

# **Kildee House Study Guide**

**Kildee House by Rutherford George Montgomery**

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## Plot Summary

Kildee House by Rutherford Montgomery tells the story of Jerome Kildee who has retired from a life-long career as a stonemason and monument maker. Kildee builds a house on a piece of property he purchased deep in the redwood forest in California. As the story unfolds, Kildee has no apparent family or friends. He lived and worked in a colder region of America and has chosen this remote place where he can live out his years in virtual isolation. He purposely builds his house against a large redwood tree that is located at the center of his property so that no neighbors will be close to him.

Kildee, who had a long career, finds himself with time on his hands after he finishes building his house. He is a kindly man with a good heart and offers food and shelter to some hungry raccoons that live in the area. One of the animals, Old Grouch, is lazy and enjoys the comfort of Kildee's house, especially the warmth of the fire and the potential of getting generous handouts from Kildee. Soon Old Grouch is joined by his wife, Mrs. Grouch, and as nature takes its course, the couple soon have babies. Kildee welcomes them all.

The raccoons are surprised when the usually silent Kildee begins talking to them one night. He reveals a bit of his past to the animals. He tells them that most of his customers were grieving over lost loved ones. He feels regret that he could never find it in himself to comfort them. When Old Grouch starts "singing" one night, Kildee surprises himself when he sings along with him. He recalls how even in church, he was too shy to sing hymns with the rest of the congregation. Something about the non-judgmental animals seems to have liberated Kildee and made him feel comfortable. Feeling happy, he begins to show a friendly face to his human neighbors.

Emma Lou is the youngest child and only daughter of the rugged Eppy family that lives down the mountain from Kildee. Emma Lou loves the woods and the outdoors and loves animals even more. After she becomes acquainted with Kildee, they form a strong bond based on their mutual love of animals. She is fascinated with the raccoons and skunks who live at Kildee's house. She helps him and provides a vitality and dynamic presence that had been missing from his life for many years—perhaps even forever.

Emma Lou's natural enemy is Donald Cabot a classmate who lets his large dog run down harmless animals in the forest. After Donald begins to spend more time around Kildee and his animals, he comes to enjoy them and begins to appreciate Emma Lou's love for them and understand the protective nature she has for them. As the animal population in Kildee's House grows to unmanageable numbers, Donald saves the day by devising a plan that will relieve the stress that Kildee is undergoing but yet will provide a safe haven for the animals.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

Jerome Kildee is an odd man who builds an odd house on the mountainside under a giant redwood tree on Windy Point. Jerome had known as soon as he first came to the area that it was a place for him—a place for silent men. One complete wall is a window that faces the ridges and valley below. The house is lodged against the trunk of a redwood, making the red bark the far wall of the one-room house. Filling one end of the room is a large, beautiful fireplace. Jerome who had been a monument maker builds the fireplace as his last masterpiece.

After moving to the woods, Jerome does no work. He owns a hundred acres of forest surrounding his house but he does not clear it. He buys all his food and pays the Eppys, his neighbors, to haul fireplace wood up to his place. Jerome purposely builds his house in the center of his property so there would be no neighbors nearby. He wants to be left alone in his thoughts. The Eppys think he is an odd fellow and are happy to leave him alone. He does make some unexpected friends in the forest. He soon learns that the racoons can't be trusted inside his house—they destroy the inside of his house scrounging for food. A family of spotted skunks makes a residence under his floor. He makes sure he looks for them before he lights a fire because sometimes they climb into his warm chimney. They don't use their biggest weapon on Jerome. The skunks are vigilant in keeping the mice population down.

A pair of mice lives in the letter box under his bed. They chew up most of his letters so they destroy any desire he might have had to brood about the past. Outside black-tailed deers visit his trash heap on a regular basis. The possums and the foxes stay their distance. Old Grouch, a raccoon that refuses to move from the redwood tree, finds a mate during Jerome's second year in the woods. The pair has babies that spring and Old Grouch, fat and lazy, doesn't provide care for the young and depends on his bride to bring him food. He and Jerome don't warm up to each other but Jerome has a grudging admiration for the old skunk because of the way he has with the ladies. Jerome and Old Grouch's mate are on a friendlier basis. She feels comfortable coming into the house for scraps of food.

During the rainy season, Mrs. Grouch moves her babies inside Jerome's house one day when Jerome is out walking in the forest. She makes a nest for them in the oven using stuffing from his mattress. Jerome moves the babies to a box in the corner but when she can, Mrs. Grouch moves them back in the oven. Old Grouch, cold and wet, slowly makes his way into the house through the open door. Jerome puts a plate of meat on the floor that Old Grouch gobbles up. Old Grouch leaves and comes back a few times while his wife is curled up with her brood in the warm box. Jerome has to shut the door to keep out the cold air but doesn't want to lock Old Grouch out. He cuts a small swinging door in the bottom of his big door. Later, Old Grouch figures out how to get back in and eats more of the roast beef that Jerome has left out for him.



Old Grouch and his wife are startled when Jerome begins talking. He tells them about his monument shop and how he had never been able to speak to his customers and comfort them in his grief. Old Grouch, almost answering him, is so full and warm and comfortable that he begins making a soft, long growl, almost singing. Jerome had never been able to open his mouth and sing, even in church. He had missed much in life. Mrs. Grouch answers Old Grouch's song with a high trill of her own. Soon the spotted skunks are sneaking in the door. Jerome puts a saucer of milk on the floor and the two skunks begin lapping it. Jerome joins in the singing which scares everyone except Old Grouch. The skunks go back to their nest and Old Grouch winds up joining his family in the warm oven. Jerome puts on his nightshirt and with a big smile goes to bed.

## Chapter One Analysis

Jerome Kildee is a recluse who has never sought companionship with other people. He purposely builds his house in a position that would be the furthest away from his closest neighbors. The fact that he makes friends with the animals in the forest is evidence that he really needs some form of companionship. When the skunks eat most of his letters, the reader learns two things. First, he must have had a relationship with the person who had written him letters and he must have cared for that person because he keeps the letters and apparently cherishes them. Secondly, the relationship must have either ended by a break-up or death because of the comment that Jerome would no longer have to "brood" about his past. This episode is a foreshadowing about his past that will undoubtedly be revealed in a subsequent chapter of the book.

Jerome has regrets about his life and his inability to establish relationships with people. He tells the racoons about his failure to comfort his customers. He had made gravestones for a living and the customers he had had were people who lost loved ones. Jerome is not comfortable around people. He had been unable to sing in church but is able to sing with the animals. He admits to missing a lot in life. Finally making a connection with animals, Jerome, who must be an elderly man, is attempting to spend his final days having friends, even if they are wild animals. But the possibility emerges that he could branch out and begin to establish relationships with humans.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

After finding his voice, Jerome begins talking to his neighbors when they stop by. He doesn't visit them but he is pleasant if they come by. Emma Lou Eppys, who had been afraid of the strange, silent man when she first encountered him, is the first neighbor to realize that he has become friendlier.

The Eppys had settled in the redwood forest of California when there were just six in the family. They had found an hold abandoned house and decided to settle there. Job and Cilly had located the owner of the house and bought it and the surrounding land. Since that time, three more Eppys, including Emma Lou, have been added to the family. The family loves the wilderness and the timberland. Job supports the family by cutting timber, but would never think of toppling a redwood. As his family grows, Job builds additions to the house.

The Eppys had hunted on the hill before Jerome bought it. After he moved in, they've stayed off his land feeling that trespassing is wrong. Emma Lou, who loves the forest animals, is glad that Jerome has suddenly become friendly. She can visit him and get closer to Roger Donald Cabot's land. She is angry with him because she had witnessed his dog, Strong Heart, chasing down the forest deer. She recalls how earlier that week she had had a clash with Donald Roger Cabot when Strong Heart had been cornering a possum. She had launched a marble out of her beany which made a big knot on the dog's rump and sent the dog running.

Emma Lou tentatively steps onto Jerome's porch and peeks into his open door. He is sitting at his table in front of the large window. Old Grouch and his family are eating off a plate on the floor and the spotted skunk pair has just descended from the chimney. Jerome tells Emma Lou they are just eating and asks her to join them. She warns Jerome about Donald Roger Cabot and Strong Heart coming after his animal friends. She tells him she has plans to put the dog out of commission. She helps wash the dishes and then thanks Jerome and bids him a good day. He tells her to come back and she promises she will.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Jerome Kildee is learning to communicate and make friends in his later years although initially it is first with animals. He had been an artisan, making monuments and engraving gravestones for a living. But he had worked alone and apparently had little contact with others during his life. The animals are bringing out Jerome's need for contact with living creatures. His experiences with the animals loosens him enough and he becomes friendly with the neighbor girl, Emma Lou.



It is obvious that the two have a lot in common. They both love and care for animals. When Emma Lou visits, she realizes from the way he treats the forest animals that the formerly unfriendly Jerome is really a kind and loving person. Jerome enjoys Emma Lou's company - he tells her to come back. Since Jerome is retired from his career, he has more time on his hands and his isolation and loneliness has come to the forefront.

Emma Lou is a spirited person who, she tells Jerome, will some day be as tall as her brothers. She is determined to protect the forest animals from another neighbor and his dog which foreshadows a probable confrontation between Emma Lou and Donald Roger Cabot. Perhaps Jerome will take a role in defending the animals.



## Chapter 3

### Chapter 3 Summary

Shortly after Emma Lou's visit, the spotted skunks add to their number. Jerome listens on the floorboards and knows everything is all right when he hears Mama churring accompanied by the sound of the soft little squeaks of the babies. Papa snarls his nose up at Jerome which tells him he isn't welcome in the nest for the time being. A mama rat pack with three babies has dug a nest under the eave. She has pilfered spools of thread and coins and even pliers along with pine cones and brush in building her nest. Jerome figures that Papa would soon be hunting baby rats. If he doesn't, Jerome will have to dig them out of the wall. Their scratching around at night is stealing his sleep from him. But Papa comes through and soon all the baby rats are gone.

Jerome is wondering why Emma Lou hasn't stopped by. He really likes her. He had always thought of girls in fluffy gowns and perfect hair. But Emma Lou is different; she wears jeans, has short red hair and usually has her face smudged up from her romps in the woods. Finally she does stop by with a hat full of blackberries. She has a knowing look on her face when Jerome tells her the animals have not been bothered by Roger Donald and his dog. Since Emma Lou is playing with the baby raccoons, Mrs. Grouch decides to take a walk in the woods.

Emma is delighted with the news that Mama and Papa have had babies. She runs outside and coaxes Mama to bring the babies out for a few minutes. Jerome is impressed because he hasn't seen them yet. She ponders the idea of having a skunk and raccoon circus—on the order of a flea circus. Jerome tells her she could probably train them because it is obvious she has a way with animals.

Kildee makes a shortcake and serves the berries over it. He splits it and says that any leftovers can go to the raccoons. Suddenly, they hear a dog barking and Mrs. Grouch yelping. The Old Grouch, Jerome and Emma Lou rush outside. Strong Heart has killed Mrs. Grouch. Emma Lou takes out a marble and launches it at the dog with her beany. The dog yelps and runs off. She warns Roger Donald that she better never see him hunting with his dog on the mountain again. Next time she'll have a rifle with her. Jerome tries to calm her but there is no chance of that. She takes a fresh marble out of her pocket, loads her beany and aims it at Roger Donald. Jerome picks up Mrs. Grouch and says he'll bury her by the house. He warns Emma Lou not to bring a rifle with her—she could get in big trouble. But in Emma Lou's mind, Roger Donald is a murderer and deserves to be shot. Jerome doesn't realize that he is talking to a member of a family that often settles their disputes with rifles. Old Grouch bristles and stares at the furry form in Jerome's arms and then runs off for the house—his babies are alone.





## Chapter 3 Analysis

Jerome and Emma Lou's friendship is growing stronger. Jerome hopes that she will stop by—he seems to miss her. Emma Lou demonstrates her way with animals. Even though Mama and Papa wouldn't let Jerome see the babies, Emma Lou somehow coaxes them to show her their babies. Emma Lou finally has a confrontation with Donald Roger and his dog, Strong Heart. Unfortunately, the dog kills Mrs. Grouch. Emma Lou loves animals so much that she puts their lives on equal footing with human lives. She considers Roger Donald a murderer and threatens to use her rifle on him and his dog.

Jerome is alarmed. He's afraid that Emma Lou would be arrested for shooting Donald Roger or, if things got out of control, for murdering him. But Emma Lou is fearless because she comes from a family that doesn't depend on the law to settle their problems. There could be real trouble up ahead for Emma Lou and Jerome as well if the neighbor boy is killed on his property. Compared to Emma Lou, Jerome who had worked by himself as a stonemason, had had a very sheltered life. The revenge that Emma Lou is seeking is something very new to him.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Jerome and Emma Lou bury Mrs. Grouch under a madrona tree in the back of his house. Emma Lou has to hold the angry Old Grouch back. He snarls but doesn't try to bite her. Emma Lou thinks a grave marker would be appropriate and Jerome offers to make one. With tears in her eyes, Emma Lou carries Old Grouch back inside where he growls at the babies who have gotten out of their box. Mama and Papa are on the table polishing off the shortcake.

Emma Lou insists that Jerome not carve "Mrs. Grouch" on the gravestone—Mrs. Grouch had never been grouchy. She asks him to carve an image of a raccoon. Underneath the image, Emma Lou decides that Mrs. Grouch should be referred to as Charmine, the name of a beautiful woman in a book she read. Under the name Charmine, "A Lovely Lady" would be written followed by "Passed Away July 27, 1948" and then finally "Rest in Peace."

Jerome removes a stone slab from the front of his fireplace behind which he has stored his masonry tools. He still has some Monterey stones left over from his shop one of which he would use for Charmine. He promises to have the stone completed by Emma Lou's next visit. She is worried about the baby raccoons. Jerome tells her that they would grow up and go off and be raccoons as they should but he thinks Old Grouch will stay with him.

When Jerome begins working with the stone, he realizes then how much he has missed it. After he works for hours, the shape of a raccoon begins to emerge on top of the slab. He makes a dinner of bacon and eggs for himself and a couple extra eggs for the raccoons. After dinner the little raccoons jump through the door to go exploring. Old Grouch, as usual, stays behind and sleeps. After cleaning up the dishes, Jerome sets the grave marker on the table. He admires his work and believes it will turn out to be his finest and most creative work. As the night wears on, he worries about the young raccoons who have not returned.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Jerome's skills as a stonemason and gravestone maker come in handy when he and Emma Lou decide to make an appropriate tribute to their friend, Mrs. Grouch. When Jerome takes up his tools again, he realizes that he has missed his work. He enjoys using his hands and creating works of beauty that will live in posterity. He shows his love for the dead raccoon by his enthusiasm in creating a grave marker that will be the finest one he has never made. Emma Lou is on a par with Jerome in her feelings for the deceased Mrs. Grouch. She bestows the name of a beautiful woman she read about and calls her a "Lovely Lady." Once again, Emma Lou demonstrates that her feelings for



animals are the same as they are for humans. Jerome has a practical attitude about the raccoons; he knows they should and will leave his shelter and live in the forest. Emma Lou is more idealistic about a possible future where they would be safe from the dangers of the forest.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

The next morning, Jerome wakes up and gets right out of bed. Since he has retired, he usually lazes in bed for a while before he rises. But not this morning. He is anxious to get back to work on Charmine's monument. He makes eggs and bacon for himself and Old Grouch. He feels sad that the young raccoons haven't returned yet. In the stone image of the raccoon, Jerome captures the exact coy expression that Charmine often had on her face. As he admires his work, a shadow appears across his doorway. Jerome is surprised to see that it is Donald Roger Cabot. Jerome is immediately upset since Emma Lou is expected at any time.

Donald Roger has come by to pay Jerome for killing his raccoon. Even when he offers one hundred dollars, Jerome turns him down. The money wouldn't replace the animal, he tells him. He advises the boy to leave because he doesn't want him or his dog shot on his property. Donald Roger doesn't take heed and continues to look around Jerome's house and talk. He admires the raccoon carving on the stone and wants to hire Jerome to create a stone likeness of his dog for him. Again, Jerome refuses - his services aren't for sale.

Donald Roger spots Emma Lou walking up the mountain with her rifle. He wants to slip away before she sees him but it is too late. Jerome walks out to meet her, hoping to distract her attention from the house. But she is anxious to see his work and wants to go inside. When they enter the house, Donald Roger is gone. Jerome figures he is either under the bed or hiding in the chimney. Emma Lou thinks the stone likeness of Charmine is beautiful.

Jerome hears a noise coming from under the bed but Emma Lou doesn't seem to notice. Papa comes prancing in to greet Emma Lou. Papa knows that something is under the bed and goes over to investigate. Emma Lou asks where Old Grouch and the raccoons are. He says the young ones have been out all night and that Old Grouch has gone out probably trying to find Charmine.

They hear the barking of a dog. As it grows closer, they go outside and see Strong Heart running up the hill. Papa goes out toward him. When Emma Lou tries to stop him, Jerome smiles and tells her to let Papa take care of Strong Heart. When the dog comes close to Papa, he launches his best weapon that sends the dog scurrying away. They laugh and, as the aroma scents the entire area, Emma Lou tells Jerome he'll have to wait to let his place air out before he goes back inside. Emma Lou decides to chase Strong Heart with her gun which gives Jerome the chance to get Roger Donald out from under his bed. Roger Donald comes staggering out of the house, holding his nose. He vows to keep Strong Heart locked up after he has him "dry cleaned." Jerome makes a camp outside where he can stay until the air clears.



## Chapter 5 Analysis

Just as an earlier chapter foreshadowed, there is finally a showdown with Roger Donald Cabot and his dog Strong Heart. The character who defeats them, however, is not Emma Lou as one would expect. Rather, it is Papa, the skunk who launches his odorous weapon and chases away Strong Heart once and for all. And it is Jerome Kildee who tries to deal with Roger Donald and talk some sense into him. When he hides him from the gun-toting Emma Lou, his action is not to shield him from injury as much as it is to shield his friend Emma Lou from shooting someone and getting into trouble with the law.

Jerome shows his wisdom and patience when he reasons that Papa Skunk would be the best foil for Strong Heart. By encouraging Emma Lou to let Papa take over, he demonstrates his ability to be a peacemaker and a diplomat. Roger Donald gets his nose full of the skunk's weapon but he also knows that Jerome keeps him from harm. Perhaps the stubborn boy, who has up to this point only thought of himself, learns something from the older man.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Jerome stays in his camp a week. He is glad to get back in his house after picking up four wood ticks and a bad stomach because he doesn't know how to cook that well outside. He does complete Charmine's monument and erects it. Emma Lou feels she has earned a real victory. She scouts around the woods after the incident but never runs into either Roger Donald or Strong Heart. Word is that after Strong Heart had been descented, he hadn't been allowed out of his locked yard. Roger Donald visits Jerome a few times but never encounters Emma Lou.

Since Jerome enjoys working with his tools again, he decides to create a statue of Old Grouch. Emma Lou is so excited about it that he decides to give it to her when he completes it. Toward the middle of August, Mama and Papa proudly parade their babies inside. They are getting bigger and hungrier and need Jerome's help to feed them. Old Grouch peacefully cohabits with the skunk family but makes sure to stay his distance. The skunk family doesn't sleep in the open room, they prefer their dark nest under the floor. They love Emma Lou and love to please her. But one night when she stays for dinner and wants to play with the babies, Mama and Papa are firm. The babies have to go on night training so they can learn how to survive in the forest.

Emma Lou loves Jerome's house and fireplace and wants a cabin just like his when she grows up. Old Grouch sings a few notes and, one after the other, in pop his children all coming home with a newly found mate. Jerome prepares a feast for the returning raccoons and their new mates. He puts plates of meat and dry bread on the floor. Emma Lou decides to make friends with them and joins them on the floor. Emma Lou offers to help make nests for the raccoons. If Jerome keeps allowing more and more raccoons to live in the house, pretty soon there won't be room for him. Emma Lou tells Jerome she'll tie an old mattress they have on her horse Frank and bring it over.

On her way home in the dark that night, she is hoping to catch a glimpse of a cougar that her brother Ben had told her was stalking in the area. She hears a growl and then a bleating sound. She knows immediately that the cougar is attacking a black-tailed doe who is nestled with her fawn in the thicket. When she comes to an open spot in the meadow, she shines her light and can see that the cougar is savagely attacking the doe, grasping it by the neck. The cougar releases the doe and glares at Emma Lou for just a few moments, then turns and sprints off. The doe is dead. Worried about the fawn, she turns back toward the thicket and locates it. She picks it up in her arms and carries it back to Jerome's house.

Jerome has dozed off by the fire and is astonished when he wakes to see the young deer. Jerome is surprised to hear that a mountain lion had killed the fawn's mother. He had had no idea that such a dangerous predator was in the area. Emma Lou tells Jerome that unless they keep the fawn in his house that the lion would kill him, too.



They will have to bottle feed it. She promises to bring milk over first thing in the morning. Jerome insists on walking her down the hill. He can tell she is scared even though she won't admit it. Truthfully, he is scared, too. Jerome brings along one of his long-handled mason's hammers for defense against the lion. They don't encounter the lion or hear it. When they get to the meadow, Emma Lou flashes her light on the dead doe. It has not been touched since she left it. There is no sign of the lion.

When they part, Emma Lou gives Jerome the flashlight so he can make his way through the dark woods. Jerome is very apprehensive on his way home. He continually flashes his light from side to side, fearing that the lion is hunched in the thick woods, ready to pounce. The only pair of eyes on which his light focuses are those of a possum that freezes for a moment then scurries off.

By the time he gets home, he is huffing and puffing. The deer is asleep under a coat; the newly arriving raccoons are asleep in the box; and, Old Grouch is curled up under the bed on a pair of Jerome's jeans. Looking around at the growing animal population, Jerome knows he has to figure out how to handle it. But he is too tired to think right then and goes right to sleep.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

With the return of the raccoons and their new mates and the addition of the fawn, Jerome is beginning to feel the pressure and responsibility of his growing animal population. His house is only a one-room building and the number of living beings that can comfortably fit into it is not infinite. As he goes to sleep after his mad rush through the woods to escape the mountain lion, he faces the fact that he will have to devise a plan to care for his animal friends. He loves them but he knows there is a limit.

Perhaps gaining the knowledge that a mountain lion is stalking the nearby woods makes him realize that he is housing animals that could well attract the carnivorous hunter and thus place him in danger. Emma Lou loves animals so much that she can't imagine drawing such a line. Emma Lou and Jerome may be heading for a conflict. She is young and idealistic. Jerome is an older man who loves nature but he is practical as well and knows that one person can only do so much. A single person can have little effect on nature and the behavior of wild animals.

Emma Lou has an unrealistic view of animals. Just as she sees equanimity between the lives of a human and those of the forest animals, she is disappointed when Mama and Papa skunk take their babies away from her when she wants to play with them. They know, through their instincts, that to protect their babies they must teach them how to survive in the woods because that's where they belong and that's where they will ultimately live.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Jerome awakens the next morning and realizes how little he knows about taking care of a baby fawn. He is looking forward to Emma Lou coming—she will know how to care for it. The fawn must think his toes are food because when Jerome slides his feet onto the floor, the fawn begins licking his toes. He is able to get the hungry fawn at bay but doesn't know how he'll manage to make breakfast with the fawn nipping at him. The raccoons are all lined up and looking hungry, too.

Emma Lou comes with some milk and a baby bottle. The fawn drinks three bottles full of milk and goes to sleep. Jerome tells her the fawn would be better at her house since he doesn't know how to care for it. But they have hounds, Emma Lou tells him, who would tear after the little deer. The deer proves to be a real burden for Jerome. The animal is always hungry and follows his every step, nudging him with his wet nose. Emma Lou is sympathetic and suggests they build a corral in the back. The corral would be tall enough to keep the fawn in but built at a height that he could jump over when he is big enough to live in the woods. She wants to teach the deer tricks just like she had done with some of the other animals.

Roger Donald watches from afar when Jerome and Emma Lou began clearing brush and cutting down trees to build the corral. He notices the seven skunks and nine raccoons that frolic around them as they work. He is fascinated when the animals perform their tricks for Emma Lou. He is jealous that he isn't welcome at Kildee's house. He is sure he could help teach the animals tricks.

As Emma Lou and Jerome work, they have no idea that Roger Donald is watching them and plotting against them. Jerome makes a little shelter with a thatched roof where the fawn can sleep. He also makes a gate so that he and Emma Lou could have easy access to the pen. Emma Lou is at Kildee's house so often that Cilly finally sends Ben up to see what is going on. Ben is surprised to see all the animals inside Jerome's house. Jerome invites him back to watch the animals perform the tricks that Emma Lou has taught them. Jerome and Ben enjoy a pot of coffee and when he leaves, Ben tells him to holler if he ever needs his help. Emma Lou suggests they name the fawn Monarch. Jerome tells Emma Lou they will have to change the nests for the raccoons. The two under the stove are fighting and keeping him awake at night. They go inside and figure out a way to change the nests around to separate the fighting raccoons.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Jerome is still struggling with the responsibility of the animals but Emma Lou continues to think of ways that will ease the burden. She is so concerned about the animals that she is willing to work hard to protect them and keep them at Jerome's house. She has



compassion for the older man who she knows is being stressed by the growing number of animals in and around his house. She likes to play with them and care for them and she enjoys teaching them tricks. She would be very sad and disappointed if Jerome got rid of the animals. Therefore, Emma Lou has her own reasons for trying to ease Kildee's burden.

The story has not seen the last of Roger Donald who is jealous of Emma Lou's access to Kildee's house. He can see himself as a welcomed guest if it wasn't for Emma Lou. He is planning some act of revenge against her which will begin to unfold in the subsequent chapters. The chapter ends in a cliffhanger making the question linger - is Roger Donald the mean kid that Emma Lou thinks he is? Jerome senses he's kind of nice. It will soon be revealed who is right about Roger Donald.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

To seek revenge against Emma Lou, Roger Donald waits until Monarch is well tamed. He calls the game warden's office in Santa Cruz. Jim Hinkle, the game warden, drops by one morning when Emma Lou is at the house. Emma Lou has been brought up to distrust game wardens. Immediately Jerome senses there might be trouble. Hinkle tells Jerome he will have to fine him for keeping a wild deer enclosed and that the animal will have to be released into the forest. Emma Lou protests. It is her fault—she's the one who should be fined. She explains that the only reason she had brought the fawn to Jerome's house is because a lion had killed its mother.

Hinkle ridicules Emma Lou for saying that a lion killed the fawn's mother. There are no lions around those parts. He refuses to listen to Emma Lou and tells her and Jerome that what they have done is a violation of the law. Roger Donald steps out from behind the house with a wide grin on his face. Immediately, Emma Lou knows that he is the tattletale who reported them. She tries to lunge at him but the warden stops her.

When the warden realizes that Emma Lou is a member of the Eppy family, he gives her story more credibility. He tells her that if she can show him the tracks, he'll forget about the violation with the deer. Roger Donald speaks up, certain that there has not been a lion in these parts. They walk out to the meadow where the lion had killed the doe. Emma Lou vows to beat the stuffing out of Roger Donald when this is all over. They find the remains of the deer—most of the flesh is gone, probably picked away by coyotes and foxes. Hinkle looks around the ground by the carcass and into the nearby woods. He finds enough evidence to satisfy him that the predator had indeed been a lion.

Hinkle happily accepts Jerome's invitation to stay for dinner. He assures him that he will not press charges and that the deer can stay in the pen but the gate has to be open so he can leave. Emma Lou tells Hinkle that if the lion is still around her brother Ben would hunt him down. Jerome's raccoons are not afraid of Hinkle. They seem to sense that he is a protector and friend. He admires Jerome for being so kind and protective of the forest animals but warns him he'll have a house full of raccoons if he continues to keep and feed them.

Hinkle admires the statue of Old Grouch and Jerome offers to make a statue for him free of charge. He'd love a statue of his Scotty dog. Emma Lou suggests he bring a picture of the dog because the raccoons probably wouldn't welcome the dog in person. Emma Lou tells Hinkle about Strong Heart chasing deer. He has a glint in his eye and says he'd stop by and see the Cabots about their dog's behavior. He says the Cabots would drop charges against Jerome after their talk. After Emma Lou leaves, Jerome starts thinking about Donald. He kind of likes the boy but he is certain the boy won't be around any more.



## Chapter 8 Analysis

Emma Lou learns that game wardens aren't bad people. Once she is able to prove her story about the lion to him, he is fair and reasonable. This incident may make her realize that her family unfairly judges men like Hinkle who are just doing their jobs and who really care about animals. Donald's revenge backfires on him. He reports Jerome and Emma Lou for keeping a wild deer penned up but after Hinkle learns that Donald had allowed his dog to run loose in the woods and chase deer, it looks as though Donald might be in trouble with the game department himself. Maybe it will make him think twice the next time he is filled with revenge.

The game warden may turn out to be a very good friend for Jerome and Emma Lou to have, especially since they are involved with forest animals. Hinkle is able to see that their motivations in keeping the deer are all good—they are not keeping the animal to raise and butcher.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

It is the rainy season during which the rain falls in steady torrents for days at a time. It is a welcome relief from the drought during the summer. With everything green and lush near Christmas, it is difficult for Jerome to get the spirit without snow and cold weather. After school resumes in September, Jerome doesn't see as much of Emma Lou who is busy with her homework and chores at home. He wants to buy her a nice Christmas gift but doesn't know what she would want. Emma Lou is having a good time at school, irritating her foe Donald every chance she gets.

The raccoons are nested inside the warm cabin and Old Grouch sleeps on a cushion by the fireplace. The baby skunks have all matured but are still under the house. Monarch is spending more and more time away. His visits become even fewer during the rainy season. Finally, he stops coming at all, although he marks out his territory on the mountain and Emma Lou is able to keep track of him.

Jerome and Emma Lou are having a Christmas party for the animals. Emma Lou doesn't let on but the party is really for Jerome. She has a present for him and her mother is making a cake that she will be bringing. Jerome trudges out in the rain and gets a tree and some boughs. Emma Lou is there when he returns. She has brought ornaments and some decorative boughs. Jerome is careful to secure the tree to the stand he built because he knows the raccoons would be curious and climb in the tree. As soon as the tree is decorated, the raccoons are attracted by the berries on the boughs and the silver balls that are hung in it.

Emma Lou and her entire family are coming to the party. Since Jerome can't think of anything to get Emma Lou, he puts a ten dollar bill in an envelope and writes her name on it.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter tells the reader that Jerome is not from the redwood forest where he built his cabin or the region around it. The only precipitation in the forest in California during the winter is rain. He recalls how Christmases in the past were accompanied with snow and cold weather. Emma Lou and Jerome have become very close—they both are planning gifts for each other. The party that Emma Lou suggested for the animals, is really a party for Jerome. She feels close to him and she also doesn't want him to feel alone since he has no family and no friends other than her and the animals.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Jerome has a spread of food on the table when Emma Lou enters, followed by Cilly and Job and then Emma Lou's six, tall brothers. Everyone is impressed with Jerome's house and his animals. Amby is anxious to see the skunks perform their tricks. Dave says he doesn't believe the skunks actually do tricks. The boys all take out pipes and tobacco and begin smoking. The Eppys have brought baskets of food including pies and cakes, cookies, meat and preserves. Emma Lou is stunned by Jerome's gift. She has never had that much money at one time in her life. She tells him she is going to buy a pair of boots with it.

To keep the raccoons away from the table, Emma Lou puts out plates of meat on the floor for them. The skunks get over their shyness and come out, sitting on small cylinders that Emma Lou has placed on the floor. They sway with the movement of her pencil, back and forth and up and down in unison. After they perform, she gives them scraps of food. Job and the boys laugh so heartily that it scares the skunks and raccoons away. By nine-fifteen it is time to go. The family has had a good time and is impressed with Jerome's house. Cilly invites him to come for dinner. Emma Lou pushes a present in Jerome's hand that she had made for him and rushes out.

Later that night a violent storm blows up. The wind blows so hard off the Pacific that it tears at his tree and moves his house, causing the roof to leak. The thought goes through his mind to run down to the Eppys for shelter. But then he figures the tree has been withstanding the winds for maybe 2,000 years. The raccoons are all inside and Jerome hears the skunks scurry under the floorboards to their nest. Later, they come inside, too. The strong winds continue, increasing the size of the gap between the house and the tree. Water pours in the house. Jerome stays on watch by the fire, adding new logs throughout the night. Eventually, the wind settles down and the earth stabilizes. The gap between the house and tree closes back closer to normal.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Jerome is widening his circle of friends by having the entire Eppy family over. Emma Lou's brothers are duly impressed with her skills in training animals. Emma Lou is astonished by Jerome's gift. She gives him a homemade gift about which she seems to be kind of embarrassed after getting what had been to her a very generous gift.

After the Eppys leave, Jerome is once again alone. He has to face the wrath of nature by himself. Although he thinks of walking down to the Eppys, he chooses to go it alone. He has a formality about himself and probably feels he would be imposing on them by barging in on them in the middle of the night. He overcomes his fear of the storm and the potential damage it could do, including to his own person, by his intelligence and

logic. The big redwood that his house is lodged against has withstood 2,000 years of storms so it is logical that it would make it through the storm that rages that night.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

By March the weather has cleared but the animal population inside Kildee's house has exploded. All the raccoon pairs have had babies and now Jerome is living with twenty-five raccoons. Jerome sleeps a lot but the hungry raccoons often disturb him. He is worried that the maturing skunks who have gone off into the woods will find mates and bring them back to the house. Emma Lou comes by and informs Jerome that the skunks have all returned with mates and have made nests under the house. She walks around and looks at all the baby raccoons. She is thrilled but Jerome calculates that by the next spring he could have as many as 125 raccoons and then 600 the next year. Emma Lou vows to come up with a solution.

Jerome makes breakfast for himself and Emma Lou. She mentions she hasn't eaten venison for a week and adds that Ben has been acting funny since she has become friendly with Jim Hinkle. Jerome asks if she's seen Monarch lately. She has seen the deer but not in the last week. Jerome senses she is worried. He tells her he is sure that Ben hasn't killed Monarch. Emma Lou has to leave after lunch to help her mother with chores. Jerome is tired but thinks about taking a walk in the woods to generate some energy. Just then, Donald pops his head in. He has been wondering how Jerome's zoo was getting along.

Jerome explains how the raccoon population had recently increased and tells Donald he'll have to think of some way to deal with all the animals or else he'll have to move out. Ben had told Donald about the tricks that the animals could do. He tells Jerome that if Emma Lou can teach the animals tricks, he is sure he could, too. After a pleasant visit, Donald says he'll stop by again. Jerome is fine with that but he says not to come when Emma Lou is there. Donald says he will try to think of a solution for Jerome and all his animals.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Jerome is sleeping a lot and he feels weak. Perhaps life in the woods with all the animals is taking its toll on him. The animals are multiplying and are constantly hungry. He has a huge responsibility with the many animals that are making their home in his house. As much as Emma Lou loves the animals and is thrilled with the babies, she is beginning to understand that the burden is becoming too much for her friend, Jerome, to bear. Even Donald knows that the growing number of animals with which Jerome is having to deal is too much for the older man. Both the young people are worried about him. Jerome thinks if they all put their heads together they will be able to figure out a way to solve his problem. If Emma Lou and Donald work on this problem together perhaps they can make peace with each other.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

There are so many raccoons exploring the house now that Jerome has to watch every step he takes or he'll step on one. The baby skunks are born and soon there will be twenty-seven new skunks coming in and out of the house. Jerome's nerves are raw and making it worse are the frequent visits by Donald. At first he is careful, but he is so fascinated with the raccoons that he becomes careless and doesn't worry about Emma Lou being there. Neither Emma Lou nor Donald has come up with a resolution for his growing animal population. He is also worried that the animals will start fighting with each other.

Donald brings by a squirrel cage with a wheel that the animals use for a race track. The skunks love it and have a great time using the race track. Jerome usually hides it when Emma Lou is coming but one day he forgets to put it away. At first she thinks the cage is a trap that Donald had set to catch the skunks. But the skunks jump in and run around the wheel. She laughs at the fun they are having and realizes that Donald has been visiting Jerome. Emma Lou looks sad and says she has to leave. He wants to say something but can't think of what to say. She isn't angry but she looks hurt. He is sure she feels he has betrayed her.

Soon Donald stops by and says he can get rid of every animal that Jerome has. Jerome tells him he won't sell them but Donald assures him that that isn't his plan. Jerome says he wishes that he and Emma Lou could get along. Donald has brought a sack of corn cobs for the raccoons who immediately begin sniffing at them. Runt, the smallest raccoon, grasps a corn cob in her paws and begins munching. She enjoys it so much that she hordes it, even keeping it away from her youngsters. Jerome watches and laughs as the raccoons devour the corn. Jerome asks Donald to stop by for dinner the next night. He needs help because he plans to introduce the new skunks to the raccoons.

A little while later, Emma Lou comes by. She wants to take the statue of Old Grouch home to put in her room. Emma Lou is in a better mood. She has seen Monarch and he is fine. Emma Lou is about to leave when Jerome invites her to dinner the next night. She accepts and he promises to cook up something special.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Jerome is playing peacemaker between Emma Lou and Donald. He likes both of the young people and his nerves are frayed worrying about them running into each other. He's hoping that they can be friends and come visit Jerome at the same time. With all the animals he has, he needs help from both of them. They have more energy than he has—the animals are wearing him down.





Jerome knows that he is taking a risk by getting the two youngsters together. Emma Lou has a hot temper and totes around a beany and has threatened to shoot Donald. And Donald had demonstrated his revengeful nature when he reported Jerome and Emma Lou to the game warden. But Jerome is a nice man and a good judge of character and thinks that both of them are good kids. He is probably wondering if Emma Lou is planning on not returning to his house because she wants to take the statue of Old Grouch back home with her.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Emma Lou arrives first the next night. Jerome has done a lot of cooking and planning and scheming and is hoping that everything will go all right. They discuss the problems they might encounter when the new skunks are introduced to the raccoons. Jerome wants the skunks to feel like they are guests—guests always behave mannerly. Donald bursts in the room. The two youngsters are surprised to see one another. Jerome knows that in the next few minutes he will know whether or not his scheme will work.

Donald has a burlap bag full of corn cobs with him. He says he needs help and passes the bag to Emma Lou. Soon she is on the floor with raccoons crawling all over her trying to get to the corn. Donald sits on the floor and the two help feed the corn to the hungry raccoons. Jerome smiles as Donald and Emma Lou are having a ball feeding the raccoons.

Jerome serves a roast beef and mashed potatoes with gravy for dinner. At dinner, Jerome asks Donald what his idea for handling the animals is. Emma Lou says it better not be mean—like selling them for their fur. Donald tells her that her brother Ben had offered that idea. She knows that he had and had given him a good swift kick for suggesting it. They argue through dinner about deer hunting. He wishes that deer hunting season was longer. She warns him to leave Monarch alone.

When Donald sits on Old Grouch's pillow, the raccoon walks over and sneers at him. Donald comments that the old raccoon likes him. Emma Lou giggles. Old Grouch hates him, she tells Donald. Surprisingly, when the little skunks begin entering the room, the raccoons don't pay much attention to them at first. As more skunks enter, there are a few tussles. The mother raccoons don't want things to get out of hand and be attacked by the adult skunks so they herd their youngsters outside. At Emma Lou's prompting, Donald finally reveals his plan. He has advertised in a sports magazine saying that anyone who wants to replenish their wildlife area with a pair of raccoons or a pair of spotted skunks could have the animals for just the cost of shipping.

Jerome thinks the idea is brilliant and even Emma Lou is impressed. Donald asks Emma Lou to have the skunks perform their tricks. The skunks take their places on the cylinders and sway in unison at Emma Lou's direction. Donald thinks it is a great show. When it's time to go, Donald offers to walk Emma Lou home.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

As the story nears its conclusion, Jerome's grand plan of making peace between Emma Lou and Donald is seeing the first signs of success. He has taken the risk of trying to unite the two youngsters because life would be easier for him and he likes both of the young people, seeing good qualities in each of them. As it turns out, Donald who at first



had seemed kind of ornery, is the person who comes up with a solution to Jerome's growing animal population. When Donald offers to walk Emma Lou home, it is an indication that the two youngsters actually like each other. Donald wants to show that he is a gentleman and spend a little more time with Emma Lou. And Emma Lou, who has never been afraid to be alone in the woods, allows Donald to walk her home.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Two weeks have passed since Donald placed the ads for the animals in the sports magazine. There has been no response and the strain is weighing on Jerome. There is a constant stream of hungry animals pestering Jerome. The skunks and raccoons begin to fight more often. Jerome converts Monarch's shed into a storage shed for himself. Field mice begin nesting on the shelves of the shed.

On a Saturday, Emma Lou comes over to help Jerome clean his house. Donald runs up the hill cheerfully proclaiming that his plan has worked. He has received dozens of letters from zoos and large estates that want animal pairs. Donald assures Jerome that his father is checking all the requests out to make sure they aren't coming from hunting clubs or fur farmers. All the people requesting the animals are offering to pick them up. Jerome says he'll keep Mama and Papa and, of course, Old Grouch. Emma Lou smiles widely at Donald and says that it's wonderful. Donald grins as his face turns red.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

At the conclusion of the story, everyone is happy. Jerome will have the peace in his life for which he planned in his retirement; the animals will all have good homes, only Old Grouch and Mama and Papa will stay with Jerome; and, Emma Lou and Donald have become good friends. Jerome has learned that he needs friends in his life—both human and animals, as long as there aren't too many of the latter.



# Characters

## Jerome Kildee

Jerome Kildee is a reclusive, elderly man who has retired from a lifetime career as a stonemason and monument maker. He has purchased a plot of land on a mountainside in a redwood forest in California. He builds a one-room house on the property. The back wall of the house is the bark of a giant redwood. He constructs a large fireplace and has a huge picture window in the front of the house that overlooks the lush forest.

After a lifetime of working, Kildee finds he has a lot of time on his hands after he completes the building of his forest home. He is a kind man who literally opens his door to the forest creatures. He begins to establish friendships with the local raccoons and spotted skunks. The animals depend on him for food and shelter and he depends on them for companionship and the feeling of purpose that he had begun to miss.

The relationships he establishes with the forest animals lead to friendships with humans. Emma Lou Eppy, a neighbor girl and avid animal lover, is fascinated by Kildee's animals. She helps Kildee care for them and even teaches them tricks. Another neighbor, Donald Cabot, who initially cared little for the safety of forest animals, eventually understands and shares the love for animals just as Kildee and Emma Lou do. Kildee is welcoming to the forest animals but when their number becomes unmanageable, he calls on his human friends for a solution on how to deal with them yet keep them safe and sound.

## Emma Lou Eppy

Emma Lou Eppy is a teenaged girl who is the youngest child and only daughter of the rough and tough Eppy family. She is a tomboy with short red hair and a turned-up nose who happily discards any thought of a frilly dress for jeans and boots. Emma Lou has six older brothers who are all over six feet tall. She boasts that she will one day be as tall as any of them.

Emma Lou loves animals; in fact, she puts them on equal footing with humans. When she catches a neighbor boy, Roger Donald Cabot, running his dog in the woods and chasing down harmless animals, she launches a marble at the dog using her "beany" and threatens Roger Donald that the next time she catches him running his dog she'll chase him and his dog down with a rifle.

Emma Lou has a natural affinity for Jerome Kildee—they both love animals. She is fascinated by Kildee's raccoons and spotted skunks and all the babies that the animals have. She has a way with animals and is able to teach them tricks. She even contemplates creating a circus act with them. Emma Lou helps Kildee in every way she can with the care of the animals.



One dark night as she returns home from Kildee's house, she happens upon a rogue mountain lion that had just slaughtered a doe. She stands firm against the animal and it finally dashes away. But the doe is dead and its fawn is an orphan. She takes the fawn, later named Monarch, back to Kildee's house. Emma Lou helps Kildee build a pen for the fawn behind his house where they care for it until it's big enough to venture into the forest alone.

## **Roger Donald Cabot**

Roger Donald Cabot is a contemporary of Emma Lou. At first they are enemies because Donald allows his dog, Strong Heart, to chase down harmless animals in the forest. Later, the two youngsters make peace when Donald begins to love and appreciate the forest animals.

## **Old Grouch**

Old Grouch is a fat, lazy old raccoon. He is the first animal that approaches Kildee in his new house. He becomes almost like the family dog—sleeping on his pillow by the cozy fireplace.

## **Charmine**

Mrs. Grouch is a sweet, gentle raccoon and mate of Old Grouch. She is chased down and killed by Strong Heart. Jerome erects a grave marker for the raccoon who Emma Lou dubs Charmine, posthumously.

## **Mama and Papa**

Mama and Papa are the pair of spotted skunks that nest under the floorboards of Kildee's house. Their babies have babies and eventually, there are twenty-seven spotted skunks living under the house.

## **Monarch**

Monarch is the orphan fawn of a forest doe. Emma Lou carries the fawn back to Kildee's house where they eventually built a corral for him until he's big enough to go it alone in the forest.



## **The Mountain Lion**

Emma Lou encounters a mountain lion one dark night on her way back home from Kildee's House. She shines the light on the predator who had just slaughtered a doe. She stands her ground and runs the lion off.

## **Cilly and Job**

Cilly and Job are Emma Lou's parents. They are the parents of six rough and tough boys and the tom boy Emma Lou. Jerome thinks it's unusual that Emma Lou calls her parents by their first names. At Christmas, Cilly brings a holiday feast to Kildee's house for their Christmas party.

## **Jim Hinkle**

Jim Hinkle is a game warden who informs Kildee that he will fine him for keeping Monarch enclosed in his yard. When Hinkle realizes that a mountain lion killed the fawn's mother, he is more sympathetic and appreciates Kildee's concern for the young deer.



# Objects/Places

## Kildee's House

Jerome Kildee is retired from a career as a stonemason. He builds a house in a remote mountainside deep in a redwood forest. Kildee makes friends with the local raccoons and spotted skunks who eventually move in and live in the house with him.

## Kildee's Fireplace

Jerome Kildee is a stonemason by trade. After building his retirement home in the redwood forest, he uses his craftsman skills to erect a huge fireplace that takes up the majority of one wall.

## California's Redwood Forest

After he retires, Jerome Kildee decides to move to California's redwood forest where he builds a one-room house on a mountainside.

## Pacific Ocean

Kildee's house is located off the Pacific coast. During the rainy season, a terrible storm blows up off the ocean causing his house to become dislodged from the redwood tree it had been built up against.

## Monarch's Corral

Emma Lou brings an orphaned fawn to Kildee's house. It is readily apparent that the fawn can't stay indoors. Emma Lou and Jerome Kildee build a corral and shed in the back for the fawn, named Monarch, where it lives until it is big enough to live in the forest.

## Charmine's Gravestone

After Mrs. Grouch is killed by a dog, Kildee decides to erect a gravestone for her. Emma Lou doesn't want her referred to as "Mrs. Grouch" and names her Charmine which is the name that Kildee engraves on the grave marker.





## **Old Grouch's Statute**

Kildee decides to carve a monument to his raccoon friend, Old Grouch. Emma Lou likes the statute so much that Kildee decides to give it to her.

## **Mama and Papa's Nest**

Mama and Papa, Kildee's two spotted skunks, are nocturnal animals and live in a cozy nest under the floorboards of Kildee's house.

## **Rat Pack's Nest**

A pack rat builds a nest in the wall of Kildee's house. The pack rat has three babies who live in the nest with her. The mother rat steals different items around Kildee's house to use in the construction of her nest.

## **Mountain Meadow**

When Emma Lou is walking home through the woods one night, she comes upon a mountain lion in the forest meadow. The predator had just slaughtered a doe leaving her fawn an orphan.



# Themes

## Making Judgments

People often make pre-conceived judgments about other people. Jerome Kildee is a shy and very reserved man. When he first moves into the redwood forest, Emma Lou, a neighbor girl, thinks he is unfriendly because he doesn't smile or say hello. Later, when he opens up and begins having contact with her, she realizes that he is a very kind and gentle man.

Emma Lou is adamant that Roger Donald is a mean boy. She has frequently seen him running with his large Doberman, Strong Heart, in the woods chasing down harmless animals. The dog had even killed one of Kildee's raccoons. As time passes and Roger Donald matures a little, he begins to show a softer side and comes to enjoy the forest animals the way Kildee and Emma Lou do. Kildee has sensed the boy is nicer than Emma Lou thinks he is. Emma Lou is stubborn, but Roger Donald is finally able to convince her that he isn't a bad fellow. He begins to treat the animals with respect and devises a plan to find good homes for Kildee's growing animal population.

When Emma Lou tells the game warden, Jim Hinkle, that a mountain lion is in the region and had killed Monarch's mother, he thinks she is a silly girl and is trying to get out of trouble for keeping a wild deer penned. Only after she takes him to the woods and he sees the remains of the mother deer and the lion's footprints, does he believe her.

## Companionship

The area that Jerome Kildee selects for his retirement home is very rugged and isolated. Kildee has left a solitary career as a stonemason who specialized in gravestones to live in different surroundings although initially he seems destined to continue his solitary existence. Perhaps for the first time in his life, Kildee has time on his hands after he completes the building of his new house. Being alone with not much to do, Kildee begins to turn to the forest animals for companionship. From the joy he experiences from his relationships with the raccoons and the spotted skunks, Kildee realizes that what he needs to fill the long hours of the day is interaction with other living beings. But having conversations with animals has its limits, of course, since animals can't enter into any discourse. Kildee begins to reach out to his neighbors and begins to have contact with them. He begins to build relationships and comes to understand that he needs them in his life.

Kildee's first human friend in the region is the teenaged tomboy, Emma Lou Eppy. When she first encounters him, he seems very unfriendly and doesn't even offer a smile. She is a little intimidated by him. But after his experiences with the animals, he begins to



reach out to Emma. He smiles and greets the girl and encourages her to visit him and the animals.

What facilitates their relationship is their shared love of animals. During his working years, Kildee had probably been wrapped up in his career and hadn't taken time to establish relationships. His shyness is also a barrier to finding companionship. He doesn't realize how much company animals can be until he is alone. After being around the forest animals, he grows to love them. For her part, Emma Lou puts animals on an equal footing with humans. Their friendship grows from their mutual love of animals. Kildee learns that it is more fun to enjoy them with another person and make life easier as well—the animals are a big responsibility and he depends on his friend, Emma Lou, to help him care for them.

## Taking Risks

Jerome Kildee learns late in life to take risks. After a long career as a stonemason in another region of the country, Kildee decides to uproot and make a huge change in his life and move to a remote section of a mountainside deep in a redwood forest in California. He is a shy man who worked in a solitary job for many years. He comments in one passage that he has remorse because of his inability to relate to his customers.

Kildee had apparently been so shy and reserved that he had been unable to utter his condolences to his customers on the losses of their loved ones. He also comments in a private moment that he had missed a lot in life. Perhaps he had been talking about relationships—a wife and children? Perhaps living a somewhat unsatisfying life is what compelled him to take the huge step of moving to the woods. Could it be his last chance to redeem himself for his past regrets?

Other characters take risks in Kildee's House. Emma Lou Eppy is a tom-boy and a rugged and brave teenaged girl. One night while going home, she is walking down the mountain in the forest. She hears some noises and senses that danger is near. She shines her light directly in the glaring yellow eyes of a mountain lion that had just killed a doe. Even though she is scared, Emma stands her ground as the predator continues to stare at her. She knows that the doe had had a fawn that would be orphaned and that the lion might kill it as well. Being an animal lover, Emma Lou is not about to leave the fawn in jeopardy. She takes a huge risk, in fact risks her life, to stay her ground. She is successful. The lion runs off and Emma Lou is able to save the fawn.

Roger Donald, a classmate of Emma Lou's, seems to be the villain when the story begins—his dog had run down and killed one of Kildee's raccoons. Even though he isn't popular with Jerome and especially Emma Lou, Roger Donald takes steps to befriend the older man and prove to Emma Lou that he isn't the mean kid she had thought he was. He puts his ego on the line to reach out to them and make them forgive and forget his past behavior.



# Style

## Point of View

Kildee House by Rutherford Montgomery is told in the third person-narrative with limited omniscience. The reader is privy to the actions of all the characters and, in a few instances, the thoughts and reactions of the main character, Jerome Kildee. Kildee is a reclusive individual who has moved away from the former, unnamed area where he worked and lived for many years. He retired to the redwood forest presumably to get away from people.

Kildee openly expresses some of his regrets about his life to the animals who invite themselves into the strange new building that has suddenly appeared in their forest. He tells them that he missed a lot in life. The expression of his feelings to the animals, though brief and in only one scene, is a device that allows insight into Kildee's rather mysterious past. It tells us that the man is very shy and reserved and has a difficult time relating to and communicating with others.

By establishing this backdrop to the story, the author then demonstrates how the animals are able to bring Kildee out of his shell and establish bonds and relationships with other beings. At first it is just the animals that he befriends but then he is able to apply those communication and bonding skills to human beings and establish strong relationships with them.

Telling the story of the reclusive Mr. Kildee from his perspective is essential because the heart of the story is the emotional growth that the retired man enjoys in the latter years of his life. Although the main perspective is the protagonist, Kildee, there are a few exceptions in episodes which are presented from the point of view of Emma Lou.

## Setting

Kildee House is set in the heart of a redwood forest in California. Kildee's House is the focus of the book and most of the scenes in the book take place in and around it. After retiring from a life-long career as a stonemason in another, unnamed region of the country, Kildee purchases a large plot of land on a mountainside in the forest. He selects the middle of his property on which to build his retirement home. By locating his house at the mid-point, he would not have nearby neighbors with which to deal—he thought! He hadn't considered the forest animals in that decision-making process.

The house is a one-room cabin. The house is lodged up against one of the redwood giants and its back wall is the bark of that tree. A violent wind and rain storm hits the area one night and dislodges the house from the tree, creating a gap between tree and house which allows water to pour in. One wall of the house is made up almost entirely of a stone-faced fireplace. Kildee had used his stonemason skills and tools to build the



large fireplace. The wall that looks out onto the valley below contains a huge picture window in front of which Kildee sits to take in the lush scenery.

Although the reader does not visit Emma Lou's house which is down the mountain from Kildee's house, Emma Lou is often in the woods traipsing back and forth to Kildee's house. It is on one of these journeys on a very dark night that Emma observes the mountain lion that had just killed a doe. Emma takes the doe's fawn back to Kildee's house where they ultimately build a corral behind the house to keep it safe from the lion until it is large enough to live in the forest alone.

The forest animals—spotted skunks and raccoons—almost take over Kildee's house. The raccoons live at various times under the bed, in a box and in the oven. The skunks live under the house and, at times, up in the warm chimney when there is no roaring fire, of course.

## Language and Meaning

Kildee's House is written in a simple language and in a straight-forward manner. There is not an overabundance of subtext that points to subtle themes or hidden meanings. Rather, the book is written in an open and honest way. The one mystery that remains throughout the book is discovering what about Jerome Kildee's background caused him to have a reclusive nature. When Kildee is first introduced, he is seen as a hermit-like character who has chosen to live deep in the heart of a remote and rugged redwood forest in California. The question lingers throughout the story: what drove Kildee away from people and civilization?

The only hint of his former life is indicated in a few passages. He "tells" the raccoons about his regrets. He realizes that he had not been comforting to his customers who ordered gravestones from him. They had lost loved ones and he had been too shy and awkward to offer his condolences. He tells the raccoons that he missed a lot in life but does not reveal exactly what he means. When the mice chew up the letters he had been keeping under his bed, the passage indicates that he will no longer have to brood about his past. The language is somewhat lyrical in that, because the physical presence of letters has been removed, the memories of the person who wrote him the letters will be destroyed as well. This person must have meant a great deal to Kildee because he has held on to the letters for what is presumably a very long time. Although the story is simple and open, the mystery of Kildee's former life remains just that—an unknown—throughout the book and to its conclusion.

## Structure

Kildee House by Rutherford Montgomery is separated into fourteen numbered chapters which are short to medium in length. There are many illustrations scattered throughout the book provided by illustrator Barbara Cooney. The story of Jerome Kildee and the retirement home he builds in a remote area of California's redwood forest is told in largely a chronological order.

The arc of the main character is chronicled from the first chapter which presents Kildee as a hermit-like character to the story's conclusion which portrays him as a man who has learned the value of friendship and his need for it. Jerome Kildee has no family or friends when he moves into the house he built up against a huge redwood tree. The first friends he makes are forest animals. His kind nature and honesty lead him from relationships with the animals to more rewarding, though more complex, friendships with human beings.

The main thrust of the simple story is the friendships that the protagonist is able to establish and how, very late in life, he opens up to the good will of others. The story does not contain an overabundance of detailed descriptions or passages, thus enhancing the story's quick pace. The story does unfold in a satisfying pace and the use of some foreshadowing as well as the construction of some cliff hanging chapters provides a healthy level of intrigue which compels the reader to read on.



## Quotes

"It's a sad business, dealing with sad people, and not being able to say a word to comfort them." (Chapter 1, page 15)

"Emma Lou always went over exciting events when she was alone in the woods. Sometimes she acted out things she hoped would happen; sometimes she just went back over things that had happened and thought of how she could have said or done something else." (Chapter 2, page 27)

"Jerome had always thought of girls as sweet little things dressed in fluffy gowns with scrubbed, pink faces, and neat pigtails down their backs. Emma Lou did not fit this picture at all—her face usually had smudges or berry-vine scratches on it." (Chapter 3, page 42)

"Ben says animals know. He says they can smell death." (Chapter 4, page 57)

"As he ate he studied the figure he was chiseling out of the cream-colored stone. He knew it was going to be good, and the thought made him forget the lonesomeness of his house." (Chapter 5, page 70)

"A week of camping out under the big oak tree made Jerome appreciate his house. He got four wood ticks on him, all burrowed into him so deeply he had to dig them out with his penknife." (Chapter 6, page 85)

"When the light hit him he leaped back from the doe and faced Emma Lou. His yellow eyes glared horribly. He snarled as loud as any zoo lion and lashed his tail." (Chapter 6, page 100)

"He did not know anything for sure, though he suspected the Eppy boys did a bit of hunting out of season. Because they never poached on his land he could truthfully say he had never seen them running deer with their hounds." (Chapter 7, page 111)

"You are dead right, miss; there was a lion here, and he killed that doe." (Chapter 8, page 131)

"He was probably asking for trouble in inviting the boy to visit him, but one more trouble wouldn't break his back." (Chapter 11, page 175)

"Donald knew Jerome wasn't poor, but it was hard to think of him as a man of means because of the way he lived." (Chapter 12, page 183)

"Looks like one part of the world was made to eat the other part. The little skunks eat mice; the racoons eat frog and fish." (Chapter 13, page 193)





## Topics for Discussion

Why does Jerome Kildee build his retirement home in the middle of the woods? Why type of work did he do before he retired? What were some of the reasons he was uncomfortable around people?

How do animals fulfill some of Jerome's emotional needs? How do his friendships with animals open him up for building relationships with people? Who is the first human friend he makes?

Why does Emma Lou hate Roger Donald? What animal does Roger Donald's dog kill? What animal defeats Strong Heart and causes him to stay away from Jerome's property?

What animal kills Monarch's mother? Who reports Jerome to the game warden? What is Jim Hinkle's reaction when he comes to check on Monarch?

Why does Jerome want Emma Lou and Donald to be friends with each other? What peace-making plan does he devise? Why is his plan risky for him?

Why is Jerome finding it difficult to keep the raccoons and the skunks? What solution does Donald come up with to solve Jerome's problem? What does Jerome insist on before he hands any animals over to other people?

Why does Jerome realize he needs people in his life? Why does Emma Lou finally soften her feelings for Donald? What does Donald admire about Emma Lou?