

I Capture the Castle Study Guide

I Capture the Castle by Dodie Smith

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Plot Summary

"I Capture the Castle" is the story of the Mortmain family living in a castle in 1930s England. The story is revealed through the journal entries of 17-year-old Cassandra Mortmain who writes every day to perfect her writing skills. The story covers six months of time during which the Mortmains emerge from poverty to relative comfort due to changing circumstances.

Cassandra's family consists of her father, James, who had a bestselling book but who refuses to write anymore for reasons that no one else seems to understand. Cassandra's biological mother died several years ago but her father married an artist's model named Topaz who adores her husband and tries to act as his muse. Cassandra has a 19-year-old sister named Rose and a 15-year-old brother named Thomas. The family has also taken as part of their family a boy named Stephen who is the son of their former maid.

The family lives in poverty since Mr. Mortmain refuses to write any more books and they have sold off their valuables including most of their furniture. Stephen works for a local farmer and gives most of his wages to the family which at least provides some food. Rose, especially, suffers from being poor and sets her sights on a young man named Simon Cotton when he, his mother and brother, Neil, return from America to run their Scoatney estate on which the castle stands. The Cottons are intrigued by the genteel Mortmains and become their benefactors, changing their living circumstances.

The Mortmains' situation improves dramatically when Simon becomes engaged to Rose who does not really love him. In time, Cassandra befriends Neil but realizes that it is Simon whom she loves. Cassandra and Thomas trick their father into writing again so the family can take care of itself without help from the Cottons. Rose realizes that it is not right to marry Simon because it is Neil whom she really loves and the two of them run away together to live in America. Simon and Rose are in love, too, and he promises to return for her one day so they, too, can live in America.



I. The Sixpenny Book, Chapters I, II and III

Summary

The novel begins with 17-year-old Cassandra Mortmain writing in her journal while sitting on the drain board of the kitchen sink because that is where the light is coming in through the window of the castle where she lives with her family. Cassandra writes shorthand in a cheap book because she can't afford more paper. The roof leaks because of the heavy rain and she notes that the inside is cozy due to candlelight. Cassandra's 19-year-old sister, Rose, irons an old dress. The Mortmain family lives in a crumbling house which is an addition to a castle built in the 1600s. Belmont Tower, the remains of yet another castle stands on a nearby mound. Rose writes daily in her journal to improve her skills and to follow in the footsteps of her father, Mr. James Mortmain, an author who had a successful book called "Jacob Wrestling," but refuses to write anymore. Cassandra's now deceased mother thought that Mr. Mortmain's refusal to write came about after he raised a cake knife at his wife during an argument one day and a neighbor intervened. Mr. Mortmain knocked down the neighbor and was sentenced to three months in jail. After his release, Mr. Mortmain seemed to be a nicer person but became anti-social. Mr. Mortmain took a 40-year lease on the castle and shuts himself in the gatehouse to read every day, emerging only occasionally to eat and sleep.

Miss Marcy, the town librarian, provides Mr. Mortmain with books and tries to help the other family members including 15-year-old Thomas and Mr. Mortmain's current wife, Topaz. The family had also taken in a boy named Stephen Colly who is the son of a former maid who died. Stephen is now 18-years-old and helps with the hens and the vegetable garden. Topaz is a former artists' model who likes to commune with nature in the nude on occasion. Stephen is shy but gives Cassandra poems written on little scraps of paper. Stephen copies other people's poetry and Mr. Mortmain tells her that she must be direct with Stephen and not encourage him but she can't bring herself to hurt his feelings.

In Chapter II, Cassandra continues writing in her journal while in bed. She shares a bedroom with Rose who bemoans the family's impoverished state all the time. Since Mr. Mortmain no longer writes, the family has no income so they have sold their valuables including most of the furniture. The girls' bedroom has only a few pieces of furniture including a dressmaker's dummy which they have named Miss Blossom who takes on the personality of a woman of the world. Earlier in the evening, Miss Marcy had brought more books for Mr. Mortmain and stayed on to help Topaz, Rose and Cassandra figure out ways to make some money. She helps the women determine their expenditures and their income. The Mortmains have not paid rent on the castle for the last three years and the landlord, a rich man at Scoatney Hall, never evicted them. He even sent them a ham each Christmas until he died last year.



Miss Marcy finds it hard to believe that the family has no income for the year and no prospects because Mr. Mortmain refuses to write anymore. When it comes down to it, the only person in the family with any earning power is Stephen who has been offered a job with a local farmer. Mr. Mortmain comes into the kitchen for a biscuit snack and looks over the computations that show that Stephen is the only earner for the family. Mr. Mortmain seems unfazed and returns to the gatehouse to read.

In Chapter III, Cassandra writes in the attic because Topaz and Rose are in the kitchen dying dresses and sheets from an old pack of green dye they found. Cassandra tells the story of how the family came to live in the castle. When Mr. Mortmain was in jail, the family lived in a London boardinghouse but upon his release, he wanted to secure a country house for the family so they went out driving one day and stumbled upon the castle. The family falls in love with the castle immediately. The next day, Mr. Mortmain goes to Scoatney estate, but Mr. Cotton would not sell the castle but agrees to rent it on a 40-year lease. The family updates the house with paint, window treatments and furniture and Mrs. Mortmain's grand piano. Now the castle is nearly bare because most of the furnishings have been sold and everything has a faded look.

After Mrs. Mortmain died, the family lived on the money she had but they have been poor for five years now. The children have been raised to believe that Mr. Mortmain is a genius who can't be rushed but they can't help but wonder if he will ever write and make any money again. The only friend Mr. Mortmain has locally is the vicar and he has dropped all his London friends. The village nearby is called Godsend, a modern version of Godys End, after the name of the Norman knight, Etienne de Godys, who had built Belmonte Castle. The castle inhabited by the Mortmains is also called Godsend but it was built by a later de Godys. No one seems to know how Belmonte mound got its name but the thinking is that it is related to Midsummer Eve because lit votives could be more easily seen there.

Analysis

The author establishes that the story is told through a series of journal entries by Cassandra Mortmain, the book's protagonist. Cassandra writes in shorthand because paper is scarce for the family and she has just a cheap book in which to write. The author establishes the theme of Creativity early as Cassandra wants to follow in the footsteps of her author father who had a successful book published several years ago. Mr. Mortmain no longer writes and no one is sure why he doesn't but his first wife had said he was a genius and he could not be rushed. This supports the creativity theme in that Mr. Mortmain's talent is great but he is mercurial like most creative people are prone to be. Unfortunately Mr. Mortmain can't be bothered with mundane work to support his family who, consequently, pay the price for his supposed genius.

The theme of Survival comes into play early too as the Mortmain family, with the exception of Mr. Mortmain, struggles with how to make money to support the family. It is possible that Topaz could pose for artists again and have her portrait painted but that is not regular income. The only secure income for the family comes in the form of a job



offered to Stephen from a local farmer. Cassandra and Rose have no employable skills, and Thomas is too young to go to work and besides he needs to finish his schooling. The family relies heavily on the eggs laid by their hens and the vegetable garden tended by Stephen. The family has come to the end of things they can sell, and the girls especially suffer from the lack of new dresses and pretty accessories which are critical to young women of marriageable age.

Discussion Question 1

In what format is the story being told? Why do you think the author choose to tell the story in this way?

Discussion Question 2

What are the Mortmains' living conditions and how did they come to be in such a situation?

Discussion Question 3

What role does Miss Marcy play in the Mortmain family's life?

Vocabulary

tea-cosy, carbolic, moat, boggy, intact, obliged, brandished, misfortune, entailing, gaiety, pathetic, pallor, inflections, immoral, daft, hypocritical, cumbersome, reproach, mullioned, battlemented, vulgar, lute, apt, surname, earshot, diffidently, enticing, scarce, commodius, hastened, soothing, literary, nil, sacking, shillings, distaste, intuition, pathetic, tactful, wended, extravagant, contemplation, seclusion, cistern, mullioned, squashy, chintz, hamlets, besiegers, trebuchet



I. The Sixpenny Book, Chapters IV and V

Summary

Cassandra emerges from her writing session in the attic to find that Topaz and Rose have dyed green almost everything they could get their hands on, from towels to dresses. Cassandra dyes her two nightgowns and then they did Topaz' bed sheets, ending up with green arms up to their elbows. It is raining again which seems to match Rose's low mood from being poor and having no marriage prospects. Stephen finds buckets to catch the drips from the leaking roof. Cassandra asks her father about his work and he is evasive with her and goes upstairs. Cassandra's mood lifts when she can smell the promise of spring in the night air but Rose's spirits can't be lifted and says that she would sell her soul to the devil for a different life. Cassandra suggests that although they don't have a devil, Rose could wish on the stone gargoyle high up on the kitchen fireplace. Thomas suggests that they haul Rose up on the drying rack and they manage to hoist her high enough so she can pat the figure on the head and Cassandra says a few lines invoking the figure, a heavenly devil or devilish saint, for some good luck. Rose is brought back down just as Topaz enters the kitchen wearing a long slicker and rubber boots and then strides out the back door.

Cassandra decides to take a bath in a big tub in the kitchen because it is warmer than the big bathroom. Stephen helps her fashion a temporary screen from the dyed green sheets and carries hot water to the tub before giving her a chocolate bar which delights Cassandra. Stephen knows that she likes to read and eat while in the tub and the only thing missing is a wireless for some music. When Stephen leaves for the barn, Cassandra sinks into her bath and thinks about the state of her family. Topaz is probably the happiest because she thinks it is romantic to be married to Mr. Mortmain and live in a castle. Cassandra also thinks that Topaz is naked underneath her rain slicker and that she will shed her coat when she gets to the mound to dance in the rain.

When Rose hears a thump at the door she automatically calls out for the person to come in. Cassandra's dog, Heloise, begins to bark madly and she soon hears the voices of two American men. Thomas comes downstairs and the men tell him that their car is stuck in the castle's muddy land and need the help of some horses to pull it out. Thomas and the two men leave the kitchen but Cassandra soon hears the door open again so she yells out that she is in a bath. The man who has come in apologizes and said he was interested in looking at the house while waiting on help to dislodge their stranded vehicle. When Cassandra is able to look at the man she is startled by his pointed, black beard. The other American comes back into the kitchen saying that he has just seen a ghost near Belmonte tower and Cassandra declares that it was most likely a naked Topaz communing with nature. Rose then appears at the top of the stairs wearing a freshly-dyed dress and the two men stare at her.

In Chapter V, Cassandra, Rose and Topaz are cleaning and decorating the castle in hopes that the two American men may come to visit soon. The men are Simon and Neil



Cotton, the heirs to the Scoatney estate, and they have arrived for their first visit to the area. Neil had been brought up on a ranch in California with his father while Simon was raised in Boston and New York with his mother. Their mother, Mrs. Cotton, is in London and will be arriving soon. Rose already has her sights set on Simon even though she can't stand his pointy beard. Rose will do almost anything to get out of poverty and marrying an heir to an estate seems like a logical plan to her.

Cassandra's journal explains that the Cottons have only been in England a few days and they are trying to take in the fact that they own Scoatney estate and the castle where the Mortmains live. Simon recognized Mr. Mortmain as a famous author which pleased Mr. Mortmain until Simon asked when a follow up book might be expected. Mr. Mortmain replies that there won't be another book and Simon tries to reason with this thinking. Neil doesn't talk as much as Simon but Cassandra thinks he seems very nice. When Thomas and Stephen have the horses prepared, the Cottons' car is pulled from the mud and they leave, promising to see the Mortmains again soon.

Mr. Mortmain seems energized by the visit from the Cottons, having forgotten how stimulating Americans could be. Topaz is excited because she thinks Rose was a big hit with the Cottons. Later that evening, Cassandra talks to Rose and cautions her about thinking about marrying Simon for money and not love but Rose is determined to get out of poverty one way or another.

Rose is writing in the barn when the Cottons return the next day but she doesn't have time to warn Topaz and Rose who are in the house. Cassandra is still in the barn when Simon and Neil emerge from the house and she overhears them talk about how obvious Rose had been in her flirtations with Simon. Neil says that they will have to drop the Mortmains or the situation will get too uncomfortable. Cassandra later tells Topaz what she had overheard and Topaz unfortunately has to agree that Rose had acted way too affected in her attention toward Simon and it had been embarrassing. Topaz feels sure that Simon and Neil will not return and Cassandra is uncomfortable talking with Rose that evening because Rose is so enthused about the potential for a marriage with Simon.

Analysis

The author introduces the theme of Religion in this section and the thread runs throughout the story. Rose says that she would sell her soul to the devil in order to have a better life. The Mortmains are not especially religious but they are desperate and will try any symbol or action if it will help their situation. This is a bit of foreshadowing as well as symbolic when Simon's profile from a candle shows him to look like the devil complete with pointed beard. In this situation, Rose could very well have the prospect of a new life if she were to marry Simon who has the devil like characteristics of a pointed beard and high arching eyebrows. Religion is also represented by the village vicar. He is central to life in the area and will become more of an important figure to the Mortmains as the story extends.



It is worth noting the relationship between Stephen and Cassandra as it supports the theme of Love. Stephen is quite smitten with Cassandra, bringing her poems and chocolate bars but she thinks he is a simple boy, sweet but not of any romantic interest. Mr. Mortmain has advised Cassandra to be more direct with Stephen about his misplaced affections but she can't bring herself to be so frank with him and risk hurting his feelings, which, ironically, is a form of love. Rose has no intention of marrying for love; she wants only to escape the life she has now and will marry to better her situation. Topaz is in love with Mr. Mortmain because he appeals to her appreciation for aesthetics. Mr. Mortmain must have loved her at some point but he is mostly dismissive of her now.

The appearance of the Cottons in the story is a turning point for several members of the Mortmain family. Mr. Mortmain feels energized by the enthusiasm exhibited by their American spirit. Rose is attracted to the possibility of a marriage which will remove her from her bleak future. Topaz is happy about the social aspects of having genteel acquaintances while Cassandra looks forward to learning more about American life and what new adventures may occur now that the Cottons have arrived.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Rose wanting to touch the gargoyle above the fireplace in the Mortmains' kitchen?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Rose set her sights on marrying Simon after only one visit with the Cottons?

Discussion Question 3

Why are the Cottons and Mortmains so intrigued by each other at the beginning?

Vocabulary

riotous, chaff, blithe, snubbing, instinctively, tactless, ceased, setbacks, whiff, grim, niche, fluted, dissuade, giddy, bask, communing, impervious, heaved, superstitious, dreary, astonished, tentative, hampering, diversion, fascination, arrogance, agony

II. The Shilling Book, Chapters VI, VII and VIII

Summary

Stephen has given Cassandra a new journal and she is thrilled. It is spring and she is at Belmonte enjoying nature with the change of seasons. It has been six weeks since the Cottons last visited and the Mortmains' hope falls when Miss Marcy tells them that the Cottons have been entertaining other people in the village including the vicar. That night, Rose wants Miss Blossom to tell her what went wrong with the Cottons and Miss Blossom (Cassandra) says that perhaps Rose had been too nice to the Cottons, that being natural is better. Topaz has also shared that Mr. Mortmain is feeling the lack of the Cottons in their lives too because of the intellectual stimulation. All Mr. Mortmain seems to work on lately is crossword puzzles and Cassandra suggests that perhaps there is money in doing that.

Mr. Mortmain returns home from the village one day and tells Cassandra that it must be their inability to pay rent on the castle that has cooled the Cottons' feelings toward them. Thanks to Stephen's wages, things improve slightly at the castle but the family soon has another small uplift in their fortunes. Mr. Mortmain's Aunt Millicent dies and leaves her wardrobe to Cassandra and Rose. Mr. Mortmain doesn't receive any money though because Aunt Millicent never approved of his marrying Topaz, a woman who would pose for artists. Aunt Millicent's lawyers contact the Mortmains and give them some money and instructions on how to retrieve their inherited items.

Cassandra and Rose make the trip to London and they are less than thrilled with the clothing they have inherited because Aunt Millicent was elderly and the styles are not suitable to young women. However, they hold out hope when they learn that Aunt Millicent also had some fur coats which they are instructed to pick up at a large department store. The furs are not quite what the girls had hoped for: a long bearskin coat, a brown long coat, a short black jacket and a large rug with a green felt border. Nevertheless, they leave the store with their new possessions and manage to board the train with their furry cargo.

When it came time to change trains, Cassandra feels a moment of panic when she sees Simon Cotton ahead. Cassandra tells Rose that they'll have to address them in a dignified manner but Rose sees that as impossible, laden as they are with the awkward furs. Cassandra suggests that they get off the wrong side of the train and walk around, giving the Cottons plenty of time to leave the station. Unfortunately, the Cottons are walking their way to retrieve a big crate so Rose and Cassandra, dressed in the fur coats, jump into the train's baggage compartment. Neil sees the movement of the coats and assumes that a bear has escaped from the traveling circus and is in the luggage compartment, so he heads to the car to retrieve his gun.



Rose takes off from the compartment, running into the woods with the Cottons and some railroad employees in pursuit. Soon, Simon emerges from the woods carrying Rose who appears to have fainted. Simon tells the others that Neil killed the bear and its body is floating down river. Everyone assumes that a bear had chased Rose into the woods and Simon carries her to his car. Rose later admits to Cassandra that she had told Simon and Neil the true story and convinced them to go along with the story of her being chased by a bear.

The next day, Cassandra writes for hours on the mound while Rose and Topaz work on the clothes from Aunt Millicent. Topaz thinks that the fascination of the bear incident will intrigue the Cottons enough to consider inviting the Mortmains to some social functions. Just in case, Topaz instructs Rose on how to tone down her approach when talking and flirting with the Cotton brothers. Cassandra sees the Cottons' car moving toward the castle and rushes to alert the others.

In Chapter VII, Rose is able to warn the others that the Cottons are arriving at the castle, this time with Mrs. Cotton along. Mrs. Cotton had seen Mr. Mortmain lecture in America so they are comfortable in conversation immediately. Cassandra watches as Rose barely pays any attention when Neil talks to her but she pays rapt attention when Simon tries to engage her in conversation. Mrs. Cotton invites Mr. Mortmain, Topaz, Rose and Cassandra to dinner the following week and Neil offers to send a car for them. After the Cottons leave, Mr. Mortmain is very complimentary about Mrs. Cotton and Topaz can't help but feel hurt by his enthusiasm for another woman. The girls worry about what they can wear to dinner at Scoatney and trust that Topaz can fashion something from Aunt Millicent's clothes.

Topaz tells Cassandra that she can tell that Simon is smitten with Rose but that Neil probably sees through her. Miss Marcy arrives with another book and tells them that the vicar has also been invited to dinner at Scoatney on the same night as the Mortmains. Miss Marcy offers to buy fabric so that Topaz can make Rose a new dress for the dinner. Stephen then offers to buy Cassandra a new ribbon or sash for her old dress but she can't let him spend the money. Stephen would like a more romantic relationship with Cassandra but she diverts him even though he is an attractive young man. Cassandra does wonder what it would be like to kiss Stephen as well as Simon and Neil but she puts a stop to that thinking right away.

In Chapter VIII, the vicar buys the collie rug from the Mortmains, giving them twenty pounds and now Cassandra can now buy a new summer dress. Topaz used to work for a dressmaker so she makes a pink frilly dress for Rose to wear to the big dinner. On the night of the dinner, a chauffeured car picks up the Mortmains and delivers them to Scoatney where the Cottons wait for them by the fireplace in the drawing room. In addition to Mrs. Cotton, Simon and Neil are a couple called Aubrey and Leda Fox-Cotton, distant English relations of the Cottons. Cassandra is quite impressed with the champagne and dinner service and pays particular note of the looks exchanged between Simon and Rose.



Eventually, Mrs. Cotton brings up the topic of why Mr. Mortmain has stopped writing and wonders if it is related to alcohol. Mr. Mortmain takes offense but Mrs. Cotton does not back down. Mr. Mortmain turns his attention to Cassandra but Mrs. Cotton is demanding his attention again before long. Cassandra can tell that Topaz is unnerved because Mr. Mortmain seems to be enjoying his interactions with Mrs. Cotton. After dinner, Cassandra and Rose try to talk to Mrs. Fox-Cotton but she puts them off in favor of talking to the men. When it comes time to dance, Neil offers to teach Cassandra some new steps but Mrs. Fox-Cotton pushes her way in so Cassandra runs to the top of the stairs and watches the other couples dance.

Rose catches a glimpse of two faces looking into the hall and realizes that they are Stephen and Thomas. Neil helps Cassandra get the two boys inside to get them something to eat. Mrs. Fox-Cotton is intrigued by Stephen and declares that she wants to photograph him in her studio in London and pay him for his time but Stephen politely declines. Before Thomas and Stephen leave, Neil gives them a ham to take home. Cassandra joins the others and Neil asks her to dance and then dances with Rose but she does not follow his lead as easily. At the end of the evening, the chauffeur returns the Mortmains to the castle. Cassandra and Rose talk about the evening and Rose says that she could find Simon handsome if it weren't for his awful beard. Cassandra cautions her to not consider marriage on the basis of money alone but Rose has already made up her mind so they both say prayers that Simon will propose to Rose.

Analysis

The Mortmains' situation is improving now that the Cottons have arrived. This is reflected not only in their increase in social activities but also the new hopes that have been planted in their minds. Mr. Mortmain is energized by Mrs. Cotton's conversations and Topaz is happy to be able to help the girls, Rose especially, in getting pretty dresses so that they can attend socially acceptable parties and attract potential husbands. The vicar has purchased the rug that had been Aunt Millicent's, giving the Mortmains a bit of money with which to work. Even Stephen's prospects are improving; he has the job with the local farmer and now Mrs. Fox-Cotton wants to pay him a good amount of money to sit for some artistic photographs at her London studio. It is symbolic that with the improvement in their financial circumstances, the quality of Cassandra's journal has also improved. Stephen has given her a new book which is nicer than the sixpenny book she had been using.

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing regarding the crossword puzzles that Mr. Mortmain is fond of working on. He spends so much time on them that Cassandra wishes there could be some money in doing it. This is prophetic because it will become a source of income for the family by the end of the book.

The author inserts humor into the story with the story of the fur coats and Rose being mistaken for a bear and being chased into the woods by the Cottons and some railroad employees. This provides some levity and comic relief in the bleak life the Mortmains



have been living. The fact that the Cotton brothers join in on the joke binds them to Rose and Cassandra, securing a nice friendship.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Cassandra choose to give Rose advice through the voice of Mrs. Blossom?

Discussion Question 2

How did the bear incident change the Cottons' feelings toward the Mortmains?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mr. Mortmain seem to be energized by his interactions with Mrs. Cotton?

Vocabulary

catkins, exuberance, vicar, gloom, merged, resemblance, imperviousness, damask, loftiest, eccentric, callous, hostels, wistful, conspicuous, fascinating, haughtily, tactless, rummage, chiffon, profound, philosophic, daft, hoisted, ablaze, naive, superficially, accentuate, crinoline, absurd, presume, frock, frail, noble, insidious, astonished, fascinate, precedence, wodge, fallow, glorious, bleat, dispiriting, shrewd, illiterate, walloping



II. The Shilling Book, Chapters IX and X

Summary

Topaz tells Cassandra that she is depressed because Mr. Mortmain won't tell her what he and Mrs. Cotton talked about at the dinner party. Later that day Stephen brings a poem he has written to Cassandra, but he quickly takes it back and tears it up. Miss Marcy comes to the castle and tells the Mortmains that Mrs. Fox-Cotton's photographs are very well known but Stephen is still not sure if he wants to pose for her. On the first of May, Mr. Mortmain dresses in a suit and announces that he is going to London but would not reveal the reason. Topaz thinks he is going for a tryst with Mrs. Cotton because she has given him a start to his writing again.

One day Cassandra is daydreaming about Simon at Bellmotte mound when Simon actually appears before her. He had come to see Rose who is not home but he hopes she will return soon. Simon also has train fare to London that Mrs. Fox-Cotton has sent for Stephen. Simon talks about Mr. Mortmain's book and can't understand some of it and suggests that Mr. Mortmain needs to be psychoanalyzed, that perhaps there is a link to his being in prison like he was before prior to turning out his successful book, "Jacob Wrestling." Cassandra walks with Simon to the village where Neil will pick him up and he tells her that he hopes she can make her father understand that Simon does not care that the Mortmains don't pay rent, that it is an honor to have Mr. Mortmain as a tenant.

Cassandra lets it slip that she had overheard Simon and Neil talking negatively about the Mortmains while in the barnyard one day. Simon apologizes and then gushes about Rose and her beauty and intelligence. Cassandra changes the subject to the beauty of the English countryside and Simon shares with her some of the things about America that he loves. When they arrive in the village, they see Rose and Neil sitting outside an inn drinking ginger beer. Cassandra orders a cherry brandy and then Simon suggests that they all have lunch together. Afterwards the Cotton brothers drive Rose and Cassandra back to the castle. Rose later tells Cassandra that she hates Neil because he wants Simon to return to America with him. Once again, Cassandra advises Rose to not put all her faith in the fact that Simon will marry her but Rose is undeterred.

Cassandra remembers that she has Stephen's train fare so she takes it to his room but he is not there. She is startled by the stark simplicity of the room, almost haunted in its earthy dampness. Cassandra decides not to leave the envelope because she doesn't want Stephen to know that she had been in his room so she waits and gives it to him when he returns home.

In Chapter IX, it is nearly two weeks since the lunch at the inn and Cassandra asks Rose if she knows when the Cottons will be returning from London. Rose tells her that they are already back but that Neil will keep Simon from seeing her for as long as he can. Cassandra doesn't understand why Rose feels that Neil hates her so much. The



next day, Cassandra learns from Topaz that Stephen has gone to London to see Mrs. Fox-Cotton. When Stephen returns home that night he says that his photo session had gone fine and he intends to go again.

The next morning, two packages arrive for Cassandra: a box of candy and a manuscript book bound in pale blue leather and gilt-edged pages. There was no card in either package but Cassandra recalls that Simon had promised to give her a box of candy when she let him look at her journal one day. Soon after, the Scoatney chauffeur arrives with a bouquet of flowers and an invitation to lunch tomorrow from Simon. Rose is excited because she interprets this as a sign that Simon is going to propose to her. On the day of the lunch, only Rose and Cassandra could go. They drove to the sea with the Cotton brothers and Neil cooked steak over a fire, quite different from an English picnic. On the way home Neil talks about a cross country trip he had made across America and Cassandra is enthralled by his descriptions.

When Mr. Mortmain returns from London he tells Topaz that he has invited the Cottons to dinner next Saturday. Topaz is outraged because they have no dining room furniture or proper dinnerware, let alone any food to serve them. Eventually Topaz puts together a dinner party which is a success. After dinner, the Cotton brothers want a tour of the castle and Neil and Cassandra decide to go swimming in the moat so that Rose and Simon can be alone together. When Cassandra is changing out of her swimsuit, she overhears Simon proposing to Rose. They soon emerge and announce that they are engaged and Cassandra can see that Simon's beard is gone.

Neil tells Cassandra that he is not happy that Simon has proposed to Rose because he feels that she is a gold-digger. Later that night Rose tells Cassandra that she had coaxed Simon into shaving his beard and that she is so relieved that the engagement is now official. She gushes that she is in love with Simon.

Analysis

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing when Simon talks about Mr. Mortmain's needing to be psychoanalyzed and that perhaps if he were put into prison again he could recreate the success of writing his first book. Toward the end of the story, Cassandra and Thomas will attempt to duplicate their father's prison experience in an attempt to try out Simon's theory.

The author also provides good contrast between the Cottons and the Mortmains by exploring the differences in their cultures. Simon and Neil are very aware of the contrast in the American way of life as opposed to that of how the English live. Simon is infatuated with the beauty of the English countryside and wants to learn more about the culture, however, Neil loves the American way of life and longs to return. Cassandra also makes note of different phrases and words that are different for the two cultures such as the English flat and the American apartment, and the English holiday and the American vacation.



Throughout the story, Neil pretends to have a negative opinion of Rose because of her insincerity. When it is announced that Simon and Rose are engaged, Neil is irate and tells Cassandra that Rose is a gold-digger. In truth, Neil is in love with Rose and acts angry to hide his real feelings. The author will reveal Neil's true feelings about Rose by the end of the story and the reader understands that Neil has not been disillusioned with Rose, when in actuality he has been in love with her.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Rose act as if she does not like Neil?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the differences between America and England that come up in conversation between the Cottons and the Mortmains?

Discussion Question 3

What reason does Neil give Cassandra for not liking Rose?

Vocabulary

trousseaux, superficial, grubbing, resignation, convex, monologue, inkling, ultimate, humiliation, companionable, frothy, determinedly, perpetual, liable, scornful, astonishment, anticipations, misjudged, pessimist, camellia, vivid, despair, maddeningly, arrogant, contralto, brocade, anticipated, astonished, awe, vicarage, conspicuous, keen, trek



III. The Two-Guinea Book, Chapters XI, XII and XIII

Summary

Simon has sent Cassandra a new blue and gold leather bound book and a fountain pen to go with it. Rose and Topaz have gone to stay with Mrs. Cotton for awhile in London to buy Rose's trousseau. Cassandra receives a letter from Neil telling her that the London flat is so crowded now that he is staying in a hotel. He also wants to return to America to get a partnership on a ranch in a California desert. Cassandra also receives a letter from Rose telling her that she is to have a beautiful bridesmaid dress and that she will buy her so many more clothes after she is married. Rose has also seen Mrs. Fox-Cotton's photographs of Stephen and he looks like a Greek god. Rose also says that she has a bathroom all to herself and when she is lonely she sits in there with all the lovely peach towels to cheer up.

Cassandra tries to maintain the household for her father, Thomas and Stephen. Cassandra wonders if she'll ever be able to capture them properly for her journal. Cassandra feels low and wonders if she might be jealous of Rose but eventually reasons that she does not envy her sister, she is missing her. Cassandra also realizes that nothing will ever be the same again after Rose gets married.

In Chapter XII, it is Midsummer Day and Cassandra is very happy because it is her favorite day. When she and Rose were younger, they would spend the day with nature rituals on the mound, complete with dancing around a big bonfire. Stephen tells Cassandra that he is going back to London to see Mrs. Fox-Cotton again. Mr. Mortmain also announces that he is also going to London, perhaps to stay at Mrs. Cotton's flat. Thomas is spending the night at the home of his friend, Harry, so Cassandra will be all alone in the castle tonight. Cassandra takes advantage of her privacy and the warm day to lie naked on the top of Belmont Tower.

The postman brings a package for Cassandra and she opens it to find a bottle of perfume called Midsummer Eve from Rose. After a cold lunch, Cassandra takes a nap before preparing for the Midsummer Day rites. Cassandra gathers flowers to make a garland and heads to the mound to make a bonfire. As the blaze grows, Cassandra is startled to hear a man calling her name and she turns to find that it is Simon who had been in the area checking on Scoatney. Simon decides to stay and celebrate the Midsummer rites with Cassandra and even dances around the bonfire with her. Afterward, Simon offers to take Cassandra to Scoatney for a late supper so she grabs a coat and dabs on some of her new perfume before driving off with him.

When Simon and Cassandra arrive at Scoatney he asks the butler to bring supper for Cassandra and they head outside to the garden so she can see the fountains. Simon brings a gramophone outside and asks Cassandra to dance with him. When the music



stops, Simon leans in and kisses Cassandra and she is flooded with happiness. Embarrassed, Cassandra runs away and Simon tries to calm her but she just asks to her one more piece of music before she must leave. Simon returns Cassandra to the castle and he asks her forgiveness for the kiss that took her by surprise. As Cassandra drifts off to sleep she is happier than she has ever been.

In Chapter XIII, Stephen returns from London and Cassandra tells him about her evening with Simon and he tells her about being with the Fox-Cottons. Mrs. Fox-Cotton thinks that Stephen has the looks to be in the movies, so he is going back to London again to meet with some people. Mr. Mortmain returns from London the next morning and he talks to Cassandra about whether Rose really loves Simon and Cassandra tells him that Rose is not prone to lying and he is satisfied with that. Secretly Cassandra wishes that Simon was in love with her instead of Rose and she can't help but think about what could have been if she had tried to get Simon's attention when they first met.

Cassandra can't pull herself out of her bleak mood so she visits the vicar for a chat and he tells her that he understands that the rules of religion aren't always comforting but that she should try just sitting in a quiet church sometime to see if it helps her. As she leaves the vicar's office, Cassandra stops in the church and tries to get some feeling for God but senses only blackness. Cassandra's mood is still dark the next morning so she wants to see the vicar again but he isn't home so she goes into an inn for a glass of port and then a cherry brandy. Miss Marcy lives above the inn so Cassandra waits for her there. Miss Marcy tells her that sometimes the best way to beat the blues is to help other people.

Cassandra tries to return to the happy feeling she had on her birthday a short time ago when Stephen had left her the surprise gift of a wireless and she is very happy. Later that morning, Cassandra receives a delivery which turned out to be a wireless with a gramophone from Simon. Cassandra wants to be thrilled but she knows that Stephen will be hurt because Simon's gift is better than his. She tells Stephen that his gift meant more to her because he had to save for it while Simon did not have to struggle to buy the gift he gave her. Stephen is so sweet about the gift that Cassandra wishes she had fallen in love with him instead of Simon. While taking a walk, Stephen passionately kisses Cassandra and she runs away through the woods but he doesn't follow her. Later Stephen passes a note of apology under Cassandra's door and she replies that she forgives him.

Mrs. Fox-Cotton wants Stephen to come back to London for more photographs. Cassandra listens to the gramophone Simon gave her and she and Thomas talk about Rose's engagement. Thomas doesn't think that Rose really loves Simon because she never talks about him while Simon talks about Rose all the time. Cassandra decides that she must find out how Rose really feels about Simon so she decides to go to London.



Analysis

The author transitions the story with the addition of a new journal for Cassandra. Simon has given her a blue and gold leather bound book and a fountain pen so that she has a nicer book to capture her thoughts. This is symbolic of the Mortmains' improving financial situation due to their association with the Cottons.

The theme of Religion continues to be important in this section. Cassandra is depressed because she realizes that she loves Simon but he loves Rose. The situation is further complicated by the idea that Rose doesn't really love Simon for himself but for his money. Cassandra has never had such an emotional personal crisis and doesn't know how to manage through it. One day it occurs to her to seek out the vicar for advice because many people turn to religion in times of personal turmoil. The Mortmains are not religious people so the children have no spiritual foundation on which to draw. The vicar tries to counsel Cassandra but she has some issues with faith so he advises her to divert her attention to helping other people as a way to ease her troubled mind but she is not sure that will work either. Finally the vicar tells Cassandra to just sit in a quiet church and observe all her senses and what she is experiencing in order to understand a higher power. Cassandra tries this but doesn't seem to get any relief. She is willing to continue to learn more about religion and even considers visiting the vicar another time for more perspective.

Cassandra's Midsummer Day ritual is symbolic of her rite of passage into womanhood. She communes with nature just like Topaz does and even enjoys sunbathing nude at the top of Belmont Tower. It is symbolic that Simon shows up unexpectedly because he will become her love interest going forward in the story. Cassandra is no longer a girl but a woman with burgeoning feelings of love and passion, and she feels that this will be the last time she will celebrate this day. Cassandra will put away childish pursuits from this point forward, and from now on the Midsummer Day ritual now belongs to her childhood.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Cassandra's new book given to her by Simon?

Discussion Question 2

Why will Cassandra no longer celebrate Midsummer Night rituals after this year?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Cassandra seek out religious advice from the vicar?



Vocabulary

disdain, glance, utter, despicable, morosity, histrionic, sepulchrally, guinea, significant, scrupulously, kippers, peculiar, preoccupied, utterly, monopoly, pagan, prelude, companionable, opulent, frantic, naive, libation, rites, moulders, slay, feeble, gramophone, unctuous, dreary, splendid, vague, conscience, irrevocably, ravenous, madeira, extremities, consolation, impudent, vestry, rebuking



III. The Two-Guinea Book, Chapters XIV, XV and XVI

Summary

Cassandra travels to London so that she can talk to Rose about her true feelings about Simon. When she arrives at Mrs. Cotton's flat, the maid tells her that Mrs. Cotton, Topaz and Rose have gone out shopping. Cassandra knows that Rose would return if she knew Cassandra had arrived but, after making a few calls, she is unable to locate her. Mrs. Fox-Cotton invites Cassandra to come to her house this afternoon so she takes a walk in the park until it is time to catch a taxi to the Fox-Cottons' home. Mrs. Fox-Cotton ends the photo shoot with Stephen when Cassandra arrives because he is distracted. After lunch, Cassandra tells Stephen that she wants to go home tonight and he agrees to go with her despite Mrs. Fox-Cotton's disapproval. Stephen and Mrs. Fox-Cotton leave for Stephen's appointment at the film studio and Cassandra returns to Mrs. Cotton's flat.

When Mrs. Cotton, Topaz and Rose return they are delighted to see her and want her to stay overnight. Cassandra's spirits improve when Simon arrives and greets her. She agrees to stay and Rose calls Mrs. Fox-Cotton to tell Stephen that Cassandra will not be going home tonight. Rose tells Cassandra that Stephen got the acting part in the movie. After dinner, Cassandra, Rose, Neil and Simon go dancing at a hotel where Neil tells Cassandra that he is going back to America in a couple days because he has been offered a partnership in a ranch. Cassandra and Simon have a few moments to talk and she is upset when the band begins to play "Lover," the song Simon had played for her at the garden in Scoatney that night.

At the end of the evening, Cassandra is sad to say goodbye to Neil. Stephen has left a note for Cassandra telling her that he is available for whatever she wants to do. Topaz pulls Cassandra aside and wants to know if Mr. Mortmain has missed her and that she needs to be needed. Apparently Mr. Fox-Cotton is interested in Topaz and it has occurred to her to have an affair with him. Finally Cassandra tells Topaz that if she were to leave Mr. Mortmain, he might never be able to work again and that thought convinces Topaz to stay.

At last Cassandra has a chance to talk to Rose but Rose is tired and says they can talk in the morning. Rose tells Cassandra to throw away a card Simon had given her with some roses and Cassandra at last is able to tell Rose that she knows she doesn't love Simon. Rose admits that she doesn't love Simon and that she finally realized it when she came to London and sees Simon so much more. Cassandra is shocked when Rose tells her that she still plans to marry Simon though and she justifies it by what marrying Simon can provide for her whole family. Cassandra shows her disgust for Rose's behavior and Rose suddenly realizes that Cassandra is in love with Simon. Rose tells her that she would give up Simon if she thought he would marry Cassandra because



the family would still benefit. The two sisters argue for a few more minutes and then Cassandra storms out of the flat, determined to return home.

Cassandra is unnerved by the street life at that late hour and she soon finds an all-night cafe where she has some tea and thinks that she, Rose and Simon are now destined to be unhappy for the rest of their lives because of Rose's decision. Rose can't find her purse when she wants to leave so she calls Stephen to come rescue her. Stephen guesses that Cassandra is in love with Simon, which is bad because Rose will never let him go. Stephen asks Cassandra if she could ever care for him but she says that she could never marry him.

In Chapter XV, Cassandra and Stephen return to the castle but he leaves for London again two days later. Stephen had told Cassandra that he will not be coming back. Thomas comes home from his friend, Harry's, house and says that Harry's father is a doctor and perhaps Mr. Mortmain needs psychoanalysis. Cassandra tries to talk to her father about whether repressing his temper all these years has also hindered his talent. She also tells him that some people think his talent has dried up because he went to prison for that short period of time which he thinks is ridiculous. Mr. Mortmain says he has begun formulating another book but does not want to be held accountable.

Cassandra devises a plan to spur her father into writing again and she enlists the help of Thomas who thinks it is brilliant. Thomas is to hide on the far side of Belmont Tower while Cassandra lures their father there under the pretense of inspecting areas that need repair. Cassandra has her father climb a ladder into a recessed area and she quickly pulls the ladder back up as Thomas appears. They have left a table, paper, pen and a few comfort items for him to begin writing. They inform him that they will return to deliver his meals but he is to remain in the dungeon until he has a good start on a book. After a couple of days, Cassandra starts to relent and is suddenly shocked when she sees Simon's car driving up to the castle, bringing Topaz home.

In Chapter XVI, Topaz and Simon inform Cassandra that Rose has disappeared and they thought she might be at the castle. Apparently Rose had left a goodbye note for Simon and left while he and Mrs. Cotton were away. Cassandra has received a telegram from Rose saying that she is safe and she will write more when she can. The telegram had been sent from the seaside village where they all had had a picnic one day so Simon and Cassandra decide to drive there to find Rose.

Before Cassandra leaves, she tells Topaz that Mr. Mortmain has been locked up in the tower and Topaz goes into hysterics. Cassandra, Thomas, Topaz and Simon walk up the mount to the tower where Topaz descends the ladder to rescue her husband. Thomas reads for clues in his father's writing and finds notes about investigating things such as jigsaw puzzles and toys in the London Museum. There are also clues to a crossword puzzle which deflates Topaz' hopes.

When Simon and Cassandra arrive at the little village, they find Neil and Rose staying together at an inn. Simon and Cassandra drive back to the castle without having approached Neil and Rose about their betrayal. In October, Cassandra receives a letter



from Rose telling her that she and Neil are in California, having driven across America. Before leaving England, Neil and Rose met with Mrs. Cotton and Simon and patched up their differences. Apparently, Stephen had visited Neil and told him that Rose did not love Simon because he saw Neil kiss Rose on the night of the bear incident. After that he kissed her on many occasions but then acted as if he didn't like her because she said she was in love with Simon.

Rose and Neil had left Mrs. Cotton's flat the night Rose went missing because Neil wanted to get married right away, something you can do in America but not in England. They decided to wait at the inn until they could get married. Stephen had also told Neil that Cassandra is the right girl for Simon which helped all of them make their decision.

Mr. Mortmain has started a book on children's puzzles and has been paid advances by publishers in America and England. Cassandra thinks that Simon would be able to help her understand her father's new book but she is afraid to see him. Suddenly, though, she looks out the window and sees Simon headed toward the castle.

Simon has come to the castle to tell the Mortmains goodbye because he is leaving for America. He wants to be there when Mr. Mortmain's book comes out so that he can write articles about it. Simon says that writing puzzles and enigmas is Mr. Mortmain's way of expressing thoughts that aren't easily expressed. Simon thinks there are probably several things that contributed to Mr. Mortmain's writing again: Mrs. Cotton's assertive style, his reading materials at Scoatney, and being shut in the tower.

Simon is leaving money with Topaz to help the Mortmain family while he is gone and he suggests that Cassandra go to college. Simon tells Cassandra that he will return soon and asks if she would like to go to America someday and she claims that she needs some training so she can be his secretary. She feels that if she says yes, he will ask her to marry him and she is not ready for that; besides she knows that he is still in love with Rose.

Cassandra has come to the last page in her journal and she will not be writing any more pages. She thinks about Simon's return and writes "I love you" in the margin of the page.

Analysis

The theme of Love is very important as the book comes to an end. Cassandra realizes that she is in love with Simon. Throughout the story, it seems as if Cassandra and Neil might fall in love because they seem to be able to talk easily and he is nicer to Cassandra than he is to Rose. However, it is revealed that Neil had been attracted to Rose soon after the Cottons met the Mortmains and evidenced when he first kissed Rose during the bear coat episode at the train station. It comes to light that Neil had pursued Rose and kissed her several times but withdrew when Rose declared her love for Simon. Clearly, Rose is not interested in Simon for who he is but for what his money can mean for her life. Cassandra knows this about Rose and feels that her life as well



as Simon's are going to be changed, but not for the good, and she can't bring herself to pursue Simon openly. In a surprise twist, it is revealed that Neil still loves Rose and they are getting married and moving to America. This leaves Simon free to love Cassandra but she feels that he needs a little bit more time to get over Rose before immersing in another relationship. Stephen has loved Cassandra all along but when she does not return his love, he finds a relationship with Mrs. Fox-Cotton. Now that Mr. Mortmain is writing again, he is once again in love with Topaz and she is in love with him because she needs to be needed and right now, she is who he needs. Amazingly, it is low key Stephen who is brave enough to tell Neil that Rose does not love Simon and that sets in motion the love matches that end the story.

It is interesting to note the class distinctions that appear throughout the story. The Cottons are of wealthy, aristocratic stock and they have the ease of a luxurious lifestyle in England, even though they are technically American. They behave in an assertive manner which is befitting both of their status and their American inclinations. They take the posture of taking care of those from lower levels of society. The Mortmains, on the other hand, are genteel poor. They had once had a position of respect in British society but since their money has run out, they struggle in poverty. It is interesting to note that Mr. Mortmain never feels any sense of responsibility to find other employment to earn money which will take care of his family properly. Rose would probably never have considered marrying Simon had her family not been poor so she is forced into making decisions she should never have had to make. Topaz, too, considers leaving Mr. Mortmain because not only is he not providing for the family, he treats her with disdain while she tries to keep the family together the best she can. The only person who steps up with some real help financially at the beginning is Stephen. He is not even a true member of the Mortmain family but he takes a job on a farm in order to earn a small wage that will buy food. In the end it is also Stephen who is the only one emotionally strong enough to reveal the truth about love and set things in the right direction for all the character.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Cassandra visit Rose in London and what does she actually accomplish?

Discussion Question 2

Is the prison trick played on Mr. Mortmain by Thomas and Cassandra appropriate? Is it successful?

Discussion Question 3

Are there any surprises for you at the end of the story regarding which couples have ended up together?

Vocabulary

claustrophobia, histrionically, tactful, prejudice, anxious, matinee, petrol, alcoves, desperate, unjust, glandular, magnificent, ironic, hideous, rouse, conscience, shrill, poached, consolation, eccentric, sarcastic, callousness, prophetic, conjured, glimpse, astounded, repressed, floundering, disjointed, dazed, daresay, eccentric, brood, hovering, brawl, trammel, glorified, splendid, adamant, inanimate, catastrophe, forethought, acrostic, rebus, piqued, astonished, distinguished



Characters

Cassandra Mortmain

Cassandra Mortmain is a 17-year-old girl who is the protagonist of the story. She wants to be a writer like her famous father so she captures her thoughts in a journal which is the source for the book. Cassandra is a bright and witty girl as evidenced by her humor shown in her journal. She is also smart and sensitive as shown by the ways she likes to spare people's feelings by not being too direct or honest. Her curiosity will also make her a good critic of her father's new book, and he values her opinion so her literary career is off to a good start.

She is not interested in Stephen's affections, but she can't bring herself to hurt his feelings. Cassandra is also very respectful of other people. She defends Topaz, her stepmother, when it would be easy to make fun of her eccentricities.

Mostly, though, it bothers Cassandra that Rose would consider marrying Simon even though she does not love him. This shows that Cassandra has integrity and a conscience where Rose is self-absorbed and manipulative. Rose likes to explore new ways of thinking and when she is depressed over the situation with loving Simon but knowing that he belongs to Rose, she seeks out spiritual advice from the vicar.

Rose Mortmain

Rose Mortmain is a 19-year-old girl who lives in a castle in Britain in the 1930s. Rose is the oldest child of Mr. Mortmain and his deceased first wife. She is at an age when finding a husband becomes a priority yet she is unable to engage in the usual activities that young women do because the family is poor and she has no nice clothes to wear. Her father had written a successful book but all the proceeds are now gone so the family exists on meager food portions and trying to survive. This situation seems to depress Rose the most out of all the family members. She has almost resigned herself to live out her days as a poor spinster when the Cotton family arrives from America. Rose immediately sets out to secure one of the Cotton brothers for a husband because they are wealthy. Rose has no way to provide for herself, so she needs a husband who will take her out of poverty and take care of her. Rose determines to marry Simon even though she doesn't love him because of what his money can mean for her and her entire family.

James Mortmain

James Mortmain is a famous author who has ridden on the success of his one book, Jacob Wrestling. For some reason Mr. Mortmain cannot or will not begin writing another book. Consequently, his family has no resources and they have sold all their valuables and important furniture to live. Mr. Mortmain has a typical artistic temperament and



immerses in novels while the rest of the family tries to maintain the household. He is very intelligent and welcomes vibrant discussion, especially with Mrs. Cotton, whose American sensibilities appeal to him. No one is really sure how to motivate Mr. Mortmain until Cassandra and Thomas force him into action by stranding him in the tower. The restriction seems to be the motivation he needs because he emerges wanting to write and becomes a happier person than he has been in a very long time.

Topaz Mortmain

Topaz Mortmain is James' second wife. She is an ethereal beauty who has posed for famous portrait painters in London. She has an artistic temperament and creative inclinations which show in her nude communes with nature. She dresses very dramatically and is a very striking woman. Topaz is also a very loving stepmother to Rose, Cassandra and Thomas as well as a good friend to Stephen. Topaz' creativity comes into play when she manages the household on hardly any money yet still produces things for the family. One example is when someone finds a package of green dye in the kitchen and she dyes everything from dresses to bed sheets just for some variety. Topaz hurts when Mr. Mortmain is dismissive towards her and she considers an affair with Mr. Fox-Cotton but changes her mind when she realizes that Mr. Mortmain relies on her. The thing that really drives Topaz is that she needs to be needed.

Stephen Colly

Stephen is the son of a deceased woman who had at one time worked as a maid for the Mortmain family. When his mother dies, the Mortmains take Stephen on as part of the family. Stephen does manual labor around the castle and eventually takes a job on a local farm so that he can give his wages to the Mortmains to buy food. Stephen is in love with Cassandra and copies poems of famous authors to give to her because he is unsure of his own thoughts. Stephen is not necessarily brilliant but is very handsome and soon catches the eye of London photographer, Mrs. Fox-Cotton, who introduces him to people in the film industry so that he can get acting jobs.

Thomas Mortmain

Thomas Mortmain is the 15-year-old son of James Mortmain and his deceased wife. Thomas is a reliable boy who does his school work and helps out with chores at the castle. Although he is somewhat quiet, Thomas observes everything that goes on at the castle. It is Thomas who tells Cassandra that Rose does not really love Simon, something he has gleaned just through observation. Thomas has strength of character too as he helps Cassandra with her plan to keep their father in the tower as part of an imprisonment experiment. Thomas is firm in his commitment to the plan longer than Cassandra who would have weakened and let their father out if Thomas had not insisted that they follow the plan through to completion.



Miss Marcy

Miss Marcy is the village librarian. She is originally from London and has come to Godsend to work. At first she misses the hustle and bustle of London, but she eventually learns to like the quiet village. Miss Marcy brings library books to Mr. Mortmain on a regular basis, in part because he really enjoys books, but also because she enjoys his celebrity even if it has waned. Miss Marcy tries to understand the financial predicament the Mortmains live under and genuinely tries to help sort out their problems and assign realistic tasks to correct their course to disaster.

Simon Cotton

Simon Cotton is one of the Cotton brothers from America and heir to the Scoatney estate in Godsend. Simon is darkly handsome with a pointed black beard which is unnerving for Cassandra and Rose who think it makes him look devilish. Simon has an artistic nature and is drawn to conversations with Cassandra, particularly enjoying her Midsummer Night festivities and listening to classical music in the garden at Scoatney at night. Simon plans to marry Rose and dotes on her even though his affection is not returned. Simon is drawn more toward Cassandra, though, because she has more artistic sensibilities than Rose does. Simon wants to do the right thing and marry Rose, but even when she runs away with Neil, Simon is generous and makes sure Rose's family will have money and the use of a car when he returns to America.

Neil Cotton

Neil is one of the Cotton brothers, the heirs to the Scoatney estate, who have come from America. Neil is an easygoing type person who is friendly with everyone. Cassandra feels an affinity for Neil immediately because he is so easy to know. Neil is especially drawn to Rose and even kisses her on several occasions. However, Neil's behavior toward Rose changes when she declares that she is going to marry Simon. Neil becomes almost rude to Rose for the rest of his visit to England. Neil longs to return to America and become a partner on a ranch in California which he does at the end of the story. Neil would have returned to America alone had it not been for Stephen who tells him that Rose really loves Neil and not Simon. Neil and Rose marry, and he takes her to America to live.

Mrs. Cotton

Mrs. Cotton is a wealthy woman who owns the Scoatney estate in Godsend in the English countryside. She is an American, and her behavior and outlook are bolder and more assertive than British women. Mrs. Cotton is used to luxury and also keeps a flat in London for when she visits the city. She is generous with her money, though, and offers to pay for Rose's wedding trousseau and a bridesmaid dress for Cassandra. After Rose's wedding to Simon, the Mortmains will receive money to live and extras such as



college for Cassandra and Thomas. Mrs. Cotton is an educated woman who loves to engage in witty debate, something that is both appealing and unnerving to Mr. Mortmain.

Leda Fox-Cotton

Leda Fox-Cotton is a photographer who has her studio in London. She is quite taken with Stephen's quiet good looks when she meets him and she pursues him to model for some artistic photos. Mrs. Fox-Cotton also seduces Stephen because he is beautiful and naive. She wants to introduce him to the ways of the world and provides an entree into the film world where he will make more money than he ever thought possible.



Symbols and Symbolism

Castle

The castle is the home of the Mortmain family, and they have leased it for 40 years. It symbolizes the method by which the family has insulated itself from the world patterning after Mr. Mortmain's reclusive behavior. While the castle is intriguing and interesting, it is also cold and dark, making the family uncomfortable in their attempts to live ostracized from society.

"Jacob Wrestling"

Mr. Mortmain's book, "Jacob Wrestling," is taken from the passage in the Bible with Jacob wrestling with the angel. This is a relatively well known passage in which a man, Jacob, wrestles with an angel which could be God. This symbolizes man's struggle to do what is right and what is expected of him. Conversely, Mr. Mortmain lives outside the account as he essentially abandons his family by not writing and earning a living, something that is expected of the head of a family.

Midsummer Night

Midsummer Night festivities had always been favorites of Rose and Cassandra as young girls because it allowed them to commune with nature. It has become a symbol for a rite of passage though because Rose is in London this summer and can't participate in the rites with Cassandra. When Simon visits with Cassandra as she begins the Midsummer Night rituals, she essentially falls in love with him and knows that this is the last time she will celebrate the rites because she is no longer a girl.

Librarian

Miss Marcy, the village librarian, represents education and learning in the story. She not only brings books for Mr. Mortmain but also tries to help Topaz and the others find more ways to earn money to benefit the household. When Cassandra is deep in depression, she talks with Miss Marcy who provides a different perspective for Cassandra to consider in her situation.

Vicar

The vicar of Godsend symbolizes religion and God in the story. He is an approachable man who is included in many dinners and events of the villagers. He also serves as a collective conscience throughout the story. When Cassandra is depressed, she visits the vicar for advice because she has never had first hand knowledge of religious



teachings or spiritual support. He provides Cassandra with new perspectives by which to look at her situation, and she is hesitant yet still drawn to the conversation.

Cassandra's journals

Throughout the book, Cassandra writes in three different types of journals. The first one, The Sixpenny Book, is a very inexpensive book in which Cassandra writes her thoughts. Paper is scarce so she writes in a special shorthand, even in the margins of the page. The second one, The Shilling Book, is a gift from Stephen. The quality of the book is better than the rudimentary book Cassandra has been using as a journal. The third one, The Two-Guinea Book, is a blue and gold leather bound book given to Cassandra as a gift from Simon. The progressively finer books that Cassandra uses reflect the improving circumstances of the Mortmains' financial situation.

Wireless and Gramophone

Stephen gives Cassandra a wireless for her birthday because he knows she would love to listen to it while she is in the bathtub. He saves all his extra money, foregoing things for himself, in order to buy Cassandra this gift. At the same time, Simon buys a wireless with a gramophone attached so that Cassandra can also play recordings. The gift is obviously nicer and more expensive than the gift Stephen gave Cassandra; however, the wireless from Stephen is a true gift of love because he had to work on a farm to save the money for it while Simon did not have to work for anything in order to provide such a nice gift to Cassandra.

Belmotte Tower

Belmotte Tower sits on a mound not far from the Mortmains' castle. While there, anyone can see for miles around and its expansive view encourages communing with nature and unlimited thought. However it becomes a symbol of focus and discipline when Thomas and Cassandra imprison their father there in order to force him into the writing process for his new book.

Peach towels

Rose is infatuated with her private bathroom while staying at Mrs. Cotton's flat. She loves to sit in there to look at and touch the lush peach towels which are all hers to use. The towels symbolize luxury and wealth to Rose who has one thin towel to use at home in the castle.

Green dye

When a package of green dye is found in the kitchen, Topaz and Rose set about dying everything from dresses to bed sheets. Green is typically the color of money so the green dye symbolizes their attempt to bring their lifestyle up to better standards, even if it is just by coloring old articles they already own.



Settings

Godsend

Godsend is the name of the village where the castle and Scoatney estate are located. It is a variation of Godys End, named after the Norman knight, Etienne de Godys, who built the castle. The castle is also called Godsend.

Scoatney Estate

The Scoatney Estate is located near Godsend in the British countryside and is the home of the Cotton family who are from America. The original owner was the man who leased the castle to Mr. Mortmain and the grandfather of Neil and Simon Cotton.

London

London is the capital of England and the center of art and cultural events. Rose and Cassandra travel on the train to London to visit the attorney regarding Aunt Millicent's estate. The Mortmains also visit Mrs. Cotton's flat in London and Stephen goes to Mrs. Fox-Cotton's studio in London for his photo sessions.

Belmotte Tower

Belmotte Tower is located on a mound area near the castle. Cassandra sometimes goes there to write and it is where she and Thomas imprison their father in order to force him to begin writing again.

The castle

The castle is located in the English countryside and was leased for 40 years after Mr. Mortmain and his first wife found it while driving one day. It is a typical castle complete with moat and turrets and is cold and dark. The Mortmains have used the castle as their home in spite of having lost so much furniture which they had to sell to get money for food.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Coming of Age is an important theme in literature. This means the transition period in which a child becomes a young adult. There is no set age for this transition because it is different for each character. Some characters reach young adulthood through the natural progression of age and maturity while some children face traumatic situations which essentially force them to grow up more quickly than their peers. In literature, Coming of Age usually features a protagonist who struggles with a belief system or other challenge in order to begin to identify as an adult. In "I Capture the Castle," the protagonist, Cassandra, grows up during the year that she shares her journal entries. As the novel begins, Cassandra is a young girl interested in playful pursuits but as the story extends she begins to take on the challenges faced by the family such as poverty and social isolation. She matures in that she realizes it is important to not hurt people's feelings intentionally. She also comes to understand that people can do things with inappropriate intentions. For example, Rose intends to marry Simon even though she is not in love with him. Rose thinks only of her delivery from poverty and doesn't care what a loveless marriage would mean to Simon.

Love

Love is an important theme in "I Capture the Castle." There are several love stories that weave throughout the book. The first love to surface is Stephen's love for Cassandra. He is shy about his approach and he even copies poetry from other poets because he is unsure of his romantic prowess. Cassandra can't see Stephen in romantic terms but loves him as a brother. The Mortmain family loves each other but they sometimes have a difficult time expressing it. Mr. Mortmain especially is reserved in showing affection. Topaz unites the family with her loving actions and she loves her husband even when he treats her with indifference. Cassandra and Rose love each other as close sisters but as they grow older, they begin to see the world differently with some different values. Even when Rose has disappointed Cassandra in how she intends to marry Simon, she misses Rose when she is away and it is clear that their bond is solid. There is romantic love with Simon who wants to marry Rose while Cassandra eventually realizes that she is in love with Simon. Neil had originally shown love toward Rose but when she decides to marry Simon, he is hurt and acts rude toward her. By the end of the story, the love maze is complete with Neil and Rose marrying and moving away to America.

Religion

The theme of religion is important in "I Capture the Castle." It is first brought up when Rose says she would sell her soul to the devil in order to get out of poverty. It is symbolic that Simon shows up and his shadow on the wall exaggerates his pointed



beard, making him look like a devil figure. It looks as if Simon will indeed become Rose's deliverance from poverty. The vicar is a symbol of religion in the story as he is present at most important events held in the village. The Cottons and Mortmains even include him in their dinners. Religion has not been a strong component of the Mortmains' lives so when Cassandra sinks into depression over Simon, she seeks out the vicar for spiritual guidance. She soaks up what he says and tries to understand what he means by advising her to be of service to others in order to ease her own suffering. This is a principle tenet of Christianity and even though it is new for Cassandra, she is interested in learning more. At the end of the story, Simon tells Cassandra that creativity such as what her father has is a God-given gift that everyone possesses. Cassandra struggles with what Simon is sharing with her but eventually begins to understand the concept.

Creativity

Creativity is an important theme in "I Capture the Castle." Many of the main characters are creative and live an artistic lifestyle. Mr. Mortmain is the most prominent example of creative expression as he has published a successful book. His lifestyle is indicative of an artist because he is blocked for some reason from writing another book and retreats to his private room in the gatehouse of the castle. His decision to live in the castle to begin with was dramatic, and his wife and children went along with his whim.

Topaz has a creative soul too. She has posed for artists many times and still likes to commune naked with nature as part of her artistic temperament. Cassandra also lives a creative life. She writes constantly in her journal where she expresses her thoughts and feelings. She also enjoys music and nature and she is probably most in touch with her feelings out of all the characters. Stephen is a reluctant creative when Mrs. Fox-Cotton engages him for photo sessions. Clearly Mrs. Fox-Cotton is artistic based on her profession and the surroundings of her studio. Simon is probably the member of the Cotton family with the most artistic bent as he enjoys nature and music and seems to view the world with a bent toward the aesthetic.

Survival

Survival is an important theme in "I Capture the Castle." The Mortmains are survivors if nothing else. Since the radical decline in their financial situation, they have been forced into survival mode in a dark, cold castle. Their important furniture and valuables have been sold in order to pay for food and other necessities. Mr. Mortmain is not writing anymore so there is no hope of any money coming into the household with the exception of Stephen, who gives up his meager wages from working on a farm. Miss Marcy attempts to help the Mortmains with their finances and is shocked by how little money the family lives on. Topaz is very inventive in her cooking and sewing skills to help the family survive on very little money. Probably the most blatant example of survival is Rose, who plans to marry Simon even though she does not love him. Rose wants out of poverty and is willing to marry a man she doesn't love in order to

accomplish it. She rationalizes her actions by saying that her marrying into the Cotton family will extend financial benefits to all the Mortmains.

Styles

Point of View

"I Capture the Castle" is told from the first person narrative point of view. This means that the author tells the story directly in her own words. As the narrator, Cassandra uses the pronoun of "I" throughout because the story is being told just as she sees it or experienced it. With the first person narrative point of view, the reader has access to the thoughts and feelings of the narrator only. What is going on in the heads of any other people in the story is only speculative as the reader does not have the privilege of seeing them.

As Cassandra goes from present day to flashbacks in the story, she still maintains the first person narrative point of view. The story is hers and the reader will learn only what the author wants him or her to learn. The first person narrative point of view tells the narrator's story and the reader must take into account who the narrator is to understand the perspective. For example, a child will see a story from a different perspective from that of an adult and the reader should make allowances for that.

An example of the first person narrative point of view is when Cassandra states, "I have just remarked to Rose that our situation is really rather romantic--two girls in this strange and lonely house. She replied that she saw nothing romantic about being shut up in a crumbling ruin surrounded by a sea of mud. I must admit that our home is an unreasonable place to live in. Yet I love it." The author not only provides information from Cassandra's perspective about what she did, but also projects into Cassandra's thoughts. If this were written in another point of view, the speaker would be able to say that Cassandra and Rose had a conversation about the castle but would have no insight on Cassandra's thoughts and feelings about her home.

Language and Meaning

Because "I Capture the Castle" is set in 1930s England, the language is current for the times. The author uses 20th century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like books and clothing styles so that the audience can relate to them.

Because the story is set in England, the author uses British English which has different spelling from the American version of the same words. For example, when Cassandra sunbathes nude at Belmont Tower, she thinks, "I had been lying with the sun on my eyelids so that for a minute nothing was the right colour." Words like colour and humour have the British English spelling.

The author uses humor to a great extent in the book too, usually from Cassandra's thoughts and dialogue. For example, when Cassandra writes, "Goodness, Topaz is putting eggs on to boil! No one told me the hens had yielded to prayer. Oh, excellent



hens!" Cassandra is witty and tries to maintain a positive attitude despite the family's dismal circumstances and she can even inject humor into the laying of some eggs by reluctant hens.

Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event, or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. *I Capture the Castle* takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does. It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current situation. In "*I Capture the Castle*," Cassandra moves from the thoughts and feelings of a girl to a young woman based on the events that occur during the year. She matures in her feelings of love and compassion and reaches a turning point in her life when she knows that it is wrong for Rose to consider marrying Simon for money and not love. She is able to voice her disapproval to Rose which shows that she has the courage of her convictions.

In addition, the author structures the book into three separate parts, each one written in a different journal. The increasingly more valuable journals reflect the improving financial situation of the Mortmain family as the story extends.



Quotes

Goodness, Topaz is actually putting on eggs to boil! No one told me the hens yielded to prayer. Oh, excellent hens!

-- Cassandra (I paragraph 1)

Importance: The family lives in poverty and food is procured only through the hens and the vegetable garden on the property or when some money comes to the family through the sale of some item. Right now, resources are very low and Cassandra is tired of eating bread and margarine. She has obviously been praying for some variety in the meals and is thankful that the hens are cooperating at last.

My dears, you know I'm trying to help you all. What's the real trouble with Mr. Mortmain? Is it--is it--drink?

-- Miss Marcy (II paragraph 9)

Importance: The family has asked Miss Marcy's help in determining ways to make some money and Miss Marcy is shocked by the state of their financial situation. Because Mr. Mortmain is a noted author, there is the assumption that the family should have some money. Rumors have spread that Mr. Mortmain might be drinking which causes his inability to work and Miss Marcy tentatively tries to find out if that might be true.

I feel grim. I haven't any clothes, I haven't any prospects. I live in a mouldering ruin and I've nothing to look forward to but old age.

-- Rose (IV paragraph 1)

Importance: The Mortmains' poverty is especially by Rose, the oldest child, because she has no employable skills and there is no money for a dowry so she is essentially not marriage material either. Given the circumstances, she is entitled to her bleak outlook.

Gosh, Simon, you're lucky to get away with your life.

-- Neil (V paragraph 5)

Importance: Rose has embarrassed herself by practically throwing herself at Simon and Neil tries to make a joke of it. Cassandra overhears this conversation between the Cotton brothers and it changes her perspective on their character.

Just think," said Rose, if father hadn't married Topaz we might be rolling in wealth by now.

-- Rose (VI paragraph 3)

Importance: When Cassandra and Rose inherit Aunt Millicent's clothes, they are less than impressed. Rose laments that they would probably have had a bigger inheritance if their father hadn't married Topaz whom Aunt Millicent never approved of. To



Cassandra's credit, she feels that she would rather have Topaz in her life than more money. This is in opposition to how Rose views the world.

And I warn you I'm quite unsnubbable, Mr. Mortmain. When a writer so potentially great as you keeps silent so long, it's somebody's duty to find out the reason. Automatically, one's first guess is drink, but that's obviously not your trouble. There must be some psychological--

-- Mrs. Cotton (VIII paragraph 5)

Importance: Mr. Mortmain enjoys conversations with Mrs. Cotton but he does not appreciate how direct she can be. She is American and more direct than the Mortmains are used to. She also thinks his talent should not be wasted. This is the start of an unexpected friendship because she has the guts to say things that his family members have been afraid to say.

What is it about the English countryside countryside--why is the beauty so much more than visual? Why does it touch one so?

-- Simon (IX paragraph 7)

Importance: Simon is an introspective person who appreciates nature and art, more in tune with Cassandra's interests than Rose's shallow inclinations. The author begins to show that although Simon will propose to Rose, they are truly not a good match because they have fundamental differences on life.

Because she's a gold-digger and you know it, Cassandra.

-- Neil (X paragraph 15)

Importance: Neil has shown his dislike of Rose throughout the story and finally tells Cassandra why he doesn't like her. Cassandra thinks Neil will be pleased that Simon and Rose are engaged but he has to reveal what he says are his true feelings. By the end of the story, this will prove to be wrong, meaning that Neil is angry at Rose but not for the reason he tells Cassandra.

Simon, I wasn't frightened and I didn't mind--how could I mind being kissed by anyone I'm as fond of as I am of you? But afterwards--well, just for a second, I was angry that you'd taken it for granted that you could kiss me.

-- Cassandra (XI paragraph 12)

Importance: Cassandra has fallen in love with Simon but she doesn't want him to know it. She gives herself away in how she returns his spontaneous kiss and then tries to recover from her unexpected response.

You're right. I can't remember her ever telling a lie. Truthfulness so often goes with ruthlessness. Yes, yes, if she says she's in love, she is--and her manner last night was quite compatible with it, given Rose's nature.

-- Mr. Mortmain (XII paragraph 6)



Importance: Everyone in the Mortmain family has secretly harbored thoughts that Rose doesn't really love Simon and is just marrying him for the money. Finally, Mr. Mortmain voices his concerns to Cassandra and she tells him that Rose doesn't lie so if she says she loves Simon, she does. Cassandra has her own secret worries about the match but she doesn't want to give her father anything else to worry about.

I won't be coming back," he said quietly, "even if I'm no good as an actor. No, I won't come back.

-- Stephen (XV paragraph 2)

Importance: Stephen is going to London to launch his film career and says goodbye to Cassandra. He still loves Cassandra but she does not love him so it is too painful to be around her anymore so he tells her that he won't be returning regardless of the state of his career.

Give me the key," Topaz whispered to Thomas. "I want to face it alone.

-- Topaz (XVI paragraph 17)

Importance: Topaz feels that her role in life is to save people and she feels worthless if she is not needed. So when the opportunity comes to save her husband from the tower, she seizes the moment to become his rescuer, and establish his need for her even more.