously and thankfully. She tells Hattie that she should probably keep her distance for a while, to avoid association with them, but Hattie has made up her mind. She will not be bullied from her friends and she is determined to do the right thing, not the easy thing.



Chapter13

Chapter13 Summary

Hattie writes her article for the Arlington News - Honyocker's Homily, and announces that she is finally able to begin sowing seed. She hooks Plug up with a neck halter and harness and then to the plow, and once Plug realizes she is serious, he gets to work. Rooster Jim rides by and is more than a little amused by her progress, suggesting between guffaws that she try plowing a straight line rather than a circle. Later Karl stands with her, looking over the field, and in German he announces that it is nothing good and gestures her need for a machine to do the work. Hattie can't help but agree, feeling she will be ninety before it is finished.

Perilee has accepted Hattie's gift of a rocker, and her help doing laundry and other chores she is unable to do now, and Hattie has all but moved into their home for the time being. While Perilee rests, Hattie sends the children out with buckets to collect greens for stew. Then, with laundry hung, she goes out in search of the children. They are headed home with a deep rumble sounds in the earth and a stampede of wild horses can be seen heading straight for them. Hattie tells the children to run and stands her ground on the opposite side of the creek with her petticoat in hand, waving it over her head, yelling and jumping to divert the thundering mass. The stallion in the lead stops, confused and Hattie is grateful that Aunt Ivy had always insisted she wear at least one petticoat under a skirt.

When Sunday came, Perilee and the children decide to join Hattie in church. Though nervous at first, when the congregation begins to sing, her beautiful voice can be heard over the din of the rest. Reverend Tweed tells her afterward that she has the voice of an angel and simply must join their choir, but Mrs. Martin is quick to announce that altos are unneeded as she has plenty. It is clear that she objects to Perilee, not to her singing voice. Perilee maintains her composure, telling the Reverend that while his offer is appreciated, she is much too preoccupied with the baby coming to join his choir and leaves with Hattie and the children. If nothing else, she had enjoyed the opportunity to sing again.

Chapter13 Analysis

It is much more difficult than Hattie realizes to plow using a hand plow. She has to keep weight on the plowshare in order to keep it embedded in the dirt and before long, blisters have formed. They are bleeding by the end of the first row. After the fifth row she has no feeling in her hands, her shoulders are beaten and she has a shiner from falling hard. Karl makes Hattie a deal to plow her forty acres by machine if she will donate a further twenty acres to him. It is also contingent on Hattie watching over Perilee, whose baby is due in two months but is already making life difficult for her. It is a deal she can't refuse.



Hattie's nerve is tested again that afternoon as she is forced to place herself between a stampede of wild horses and the children, waving her underthings to distract and turn the lead stallion. It is just one of many things she would not have believed she had the nerve for before coming to Montana. Hattie is changing with every day, and though many days are difficult, the benefit to her character and strength are immeasurable. The war time attitudes continue to frighten and divide people who not long before lived happily as neighbors and friends. When Perilee joins Hattie in church that Sunday for the first time, her wonderful singing voice is easily picked out among the many. Reverend Tweed quickly invites her to join the choir, but Mrs. Martin asserts her prejudice. It is clear from her attitude that she can barely tolerate the fact that a woman who is married to a German man is even in "her" church. As always, Perilee maintains her ladylike demeanor and insists she would have no time to join such a group now. Hattie admires her strength of character in this ongoing and undeserved slight against her and her husband who's only crime was that he was born in another country.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Two weeks later, Hattie comes across Leafie, who is on her way to town to run errands for Karl. Karl doesn't dare leave Perilee now and Perilee is increasingly insistent that he stay away from the Council of Defense members, who are out of control. Perilee even asked Karl not to attend Lutheran services, but there Karl drew the line and wouldn't yield. They have coffee and pie together and agree to meet up in an hour to walk home together.

Hattie's errands take her to Nefzger's store and post office where Mr. Nefzger regretfully tells her that Chester left behind an IOU for the fencing, and until now he hadn't had the heart to present it to her. Hattie gives him every dime she has on her, but it isn't nearly enough to cover the \$220 bill. She promises to pay the rest off as quickly as she can and leaves, running into Traft Martin outside. She tells him that she saw him leaving her place the night of the fire. He starts to explain himself but can see by her face that she isn't receptive to anything he has to say. At that moment, Rooster Jim careens past them, out of control on his newest acquisition — a bicycle. Unable to stop, he steers for a hay bale and ruefully announces that he shouldn't have traded a pig for the useless contraption. Leafie joins her at that moment and they walk back, Leafie keeping up a steady stream of conversation while Hattie goes over and over in her mind the newest developments both financially and with Traft Martin.

A week later, Hattie finally finishes her fence and walks to Rooster Jim's, feeling cause for celebration. She is amused to discover that he turned the bicycle into a trellis for string beans. He tells her that it's time her farm had the addition of some hens, and donates three of his flock to get her started. He also throws in a rooster to keep her flock going. When she gets home she realizes her hen house has no fence and has to laugh as she realizes her fencing chores will likely never be done. She puts the chickens and rooster in the house for safe keeping and spends the rest of the afternoon and early evening competently fencing the area off. Exhausted, she turns them loose inside and barely has the energy to eat.

A letter from Charlie reveals the death of a comrade and his deepening desire to come home. She replies, telling him all she can to distract him from the death all around him and signs off telling him to keep himself safe and his boots dry.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Leafie and Hattie walk to town together and Leafie tells her that the services at the Lutheran Church were recently disrupted. Pastor Shatz was fined for preaching in German so that his many members could understand the service. The Council of Defense not only fined him but threatened to jail him if it happened again. Leafie is



clearly disturbed, as is Hattie, but Leafie isn't fearful of the Martins herself. She tells Hattie that the one thing worse than the wrath of the Martin brothers would be to stand by and do nothing when you know what folks are doing is wrong.

Hattie learns about the IOU Chester left behind at Nefzger's and is so engrossed in her new financial hurdle that she hardly hears Traft talking to her outside until he comments that he hasn't seen her in some time and inquires as to whether she is avoiding him. That wakes her from her stupor. Her tone is so accusatory that Traft knows there is no point in trying to explain at the moment, but he is clearly trying to defend himself, which confuses Hattie.

She hasn't seen Rooster Jim since the incident with the bicycle and decides to walk his hat, left behind at the scene, back to him. He tells her it's time to add chickens to her farm and donates three hens and a rooster. The crowing Albert does at first light is not exactly a welcome sound she is soon to discover, and chicken farming comes with its own challenges as well. She has trouble getting her hens to sit until Rooster comes by and shows her how to tie one leg to a nail in the wall to allow just enough room to eat, get water and nest. All but one soon get the message, and she follows his advice and dunks that one in frustration. The hen goes into shock, and at first she thinks it's dead, but it recovers and proves to be a good layer and setter.

A letter from Charlie reveals the distinct lack of glamor in the job he is doing. Where he so eagerly enlisted to help the war effort at first, his concerns are now reduced to his next hot meal, real shower and always the hope of coming home soon. He also continues to berate her for not writing more often, unaware that her letters are plentiful and have just not yet arrived. She sits down and writes again, hoping to cheer him with news of anything but more war.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

On May 15th, Hattie writes again to Uncle Holt, telling him about their nearest thing to a doctor, Leafie, who could be counted on to prepare everything from a poultice to a splint. Hattie happens to be with Leafie one day when she detours to the Ren farm to check on Mabel and her six children. While they are there, Elmer Ren is arrested by Deputy Patton and another man for neglecting to register for the draft. Ages twenty-one to thirty-one face mandatory registration, and Elmer is thirty-one. He argues, reminding Deputy Patton that his family need him. Elmer Junior runs out of the barn with a hoe and demands that his father be let go, but no amount of begging or pleading changes the inevitable. Elmer Junior chases the men until he trips in a prairie dog hole, breaking his arm. Luckily, Leafie is there to set it, and also promises to talk to Reverend Shatz to see about raising money for Elmer's bail. Several hours later, Leafie and Hattie return with news that Elmer will be released the following day on bail and to remind Mabel that she has friends who will help no matter what. All Hattie can think of is the sanctimonious letter she had written to the Arlington news supporting the draft and citing how every man should do his duty and that it was a small sacrifice to have to leave one's family compared to what others suffered.

The days pass and the papers are full of reports of people accused of sedition. Hattie can't help but notice the names reported all sound German. The lack of rain is discouraging, and she worries about her crop as the heat is relentless. She goes out and picks cheatgrass until, overcome by heat, she tips over. The next voice she hears is Traft's as he helps her into the house. A cool cloth is put on her forehead and he makes them both a cup of tea before admitting the true reason he is there. He has a proposition for Hattie. He will loan her eight hundred dollars, four hundred of which is to be used to pay out the money left owing to prove up. Then, he will forgive the debt providing she commute his claim to him so that he can expand his ranch adding her 320 acres to his. Hattie thanks him for the generous offer and for bringing her inside, but she turns him down. She can't explain her reasons and isn't sure herself how sound they are, but she isn't ready to give up.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Hattie's eyes are opened yet again when she happens to be out with Leafie, and is at the homestead of Elmer Ren when Deputy Patton shows up to arrest him for failing to register for the draft. She had recently send an article to the Arlington News, thinking about the war, and suggesting that everyone should be happy to do their duty and commit their time to the war effort. It was easy for her to write this article from home, and at the time that she wrote it, she truly believed it, but to see Elmer physically taken from a family who so obviously needed him certainly puts things into perspective for her. She realizes that this is more than a small sacrifice, especially for men who have a



family that is counting on them. Knowing how difficult it is to deal with the homestead requirements, she suddenly understands that to have a husband and father taken from a homestead leaving his wife to deal with proving up, raising children and managing to put food on the table is not such a simple or even reasonable request — even if there is a good and justifiable cause for such action. She finds herself regretting the words she penned and recognizing the cost to some families.

To add to her regret for that article, she reads more and more in her own papers regarding some families and accusations of sedition against them. Once again, this issue hits home when she sees how easily this charge can be made against people who most often have done nothing to deserve it. Karl is a perfect example of a man who is being condemned simply because of his birth place. The fact that he has lived as their neighbor and been part of their community long enough to be a positive and decent influence on those around him, helps his fellow man and is morally beyond reproach counts for less than does his last name is both depressing and frightening. She wonders if war is making people lose their minds as well as their judgment.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Hattie spends a great deal of time with Perilee as the day for her baby to be born draws near. They are working together in an effort to finish a quilt for the baby, and while Perilee promises that the baby will not be born before the quilt is done, it is a promise she is unable to keep. Karl comes racing through one night to tell her that the baby is coming. Hattie heads for their homestead immediately, telling him to go ahead and get Leafie. When Hattie arrives, the children are worried and Perilee is much closer to delivering her baby than even Hattie wants to admit.

She prays Leafie will get there in time, but begins preparations just in case. Chase, as the oldest, is in need of some way to be useful, so Hattie puts him to work filling the chip box and fetching water while she puts out newspaper and makes up a bed for the coming infant. Their baby girl is born long before Leafie and Karl return, and Hattie is amazed at how tiny she is. Despite her fears that she would be inadequate, she manages to tie off and cut the cord, clean up little Charlotta and get her back to her mother. The amount of blood worries her, and she hopes that Leafie will arrive soon to tell her that this a normal occurrence.

When Leafie finally arrives with Karl, she is pleased with Hattie's efforts and immediately takes charge. Since the baby is premature, the most important thing is to keep her warm. They put little Lottie in a bread pan on the open oven door, and for the next week Hattie shuttles her back and forth from the door to her mother and back again, while looking after the household for Perilee. When it is clear that Lottie is out of the woods, and will be fine, Hattie finally returns to her own home. Although Jim has been doing her most pressing chores for her, she has fallen behind in so much and struggles to get it all done. On the second night at home, she realizes that her unrest is due entirely to the fact that she misses her surrogate family and is lonely.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Hattie's most recent article to the Arlington News cites how her high school teacher, Miss Simpson, would approve of the kind of lessons that living in Montana is teaching her. Her efforts at domesticity are vastly improved, and while she will never consider herself to be equal to Perilee in the cooking or baking department, she now considers her own efforts to be edible. She also cites her growing competency with a quilting needle. She remembers on how first arriving she thought that the Montana landscape was flat and dull, and now was able to see the subtleties and beauty of every coulee and cutback. She is already beginning to think about how she can capture this design in a quilt of her own creation after the quilt for Perilee's baby is complete.



Hattie also appreciates Perilee's ability to substitute in recipes as some items become more difficult to get as a result of the war. Using cornmeal instead of flour to make bread and muffins is a good example of Perilee's ingenuity. Perilee has little appetite as the delivery date for her baby approaches. Hattie distracts her and keeps up her spirits, and when the time comes she discovers that she has more fortitude than she would have imagined, delivering Perilee's baby herself and managing to keep everything under control until Leafie and Karl return.

After spending a full week with Perilee and the family, helping with the chores and generally ensuring that everything is okay before returning to her own homestead to resume her chores, Hattie discovers that not only has she behaved with the same love and care a sister would, but she has felt like a sister. Now, she misses her family and the meals alone are lonely.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Rooster Jim brings Hattie her mail, and over chess they discuss the latest way in which the war will cost them. June 28th has been declared National War Savings Day, and everyone is encouraged to purchase war savings stamps. The fact that war bonds have already been purchased does not count and further contribution is expected. On that day, Hattie pledges everything she can, and is told that the minimum allowable pledge is one hundred dollars. Even with a good crop, Hattie will not be able to pay her bills with that large a pledge. When she voices her concern, she is threatened with a trip in front of a judge to review her patriotism. Trying not to cry, she rewrites her pledge to reflect the minimum. She tells Leafie afterward that she doesn't know how she will make it. Leafie invites her to the parade at Wolf Point, telling her she is taking Perilee's kids with her.

Hattie goes with Leafie to the parade, where they see the newest in automobiles and Mr. Hanson offers them candy and cold sarsaparilla. Fern drops her flag and Hattie sends the others ahead while she collects it from the street afterward. She hears voices that catch her attention, with Traft as their ringleader. Mr. Ebgard is the latest victim of their bullying, and Hattie listens in horror as they claim he hasn't done enough for the war effort. He tries to reason with the group but things go from bad to worse as they suggest that if he truly loves his country he will get on his hands and knees and crawl towards the flag. The humiliation is followed by physical abuse, at which point Hattie can stand by no longer. She strides into the office, announcing her appointment time, and takes Ebgard to his office. Traft backs down and calls off his men. When the coast is clear, Hattie returns to Hanson's with Ebgard's deep appreciation.

Chapter 17 Analysis

When Traft creates the latest in a growing list of ways to put his hand into the pockets of all farmers, Hattie truly doesn't know how she will get by. The declaration of a National War Savings Day, upon which each farmer is required to purchase a minimum of a hundred dollars worth of war savings stamps, is enough to break many farmers, especially those like Hattie, who are stretched to the outer limits of her budget as it is. Even with a full and hearty crop, this pledge will put her well into the red and make it impossible for her to pay her debts. She tells Leafie about it, and Leafie recommends that Hattie take her mind off it for a while by attending the parade in Wolf Point. Instead of helping however, the day is further complicated by Hattie's witness of Traft and his men further abusing their power, and in the process, abusing Mr. Ebgard. They accuse him of being less than patriotic, bully him and then begin to physically abuse him at which point Hattie can stand by and do nothing no longer. She goes to Ebgard's rescue, claiming she is late for their meeting and walking him into the back office. Traft backs



down then, but Hattie sees another example of him abusing his power and she likes him less and less.

By the time Hattie gets back to Hanson's where Leafie and Perilee's children wait, she is unable to even discuss the event.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Independence Day celebrations give Hattie a chance to demonstrate her pitching arm in the friendly game of baseball that is regularly played, and the picnic is filled with goodies brought by all. It is so hot that Hattie has been dragging her mattress outside at night, trying to take advantage of even the slightest drop in temperature. The Martins don't attend the Independence Day picnic, and Hattie is grateful. Though Hattie's team loses in the end, the game is well played and enjoyed by all. Afterward, having visited and eaten, they pack up to head home for their individual chores. Hattie has Karl drop her off early so that she can walk the remaining distance and cool off.

The sound of riders breaks Hattie from her thoughts and she watches the group in the distance as one rider breaks off and heads for Hattie's. Traft is polite, asking if she enjoyed the celebrations, and then finishes giving her his side of the story from the night of the fires, insisting that when she saw him that night he was helping to put the fire out in her barn — not lighting it. He admits that the issue with Ebgard probably got a bit out of hand and Hattie snaps at him, telling him he has a lot of nerve discussing anyone else and their contribution to the war when he himself is still here. He admits to having enlisted, but that his mother managed to finagle an appointment to the Council of Defense, convincing him that he could do his duty here as well. It is obvious to Hattie that his mother rules and Traft isn't thrilled with it. At that moment, she finds herself forgiving him to a degree, having some understanding for his situation, but then he tells Hattie that he needs her land. He asks her outright if she is waiting for the young man she keeps writing to and Hattie tells him the conversation is over. She won't sell and that's final. She turns and walks inside and he is galloping away before she can get inside the door. She sits down and writes an episode for the Arlington News, suggesting forgiveness is an important part of liberty.

On June 15th, Charlie writes her and tells her about the many ways he finds himself remembering her and how it keeps him going in that place. His letter is somewhat darker than usual as he has lost a friend who was standing not twenty yards from him at the time. Of all the things he was taught, how to cope with this loss was not one of them.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Hattie diligently waters everything by hand around her homestead, praying for rain and remembering as well as realizing how much water she wasted in her life before now. Being a homesteader has taught her so many lessons and this is certainly not the least of them. She uses bath water to wash the floor before putting it on the few flowers around the steps afterward. Nothing goes to waste now, and she is acutely conscious of every drop that she uses and reuses. Sleeping outside was a challenge for the first



night as she accustomed herself to the many noises that begin after the sun goes down. The first night, she sleeps little, thinking about all the things that might be out and about, and trying to identify every rustling sound. The second night, she is so tired that sleep comes easy and is deep.

She gets ready for the Independence Day picnic, baking pies and looking forward to demonstrating her skills as a southpaw. This is the first time that Hattie has anything to bring to this region from Arlington and thinks about how surprised they will be as she packs the pies and her own mitt. The creek is wonderfully cool and the fact that the Martins rarely attend the yearly picnic only makes Hattie more comfortable. She manages to pitch in the last inning, but by then it is already too late to regain the ground they've lost and the game goes to the other side. Sportsmanship is good however, and spirits are high regardless.

When she gets home that evening, Traft pays her yet another visit. With references to how difficult it can be to live on a homestead, he recalls the many people he has seen fail for reasons beyond their control and tries to smooth over the obvious tensions between himself and Hattie. She is angry enough now, however, to tell him how she feels and brings up issues such as his bullying of innocent people like Mr. Ebgard. Though he admits things may have gotten out of hand there, he still defends himself until Hattie brings up his lack of patriotic contribution. He admits that though he enlisted, his mother intervened and prevented his actual participation beyond the appointment to the Council of Defense. Hattie can see a familiar expression on his face. She recognizes that he feels his life is not his own, just as she once had with Aunt Ivy and others before her. Softening somewhat, she even forgives him which he interprets as an agreement to sell to him. She quickly sets him straight and when he gallops off, his face is one of barely controlled rage. She wonders what kind of enemy she is making, but is determined to stay anyway.

Charlie writes a rather disturbed letter in which he describes the death of a friend who was standing not far from him when it happened. He is obviously unnerved and has had more than enough of the war. The only thing that keeps him going is memories of friendships like hers.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Hattie's next installment to the Arlington News describes her experiences with threshing her flax. She is proud of the bundles, called shocks, that are left behind and looks forward to threshing the grain in a few weeks time. They are words that bring her great joy to write. It is still so hot that even preparing a meal is almost too much work. She can see dust on the coulee, and before long, Traft comes into sight on Trouble. He asks if he can water his horse and Hattie agrees immediately while he stands and discusses the lack of rain with her. He makes a point of mentioning disappointing harvests elsewhere, telling her it still isn't too late to accept his offer. When she insists that she truly isn't interested, he tells her what a mistake she is making, but she is adamant that it is hers to make. He disagrees, but leaves.

Two days later, Karl and a few other neighbors come to thresh the grain. Leafie and Perilee show up to help her make a noon meal for all and Chase tries to talk his way out into the fields to help, but Perilee insists that as yet he is too young. Instead, he runs drinks out to the field, stashing them inside shocks to keep them cool and marking the shocks they are in with a bundle of straw laid across the top so the workers knew which ones were hiding refreshments. Hattie tells them about Traft's visit and the reason for it, and Leafie reminds her to be careful with which enemies she makes. When big black clouds roll in, Hattie is momentarily terrified that grasshoppers will beset her farm, but the reality is almost as bad. Hailstones as large as eggs pound the fields without mercy, breaking Hattie's heart as she watches. When it is finally over, the men return with Chase for tea before they force themselves to take stock of the damage. Now, most of her crop is reduced to cattle feed, which will fetch a much smaller payday. Hattie prays for divine intervention again. Dispirited, she pulls herself together after everyone is gone, and heads out to do her chores. She goes through Chester's trunk again more carefully, hoping to find hidden treasure that will rescue her now. What she finds instead of a secret cache of money is a photo of her mother and father, herself as a three-month-old, and who can only be Chester in the background. It does for her spirits what little else could have. She thanks her Uncle Chester for this gift.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Hattie is finally beginning to reap the rewards of her efforts as a first time farmer. She has put so much time, effort and love into the growth of her flax that she finds it difficult at first to cut down what looks like an ocean of blue flowers. Still, once the threshing has begun, she finds equal pride in the shocks standing tall in the sunshine, and watches with gratitude as her neighbors help with this stage. As is common practice in Montana, when it is time to harvest, neighbors join forces to make light of the work. This is also true of the women who band together to cook and bake in order to feed the hungry masses that work in the fields. Perilee and Leafie join Hattie on her homestead and



while they work, Hattie tells them about the visits that Traft has been paying her. They are relieved that Hattie has stood her ground and refused to sell to him, but at the same time Leafie warns her that he is not an enemy she wants to make. Hattie already knows this, and has had her share of doubts about the kinds of actions he might take if he gets tired of waiting. When the big black clouds come overhead, Hattie remembers his story about the grasshoppers and for one dreadful minute, she thinks that her crop will go to the insects, but the reality is almost as bad.

Hailstones that are the size of eggs pound the workers and her fields until there is little left to salvage or harvest. Instead of reaping a crop that would just barely cover her considerable debts, she is faced with grain that is good for little more than cattle feed. It is hard not to cry as she watches one person feeding the machinery that should have been the job of three. Later, no matter how she tries, she can't make the numbers work. She pulls herself together to do her chores, and one more time goes to Chester's trunk in the hopes that it will contain some miracle that will bail her out of the financial mess she is in. She carefully pulls out each item, but there are no financial surprises. Out of a book a photograph falls, and looking at it she is given a strength once again to hold her head up high. The photo is of her mother and father, herself at about three months old and Chester himself in the background. She sees courage in their faces, not condemnation, and a rush of memories flood her that haven't been accessible for some time. With gratitude, she thanks her Uncle Chester for this precious gift. She had prayed for some divine help, and it once again came in ways that while she didn't fully understand, she sure appreciated.



Chapters 20 and 21

Chapters 20 and 21 Summary

Registration for the third draft begins on September 12th. President Wilson wants thirteen million men between eighteen and forty-five. Elmer Ren had already enlisted and it was likely that even Traft couldn't avoid it this time. Charlie's last letter had ended with fifteen stars and Hattie knew that meant that he had lost fifteen more friends. Rooster Jim arrived looking more serious than usual, and at first Hattie thought there was a problem with Perilee or the kids, but Rooster Jim had come to talk to her. He brought news from Mr. Ebgard, who wanted her to know right away that Traft had filed to contest her claim. He made the claim that Hattie hadn't met the age requirements. The next day Hattie rides in to Ebgard's office and answers the questions put to her by Mr. Ebgard. He asked her when her birthday was, and how old she was; where her parents were and how she came to be caring for herself. As a result of his investigation, he tells her and Traft both that he determined that her upbringing likely caused her to grow up five or six years sooner than other girls her age. As such, he was making a ruling that the head of household status would overrule the age requirements. Traft is livid and after he leaves, Hattie thanks Mr. Ebgard, who invites her out for a meal.

In October, Rooster Jim brings news that the Spanish Influenza has reached Wolf Point. Mr. Hansen and his family are ill as are the Ebgard's. Rumor was the there was illness in the Martin residence as well. Leafie immediately mixes up a large batch of sagebrush tea and begins dispersing it to everyone. The next morning, Hattie is visited by Chase and Richley. Chase is excited that he is going to Richey to pick up a tractor part and bring home a sideboard that Karl had already put a down payment on. After they leave, Hattie spends time quilting with Perilee and goes home.

The next day, she does her chores and sets off for Perilee's again. As she nears, she sees that no smoke comes from the chimney. The thought of the new baby spreads fear quickly through her. She runs the rest of the way and finds Perilee, Mattie and Fern feverish and immobile. The jar of sagebrush tea sits untouched on the table. Hattie begins bathing and trying to feed small amounts to each in turn. Mattie keeps crying out, and as Hattie rocks her, the grating sound in her chest stops. Hattie can't bring herself to put Mattie down and can't tell Perilee yet either — not while she is still so sick. On the third day, Leafie shows up and they cry together before bathing and dressing Mattie for her final rest. As they finish, Karl and Chase return, but Hattie meets them at the door and tells them to stay out. She sends them to her house to stay. The next day, he returns with a small casket he made himself and they bury Mattie on the property. There are many who lose loved ones as influenza blazes through the area.



Chapters 20 and 21 Analysis

Hattie, like many others, has a sleepless night on the 11th of September as she thinks of the many men who will be called upon to serve their country in this third and hopefully final draft. Even those who managed to avoid service up until this point are likely to be pulled in now, as President Wilson is trying to amass thirteen million men in this draft. Her letters from Charlie are ever more disillusioned as he faces hardships and loss, and counts the comrades who fall to each side of him. The following morning, Rooster Jim arrives and brings news from Mr. Ebgard regarding her homestead. Traft Martin is challenging her claim to Uncle Chester's homestead, using her age to claim that she does not meet the requirements of law to homestead. A hearing will be held in town the following morning and Hattie will face Mr. Ebgard and Traft Martin as she defends her right to the land bequeathed to her. Mr. Ebgard questions her about her age and her upbringing, and rules that despite her physical age, her mental age qualifies her as the head of the household and therefore he will overrule the requirements of age. Traft is furious, but Ebgard and Hattie celebrate by going out to eat.

In the month of October, Spanish Influenza will be one of the largest hurdles faced by the region and by Hattie and her neighbors. Hattie will avoid the illness herself as a result of Leafie's sagebrush tea, but Perilee and her children don't drink the unpleasant tasting liquid, and when Hattie arrives, they are already very ill. She works without rest, bathing, cooling and feeding them one at a time, trying to nurse them back to health. The loss of Mattie is one that breaks Hattie's heart but she is unable to stop and grieve. The others are still so much in need. She doesn't reveal the truth to Perilee immediately, knowing that she has to gain some strength back first, but by the time Leafie checks in on them three days later, Perilee knows the worst. Leafie helps Hattie to prepare the young girl for her final rest while having returned from the city, Karl and Chase stay at Hattie's home. Karl hand makes a coffin for Mattie and they lay her to rest on the property. She is just one of many who will lose their lives to influenza in this terrible time.



Chapters 22 and 23

Chapters 22 and 23 Summary

Hattie goes over her ledger again and again, but can still see no way of completing the necessary requirements for proving up Uncle Chester's claim. It was so much more than being unable to pay the final \$37.75 for filing fees — it was debt to friends and neighbors. When Jim rides up on his new Indian motorcycle and announces the end of the war, Hattie is less than excited, although she tries to fake her way through. She shows Jim the ledger and admits her failure. He tells her things have a way of working out, and leaves to spread the good news to others. Hattie decides to talk to Mr. Ebgard one more time and rides to Wolf Point to ask him for an extension, but he is unable to give her one. Even Traft no longer wants to buy. He knows the land will be free shortly and can wait. The next morning, she asks Perilee if she can stay with them until she manages to find her feet again, but Perilee has a confession of her own. She and Karl are moving. They are leaving for Seattle, and by the end of the week the papers are signed and final. Hattie takes a basket of gifts with her to say goodbye to her friends and surrogate family. She gives Perilee her just finished quilt, filled with pieces of fabric that bound them together. Hattie goes home and packs her things into Uncle Chester's trunk. She accepts a job in Great Falls in a Rooming House to pay off her debts and will decide her future from there. In six months, she would have a fresh start, and had no idea where that would be. Rooster Jim takes her to the station, giving her two last letters. One is from Uncle Holt who sends her train fare and the other is from Charlie who finally admits his heart lies with her and not Mildred — and it always has — and asks if she is up for a visitor in her Montana homestead.

Hattie writes Charlie back with the latest news, suggesting he stop in Montana anyway and take in the ambiance of the place she called home, and explains her plans for the immediate future. Her new job doesn't allow pets, so she leaves Mr. Whiskers with Leafie, who is happy to take him. Rooster Jim takes back his hens and rooster, and Plug is given to Elmer Ren Junior. She leaves Wolf Point alone, just as she arrived, with one last letter from Charlie, who announces his intention to apply at Boeing Airplane Company in Seattle and his thoughts that perhaps they'll both wind up there. Perilee writes to tell her that the Seattle Times has one woman reporter already and would perhaps enjoy another. The train leaves the station with Hattie looking forward to the future.

Chapters 22 and 23 Analysis

Mattie's death was the last straw and takes the fight out of Hattie. She thinks about the many who have helped her since she arrived. Hattie goes to Perilee's and sees the pain still in her face. They sit down and she confesses that she's lost Uncle Chester's claim. Perilee and Karl have news as well. Perilee confesses that she can't stand the memories of Mattie everywhere she looks and they have sold the homestead. They've



purchased a Dodge touring car and will load it with everything they can. What remains will go at auction. They make sure she promises to visit them in Seattle before driving away. Hattie begins packing as well. She finds a home for Mr. Whiskers, Plug and her family of chickens, deciding to take a job in Great Falls until her debts are paid. She figures she has six months before she is ready to make a new start.

Before she leaves, several letters arrive. One from Charlie says he is headed home. He finally admits his feelings and his heart lie with her, and asks if she feels the same. Would she welcome him if he came to Montana? A letter from Uncle Holt includes enough train fare to bring her back to Iowa, although he suspects her future is further west not east. He expresses his gratitude that the ocean will stop her from going too much further from them. She writes a letter to Charlie and tells him the latest news. She suggests that he stop in Montana anyway and take in the homestead that she was so proud of. The next letter she gets from him announces his intention to seek employment in Seattle's Boeing Airport Company and his thoughts that perhaps they will be there together soon. Hattie pulls away from the train station with one trunk. She leaves behind the insecure and scattered girl who arrived in Montana almost a year ago, and leaves a woman proud, confident and ready to face whatever the future holds.



Characters

Hattie Inez Brooks

Hattie Brooks is sixteen years old and lives in Arlington, Iowa with her Uncle Holt and her Aunt Ivy. She was born in Arlington on the twenty-eighth of October in the year 1901. It is now December in the year 1917, and Hattie is just months from finishing school. She is a sometimes shy, self-contained girl who has been shuffled from one family member to another since her mother passed away when she was just five years old. Since her father had already been dead for several years at that point, Hattie found herself orphaned and at the mercy of ever more distant family for her care.

Hattie's best friend is Charlie Hawley. In fact, she considers Charlie to be the best thing that ever happened to her. Charlie took Hattie under his wing when she arrived in Arlington, walking her to school, finding Mr. Whiskers (an old tom cat) for her, and generally offering her a friendship she had never known before. One thing Hattie cannot remember ever having is a place to call home. When her Uncle Chester writes to her from Montana, claiming that a general homelessness was something they had in common, she is stunned to find that he has willed her his home, property, horse and cow in Montana. With a sudden feeling of belonging and a sense of home at last, Hattie wastes no time boarding a train for the adventure of her life.

Homesteading in Montana is so much more than Hattie bargains for in so many ways. The eleven month experience changes her profoundly. She arrives with little self confidence and few skills, and leaves a competent and capable woman with a good grasp of who she is. During her time in Montana she works harder than she ever thought possible, makes friends that inspire her to be a better person, and overcomes her shyness and self deprecation. Hattie learns the value of a true family, sees and one day wants the love of a good man, and learns that children are more than the smell of sour milk and non-stop chatter. She experiences joys she never knew existed and loss that would break her heart but not her spirit. When she leaves the homestead, she does so with her head held high from the experience.

Perilee Johnson Mueller

Perilee is Hattie's next door neighbor and fellow homesteader in Montana, and is thrilled to finally have another woman to talk to in the area. Considered to be a mother hen by all who know her, Perilee is happy to offer her help to Hattie whenever she can. Perilee has a long nose which looks somewhat out of place on her round face. She has hair that is unruly and rusty brown in color, and walks with a limp that makes her appear to be less than graceful. Though plain to look at and not the type to turn heads when she walked into a room, when she smiles, her entire face lights up. Perilee claims that Chester was very good to her. She has nothing but good things to say about him.



Perilee is married to Karl and has three children from a previous relationship that range in age from Chase, who is eight years old, to the baby whose name is Fern. Maggie, the middle child, is six. While Hattie is in Montana, Perilee gives birth to her fourth child — a girl that is born prematurely and is named Charlotta or Lottie for short. The acting doctor for the region, Leafie, does not make it to the Mueller household before the baby is born, and Hattie finds herself playing midwife.

Perilee and her children are stricken with Spanish Influenza while Karl and Chase are in the city buying a part for the tractor. Though Hattie does all that she can, the illness takes young Mattie before it has run its course. Perilee is devastated, and can no longer face the memories of her daughter that are everywhere. Soon after, she and Karl make the decision to sell the homestead and move to Seattle. The news is a shock to Hattie, who hoped to stay with them for a while when she lost Uncle Chester's homestead, but she understands Perilee's motives. Perilee is like a sister to Hattie, and Perilee extends an open invitation to join her and Karl and the children in Seattle.

Jim (Rooster) Fowler

Rooster Jim is an eccentric old man with a dark black beard that hangs down to his waist. His eyebrows look like a wire brush that have been dusted with snow and his eyes are bright and attentive, making him look thirty years younger than his age. He comes by his nickname honestly, wearing colors in combination that stand out.

At first glance, and in closed quarters, Rooster is a potent man in more than one way, giving off an aroma of one who has not either bathed or washed his clothes in some time. He has a good sense of humor however, and a kind and generous nature.

He enjoys passing the time playing chess, first with Chester and then after he passed away, he taught Hattie. Rooster lives alone on one of the homesteads that borders Hattie's. He raises pigs and chickens and tends to do even that in a rather eccentric manner. When Hattie finishes fencing off the 480 rods necessary, he happily donates three hens and a rooster to her homestead.

Rooster is the first person in Vida to own a bicycle, although the experience isn't the best. He traded a pig for what he not so affectionately calls his contraption afterward, and on his first ride, he loses control of it and crashes into a hay bale. The next time anyone sees it, it is in his garden acting as a trellis for his string beans. His next foray into the future is the purchase of an Indian motorcycle which he appears to have much more success with. It is on this motorcycle that he goes from farm to farm, announcing the end of the war.

Traft Martin

Recently having become a part of the Dawson County Council of Defense, Traft is now part of the group that is supposed to be encouraging people to follow the rules regarding food and to buy Liberty Bonds. He is a handsome man with a smile that only



increases how good he looks to Hattie. He can't be much more than twenty years of age and rides a horse called Trouble.

Traft is more trouble than his horse. He and Hattie are at odds more often than not. He manages to avoid the draft with help from his influential mother and the job she gets him on the Council of Defense, but he resents her intrusion and interference, much as Hattie has resented Aunt Ivy's meddling.

Traft and the Martin family homestead borders one side of Hattie's claim, and once Hattie has settled in, builds her fence as required and plants the requisite acreage necessary to prove up, Traft arrives and announces his intention to make his homestead one of the largest or even the largest one in the territory. He wants it to rival the largest now located in Texas, and to do so, he requires her claim. His offer, while generous, does not take into consideration that Hattie wants to stay. When Hattie refuses, not once but twice, his anger is palpable, as Traft Martin is a young man who's family wealth and position has enabled him to get and to do as he pleases. He is not used to having anyone say no to him. Her refusal is one that Traft punishes later. When Hattie realizes she will lose her claim and approaches Traft to finally accept his offer — at half price if necessary, he coldly tells her he is a business man and knows that she is losing her struggle to hold on to the property. Why would he pay for it when he could simply wait and take it for the back taxes once the government has reclaimed it? In short, Traft is a jerk.

Charlie Hawley

Charley Hawley is Hattie's best friend. When the story opens, Hattie is writing one of many letters to him, and these letters are kept up throughout the entire novel as she keeps him apprised of her progress in Montana. Charley was the first real friend that Hattie ever had, beginning with her move to Uncle Holt's when he reached out to her and took her under his wing. He walked her to school, showed her around and even taught her how to play baseball and pitch. Charlie left Arlington to fight the war two months before the story starts, and his departure is felt deeply by Hattie who nurtures a secret crush on him. Though it appears at the time that he is spoken for, and Mildred makes no secret of her affection for him, after months of letters back and forth between the two, Charlie finally admits his heart lies with her, not with Mildred.

Charlie is a gentleman in all aspects. He is kind, and considerate, and deeply affected by the war he enlists for. The deaths of his many comrades makes him wonder why he ever thought that enlistment was a noble idea and he finds himself wishing he had never done so before too long. While in the service, he learns a trade and when the story comes to a close, the war is finally at an end. He is coming home again, and when he learns from Hattie that she has lost her homestead and that her best friend has gone to Seattle, he announces his intention to seek employment as an aircraft mechanic for Boeing Airplane Company located in Seattle. It is clear from his letters that he expects she will likely end up there, and hopes that he will have a chance to pursue the feelings he has finally admitted to her.



Uncle Holt

Uncle Holt is a distant cousin to Hattie, and despite that, he and Ivy take Hattie in, beginning at the age of thirteen. Uncle Holt reads a voracious amount, preferring to read newspapers. He is a kind and fair man and was the first one to warn Hattie about the coming war, citing that anyone could see it coming if they paid attention. Uncle Holt smokes a pipe and is a fountain of good advice and common sense. He encourages Hattie to go to Montana when she expresses interest, giving her his old work boots and driving her to the train station to see her off in his new Ford Town Car. He reminds her not to be too proud to ask for help. As Hattie is ready to board, a thousand of his kindnesses over the years run through her mind.

Uncle Holt is the only person other than Charlie from Hattie's life in Arlington who is supportive. She keeps up a running correspondence with him, entertaining him with stories of her new life in Montana and the struggles and adventures she faces as a homesteader. He is so engrossed by her storytelling that he shows some of her letters to the Arlington newspaper. The paper decides to regularly print her articles, and he sends her a check for the first ones. It is an income that enables Hattie to live much more comfortably than she would have otherwise, and it is just one more example of the ways in which Uncle Holt has her best interests at heart.

When Uncle Holt learns that Hattie has lost the homestead, he sends her enough money to get back to Arlington by train if she desires, although at the same time he acknowledges that he realizes she will likely rather go further west. He makes no secret of the fact that she is missed.

Leafie Purvis

Leafie Purvis is one of the neighbors who was present when Uncle Chester died. She is a straightforward woman who speaks her mind, and to Hattie's surprise, even smokes tobacco. Leafie is Vida's area doctor. Though unlicensed to practice medicine, she is the closest thing to a doctor that the region has. She helps Hattie in many ways. One of the most important is the way in which Leafie knows her mind and leads by example. While everyone in the region fears the Council of Defense and won't speak out against them for fear of reprisal, Leafie reminds Hattie that evil can only flourish if good people stand by and do nothing. She will not. As such, Hattie learns to take a stand for the things that she believes in, including vigorously defending her friendship with Perilee and Karl Mueller when the Council suggests that his German heritage makes him less than American. Traft makes many attempts to get Hattie to distance herself from them, telling her that her connection to them could be seen in a dim light, but Hattie makes it abundantly clear that they are her friends and she will stand by them — a lesson taught her by Leafie Purvis.

Leafie is a horse trainer who is well known in the area for her knack with horses. Leafie is also the area's makeshift doctor and the local midwife, although she doesn't manage to attend the birth of Charlotta in time. She also takes it upon herself to make the rounds



dispensing Sagebrush tea to the local residents in an effort to ward off Spanish Influenza. Her tea likely keeps Hattie healthy while she nurses the Mueller family, who did not drink.

When Hattie leaves Vida after losing the homestead, she gives Mr. Whiskers to Leafie, who admits that life will be emptier without her there.

Mr. Whiskers

Mr. Whiskers is a tomcat who was a gift from Charlie to Hattie to keep her from being lonely in Arlington when she first arrived. The tomcat is one of Charlie's many kindnesses to her, and she cherishes him. Hattie takes Mr. Whiskers to Vida, Montana, with her where he catches mice and enjoys the country life. He likes it so much that Hattie doesn't have the heart to move him again when she loses the homestead. Instead, she allows him to go and live with Leafie instead.

Chase Johnson

Chase Johnson is Perilee's oldest son. He is wise beyond his eight years of age, and is the person who has been looking after Hattie's cow, Violet and her horse Plug while they await her arrival. When Hattie finally shows up, he brings the animals to her, and comes to her rescue as he finds her with her hand firmly frozen to the water pump handle outside. He is a fountain of good information and advice and is always willing to lend a hand to Hattie when needed.

Chase and his sister Mattie attend the local school until an episode of bullying that has its roots in the fact that Karl is German gets him beaten up and chased home by a member of the Martin family and a group of his friends. As a result, Chase flatly refuses to attend that school again.

Chase is an inventor, and intelligent enough to make good on many of the ideas he has. He is constantly thinking of ways to make life easier on the homestead, and working on ways to make his visions a reality. He is the man of the house when Karl isn't around, and treats both his mother and Karl with a great deal of respect. Chase and Hattie become good friends, and Chase trusts Hattie enough to be somewhat vulnerable around her on the odd occasion. Hattie sees his voracious appetite for reading and loans him books from her extensive library. When Perilee announces that the family is moving to Seattle, Hattie makes a gift of several of her favorite books to keep Chase entertained.

Chester Hubert Wright

Chester Brooks is Hattie's uncle and was her mother's brother. A self-described scoundrel for most of his life, Chester never married, and never had any children of his own. The first time that Hattie becomes aware of him at all is when his final letter



reaches her bequeathing his homestead to her and encouraging her to show some of her mother's stamina and take over the property.

He acknowledges that he and his niece have a great deal in common as neither one had ever had a proper home of their own, or somewhere they belonged until Chester staked his homestead claim. He tells her in his final letter that he thought of her often and would have taken her in had he had a home to bring her to. It had been his intention to do so when his homestead was proved up and legally his. Now, all he can do is leave it along with Violet and Plug to her in his final instructions.

Chester also leaves Hattie a trunk that he asks Leafie to put aside and give to her privately after her arrival. The trunk contains such surprises as quilting squares, a photograph of her parents with her as a baby and him in the background, and other treasures that make Hattie feel closer to him. This trunk is one of the few things Hattie takes with her when she leaves.

Mr. Nefzger

Mr. Nefzger runs a store in Vida, Montana. He advances Chester the fencing for his homestead, and waits for many months before even telling Hattie that the two hundred dollar bill exists. He is a nice man who is fair and kind to the people in the area. He deals honestly and openly.

Reverend Tweed

Reverend Tweed runs the local church and has only a small role to play in this story. He appoints Mrs. Martin to head the church's efforts at creating a choir which Hattie hopes will be a way to get Perilee to begin coming to church and while the Reverend agrees in principle, he bows to the prejudice of Mrs. Martin and her influence.

Mattie Johnson

Mattie Johnson is Perilee's second oldest child. She is six years old and talks a mile a minute, but is a pure and kind heart who touches the lives of all around her. Mattie has a doll named Mulie that she treats as though it were a child of her own. She never goes anywhere without it. She is a bit of a talker, and at first a bit overwhelming to Hattie, but soon worms her way into Hattie's heart as she does all who know her. To those close to her, she is their little Magpie.

Mattie succumbs to Spanish Influenza and dies in Hattie's arms. Her death so devastates the family that they sell their homestead, which is too full of memories of her for them to stay. Hattie is almost as broken by her death as Perilee is.



Aunt Ivy

Aunt Ivy is the wife to Uncle Holt and is a mean-spirited and selfish woman. She is no direct relation to Hattie and resents Hattie's presence in their home. She agrees that Hattie will stay with them, but only until they can find someone who can put her to use. She manages to do so after Hattie has been with them for three years, making arrangements to send Hattie to work in a local boarding house for her keep. Thankfully, this event occurs at the same time as Uncle Chester's letter arrives.

When Hattie decides to go to Montana, Ivy is discouraging and angry that Hattie would do so after Ivy had made arrangements for her at the boarding house and makes no secret of her feelings. She has spent three years looking down on Hattie and treating her like an inconvenience and an imposition.

Mr. Ebgard

Mr. Ebgard runs the local titles office. He is the one Hattie approaches to find out what she must do prove up her claim. He is a good man and Hattie comes to his rescue when the Council of Defense makes a victim of him. They accuse him of being less than fully supportive of the war effort, and would have beaten him more severely had Hattie not seen what was going on and stepped in to help.

Karl Mueller

Karl Mueller is Perilee's second husband and loves her unconditionally. He is a good man who works hard for his family and to help his neighbors. Karl devotes his time to helping Hattie build her fence when she is not looking, preferring to work in anonymity. His German heritage is reason enough for him to be harassed by the Council of Defense, despite his history in the community and his reputation as a good man. Mattie's death is devastating to him.

The birth of his daughter Charlotta is a miracle to him and an added blessing to a family he cherishes.

Mr. Hanson

Mr. Hanson runs the local store and bakery in Vida Montana. He helps Hattie set up her first stock of supplies when she comes to town and is always supportive of her and of the community in general.



Mildred Powell

Mildred is the girl that Hattie believes Charlie is sweet for. She behaves as though she is losing her betrothed when Charlie boards the train to join the rest of the enlisted men. She sobs and knits five pairs of socks before Hattie can finish her first pair to be sent to the men in uniform. Before Charlie can return, Mildred marries another man.

Aunt Seah

Hattie's Aunt Seah took her in when she was five and looked after her when her mother got pneumonia and passed away. Seah claims Hattie's mother died from a broken heart. She keeps Hattie until she herself becomes too old to care for her. Aunt Seah's gift to Hattie is to remind her constantly that her parents loved her so much.

Wayne Robbins

Wayne Robbins is the neighbor who helps Hattie to harvest her flax and grain.



Objects/Places

Arlington, Iowa

Home of Aunt Ivy and Uncle Holt - the family that took Hattie in at the age of thirteen and fostered her until her Uncle Chester bequeathed her his homestead when she was sixteen years old.

Wolf Point, Montana

Town where Hattie arrives from Arlington to be picked up by Perilee Johnson Mueller and her family and taken the rest of the way to her new home.

Vida, Montana

Closest town to the homestead Hattie inherits from her Uncle Chester.

Hanson's Cash Grocery and Bakery

Store in Wolf Point where Hattie stocks up on supplies for her new homestead.

Great Northern Railway

Railway that takes Hattie to Montana.

Wishing Rocks

These are black rocks with white rings around them that Charlie teaches Hattie are wishing rocks. Hattie later shows these to Chase and Mattie.

War Stamps

Considered to be just another way to support the war effort and help to finance the expense, these are voluntary, but the Council of Defense makes their purchase mandatory by way of intimidation.

Liberty Bonds

Liberty Bonds are another way to support the war effort. Homesteaders each pledge fifty dollars per bond, paid in five dollar installments until they are paid off. Those who



don't purchase them are considered to be suspicious and accused of supporting the Kaiser instead. Liberty Bonds are only issued in one hundred dollar lots and conditional on a successful crop.

Honyocker

Name given to those who stake claims and attempt to homestead.

The Tipped M

Name of the Martin's homestead.

Chinook

Name given to the warm wind that comes through in winter at times.

Great Falls

Where Hattie goes to take a job and pay off her debts.

Brown's Rooming House

Place Hattie will work as a chambermaid.



Themes

A Place To Call Home

Hattie Inez Brooks is an orphan who lost both her parents at a very early age in life. From then on, she lived on the handouts and generosity of a variety of ever more distant relatives. The one thing that Hattie never knew, or at the very least could not remember, was what it felt like to belong — to have a place to call home. Every family that took her in made it plain that she would be fed and clothed, but that it was by their discretion and could just as easily be taken away. She lived in constant fear of having no where to live, and being homeless. Her one secret dream was simply to belong and to have a place to call home.

When she receives the letter from her late Uncle Chester telling her that she has inherited his claim to 320 acres in Montana, she doesn't need much time to make a decision. She is packed in short order, and though only sixteen years old, she boards a train from Iowa to Montana to take over her uncle's claim. It is a life of considerable difficulty and hard work, but it is the first home that Hattie can remember, and the very idea that it is hers provided she lives up to the requirements, is enough to help her to overcome most obstacles. Though at the end of almost a year of near constant struggle, Hattie still loses her claim, she comes away from the region with much more than she arrived. As she heads towards her new job in Great Falls, she realizes that she is leaving behind "Hattie Here and There", which is how she thought of herself before. Now, she was confident and self assured, and the young lady who arrived in Montana - without roots or a feeling of family and belonging... well, she wasn't going to miss her at all.

Friends and Family

Hattie goes to Montana at a time when many young men have signed up or are signing up to fight a war against the Kaiser. Her best friend Charlie is one of the young men who enlisted, and his enlistment might have played a part in her decision to leave Arlington when Uncle Chester bequeathed her his Montana claim. At first, Hattie is surprised by the generosity and help she receives from total strangers. The lifestyle is difficult, but help comes from all sides as Hattie builds fences, plants crops, learns to bake, cook and quilt. Her neighbors quickly come to the rescue when she needs help, and she learns by their example.

Perilee and her family are a source of companionship, friendship and steadfast loyalty. In a short time, Hattie comes to think of their family as her own, and her relationship with Perilee is one that is closer than that of one sister to another. They see each other through laughter and tears, hard work and loss, celebration and birth. In many ways, they are closer than family. When Perilee and Karl make the decision to move, her most difficult parting is with Hattie, but Hattie has lost her homestead and has no choice but



to leave herself. Friendship and family overcomes all things, including distance, and it is clear to the reader that they will soon be living close again.

A Loyal American...

Hattie Big Sky deals with an issue that comes up again and again when war is being fought, whether it be on the continent or not. The war in this case is being fought against the Kaiser in the early 1900s, and young men from across America are encouraged to enlist, or drafted into service. Those who remain behind fight another battle on the home front. This is a battle of trust and loyalty. Americans who were trusted neighbors and friends are suddenly suspicious and mistrustful of each other. In this novel, those of German descent are singled out, and their loyalties are questioned. Though they have lived in the region for years, and have never given anyone cause to question them, they are now in the spotlight.

The Council of Defense is formed to investigate those who might not be patriotic, but they take their positions with more zeal and fervor than necessary. Some extremists go so far as to burn down the barns of those who's largest crime is simply being of European descent. Others are penalized for maintaining their friendships with the people they have known and cared about for years. Investigation crosses the line into harassment what are loyal Americans have no recourse. This is not an issue that is confined to those of European descent. Simply speaking out in favor of ending the war, or bringing the young men home can be enough to cast suspicion your way. Have you bought your war bonds? Have you attended the right functions... paid the right dues? When the behavior of average every day Americans is brought into question, the war is much closer to home than advertised.



Style

Point of View

Hattie Big Sky by Kirby Larson is written entirely in the first person from the perspective of Hattie Inez Brooks. This young homesteader, who had lost both her parents by the time she was five, was shuttled from family member to family member until finally, at the age of sixteen, her Uncle Chester left her with a parcel of land in the barely settled region of Montana. Uncle Chester was her mother's brother, and a relative Hattie had no memory of, but he thought of her often and bequeathed his 320 acres of land, a horse named Plug and a cow named Violet to her, and all she had to do was meet the basic requirements between January and November. Hattie would jump on this opportunity to finally feel like she belonged somewhere, and the remainder of the story is her firsthand account of the challenges she faced, and her personal growth as a result. Before November would arrive, she would become a proficient housekeeper, cook and baker, fence builder, farmer, milker, rancher and friend to most who knew her. A stubborn streak would keep her going through most challenges she faced, and her newfound friends would give her the courage to fight for what was right in a time where war, illness, and hardship are second nature. While Hattie would never manage to prove up and would therefore lose her homestead, she would leave Montana with much more than she came.

Setting

Hattie Big Sky opens in Arlington, Iowa, where Hattie Brooks lives in the care of her Uncle Holt and Aunt Ivy. At the age of sixteen, Hattie is resented by Aunt Ivy, who's only interest seems to be in ridding herself of this charge. Hattie has few ties to the area, despite having been born there, and has been orphaned for long enough to feel as though she doesn't belong anywhere until the letter arrives from Uncle Chester. Then, taking a giant leap of faith, she packs her few belongings and jumps on a Great Northern Railway headed to Vida, Montana to accept Uncle Chester's challenge and the land he bequeathed her. She would spend her first night in Wolf Point, Montana upon her arrival where she would learn the terms of her homestead and discover the challenge that truly awaited her. From January to November of 1918, Hattie would make the transition from young lady to woman, and experience a personal growth and spiritual awakening that would put her on a path of strength and selflessness. During a time of war with Germany, Hattie would work a homestead with little experience and face extreme challenges both personally and physically. At the end of it all, despite losing the homestead because she is unable to bring in a crop that would pay out her debts, Hattie will leave with much more than she first arrived, and looking forward to her future.



Language and Meaning

Hattie Big Sky is a novel that takes place in the early 1900s. It is a story of a young girl who was orphaned at the age of five and forced to be more self-sufficient than most girls her age. She accepts a challenge from her late Uncle Chester to complete the homesteading requirements on 320 acres in Montana. It is a time of turmoil — and Hattie accepts the challenge. Throughout the next eleven months, Hattie will write often to her two life lines. Charlie Hawley is her best friend in Arlington, Iowa, who left the region two months earlier to join the war effort against Germany. She writes to him regularly with stories about her new life in the hopes that she brings a little light to his. Her other life line is her Uncle Holt, who supported her decision to accept Uncle Chester's challenge. Since the story takes place in the early 1900s, the author uses phrases that lend authenticity to his tale including the references to Hattie and those who stake claims as Honyockers. Kirby Larson also takes great care to include the many tasks that a young homesteader would be involved in, describing Hattie's ongoing efforts to improve her baking and cooking, as well as tasks such as quilting and laundry. The story also touches on the methods used in the early 1900s to farm, build fences and even barn raising as a community effort. All of these things bring a ring of truth to a story that touches on a lifestyle that has changed in so many ways since the early 1900s. Another way in which the author emphasizes the time and place of this story is the ongoing efforts made to support the war effort while barely stopping short of rounding up all the people in the community who happened to have been born in German or even Europe in general. This kind of behavior was not uncommon. At the same time, communities and neighbors in small rural areas such as Vida, Montana were prone to helping each other in times of need, and banding together to make work easier.

Structure

Hattie Big Sky by Kirby Larson is a novel of 286 pages divided into twenty-three chapters. The chapters are all of approximately equal length and are presented in much the same format throughout. This is a novel of personal and spiritual growth for the main character, Hattie. Each chapter reveals another challenge that she faces, and generally manages to overcome. Her experiences are documented in the beginning by letters that she faithfully writes to her best friend Charlie who has gone off to war against the Germans and to her Uncle Holt who steadfastly supports her endeavors. Uncle Holt shows some of her letters to the local Arlington newspaper and they employ her to write about her experiences as a homesteader in the still rough and wild land of Montana. Each chapter is a triumph in one fashion or another as Hattie learns to build fences, farm her land, tend her cow and horse, cook, bake, clean and become a person whom she can be proud of. She will stand up for her friends, give herself tirelessly to the betterment of her neighbors and their combined interests and despite her unfailingly positive spirit and courage, she will lose the homestead she worked so hard to prove up. In the end, she will leave Montana and her Uncle Chester's homestead in better condition than she found it and will be ready to face whatever the future holds for her.



Quotes

"With him (Charlie) gone, life was like a batch of biscuits without the baking powder: flat, flat, flat."

Chap. 1, p. 4

"I trust you've enough of your mother's backbone to meet the remaining requirements."

Chap. 1, p. 8

"Honyocker, hayseed, squatter - it's all the same."

Chap. 2, p. 16

"Trust me, this is a castle compared to a sod house."

Chap. 4, p. 38

"Wouldn't Chester love to know that Violet finally got her comeuppance?"

Chap. 5, p. 59

"I guess we're supposed to be grateful there's no fee to register."

Chap. 5, p. 60

"Do you think I have the 'froch' bite?"

Chap. 6, p. 63

"This war's making folks forget what it means to be neighbors."

Chap. 7, p. 84

"Name one thing I've done that might cause someone to suspect me of being unpatriotic."

Chap. 10, p. 117

"You tell me the good Lord's in charge of this mess and I'll scream."

Chap. 14, p. 163

"Not afraid of anything, and one sandwich short of a picnic basket when it comes to common sense."

Chap. 15, p. 180

"I'm prepared to loan you eight hundred dollars so you can be done with the whole homestead headache."

Chap. 15, p. 190

"Why, Hattie, I believe you've learned to take the lead out of your baking."

Chap. 17, p. 205

"Most of us are still walking around 'cause we haven't got the money for a funeral."

Chap. .17, p. 208



"Word has it, Ebgard, that you haven't been doing your share to support the war effort."
Chap. 8, p. 213

"Mother finagled the governor to appoint me to the Council of Defense."
Chap. 18, p. 229

"White reaper, my dad called it."
Chap. 19, p. 240

"See, unless you're the head of household, you've gotta be twenty-one to file a claim."
Chap. 20, p. 248

"I am going to rule that the head-of-household status takes precedence over the age requirement. And, as Miss Brooks has herself explained, her sixteen years are the equivalent of twenty-on years for other girls raised under more fortuitous circumstances."
Chap. 20, p. 252

"Help us get used to the quiet spaces she used to fill up."
Chap. 21, p. 263

"Anyone with two eyes could tell I was sweet on a southpaw pitcher with big dreams."
Chap. 22, p. 279

"I'll be able to slice up the quiet and serve it on toast."
Chap. 23, p. 281



Topics for Discussion

What prompts Hattie to decide to accept the offer to homestead in Montana at the young age of sixteen? How does she view the drastic change and why is she willing to leave what seems to be a reasonably stable situation? What one thing has she always wanted, and not had until her Uncle Chester writes to her and bequeaths her the 320 acres he has begun to homestead? Is this a wise decision? What risks does she face?

Who does Hattie write a letter to in which she discusses the merits of the Daylight Saving Time plan? When is the plan put into action? What is the underlying purpose of the plan? Who initiates it, and why? How does Hattie feel about the plan in general? What part of the plan still seems a little strange to her? When the war was over, why do you think the plan was kept in place?

Who is Hattie's best and only friend in Arlington before she leaves for Montana? Where is he when she leaves? What gift does he give Hattie that goes with her to Montana but stays in Montana after she leaves? Why does this gift get left behind and with whom? What does he reveal to her before she leaves Montana and why does it come as a surprise to Hattie?

What is the meaning of "proving up" where homesteading is concerned? What are the qualifications that must be met in order for Hattie to have her Uncle Chester's claim approved? What is confusing at first about these qualifications? What will likely be the most difficult part to comply with? Why? How many acres will be Hattie's if she manages to prove up her uncle's claim?

What is sedition? What comments might be construed as being seditious in the time period covered by this novel? What disturbing trend does Hattie notice about those people who are accused of seditious behavior? What might be the result of this kind of behavior during war times? What nationality of people is under suspicion and why? What does association with this group of people likely warrant?

What does Traft Martin want most from Hattie? How does he respond when she flatly refuses to comply? What veiled threats does he use in the hopes of convincing Hattie to change her mind? What do his comments actually inspire in her instead? What conclusions does Hattie draw about Traft after their first few meetings? How does this work against him?

What crop does Hattie plant? What method of tilling the soil does Hattie employ? What does she rapidly discover about this method? What are the results of her initial efforts? Who comes to her aid and under what conditions? What expectations does Hattie have for this crop? What two natural events almost cost her the entire year's planting? How and why?

What ways are employed to aid in financing the war effort? How are these methods put into practice? What is expected of each farmer or homesteader? What conditions are



attached? Which of these does Hattie find difficult to comply with? What does she attempt to do, and what response does she get as a result? What is the outcome of the confrontation that ensues?

What tragedy occurs in Perilee and Karl's family? Who is there when it occurs? What efforts are made to avoid it? Who else in the community is affected and how? What is the end result of this tragedy? How might it have been avoided, if at all? Why didn't the caregiver who was in attendance suffer from the same thing? How do Karl and Perilee respond? How does this affect the plans that Hattie hoped to put in place?

Why does Hattie give up and leave Uncle Chester's claim? What is she unable to accomplish? What does she decide to do when she leaves the area? How does she plan to remedy the situation she is in? Based on the letters she receives just before she leaves, what conclusions can be drawn about her future plans? What is the one personal part of herself that she leaves behind? How does she feel about that?