

Jacob's Ladder: A Story of Virginia During the War Study Guide

**Jacob's Ladder: A Story of Virginia During the War by
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Plot Summary

Duncan Gatewood is the young master of Stratford Plantation. He and his sister, Leona, study with a neighbor girl, Sallie Botkin, from Sallie's father Uther Botkin. Duncan is out on the land when a terrible snowstorm hits and when he makes it back to the barn he finds a young slave girl named Midge waiting for him. The two begin an affair that angers Duncan's father, Samuel Gatewood, to the point that he sends Duncan away to military school. The affair continues and when Midge becomes pregnant with Duncan's child, Samuel buys a slave from Uther, a man named Jesse Burns, and forces Midge to marry Jesse, then changes her name to Maggie. Samuel later forces Duncan to admit to his folly, pointing out that the son, a boy named Jacob, is officially a slave and that Duncan's own son will be forced to work in the fields and could even be sold. Duncan is angered by his father's tactics and returns peremptorily to military school. Samuel then decides to sell Maggie and does so, her son Jacob at her side.

The selling of Maggie prompts Jesse to run away and Sallie and her new husband, a former school teacher named Alexander Kirkpatrick, harbor Jesse. Jesse is found and returned to Samuel. Sallie and Alexander are arrested and sentenced to five years in prison. Sallie is later released with her agreement to serve as a nurse for the Confederate Army and Alexander is released to be a soldier, though he runs away during the first battle. Alexander finds refuge with a family who call themselves members of the "Brethren," seeming to fit into their simple lifestyle with ease. When the young son of the house is accused by a group of renegades as being a Union spy, Alexander tries to distance himself from the family and obeys a command by the renegade leader to kill the boy. Alexander joins the group and they spend their time stealing until they're captured.

Meanwhile, Jesse and another slave named Rufus escape the plantation yet again. This time the two men make their way far north and when Rufus is killed, Jesse finds work and settles into a life of labor that is sweet because it is also a life of freedom. Given the opportunity, Jesse joins the Union Army and is eventually captured. When Duncan encounters Jesse by chance, he heeds Jesse's pleas and claims Jesse as his property, saving Jesse from a certain death in a Confederate prison. Duncan then helps Jesse escape back over enemy lines to the north.

While the war rages, Maggie finds herself bought by a man named Silas Omohundru who later sells Maggie into prostitution. With the war at its peak, Silas goes into the business of running the blockades with goods in great demand. Maggie and Silas find themselves at an impasse when Silas realizes that Maggie has avoided having children so that her son, Jacob, is secure. Maggie, now calling herself Marguerite and passing herself off as a foreign bride to cover her mulatto coloring, believes Silas will never be able to love her son as his own. While the Union Army advances, Maggie escapes with Jacob and a single faithful servant, and with enough money sewn into her gown to open a bank during the reconstruction period. Maggie never again sees Jesse or Duncan. Duncan marries Sallie and the Gatewoods, with the help of a few faithful servants and their grandchildren, begin rebuilding their lives.



Part I: Chapters One through Seven

Part I: Chapters One through Seven Summary

As the story opens, a young woman is traveling the countryside in search of those who remember the days of slavery. She is employed by the Works Progress Administration on this project and hears several people talking about the storm known as "Cox's Snow." The young woman then meets up with a woman named Miss Marguerite who begins telling her story, starting with Cox's Snow at Stratford Plantation in Virginia on January 22, 1857. In those days, Miss Marguerite was known as Midge.

Uther Botkin is sixty-five, a poor man who has property bordering Stratford Plantation left to him by a relative. He'd married a young, unhealthy woman named Martha when Uther came into the inheritance. They have a slave "boy," Jesse. Then Martha gives birth to a daughter, Sallie, and dies six months later. Samuel Gatewood, owner of Stratford Plantation, helps make arrangements for a black woman named Opal to help out at Uther's farm and the two divide the chores to their satisfaction though it means Opal does a great deal of the outside work and Uther teaches several area children, including Samuel's children, Leona and Duncan. Because there is much less to do, Uther's family, including Opal, is ready for the storm long before those at the Stratford Plantation.

Duncan Gatewood is away from home when the storm strikes. He finally stops trying to decide which way is home and the horse finds the way. Inside the barn, he discovers a young servant girl named Midge who was sent out to see if Duncan had found his way to the barn. They are snowed in and spend their nights together, drinking the milk from the cows and caring for the animals. When a crew digs their way to the barn, it's discovered that Duncan and Midge are inside together.

In chapter two, "John Brown's Body," two years have passed and Duncan is away at military camp. He's guarding the area prior to the hanging of John Brown. In chapter three, "Jumping the Broomstick," Uther says that his daughter, Sallie is attending the Augusta Female Seminary. Samuel Gatewood has purchased a slave from Uther to marry Midge. Samuel tells Uther that he believes the man, Jesse, will be good to Midge and points out that Jesse is willing to take Midge's unborn child - who is actually the child of Samuel's son Duncan - as his own.

Samuel's wife Abigail learns from her sister-in-law Kate that Samuel's mother is upset at all the preparations for the marriage of Jesse and Midge. Jack the Driver tells Samuel that Midge is refusing to marry Jesse, citing the fact that Jesse is "too black." Samuel tells Jack that most owners, having found a slave pregnant by the master's son, would simply have sold the slave and says that if Midge doesn't marry Jesse, he'll do that. Samuel considers the upcoming ceremony of "jumping the broom" and decides that Midge, as a respectable married woman, should now be called Maggie.



In chapter four, "Halfway Home," Sallie Botkin is on her way home from seminary with her new husband, Alexander Kirkpatrick. Alexander was a teacher at the seminary and he and Sallie had an affair. When Sallie became pregnant, the two are hastily married and are going home to Uther's house. They arrive at an inn called "Halfway House" where Sallie learns of the marriage of Jesse and Maggie.

In chapter five, "Christmas Gift," Jesse confides in Uncle Agamemnon that Maggie won't come to his bed and the old man agrees to make Jesse a charm. Jesse reads letters received by the slaves and writes some replies. People arrive at Stratford Plantation, including Leona and her husband, Thomas Byrd, Uther's family and Duncan, home from the Virginia Military Institute. After dinner, Samuel gives Duncan a gun as a gift and then takes him to the salve quarters to open the cask of liquor as a Christmas gift. There, Samuel takes Duncan through a very uncomfortable scene in which he insists that Duncan look at Jesse's muscles, then at Maggie's face, then tells him to take Maggie's baby, Jacob. Duncan refuses and walks away. Father and son later fight and Duncan leaves. Samuel then says that he must have Maggie off the plantation and "restrains" Jesse during the ordeal.

In chapter six, "The Feejee Mermaid," Sallie and Alexander are at odds, Sallie being completely silent following the loss of their baby. In chapter seven, "A Runaway Slave," Samuel, Jack and some hired slave hunters are looking for Jesse who has run away. They find him at the home of Alexander and Sallie. Samuel says that he will do nothing to them or to Jesse if they will give him up, but they refuse. When Jesse is found, he's shackled and returned to Stratford Plantation but Samuel's son-in-law, Catesby, says that there's no option but to charge Sallie and Alexander for harboring a runaway.

Part I: Chapters One through Seven Analysis

The woman known as Miss Marguerite gives a very brief overview of several details of the story. She says that she'd slept with the cook and that she'd warmed herself in the winter by the chimney. She also says that she'd spent a great deal of her time with Miss Abigail, Samuel's wife. Miss Marguerite also tells about the birth of Miss Abigail's twin boys, and that the twins were born dead though Miss Abigail, apparently not fully believing that the babies could be dead, had insisted on holding one of them. The babies had apparently been dead for days before their births and the skin slipped from the child. Miss Marguerite describes it as the skin slipping from a dead rabbit.

The situation between Sallie and Alexander is strained as both seek a way to reconcile themselves to the current circumstances. Sallie is hopeful and Alexander seems resigned. An interesting point is that Sallie continues to think and talk about the wonderful time she's going to have with her father and Alexander living in the same house. Sallie cites their educational background as a commonality that will bring them close together. She tells the owner of the Halfway House inn, Mr. Cross, that her father doesn't yet know of her marriage or her imminent arrival. She seems to have no fears that her father, upon learning that this older man got Sallie pregnant, would be upset. As it turns out, she's apparently correct though the initial arrival and introductions are not



included in the story. Sallie does seem to be at least slightly worried that people will shun the child but Alexander predicts that people will "look up to" their son, perhaps as a senator.

Jesse seems intent on making his life work with Maggie though Maggie doesn't seem the least interested in Jesse. Jesse's request to Uncle Agamemnon to help him by creating a charm is a testament of the desperation of the young man who has been educated by Uther. Jesse seems to be slightly ashamed to be asking for such a charm, probably because he hates to admit the problem but also because he has been raised by Uther to believe in reason rather than superstition.

As Duncan is arriving at the border of the plantation, he wishes he'd been free to accept the invitation of a roommate rather than returning home. He notes that the plantation seems small though it was once his entire world. He also notes that he can't bring himself to think about Maggie lying in Jesse's bed and that he can hardly imagine the level of desire that has taken over his thoughts and alienated him from his father. Duncan says that he's glad South Carolina has seceded from the United States because the political upheaval and threat of war gives him something to take his mind off his desire for Maggie.

Samuel seems to be trying to teach Duncan a lesson but the lesson is lost in Duncan's anguish at being forced to see Maggie and the child, Jacob, who is Duncan's son. Samuel tells Duncan that men like Jesse, with his strong back and willingness to work, is an asset to the plantation as are women like Maggie. He then points out the child, Jacob, and tells Duncan that this boy will one day be a worker like all the other slaves, and that he may work in the saw mill or the fields or may even be "a house nigger." The goal seems to be Samuel's way of trying to teach Duncan the error of his ways, but the result is that Duncan is forced to confront the young woman he still desires and to see his child in these circumstances. For Maggie's part, she tells Jesse that she doesn't love him or desire him and suggests that he find another woman. Jesse says Maggie is all he wants and that he'll take whatever she can give him.

Alexander says that he wishes he were able to discuss his life, his thoughts and his feelings with Sallie, but that her silence is so noisy that he can't stand it. At one point, Alexander says that he enjoys visiting with Uther, a statement that would have pleased Sallie except that Alexander adds that he enjoys the visits though Uther isn't as educated as he. Alexander believes that Sallie should have known that he'd not meant anything negative by the remark and that he'd really just been searching desperately for something to say to hold onto the upbeat mood that had accompanied Uther's visit. Alexander is making a fatal mistake here in that he believes Sallie should simply know what's in his heart. He wishes he could tell her about a trip to see what was billed as a real mermaid as a child. When he arrives, however, he discovers that it's nothing like he'd expected and was something of a rotting fish corpse which frightens him horribly.



Part I: Chapters Eight through Thirteen

Part I: Chapters Eight through Thirteen Summary

In chapter eight, "So Gallantly Streaming," Duncan and several other cadets from the military institute in Lexington, Virginia, are present to hear a speech when a Union flagpole breaks, sending the flag crashing to the ground. Duncan and the others laugh and the Union cadets present rush them, starting a fight. Duncan and some others go back to the institute and gather their weapons, returning with the intention of regaining their honor. A superior officer stops the fight before it starts, telling the young Confederates that war is imminent and that the place to regain their honor will be on the battlefield there. Duncan has by now earned the nickname "Wheelhorse" from his classmates. In chapter nine, "High Headed Sheep," Opal attends church and begs Jack to put in a good work with Samuel Gatewood on behalf of Sallie. Some of Samuel's slaves offer to help Opal put in the spring planting and she says she wants Jesse, though Jesse is still being held in jail after having tried to run away again.

In chapter ten, Ellam Omohundru is traveling with his uncle, Silas, who buys and sells slaves. Ellam has seen Maggie and goes to visit her where she and the other slaves are being held. He has sex with her, offering her "two bits" for the service, but she says she has no need of money. The next morning, Silas flips over Ellam's chair and dumps breakfast and coffee on the younger man, then goes on a tirade about Ellam's treatment of Maggie. Silas tells Ellam that instead of the one hundred dollars he was going to pay him, he'll give anything over sixteen hundred of Maggie's selling price, apparently as an incentive for the young man to treat Maggie with respect until time for the sale.

In chapter eleven, Catesby plays cards with Duncan and some other young men who have enlisted, losing a great deal of money and his watch. It's on one final bet that Catesby loses that he agrees to join the Confederate Army for a one-year stint. In chapter twelve, the judge cites his lack of compassion for abolitionists during the current climate and sentences Sallie and Alexander to five years each in the Richmond penitentiary. They are transferred to the jail by carriage, accompanied by a warden and his wife. Sallie notes that she probably should have pleaded for mercy, but didn't.

Chapter thirteen is "Remarks by a Mountain Agriculturalist, Samuel Gatewood, as printed in the Southern Planter, April 19, 1756." The essay details the necessity for kindly treatment of slaves, citing the need for healthy men and women who are able and willing to work hard. Samuel cites the need for a dedicated "driver" who is willing and able to share the work, endure the sun and remain present until each day's work is complete. Following the essay it's noted that Samuel asks Jesse what would convince him to stop running away. When Jesse says having Maggie and Jacob return, Samuel says that their presence tears his family apart and that he cannot grant that request.



Part I: Chapters Eight through Thirteen Analysis

The chapter titled "High Headed Sheep" includes an interesting analogy in which Opal likens Jesse to a "high headed sheep" she once had. According to Opal, the sheep refused to have anything to do with her and would stand at a distance as long as she was near. However, when dogs kill the other sheep, the "high headed sheep" runs for a solid wood fence and knocks himself down. Though he by then knows that he can't possibly break through, he continues running at the fence until he breaks his own neck. Opal says the sheep must have known the effort was futile. The analogy seems to indicate that Jesse also knows his attempts at escape are futile, and that he would not achieve anything even if he does manage to escape, but continues to run at it anyway.

Silas tells Ellam that he expects to get twenty-four hundred dollars for Maggie because she's pretty and will bring that to someone who wants to set her up as a prostitute. Silas says that Ellam, in having sex with Maggie, likely made her feel that she has no choice in her life and that will affect how Maggie acts when Silas presents her to potential buyers. The problem, according to Silas, is that Maggie must act a certain way in order to command that price. If she act belligerent, a potential buyer may believe that Maggie could refuse customers or rebel, and decide that she's going to be too much trouble to be worth much. Silas and Samuel are very similar in that they believe slaves have to be treated well in order to gain the most from them. Samuel says a slave who's been beaten can't work as hard as one who is healthy. The differences in the two is that Silas says the slaves are human beings, capable of a full range of emotions and that treatment affecting those emotions must be such that the slave is at his best while Samuel doesn't seem to know - or care - that the slaves are humans, that they are hurt at being parted from loved ones and angered at humiliation just as anyone else would be.

On the way to the penitentiary, Sallie recalls the scene when she lost the baby. She'd blamed herself initially, saying that she'd gotten too much exercise, and Alexander doesn't reassure her on these points. Instead, Alexander says that he doesn't know what the two of them would have done with a baby. His words are cold on the surface but it seems likely that this is Alexander's way of dealing with the pain of the loss. For her part, Sallie believes that even a child would not have been enough for Alexander. She seems correct in this assumption and it seems that Alexander is the kind of man who always feels he is surrounded by people inferior to him, always wants more than he has but believes it's not his fault that he has so little, and never takes initiative to change what he doesn't like.



Part II: Chapters Fourteen through Twenty-Seven

Part II: Chapters Fourteen through Twenty-Seven Summary

Chapter fourteen, "Letter from Corporal Catesby Byrd to his Wife, Leona," is written from Camp Bartow, Virginia, on September 16, 1861. Catesby says that he and Duncan are well, urges Leona to stay at Stratford with her family for security, and asks that she talk to her mother about getting Samuel to write to Duncan, saying that he believes Duncan is ready to reconcile. In chapter fifteen, "Cousin Molly," Sallie is forced total silence as are all prisoners. She sees Alexander daily but they are forbidden to speak at all. Sallie is called for a visitor and finds Abigail's Cousin Molly has soap, cheese and other minor gifts, along with a promise to visit again.

In chapter fifteen, "Bullwhip Days," Jesse has come to imagine that Maggie loves him, though she didn't prior to being sold away from the plantation. Jesse says that he's not trying to run away from the plantation but is trying to run to Maggie. On his third attempt, Jesse is asked to promise he'll give up the idea. He refuses and Samuel orders two of the men to whip Jesse. Both refuse and Samuel does it himself. Opal tells Jesse that the baby isn't his, a fact Jesse already knows, but he says it doesn't matter. Uther tries to buy Jesse but Samuel refuses. A fellow slave named Rufus says that two other slaves ran away and that Jack whipped them when they were returned. Rufus then says that he's also planning to run and Jesse advises that he do so in the evening so that he has a night's head start when he's discovered.

In chapter eighteen, "Inauguration Day," Alexander is called to the office of the acting keeper of the penitentiary and is told he can be pardoned if he agrees to serve in the Confederate Army. In chapter nineteen, "Elementary Arithmetic," Duncan and Catesby are among those involved in a big battle at McDowell. The Confederates are in an unenviable position but Duncan is elated with the excitement, saying that he understands why men go to war. As the battle draws to a close, Duncan is hit in the leg. He doesn't immediately look and admits that it's because he doesn't want to know how bad it really is. In chapter twenty, "A Note from Catesby Byrd to Samuel Gatewood," Catesby writes that Duncan has been wounded, that he won't die and will keep his leg, and that Samuel should send someone to Wilson's Hotel, an establishment that's been turned into a hospital for the wounded, to get him. In chapter twenty-one, Sallie is visiting again with Cousin Molly when the prison keeper arrives. He tells Sallie that Alexander is demanding that he be treated as a prisoner of war because he is an abolitionist. Sallie tries to convince him this is a poor move but he refuses. Alexander cries and pleads as he's being flogged.

In chapter twenty-two, "A Letter from Catesby Byrd to Duncan Gatewood," Catesby describes an incident in which he and another Confederate were standing guard when a



Union soldier stumbled into their camp. Catesby says that his fellow soldier eventually convinces the boy that no one will take anyone else prisoner and that the boy should simply return the way he came in search of his regiment, which he does. Catesby ends the letter by asking when Duncan plans to return to duty. In chapter twenty-three, "Respectable Work," Sallie is released from prison into the custody of Cousin Molly to work in the military hospital in Richmond, Virginia. Molly tells Sallie that it may not be much of an improvement. Sallie admits that she might not be able to do the work, but promises to try. At the hospital where Molly oversees the nurses, Sallie is told to take piles of used bandages for disposal. She does so, noting the feces, blood and pus on the rags and the piles of rotting human flesh, probably amputated limbs, in the pit where she dumps them. When a surgeon asks how many more are awaiting his services that day, he's told there are about fifty. Sallie tells Molly it isn't what she'd expected.

In chapter twenty-four, "The High Life," Silas Omohundru arrives with an acquaintance at a house where there is prostitution and evening entertainment known as the Captain's House in Memphis, Tennessee. Silas hates the evening's fun, complains of a headache and slips into a parlor to be alone for awhile. Maggie is in the room, also seeking some quiet time away from the bawdy noise of the rest of the house with the male callers. Silas tells Maggie's owner that he plans to spend the night with the girl and drifts off to sleep, waking the following morning. When Omohundru leaves Memphis, he's passed off most of his cotton trade to another man and it's later reported that he has a blockade runner and has married a Bahamian girl.

In chapter twenty-five, "Granary of the Confederacy," every able hand is pressed into service as Samuel Gatewood and his neighbors struggle to find a way to gather their crops. Samuel says that the government has "rented" some of his slaves while others have simply run away. Some have been returned while others were killed in their escape attempts. The remaining men work as cradlers, cutting the wheat while others less able to withstand the rigors of the work rake and stack the wheat. Samuel himself is working alongside Duncan who is almost completely recovered and will soon be rejoining his regiment. Catesby, having had a brief stay at home, has never seen his youngest child, Willie, who is ill with the fever. When Samuel arrives home after a day's work, Abigail says that the child's life is in the hands of God and that there's nothing else to do but wait and pray. Uther arrives and thanks Samuel and Abigail for having played a role in getting Sallie released from prison.

Chapter twenty-six is titled "Can You Run?" One evening, just after Jack does a final check to be certain that all the slaves are present, Rufus slips away and breaks into the root cellar where Jesse is being held. Jesse is shackled and Rufus carries tools taken from the forge to help break Jesse's chains. They travel only a few hours the first night, wasting a great deal of time breaking the shackles and completing the task during their second day. They quickly reach the outer limits of where Jesse had gone on his previous attempts. They soon encounter a group of rebels who are obviously very dangerous people and the two men sneak out that night after everyone is asleep. They later encounter Union Army officials and answer questions about what they'd seen during their travels, information that earns them a meal. They continue to follow the railroad tracks and when they find another band of soldiers, this time Confederates, they



pretend to be returning to the home of their master in a nearby town after having gone to visit some girls. The soldiers don't seem to accept the story but don't argue overly much. When one of the soldiers tells the two that Abraham Lincoln has made the Emancipation Proclamation, the two men are dumbfounded. Then one of the soldiers shoots Rufus in the chest. As Rufus is twitching, the man says that Rufus is trying to get away even in death, and shoots him again. The man turns on Jesse but says that if he shoots both men there will be no one to bury them. Jesse immediately goes in search of ground soft enough that he can dig with their tin cup, the only tool he has for the chore, and promises Rufus that he won't bury him until he's done running.

In chapter twenty-seven, "A Letter from Sergeant Catesby Byrd to his Wife Leona," Catesby writes in great detail about the battles and the situation with the Confederate Army. After several pages, he tells Leona that he's written about all these other things to put off writing the purpose of the letter. He tells her he is grieved over the loss of their son, Willie, and that he holds the boy dear to his heart though he never held the child in his arms.

Part II: Chapters Fourteen through Twenty-Seven Analysis

Cousin Molly is an interesting character in that she seems to be clinging to a past that no longer exists. However, she is kind and seems intent on helping those she encounters. She also has a sense of humor and it's that fact that seems to get through the wall Sallie is building around herself. Cousin Molly scorns predestination, saying that if everything is predetermined and left only to fate then there's no need for a person to do anything for herself. In an apparent effort to make this point with a trivial daily task, she says that if "a person cannot affect her own salvation, what is the point of ironing her underthings." Sallie replies that a person irons their underthings in case she falls so that people see them. Molly thinks about this for some time before she says that she would hope people would have the decency to turn away, but that some might not. The conversation seems to have just the right level of humor to help Sallie trust Molly, who will become a lifeline during the course of Sallie's prison term.

As Alexander tells Sallie about his decision to demand that they be treated as prisoners of war, Sallie tries to remain calm. She patiently explains that she is from the South and that she desire no other life than to return home. Alexander, however, is on a tirade and imagines that he will be acclaimed for his stand. He says that his uncle had never been invited to preach a Yale, though he'd always imagined that he would be.

There's an instant connection between Silas Omohundru and Maggie, though this connection is not really spelled out for the reader. Silas doesn't initially remember Maggie and when he does, he tries to apologize for having once sold her into this life. She tells him that it's not his fault. It's unclear whether Silas feels guilt for his role in Maggie's slavery or if there's simply two people who sense a kindred spirit in the other. In any case, this will be the beginning of Maggie's new life with Silas and she will continue to claim the name Omohundru throughout her life.



One evening, Duncan and Samuel ride together and Duncan suggests that they go to a swimming hole known as Blue Hole. There, they swim and Samuel realizes that Duncan probably brought Maggie to this place while they were involved in their relationship, though he doesn't say anything about it to Duncan. For his part, Duncan notices that his father's flesh is flabby and that he's aging quickly, although he also doesn't say anything. This is an example of the coming of age theme that is seen in various characters throughout this book.

When Rufus and Jesse decide to run away, they take more time to plan it than Jesse had apparently done on their own. Jesse, knowing how to read, wants a map and a house servant slips books from the library out to Rufus who slips them in to Jesse until they find the map Jesse wants. Rufus has some basic horseshoeing tools with him and plans to earn his living at that trade. An interesting part is that Jesse still seems to have a sense of humor. When Rufus breaks into the root cellar to let Jesse out, it's too dark to see. He calls out, asking if Jesse is there. Jesse is locked up all the time but tells Rufus that he'd been to Memphis earlier in the day and had just managed to return in time for their meeting.



Part III: Chapters Twenty-Eight through Thirty-Six

Part III: Chapters Twenty-Eight through Thirty-Six Summary

In chapter twenty-eight, "The Outside Wife," Maggie, now known as Marguerite, is in Nassau, the Bahamas. The date is November 6, 1862, and Marguerite is in the company of Silas at an expensive gathering at the governor's mansion. Most in attendance are blockade runners, as is Silas. Marguerite is quickly learning how to handle herself at gatherings of this kind. There are a number of women in attendance who are, just like Marguerite, not wives but mistresses. These women are known as "outside wives" and the governor's wife refers to them as "companions." Marguerite is happy in her life with Silas though she is worried that he would never love Jacob as his own son if Marguerite gave him a child of his own. Toward that end, she's sought out methods of ensuring that Jacob remains an only child and Silas treats him as his own. Marguerite is accompanied by her maid, a dark woman named Kizzy. There's a brief discussion between Silas and Marguerite as they consider what they'll do when the war is over, though Silas says the months of war stretch out before them with no end in sight.

In chapter twenty-nine, "A Big Scrap," Alexander arrives in Fredericksburg, Virginia, just before a big fight. He tells Duncan that he claimed the two men were half-brothers in order to be assigned to Duncan's regiment. Alexander is quickly set up as a courier because of his education and ability to read and write. When the fighting begins in earnest, Alexander is sent with a message to a particular group about to be hemmed in. He initially believes this to be the chance to be a hero but falls into a bramble thicket and runs away instead. He is soon escorted by a Tennessean who makes Alexander help a young boy walk until the boy dies. Alexander gets in an ambulance based on his injuries, which are minor in comparison to most. When he has the opportunity, he jumps from a train and runs away. Duncan and Catesby survive and watch helpless as wounded men die in the fields.

In chapter thirty, Sallie continues working at the hospital and prays for winter storms because that sometimes slows the number of wounded arriving. When a young soldier asks Sallie if he's going to die, she says that he won't live through the night. He then asks her to remain with him and she does until he dies. One of the surgeons, James Lane, receives a telegram. Though he doesn't say what news is contained in the telegram, he begins to cry but then goes back to work, amputating limbs quickly and with precision. When a Union soldier is brought to him, James instructs that he and all other Union soldiers be taken to another surgeon for the rest of the evening, saying that he can't be certain he won't intentionally harm the man. In chapter thirty-one, "A Contraband," Jesse is working on a detail charged with cleaning out the cesspools



around the hospitals. Jesse works the pumps and unclogs the screens as necessary. Men don't last long at this job, falling ill or moving on to another job as quickly as possible. He learns of a job at the ramifications and decides that he'll go there the following day to look for a new job.

In chapter thirty-two, "Mrs. Omohundru," the scene returns to the girl from the WPA who is interviewing Marguerite Omohundru. The girl says that her father and her boss have criticized the amount of time she's spending with Marguerite, both saying that the story she's telling isn't true. Each day the girl arrives and Marguerite tells her additional details of the story. The girl has stopped taking notes and is now simply immersed in the story. Marguerite drops back to "Chancellorsville, Virginia, May 2, 1863," telling stories of the fighting and the role of Duncan and Catesby in a particular battle. Duncan is still riding the horse that had been his since he was a child, Gypsy. During the battle in which the Union soldiers are thoroughly routed, Gypsy is slashed and her intestines spill out onto the ground so that Duncan has to slit her throat to put her out of her misery. Chapter thirty-two is a "Letter from Lieutenant Catesby Byrd to his Wife, Leona," dated from Richmond Virginia, on May 10, 1863. Catesby informs Leona that Duncan has been severely injured, has lost an arm, and is at the Camp Winder Hospital. Catesby offers condolences on the death of Aunt Kate.

In chapter thirty-four, "Cheap Gloves," Samuel arrives at the hospital. Duncan is in poor spirits and at one point Duncan apologizes for his melancholy. He tries to make a joke, saying that he has arranged with another amputee to buy gloves together and split them so that the cost of gloves will always be cheaper now, but it comes off as a bitter complaint rather than a joke. Samuel and Catesby later meet up and Catesby says that he'll be returning with the regiment. Samuel tries to talk to Catesby about his gambling but Catesby says that he doesn't need to be wealthy unless he loses. In chapter thirty-five, "Family Happiness," Alexander has found refuge with a family of "Brethren." Alexander is found sleeping in a haystack just a short time after the father of the family is found murdered. The two sons of the Danzinger family invite Alexander to work for food that day and that evening he's invited to stay, provided he carries his share of the work. Alexander agrees and remains with the family.

In chapter thirty-six, "An Evening at Johnny Worsham's Gambling Hell," Catesby arrives at the gambling hall, a favorite haunt, and wants to buy into a particular poker game ongoing. He's told there's a buy-in of five hundred dollars and Catesby pulls out the two hundred of his own money he had planned to gamble with, adding three hundred of the army's money he is supposed to use to buy supplies. Silas Omohundru arrives and joins the game. At one point, Catesby realizes that he's lost most of the money but has won it all back by daybreak.

Part III: Chapters Twenty-Eight through Thirty-Six Analysis

Alexander arrives at the battlefield, apparently not of his own free will but because of coercion by the prison officials. He'd apparently turned down the initial offer but is now



pressed into service. Alexander arrives with the idea that he might emerge a hero of some sort and seems to have the idea that he can still redeem himself though he hasn't yet seen any fault in his own actions. He immediately begins repeating his stories of being a Yale graduate and an educated man which earns him no respect but does get him assigned as a courier. What's interesting is that Alexander seems to have no idea what the war is truly like though he does wish he could return to prison long before the first fight begins, citing the fact that at least he was fed in prison. When he takes his first message between two commanding officers, the response is a brief tirade about that general's plans to remain in position as long as possible to protect those on their flank. After that tirade, Alexander reads the message he's carrying and discovers that it's a joke, chiding the other commander for having allowed his soldiers to start the war which now prevents both officers from being at home with their families. Alexander is cheered by this exchange and, incredibly, seems to believe that the entire war is nothing but a hoax. He looks around at the other soldiers, wondering how many of them are also in on the joke. It seems impossible that Alexander could take this communication to heart in such a manner, but he does.

Jesse notes that there are a lot of jobs the whites won't do, including cleaning out the cesspools, and he is glad of it. Jesse rents a sleeping space in a laundry, earns twenty-five dollars a month and feels that he's doing well. He buys meat pies from a local store for his supper every night and cheese for his breakfast, cleans his clothes at the laundry where he lives and has a little money set aside for when he needs new pants. Despite the hardships he's facing, Jesse looks at his situation and believes he is a rich man. An interesting change is taking place in Jesse. Though he has yet to take a real look at his situation with regard to Maggie, he is no longer certain that he can see her in the stars as was the case while he was on the plantation. Jesse does note that he doesn't care to visit the houses of prostitution around the city and that he feels more like "a little boy searching for his family than a grown man searching for his wife."

The Danzinger family is among those who are conscientious observers. While they were initially harassed for their views, they are allowed to live mostly in peace from the government because the farms produce a great deal of goods, including food, needed by the armies. It's interesting that Alexander seems to find his niche here in a place where he's required to work hard at menial jobs and manual labor. There are no books in the house except the few written in German and Alexander finds that he doesn't miss the books and doesn't really care. Another interesting point is that the members of the community know that the Danzingers are harboring a man who has deserted the army and that they keep the information secret.

When Catesby confesses to Silas Omohundru that he'd been gambling with money that wasn't his own, Omohundru asks him what he'd have done if he'd lost it. Catesby doesn't explain other than to say he would have done the "honorable thing."



Part III: Chapters Thirty-Seven through Forty-Three

Part III: Chapters Thirty-Seven through Forty-Three Summary

In chapter thirty-seven, "Washing the Corpse," Opal and the young slave from Stratford Plantation, Franky, are washing the corpse of Uther Botkin. Sallie writes that she is unable to return home and Opal wants to remain at the Botkin place but is told to return to the Stratford Plantation. In chapter thirty-seven, "Letter from Lieutenant Catesby Byrd to his Wife, Leona," Catesby says that he's "renounced his previous sinful ways" and has become a Christian. He urges Leona to keep an eye on Thomas, remembering that the temptations on a young man can be serious at his age. Catesby says that he's given up gambling and now doesn't understand why it had been so important to him.

In chapter thirty-nine, "Love in the Rebel Capital," the girl again talks to Marguerite Omohundru about the pressure she's receiving to make progress toward her ultimate goal and is being told to leave Marguerite's story behind to go on to real slave stories. Marguerite picks up the story, telling of Sallie's work in the hospital and the fact that people of society don't really want to know about the hospital. Cousin Molly tells Sallie that she must go to Duncan in the hospital. Sallie initially hesitates but agrees. Duncan talks of his relationship with Midge, saying that he's afraid she bewitched him. As Duncan recovers, he says that his father sees Duncan's lost arm as an opportunity to have Duncan come home. Duncan later attends an event with Sallie where he meets Confederate President Davis. Duncan is somewhat annoyed at the conversation and at one point asks Davis why it is that the men are fed so much better in the hospital than in the field. Davis responds at once that it's so the wounded men will heal quickly to return to the field. Duncan talks to Sallie of aspects of the soldiers in the fields. He recounts a time when the Union and Confederate troops were camped so near each other that the music from the Union camp could be clearly heard. When the Confederates yelled that the Union musicians should play some Southern music, they immediately respond with "Dixie."

Chapter forty, "Recruiters," is set in Washington City, District of Columbia, on November 20, 1863. Jesse is working with a group of blacks, mostly former slaves, who are building embrasures at the edge of the city. There is a conversation among the commanding officers about the value of the black workers, with one colonel saying that there are good and bad among them, but that many of them are comparable to their white counterparts, especially considering their disadvantages during the days of slavery. Jesse and the others are working hard, passing sandbags for the structure, when a recruiter arrives. The first who speaks to the blacks takes a tack that the men don't care for, citing the possibility of revenge if they join the Union army. When the blacks aren't swayed, another takes up the conversation, saying that the men know the



whites have kept few promises but that it's because of Lincoln that the blacks are free to make a choice for themselves. He urges them to choose to serve in the military, a plea that gains Jesse's attention.

In chapter forty-one, "Master Abraham's Sermon," Jesse and seven others arrive at their barracks in Analoston Island, District of Columbia. The barracks are in deplorable shape and Jesse sets the men to work, cleaning, gathering wood and making the barracks livable. Jesse reads from a two-day-old newspaper, telling the men about the Gettysburg Address presented by Lincoln. When he finishes, the men say that Master Abraham presented a powerful sermon. One of the men asks Jesse if they, the blacks, are "the people" Lincoln talks about. Jesse responds, "not yet." In chapter forty-two, "A Christmas Dinner," Catesby is bunking with a man named Private Mitchell. The two are comfortable together, working well together though Catesby realizes that Mitchell isn't a devout Christian as Catesby has become. There's a prayer meeting and most of the men attend. It's not until the meeting ends that Catesby realizes that these men aren't present out of any desire to attend a prayer meeting or to confess their sins, but that they were just trying to relive memorable Christmas seasons from before the war. It's on this day, when Catesby has a piece of bacon saved for Christmas dinner to share with Mitchell, that word comes down that there's a Christmas feast due to arrive via rail later that day. The men are told that the food is a gift from the people of Richmond as repayment for the soldiers' willingness to share rations during a siege of that city. When the train arrives, there's a single basket of food and the men draw lots for it. The disappointment is palpable.

In chapter forty-three, "Charades," the girl arrives at the home of Marguerite Omohundru with the news that she's to start a new job soon, having given up the job with the WPA. Marguerite takes up the story in Richmond on January 8, 1864. Duncan wakes to a cold room and realizes that as a child he'd felt it was the house servant Pompey's duty to light the fire in his room, warming the temperature so that it's comfortable for Duncan. Cousin Molly says that she believes the war is toughening everyone. Duncan is adapting to the loss of his arm though he never wears neckwear that requires tying. On a particular evening, Duncan is to attend an event with Molly and Sallie though Sallie begs off after losing another patient that day. Soon after his arrival, Duncan sees Midge, now known as Marguerite Omohundru, and manages a private conversation with her. She tells him something of her life, including that Duncan's son, Jacob, thrives. Duncan promises that he won't reveal her secret, a fact that Marguerite confesses concerns her at every turn.

Part III: Chapters Thirty-Seven through Forty-Three Analysis

Opal has maintained some aspects of the farm that was not really part of her job, only part of her ability to manage under the circumstances and to think ahead. For example, she walks into the woods daily to milk the cow and come back to the plantation with the milk. She has kept her pigs in the woods as well and when there's a need for fresh hog meat, she sends Catesby's son Thomas into the woods to shoot one. Bringing a hog out



of the woods is a great deal of work but the area farmers who slaughtered their hogs at the usual time of year found the army descending on them, confiscating the meat and the live hogs to feed the men. This shows a great deal of initiative. It seems ultimately unfair that Opal is forced to leave the home she's known for decades after she's worked so hard.

In his feverish delirium, Duncan rails about Maggie, referring to her as Midge, the name she had prior to her marriage to Jesse. He yells out about their sexual encounters. As he begins to recover, he cries about his lack of courage when the time came for him to stand up for his son. Duncan says that he allowed his son to be sold rather than standing up to his father, insisting that he raise his son as his own.

One of Jesse's fellow recruits says that he wishes he hadn't joined soon after they arrive at the barracks. Jesse promptly replies that if the man hadn't joined, he'd be back at his old job the next day wishing that he had. Jesse seems to understand a great deal about human nature in both races and this is a gift that will help him succeed in the military.

When Marguerite and Duncan prepare to slip outside for a private conversation, Marguerite tells a servant to bring her wrap. Once outside, Duncan tells Marguerite that she's learned to issue orders to servants and she says that it's not an admirable quality. Marguerite herself had talked of the difficulties of learning to deal with servants. While at a dinner table, she'd noticed that the diners simply didn't see the servants and that the hands who waited on the tables were all but invisible and that there must be an art to making the servants invisible. When Marguerite and Duncan are outside and the servant arrives with her wrap several minutes later, the servant seems to expect that Marguerite would be angry at the delay and immediately offers an explanation. Marguerite doesn't grow angry but does give the man a coin as a thank-you for the service. It may have been easier for some people to make this transition but Marguerite is obviously ill at ease in the social situations, partly because of her feelings for the plight of the servants and partly because of her fear of being recognized.



Part IV: Chapters Forty-Four through Fifty-Three

Part IV: Chapters Forty-Four through Fifty-Three Summary

In chapter forty-four, "A Nickel-Plated Watch," Alexander is traveling with members of the Danzinger family on their way home from prayer meeting. Alexander is listening to young Seth Danzinger talk about the ease with which a person can slip from doing what's right in the eyes of their religion to taking on the ways of the world when a group of renegades stop the buggy. They demand that Seth and Alexander get out and the two comply. The renegades tell Seth that they'd known his father to be a spy for the Union Army and that they'd seen him in Winchester where they believe he'd also been sharing information. Seth denies it but when it becomes evident the renegades are going to shoot him for his alleged crimes anyway,

Seth asks Alexander to tell his family that he loves them and that his younger brother will now have to take over the duties of the man of the house. Alexander, meanwhile, works to convince the men that he is a soldier, convalescing, and that he has plans to return to his regiment soon. Though the men don't believe him, they eventually order him to shoot Seth as a traitor. It's noted that Alexander doesn't know what else to do and so kills Seth.

In chapter forty-five, "Don't We Look Like Men A'Marching," Sergeant Jesse Burns is leading the A Company near Fairfax City, Virginia, when a surgeon named Potts reminds Jesse that Potts will put money into a savings account for any man that requests it. Jesse says that he doesn't believe it to be a good arrangement, citing the fact that their money would be lost if something happens to Potts, but at Potts' insistence, Jesse promises to remind the men that the service is available. In chapter forty-six, "Don't We Look Like Men A'Marching (Reprise)," Jesse's company is on an extended forced march. Jesse and Captain Fesseden pull up the rear to press the stragglers. In chapter forty-seven, "The Mule Shoe," there's a terrible battle near Spotsylvania Courthouse, Virginia, on May 12, 1864. Catesby Byrd is involved for the Confederates and his men have a horrible time trying to hold a line until reinforcements are in place. In chapter forty-eight, "Don't We Look Like Men O' War," Jesse learns that the surgeon named Potts has autopsied and cut off the head of a black soldier. Jesse tells the commander that the men are upset over the incident and the commander says Potts will be discharged from the army for his action. There's another battle immediately following and Jesse's men are in the heat of that fight.

In chapter forty-nine, "A Letter from Major Duncan Gatewood to Leona Byrd," Duncan tells Leona that Catesby has given his life for his country. Duncan goes into great detail of the battle at Spotsylvania, saying that Catesby had shown up after the battle, covered in blood, and had told a fellow soldier that the "Virginians would fight until every man



and boy was dead." Duncan says that he found Catesby later, sitting at a tree with his pistol in his hand, having taken his own life. In chapter fifty, "A Changed Woman," Sallie continues her work with the wounded and dying, writing letters and comforting those who have no hope of survival. The work is trying until one night when Sallie realizes the truth of Cousin Molly's attitude, that the nurses can do everything they can for the wounded, but that the nurses themselves must go on living. Sallie is nearing her nineteenth birthday.

In chapter fifty-one, "Early Yellow Tomatoes," Abigail Gatewood is helping Opal set out tomato plants at the plantation. Catesby's daughter, Pauline, says that her mother spends all her time praying and crying. The family is in difficulty, having lost most of their help and depending on Catesby's son, Thomas, who is flighty and unwilling to help unless the mood strikes him to do so. In chapter fifty-two, "Master Abraham Pays a Call," Jesse and his company are assigned to work on a dock. Jesse makes the acquaintance of another black military man. Later, Jesse's company is on the road when Abraham Lincoln comes by. Jesse notes that the man doesn't sit well in the saddle, is dressed in a black suit, and that the "colored troops broke ranks" and ran to Lincoln, touching his clothing and even his horse with great reverence.

In chapter fifty-three, "By the Dark of the Moon," the girl and Marguerite spend some more time together. Marguerite says that she was careful to never give Silas a child of his own blood, fearing Jacob would be pushed aside. She returns to the story with Silas awaiting the arrival of his ship, the "Wild Darrell." It's safe arrival prompts Silas's attendance and he orders the cargo unloaded immediately. There is a great deal of speculative cargo, including items that are scarce in wartime, but Silas also deals in goods for the army. Silas has begun to be angry of Marguerite's insistence that she remain away from society as much as possible, saying that she cares more for her reputation as it would affect her son than she cares for Silas.

Part IV: Chapters Forty-Four through Fifty-Three Analysis

Alexander has seemed to fit into the Danzinger household and has apparently become an accepted member of the family, having been invited to prayer meeting for the first time on the night Seth is killed. This is a sign of their acceptance and of the fact that they trust Alexander. Seth also trusts Alexander with his final earthly request - that Alexander pass a message on to the rest of Seth's family. Alexander by now knows this family, having been taken in by them at a time when he was desperate for shelter. It's a sign of his character that he simply folds under the pressure to kill in order to save his own life. Alexander will quickly fit into this band of renegades to the extent that he's no longer in any danger of being killed as the northern sympathizer, but he will become so cruel that even this band of renegades fear and hate him.

There's a desperation about Abigail Gatewood that is uncharacteristic of a woman of her breeding, but that seems typical of women of the period who are unable to fulfill what they consider their traditional roles. In Abigail's situation, she is upset because of the



work she's now forced to do, apparently not so much because she's doing manual labor such as setting out the tomato plants, but because she knows that if these tomato plants don't bear, there will be no tomatoes for food and no seeds for the garden for the coming year. This uncertainty, after a lifetime of looking to someone else to provide the food she eats, is evident in her attitudes and actions. This is also typical of others, including Opal, who cites her fear of what they'd do if they were to break some piece of equipment, such as the cards use to clean and flatten the wool from their sheep.

Marguerite outright tells Silas that she doesn't believe he will ever love Jacob as his own and Silas outright accuses Marguerite of ensuring that she doesn't bear Silas's child. The two are at an impasse on this point because both is right. While Silas doesn't press the issue of a child, it does seem to be the beginning of the end of their relationship. Silas tells Marguerite that he'd never loved another woman and there's an implied "but" at the end of that sentence, seeming to indicate that he's come to realize that he could live without her. To Silas, this unwillingness to give in to Silas's desire for a child of his own must seem an act of disregard for his feelings. Marguerite seems to feel the same toward Silas for his lack of affection for Jacob.



Part IV: Chapters Fifty-Four through Fifty-Eight

Part IV: Chapters Fifty-Four through Fifty-Eight Summary

In chapter fifty-four, "Jine the Calvary," a young Union soldier stumbles into the camp of Alexander and the other renegades. The leader tells Alexander that he's not to lay a hand on the boy, vaguely citing a previous incident. Alexander is accepted into the group because he is able to help with strategy, overriding emotion in favor of lucrative thefts. In chapter fifty-five, "In Shady Hollywood," Duncan and Sallie are having a picnic. The conversation turns to marriage but neither seems certain of their feelings for the other,

In chapter fifty-six, "Master and Man," there is a detailed description of the battle in which the black soldiers are pitted against the Confederates. Jesse and several other black soldiers are captured by the Confederates. The men are being released to former masters providing those masters are willing to claim them and take them home. Duncan finds Jesse there and has to decide whether to take Jesse back to Stratford Plantation or to let him remain in prison. The men are pleading with the whites to be released, promising to work in the fields or to do any labor necessary in order to avoid the prison because of the stories of maltreatment in the prisons. Duncan takes Jesse to an abandoned house and they share rations for their meal. Jesse asks Duncan why some of the black soldiers were killed while trying to surrender. Jesse says that some men "chose their own damnation" by their actions on that day. Jesse and Duncan talk about the days of their youth, with they, along with Leona and Sallie, were being taught to read by Uther. Duncan says they could have said anything they felt to each other in those days but Jesse says that he, as a black man and a slave, learned quickly when and how to keep his mouth shut - a lesson Duncan didn't have to learn. The two men also talk about their fears for the war. Duncan says that if Virginia falls, the people of the state will be "a conquered people." Jesse says that he has already been a member of a conquered race of people. There's a consensus between the two men that it will take a long time for the slavery issue to be cleared up, regardless of which side wins the war at hand. They talk on through most of the night and Duncan helps Jesse escape back through the Confederate lines that night.

In chapter fifty-seven, "The Loss of the Wild Darrell," Marguerite and the girl talk at Marguerite's home. Marguerite tells the girl that her family is to arrive soon for a party to celebrate Marguerite's birthday, and invites the girl to attend. The girl readily agrees. Marguerite says that while the family is visiting, they will try to convince her that it's time to sell the bank. While Marguerite says that she may do as they ask, she says she's been in business since 1864 when she took over the clerk's duties for Silas. Marguerite says that she is left with the business to tend while Silas was away in Richmond. She



finds the clerk's methods shoddy and immediately sets out to collect on invoices that were simply not filed correctly with the military. She then goes to the bank and demands that Silas's assets be converted to gold currency instead of Confederate money or cotton pledges. She meets resistance and eventually turns bonds into cash by dealing with blockade runners. When someone goes to complain of Marguerite's actions to Silas, he refuses to listen. Silas then takes Marguerite to the room set aside for the blockade runners, the crew of the "Wild Darrell." There, Silas tells the crew that any instruction from Marguerite is to be taken as if it were his personal directive. Later, the "Wild Darrell" is run aground. Silas leaves and Marguerite says she never saw him again.

In chapter fifty-eight, "Improving the Race," Jesse teaches reading to others in the army and on a particular day travels to visit friends in a nearby company where Jesse hears the men singing the spiritual, "Climbing Jacob's Ladder." Jesse talks about Maggie, his desire to reunite with her, and his belief that reading is going to be vital for the success of the race after the war is over.

In chapter fifty-nine, Alexander and the group of renegades are captured with several of them killed. One of the officers asks Alexander what happened to make him fall into this group, and Alexander replies that he wasn't "an honest man" when he began his association with them.

Part IV: Chapters Fifty-Four through Fifty-Eight Analysis

Alexander has obviously endured some sort of complete mental breakdown and it can be argued that it occurred during his first taste of battle though it seems more likely that it was simply a part of Alexander's makeup that has now come to the front.

There's a very convoluted conversation between Sallie and Duncan in which he seems to avoid the topic when she suggests that they marry and then proposes himself. In Sallie's case, she seems to propose marriage but then when Duncan does propose, she refuses. She then says that he has to promise that he'll keep himself safe. It seems that Sallie is fearful that she will move into a relationship with Duncan and then he'll be killed, leaving her to mourn him. This seems a natural reaction on the part of a young girl who is trying to keep her emotions safe, especially considering the difficult job she's been doing for the past months.

Silas instructs Marguerite to pay the crew after the "Wild Darrell" runs aground, and she refuses, saying that the crew must take some of the risk, as she and Silas have, and blames the pilot who has been known to drink when he should have remained sober. This is an interesting scene because it is apparently the culmination of Silas and Marguerite as a couple though it seems to take the loss of the ship, the "Wild Darrell," to prompt Silas's decision to leave. They have had trouble over various issues and this is just the latest in those, but is obviously enough to make Silas come to a final decision. Silas tells Marguerite that she is to "do as she sees fit," and that the company is



completely in her hands so that she should do whatever she wants. Marguerite seems to realize Silas is going to leave her. She takes Jacob to her servant, Kizzy, and she and Silas spend the day and that night making love. The following day, Silas boards a train headed north and Marguerite says she never saw him again. Another interesting point of this scene is that it seems Marguerite is now expecting that Silas is going to leave and she apparently does nothing to change his mind. This makes Marguerite seem cold, especially considering this man has taken her literally from a house of prostitution and into a life of literal luxury.

Jesse believes fully that the blacks will have a chance at a decent job and life after the war, but only those who can fairly compete with whites. He cites his idea that blacks who can read will have an opportunity for better jobs, the same as whites who can read. Another interesting thing is that Jesse's love for Maggie has never waned though he has matured himself. He can no longer "see" her in the stars as he had once claimed, but is now wondering how he'll ever be able to find her. His attitude isn't echoed by all black men, including one who advises Jesse to give up worrying about Maggie and choose one of the many women willing to marry him instead. This friend also tells Jesse that there's no way blacks will be given anything but the lowest jobs, regardless of their abilities.

Alexander's statement to the officer who captures him - that he wasn't an honest man when he began his association with the renegades - seems to be the first time Alexander has been willing to tell the truth and to stand up as a man. As a rule, prior to this encounter, Alexander has blamed everything on someone else, including his own failings. It's not clear what's changed but it seems likely that Alexander has simply matured to the point that he's realized that he is responsible for himself. An interesting point here is that Alexander seems almost proud of himself for his crimes. It's left to the reader to determine the significance.



Part IV: Chapters Fifty-Nine through Seventy

Part IV: Chapters Fifty-Nine through Seventy Summary

In chapter sixty, Duncan is at home at Stratford Plantation. Leona has died and his grandmother continues her constant prayer. Sallie is at the plantation as well and she and Abigail are becoming fast friends. Sallie and Duncan visit the old home place and there Sallie agrees to marry Duncan. Jack the Driver remains at the plantation as well and there's a plan on Christmas morning to distribute gifts to those who remain. Two days later, Duncan and Sallie return to Richmond. In chapter sixty-one, "A Letter from Silas Omohundru to Marguerite Omohundru," Silas says that he has volunteered for the Confederate Army. He describes the deplorable conditions, says that he's very hungry and works hard, and promises to become a better father and husband when he returns. He warns Marguerite to think about where she will run if Wilmington falls to the Union.

Chapter sixty-two is titled "Why Do They Hate Us So?" Marguerite is preparing to leave Wilmington with her servants and former slaves, Kizzy and Mingo. On the road they are beset by Union soldiers who take the majority of their money and their horses. When they tell Mingo and Kizzy - who is pregnant - that the two can come with them, Mingo hops on the opportunity though it means leaving Kizzy behind without a horse for transportation. Marguerite takes control, tells Kizzy that it's not worth crying over a man like Mingo, and makes up a sling to carry a small ham and some other small belongings. In chapter sixty-three, "A Letter From Mrs. Duncan Gatewood to Abigail Gatewood," Sallie describes her wedding to Duncan and thanks Abigail for the gift of the gown and the ring.

In chapter sixty-four, "The Lanyard," Silas is killed by Union troops at Petersburg. In chapter sixty-five, "A Burial Party," the Confederate Army is facing devastation as Sallie and Duncan part and Duncan promises that they'll reunite, "in this life or the next." In chapter sixty-five, "Until Death or Distance Us Do Part," Jesse worries that he won't be able to find Maggie and that, if he does, their slave marriage won't be legal. Jesse and another man talk about the causes and outcomes of the war and the man says that the blacks didn't cause it, but predicts that their role will be forgotten. In chapter sixty-seven, work goes on at Stratford Plantation with Abigail taking the reins of a plow while Samuel and Jack the Driver pull. In chapter sixty-eight, "Lookaway, Dixieland," Duncan and Thomas Byrd are at Appomattox Courthouse at the end of the war. The Confederate soldiers are saluted by the Union as they lay down their weapons in surrender.

In chapter sixty-nine, "An Advertisement in the Richmond Whig" pleads for information about Maggie and includes contact information for Jesse. In chapter seventy, "Reunion," Marguerite tells the girl that she never responded to the advertisement. Marguerite's family arrives. Jacob introduces members of the family. Some of them tell the girl that



Marguerite told them each of her heritage and her life as a slave once the children were old enough to understand and accept.

Part IV: Chapters Fifty-Nine through Seventy Analysis

Samuel goes on a tirade about the family's situation, including his mother's constant praying and the death of Leona, and says that it all stems from his own lack of honor. Samuel's father was killed over his dalliance with a woman and Samuel believes now that had he challenged the man who killed his father, his family would be much better than it is. He seems to believe that his own lack of honor has poisoned the family. On Christmas Eve, Grandmother begins the prayer and includes a plea for pestilence on the camps and a prayer for the souls of those "who died irregularly," apparently referring to Catesby. She then talks about the lack of judgment in the women who loved those men, apparently talking about Leona. At this point Samuel intervenes. He tells his mother that she is his dependent, but that she might be more comfortable in another house on the plantation and that he's not going to let her destroy young Pauline.

There are some additional changes in the life at the plantation. When Samuel tells Pompey - the house servant who always felt himself better than the other slaves - to perform a duty, Pompey is insolent. Pompey has, like many of his kind, fallen into the trap of believing that he is now better than anyone because he is free and remains at the plantation of his own free will. Pompey will later be killed with his attitude cited as the reason. Though there's no excuse for the racial violence that occurs after the Civil War, the men like Pompey who believe they are owed some level of respect because of their former positions above that of other slaves are among the easiest targets.



Characters

Duncan Gatewood

Son of Samuel and Abigail and brother of Leona, Duncan is raised at Stratford Plantation and has a relationship with a mulatto slave girl known as Midge who is later named Maggie and then Marguerite. When Duncan's father discovers the indiscretion, Duncan is sent away. Duncan then fathers a child by Marguerite, a son she names Jacob. Duncan sees the child only once and only at the insistence of his father who points out that Duncan's son will be raised as a slave, could be forced to work in the fields or even sold at the whim of his master. Duncan is something of a self-centered young man who matures a great deal during his time in the army and comes to realize that he'd felt it was the duty of the slaves to take care of his needs. Duncan loses his arm during a battle and falls into a melancholy after that, though he does eventually snap out of it. While recovering, he reconnects with a childhood friend and neighbor, Sallie Botkin. The two become attached though Sallie fears for Duncan's life as he returns to the front. Duncan as an adult is more responsive and responsible than he likely would have been if he'd been spared the rigors of war. Duncan is present at Appomattox when the Confederate Army surrenders and lays down their arms. He feels the despair of defeat but seems to look forward to seeking out a normal life with Sallie. Duncan and Maggie never reunite and he never again meets his son, Jacob.

Maggie, Midge or Marguerite

Known originally as Midge, Maggie's name is changed upon her forced marriage to a slave named Jesse and later changes her name to Marguerite Omohundru. Maggie is a mulatto and refuses Jesse's attentions, saying that Jesse is too black. Midge, as a slave, is adept at mimicking others and easily takes on the tones and language of the masters. It's unclear whether this is part of her attraction to Duncan, but when the two find themselves alone during a snowstorm, they begin a sexual relationship that lasts for some time. When Maggie becomes pregnant with Duncan's son, Duncan's father sends Duncan away and later sells Maggie, apparently in his efforts to keep the two apart. Maggie manages to keep her son with her, a boy she named Jacob, despite being sold into prostitution.

During her transfer from the Gatewood home, Maggie is bought by a man named Silas Omohundru and it's he who sells her into prostitution. When Maggie encounters him again later, it takes Silas some time to remember her and there's an immediate connection between the two which evolves into a relationship. Silas takes Maggie from the situation and though he never marries her, she takes his name. Marguerite escapes from the advancing Union Army and though the story isn't ever completely explained, has enough gold sewn into the hem of her dress to open a bank during the recovery period. Marguerite tells her story to a young girl working for the WPA.



Sallie Botkin Kirkpatrick

Daughter of Uther Botkin, Sallie is sent home in disgrace from the Augusta Female Seminary after engaging in an affair with her teacher, Alexander Kirkpatrick, that results in a pregnancy. Sallie is hopeful about her future with Alexander but soon comes to realize that she'd not known Alexander at all when she began her life with him. Sallie is sentenced to jail for her role in helping an escaped slave but is later released on the condition that she serve as a nurse in a Confederate hospital. She does so and nurses Duncan as he recovers from his amputation. Sallie and Duncan marry as the war comes to a close.

Alexander Kirkpatrick

A teacher at the Augusta Female Seminary, Alexander is dismissed after Sallie's pregnancy becomes known. He's an educated man and knows a great deal about the romantic languages, an aspect of his education that greatly attracts Sallie but doesn't prepare him for a life of anything other than teaching. Alexander is a cruel man at heart who believes that life expects too much from him. He runs from his duties as a soldier and readily turns on a family that takes him in, killing a young boy and joining a band of renegades. He's eventually captured and it's unclear whether he's immediately killed for his crimes, though it seems likely.

Uther Botkin

Sallie's father and owner of Jesse before Jesse is sent to the Stratford Plantation to marry Maggie. Uther is educated and moves to the farming life after inheriting property from a relative. His wife dies after giving birth to one daughter, Sallie, leaving Uther to carry on with the help of a slave woman named Opal.

Leona Gatewood Byrd

Daughter of Samuel and Abigail and sister of Duncan, Leona is married to Catesby Byrd. Leona grieves horribly after the death of Catesby and dies soon after his death.

Catesby Byrd

Leona's husband, he is a lawyer who has high hopes for a judge's seat at the time South Carolina secedes from the Union. He is a gambler at heart and it's when he loses a bet that he volunteers for the Confederate Army. Catesby witnesses a horrible battle and takes his own life soon after.



Samuel Gatewood

Samuel believes in treating his slaves well, refuses to allow the whip used as a regular form of punishment and believes in a separation between the races. He is father of Duncan and Leona and when Samuel learns of the relationship going on between Duncan and a slave girl named Maggie that results in a pregnancy, he sends Duncan away and forces Maggie to marry a slave he buys from Uther for that purpose. Samuel comes to realize that his life has to change as the war takes a toll on the south and the story closes with Samuel hitching himself to a plow, providing the "horse power" to break the land necessary for the family's survival.

Jesse Burns

The man who has served as a slave for Uther for most of his life, Jesse is bought by Samuel Gatewood specifically for the purpose of marrying Maggie. Jesse is head over heels in love with Maggie though she scorns his attention. Jesse runs away repeatedly after Maggie is sold and eventually joins the Confederate Army. Jesse can read, having learned with Sallie, Leona and Duncan, and believes that blacks will have opportunities after the war, especially those who are able to read. Jesse runs advertisements for Maggie, but never finds her.

Silas Omohundru

A slave trader who turns to blockade running with the onset of the war and the announcement that slaves are freed. Silas sells Maggie at one time and later takes her from a life of prostitution but never marries her. Silas is killed during the war.

Abigail Gatewood

Mother of Duncan and Leona, Abigail is a gentle woman who believes women have specific roles to fulfill and who is anxious to do her part. She is generous with her Christmas gifts to her slaves, a fact that makes her unpopular with other slave owners. Like Samuel, she realizes the need to change with the changing times and accepts her role in their new lives, driving the plow that is to be pulled by her husband and a faithful former slave, Jack.

Jack the Driver

Jack is a slave who tells the other slaves that their lives with the Gatewoods is a good life, urging them to understand that if they make trouble and are sold, they could find themselves in much worse circumstances. Though Jack doesn't do a great deal of manual labor in his role as "the driver" in charge of the workers, he readily accepts his



new role as one of only a few who remain to help Samuel Gatewood work the plantation.

Aunt Opal

A slave woman hired out to Uther to help handle his property and raise his daughter, Sallie, after the death of Uther's wife. Opal is shrewd and realizes that the only way she's going to retain the livestock is to hide it in the woods so that the marauding armies can't readily find the animals. Toward that end, she skips the traditional hog-killing time and travels a half mile into the woods each day to milk the cow. She hates the thought of leaving the home she'd had with Uther after his death but does go back to the Gatewood house. It's noted that she seems to have mixed feelings about the war and Abigail Gatewood says it's no wonder because people like Opal were raised by the families of the Confederacy but are being promised great things by the Union Army.



Objects/Places

The Works Progress Administration

The organization the "girl" works for and that is sponsoring the project to document the memories of slavery days.

Stratford Plantation

The plantation owned by Samuel Gatwood where Duncan grew up.

Virginia

Where Stratford Plantation is located.

Virginia Military Institute

Where Duncan is sent after Samuel discovers his affair with Maggie.

The State Penitentiary at Richmond

Where Sallie and Alexander are to serve their five years in prison for their conviction as abolitionists.

McDowell

The site of the battle where Duncan is wounded.

Wilson's Hotel

The establishment that is taken over as a hospital where Duncan is taken after being wounded at McDowell.

Richmond, Virginia

Where Sallie works in the military hospital under the supervision of Cousin Molly.



Memphis, Tennessee

Where Maggie is living in a house of prostitution when she again meets Silas Omohundru.

Camp Winder Hospital

Where Duncan is taken to recover from his amputation.

Alalaston Island, District of Columbia

Where Jesse and the other recruits arrive after joining the Union Army.

The Wild Darrell

The name of Silas Omohundru's ship.



Themes

The Hardships of War

The recurring theme of the hardships endured by everyone touched by the war is important because it drives many of the characters and their actions. An important example of this theme is seen in the case of Catesby Byrd. Catesby joins the war because he lost the bet and gives the ultimate sacrifice for that gamble. When Catesby sees a horrific battle, he indicates that the war will go on until every man and boy from Virginia are dead. Catesby then takes his own life, apparently unable to withstand the memories of the battle he'd witnessed. With Catesby's death, his wife Leona becomes an inconsolable grieving widow and later dies. Though it's noted that she died of a fever, Samuel Gatewood seems to believe that Leona literally grieved herself to death. Another example is seen in Sallie Botkin Kirkpatrick. Sallie is released from prison to nurse the wounded and dying Confederate soldiers though she ends up nursing soldiers from both sides of the war. When Sallie and Duncan reconnect, there's an instant attraction but Sallie can't bring herself to commit to Duncan, apparently because she fears that he too will be killed in action. Duncan himself loses an arm during a battle and spends a period of time in a deep depression before finding his way clear to begin living again.

Desire for Freedom

The desire for freedom is an important theme in almost any book dealing with the Civil War because the characters from both sides are seeking some particular freedoms. In the case of the blacks, the desire is obviously the freedom of liberty, accomplished through the abolishment of slavery. In the case of the whites of the south, the freedom sought is the freedom to live their lives as they please without answering for those choices. While there's no doubt that slavery is wrong, it's important to keep in mind that it was a way of life for the people of the south prior to the civil war. Meanwhile, people like Rufus who are victims of the slave system desire the right to choose their own lives, regardless of the kindness of their masters. Jesse says that he never ran away from Samuel Gatewood but ran to find his wife. What Jesse doesn't say but what's implied is that he has sought the freedom that would have allowed him to live with his wife without fear that one of them would be sold. When Jesse and a group of black soldiers encounter Abraham Lincoln, the man who signed the law giving the blacks their freedom, the soldiers rush to Lincoln for the opportunity to touch his clothes or his horse, and to say "thank you." Jesse and Duncan talk about their lives and agree that it will take a long time to clear up the mess created by the slavery system. When Duncan says that there'd been no harm intended, Jesse points out that a person's intentions and what that person actually does are two different things.



Coming of Age

The coming of age theme is seen in several of the characters, with Maggie, Duncan and Sallie being among the most prominent. Sallie finds it unbelievable that Alexander would choose to insist that he be treated as a prisoner of war after being imprisoned for abolitionism. Then she listens as Alexander admits that some of the things he'd told Sallie are outright lies. She can't immediately break her desire that Alexander continue to be the wonderful, educated man she'd thought him to be, but does come to that point. For Duncan's part, the boy who begins a forbidden relationship with a mulatto who is a slave of the household is forced to grow up quickly as he is thrown into the horrors of war. When Duncan is at home after being wounded, he goes to a swimming hole with his father. There, Duncan notes that Samuel is aging, a point generally lost on young people until it impacts them personally. In Duncan's case, he still has time with his father but understands that his father isn't immortal, probably at least partly because of the death he's seen on the battlefields. The coming of age theme is seen in other characters as well. In a very evil way, it's seen in Alexander who, after a great deal of time spent blaming other people for his faults and failures, accepts responsibility for his actions. When he's caught with a group of renegades, Alexander says that he was not an honorable man long before he fell in with the renegades.



Style

Point of View

The story is presented in from an omniscient perspective, an interesting choice because the story is reportedly being told by a single person. This is a discrepancy that may bother some readers. Miss Marguerite is reportedly telling the story to a young girl, a member of the WPA who is seeking to document the stories of former slaves as part of her project. However, Marguerite's story offers many details that she could not have known. When Marguerite - then known as Maggie - had been sold away from Stratford Plantation, she should not have been able to relate the stories of Jesse's escape nor the way Rufus later died. This is especially true considering that Marguerite says she didn't answer Jesse's ad in search of her. She offers up equally impossible details of Duncan's life though she says she encountered him only one time while she was posing as the wife of Silas Omohundru.

There is a section in which the young girl tells Miss Marguerite that she'd told some of Marguerite's story to her own father, and that the girl's father says that he's always known Miss Marguerite and that the story is pure fiction. The girl herself comes to doubt the story, noting that there are historical periodicals laying around Miss Marguerite's house and that they seem to have been moved every evening. She suspects that Miss Marguerite is doing research for the next "chapters" of her story. That would explain how Miss Marguerite knew details that she could not otherwise have possibly known. It's left to the reader to decide whether the story is true from Miss Marguerite's perspective, and whether this even matters.

Setting

The presentation means there are two distinct settings, that of Miss Marguerite's home where she and the girl get to know each other and where Miss Marguerite tells her story, and a second in Virginia and other parts of the south in 1857. The settings are real and the events, including the Civil War, are also real. The story, set against these real settings, is more believable because of the setting. The dual settings are vital considering the method used to present the story. There are extensive descriptions of several battles, including tactics and outcomes. Names of famous generals and other Confederate and Union leaders are used freely throughout the story, adding to the realism of the text. For example, Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is printed in a newspaper and Jesse reads that to his fellow soldiers on their first night as members of the Union Army. The soldiers later meet Lincoln and the description is vivid, including the fact that Lincoln did not ride well. The fictional settings - that of Uther's house, the Stratford Plantation and other homes and sections of countryside - are believable and blend well with the real settings.



Language and Meaning

The story is written in fairly easy language and most readers should have little trouble understanding the story line and tracking the characters. One interesting aspect of the story is the conversation and statements by the blacks. There are words like "jine" and "ceptin," which are really "join" and "excepting." These words are written in the manner of language expected from the characters and the time period and add a level of credence. The majority of these words are self-explanatory and the use of these words and phrases are limited, meaning readers should not have trouble with them. The story is presented in some graphic detail with stories of death, murder, cruelty and hatred. These are not used overly much but may disturb some readers. It should be noted that the woman known as "Miss Marguerite" as the story opens is known as Midge and Maggie at various points in the book and by various characters. To avoid confusion, the woman is referred to by whatever name a particular character uses. Jesse tends to call her Maggie while Duncan calls her Midge. The reader should keep in mind that Midge, Maggie and Miss Marguerite are one and the same.

Structure

The story begins in the 1900s with a young woman who is never identified as anything other than "the girl" working on a project for the Works Progress Administration documenting the stories of slaves. The girl meets a woman named Miss Marguerite who tells her story, beginning in Virginia in 1857. The book is divided into four sections, including "Antebellum," "Honor" and "The Bonny Blue Flag." The story is further divided into seventy chapters, ranging in length from a single page to several pages with no real typical length.

Some of the chapters begin with a conversation between Miss Marguerite and "the girl." These are set apart with italics representing the conversations between the two. Some other chapters are presented merely as reminiscences of the woman, Miss Marguerite, though they are not presented as such. These chapters merely begin as if the story were being presented in a traditional manner rather than as the memories of Miss Marguerite. There is one chapter that is presented as a newspaper clipping of an advertisement in which Jesse is seeking information about Maggie. That brief clipping stands alone as the entire chapter though it is the exception in terms of length with most chapters being much longer. The story is presented in chronological order for the interviews between the girl and Miss Marguerite with the real story - that of the lives of Duncan, Maggie and others during the Civil War - presented as a series of extended memories or flashbacks.



Quotes

"The loss of honor, sir - and I intend no disrespect - is a young man's fear. We old men fear falling upon the mercy of others." Chapter 2, Page 37

"Duncan knew that if one lad yelled 'Forward!' or 'Let's get the bastards!' the cadets would charge and nothing Old Smith could do or say would stop them. He yearned to cry that fatal command but choked." Chapter 8, Page 92

"If a negro requires whipping, whip him and be done with it." - Samuel Gatewood, Chapter 13, Page 117

"Our provisions have been adequate, but only because the poor citizens of these parts are much pressed by us. We are an army of patriotic locusts." - Catesby Byrd, Chapter 17, Page 138

"After what I did with Midge, I never thought I could hold my head up again. The army gave me back my honor." Chapter 39, Page 307

"There are loafers and scoundrels among them, to be sure. But there are individuals who, saving the color of their skin and the ignorance due to their previous servitude, could stand comparison with any white man." Chapter 40, page 309

"Duncan, I do believe we had grown too rich, too complacent; this war is pruning us." - Cousin Molly, Chapter 43, Page 328

"Perhaps he had simply endured more than a mortal man was meant to endure. My dearest friend took his own life soon afterward." - Duncan Gatewood referring to Catesby Byrd, Chapter 49, Page 379

"If Aunt Opal had mixed loyalties in this war, what could be expected? The Federals had promised the coloreds so much!" Chapter 51, Page 388

"In the army, out of the army, we still niggers." Chapter 52, Page 393

"Two days after Christmas, Sallie and Duncan returned to Richmond. Before they departed, Duncan informed his father that General Lee's army needed all Aunt Opal's hoarded corn and most of Stratford's hogs." Chapter 60, page 461

"Jack buckled Samuel Gatewood into the adapted harness. 'It'll be our legs what pushes and our shoulders what pulls, same as if we as horses,' he advised." Chapter 67, Page 507



Topics for Discussion

Describe Midge's life and the changes that occur that cause her name changes over the years.

How does Duncan and Midge come to be together the first time? What does Samuel Gatewood think of the affair between his son and the slave girl? What actions do Samuel take to try to rectify the situation? What is the result of the affair and what becomes of Duncan and Midge?

Who is Uther Botkin? Describe Uther and his character. What is the role Uther plays in the lives of Jesse? of Duncan? of Sallie? of Opal?

How does Sallie come to know Alexander Kirkpatrick? Describe their lives during their time together. How does the story end for each of them?

Compare Uther and Alexander. What do the two men have in common? What are their differences? Compare Uther and Samuel. What do the two men have in common? What are their differences?

Who is Abigail Gatewood? Samuel Gatewood? Leona Gatewood Byrd? Pauline Byrd? Thomas Byrd? Rufus? Jack the Driver? Pompey? Kizzy? Seth Danzinger? Silas Omohundru? Jacob? How are each of them connected to Duncan Gatewood?

Describe at least three scenes that indicate the desperation of the men and women of the south during the Civil War.

What kind of person is Duncan Gatewood? Is he proud of his son? Support your answers with scenes from the story.