

The Last Letter Home Study Guide

The Last Letter Home by Vilhelm Moberg

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Plot Summary

When the Civil War breaks out in Part 1, Karl wants to enlist to serve his country, but Kristina objects to him becoming a murderer because she worries about his eternal soul. Luckily for Kristina, Karl's lame leg causes the doctors to reject him for service. Karl argues with Samuel Nojd about whether the land was stolen from the Indians or rightfully belongs to the settlers who bought it as the Sioux, suffering from famine during the harsh winter, sharpen their tomahawks. When Kristina gets sick, bleeding between her legs, Ulrika convinces her to go to the doctor who warns that her next childbed will kill her, and Karl endures the deprivation out of concern for his wife. Karl receives a letter from his sister, Lydia, in Sweden, informing him that their mother has died.

Though many Lutherans are swayed to the Baptist faith in Part 2, Kristina decides to stay with her baptism and her God until she dies. When the Astrakhan apple tree from her parental home in Sweden produces fruit, she is excited for the opportunity to share some of the Old Country with her children when the fruit ripens. After fully recuperating, Kristina convinces Karl to yield his body to her, but Karl is terrified when Kristina tells him she is pregnant some time later.

As the Sioux attack settlers in an attempt to reclaim their land, Kristina miscarries the baby, and Karl tends to her as she is stuck in bed, sending their children to safety with a neighbor since the women and children are evacuated due to the Indian attacks. Kristina's condition worsens, and she dies shortly after the Sioux are defeated. As he builds a coffin for his wife, Karl decides God is not trustworthy because Kristina trusted God to take care of her and God allowed her to die. When Ulrika chides him for killing his wife by yielding to his carnal desires, she is shocked at his blasphemy as Karl claims he will never forgive God for taking Kristina from him. Karl writes Lydia that the Civil War is over and the government promises good times.

In Part 3, Klas Albert marries Marta and, in exchange, gives Karl a map of Ljuder parish which Karl wants because it is consoling to have the place he was born on paper, though he will never return to his homeland. With his four sons grown, Karl undertakes the task of clearing the last of his land, an oak stand to the east of his house, but his back is injured when he is trapped under the last tree; however, he still refuses to submit to God. Karl writes Lydia that he has given his farm to Johan, his oldest son, and though he misses Sweden, he has never regretted his immigration.

In the Epilogue, American culture overtakes Swedish culture as Karl grows old. He is too pained to work much, so he spends his days watching his grandchildren play and recalling his youth while looking at his map of Ljuder parish. Though Karl still misses Kristina, he knows he will soon be buried next to her. Each evening, he walks around the settlement to ensure all is well. Karl's neighbor, Axel J. Anderson, writes Lydia to inform her that Karl died in his sleep on 12/7/1890 at the age of sixty-seven and will be greatly missed by his family and friends.



Preface and Part 1, Chapter I

Preface and Part 1, Chapter I Summary

The Last Letter Home by Vilhelm Moberg is an emotional narrative about the lives of a Swedish family who immigrated to Minnesota, searching for a better life. Karl and Kristina Nilsson struggle to make their land support their family while raising their children in the midst of the Civil War and the Sioux war against white settlers. When Kristina dies, Karl must learn how to continue on without his helpmate of twenty years. The Last Letter Home is a novel that touches the heart as it details the trials that immigrants faced after enduring the difficulty of relocating their families halfway across the world.

The Preface: The Country That Changed Them explains that this is the last installment about a group of Swedish immigrants who settled in Minnesota where they created a new community, becoming American citizens when the region was admitted as the thirty-second state in the Union. Unfortunately, as the Civil War breaks out between the North and South, Indians driven from their ancestral lands fight to reclaim their land. Saddled with many responsibilities due to the gift of liberty and forced to govern themselves, the immigrants change America as America changes them.

Beginning Part 1, Chapter I: Old Abe Calls describes how, due to the invention of the telegraph, within hours every city dweller in Minnesota knew what happened in South Carolina on Sunday, April 14, 1861, and the people of Chisago Lake knew by Monday afternoon. Karl Oskar Nilsson, owner of the first settlement at Chisago Lake, was harrowing his field with a new team of horses while waiting for his oldest son, Johan, to return from Klas Albert's store, wondering what is taking Johan so long. When Johan rushes across the field to announce that war has broken out between the Southern slave states the North, Karl is relieved that it has finally happened. After instructing his sons to continue with their work, Karl continues working as well because he must plant his spring wheat regardless of the war. At dinner, Johan shares the news with his mother, Kristina, and his siblings. Kristina and Karl disagree about the war because Kristina believes killing is wrong no matter the reason and punishment belongs to God alone. When he learns the President is calling for troops, Karl knows that, as a good citizen, he must answer the President's call, but he must wait because he needs to sow his land so people will have food next year.

Minnesota is the first state to reply to Lincoln's call, and though the President asked for 75,000 men, the people of the North promise him 600,000 soldiers. Spring and summer is peaceful in Lake Chisago as the war rages further south; however, the war does not end quickly as the papers predicted, and it goes badly for the North. In August, Lincoln asks for another 300,000 men, threatening to issue conscription in October if the number is not met. In early September, Karl reads a summons for the Swedish settlers in Minnesota to form their own company. After passing a restless night thinking about it



deeply, he tells his wife in the morning that he is going to Stillwater to volunteer for the war.

Preface and Part 1, Chapter I Analysis

The preface explains that *The Last Letter Home* is the last of a series of novels about the immigration of Karl and Kristina Nilsson. It identifies the novel's setting as Minnesota and also specifies the time period by indicating that the Civil War breaks out, meaning this novel begins in the early 1860s. Additionally, the preface alludes to an important point of the novel: how the immigrants change America even as their new country changes them. The first chapter introduces the main characters, Karl and Kristina, and though Civil War breaks out, Karl continues working in his fields because people need food whether there is war or not, showing his rational side. Karl and Kristina disagree about the war with Karl showing national pride in his new country and support for the President he helped elect; meanwhile, Kristina sees the war from a religious perspective, believing punishment belongs to God alone. Karl wants to enlist when the President sends a call for troops, but he knows he must first tend to his duty regarding his farm to ensure his family is taken care of and people have food. Kristina does not understand why people are so joyous about murdering their countrymen, but Karl sees the war as just because its purpose is the abolition of slavery. Four months into the war, Lincoln needs more soldiers, and when the Swedish settlers of Minnesota decide to form their own company, Karl considers the matter intently and decides to enlist.



Part 1, Chapter II and III

Part 1, Chapter II and III Summary

In Chapter II: I Am Concerned With Your Eternal Life, Kristina sews flannel shirts for Karl on her new sewing machine, slowing the wheel when Karl joins her. When he announces that he has decided to volunteer for the war, she calmly suggests he wait for conscription, but Karl would be ashamed to be forced to fight for his country and must go now. Kristina objects that the Fifth Commandment says not to kill and she does not want him to be a murderer because she is concerned with his eternal salvation. Karl is dumbfounded because he expected his wife to object to him leaving his family. He has received a call of duty from the President, but "from his wife the husband and father now received another reminder, another call. But it did not concern this world, rather the eternal one" (p.16). Kristina accepts her fate which is why she does not ask Karl to consider her since she is not afraid to be left alone. Recalling how her grandmother was widowed at the age of thirty, she thinks men go to war to destroy life, leaving women alone to preserve it. Karl argues that it is not sinful to kill enemies in the war, especially since the Southerners treat slaves so poorly, and Kristina says he must go if it will bring peace to his mind, hastening to prepare his clothing so he can go to war.

The next evening, Kristina is still sewing when Karl returns late from Stillwater. Since he seems depressed, she wonders if he has changed his mind, but he soon tells her he was rejected because of his lame left leg, and he is ashamed that the doctors decided he is not good enough. Kristina is agitated; she would be proud if she were a man who was found unsuitable to kill people. Shaking off his burden, Karl assures Kristina he will be home during the war. If he had heard Kristina's prayer the previous evening, he would know who had prevented him from going to war and risking his eternal life.

Chapter III: The First Commandment for Emigrants offers the rule never to regret one's emigration and to love America. Kristina tends the apple tree that she brought to America as a seed from her parents' home in Sweden. Though it has been alive for three years, it has not yet produced fruit. Kristina's twelfth winter in America nears, but though she has been weakened since her miscarriage two and a half years ago, she is not frightened by death; yet, she suffers from the thought that she will never return to her homeland. She only begs God not to leave her children motherless yet, and every evening, she thanks Him for allowing her to have another day with her family. When Karl returns from visiting Anders Mansson, wearing an unusual expression on his face, he explains that he found Anders' mother, Fina-Kajsa, dead in the field when he arrived on the farm, and Karl found no way to encourage Anders to quit drinking. A few weeks after the funeral, Anders goes missing, and some time later, a boy fishing at the rapids below Taylors Falls finds a hat with Anders' initials on it. Everyone believes Anders jumped into the spring, but they never recover his body. Anders Mansson was the first Swedish settler in the St. Croix Valley, but he has no grave because one decision, to emigrate, decided his life since he was unable to follow the emigrant's first commandment, not to regret his emigration.



Part 1, Chapter II and III Analysis

When Karl informs his wife that he plans to enlist for the war, she wants him to wait for the draft, but Karl's pride will not allow him to be forced to defend his country. Though Kristina knows that she cannot dissuade her husband, comparing his decision to join the war to his decision to immigrate, she explains to him that she is concerned for his soul; the Bible forbids killing, and she does not believe that God condones murder even in war. Karl is conflicted because he is forced to choose between a call of duty from his President and a call of morals to God as his wife reminds him. Karl argues that killing people during war is not sinful, mainly since it is being done for the greater good, and Kristina prepares his clothes more quickly so he can go to war well prepared. Karl is depressed when he is rejected because of his injured leg, causing Kristina exasperation since she believes it is an honor to be found unsuitable to be a murderer and had prayed that Karl would not go to war and risk his eternal life.

The third chapter mentions Kristina's care for the Astrakhan apple tree she brought to America from her parental home in Sweden, showing how this immigrant has begun to affect America in a small way by importing part of her childhood home, and this tree will play a role in her future. The rest of the chapter focuses on Karl finding a neighbor's mother dead in the field, causing Anders Mansson great grief. Eventually, Anders disappears, and when his hat is found, everyone assumes he committed suicide. They never find his body so he does not have a grave, though he was the first settler in the St. Croix Valley, and the narrator suggests that his death was caused by breaking the most important rule for immigrants, which is to never regret one's immigration. This rule comes into effect again later in the novel as the reader can compare the differences between immigrants who regret their immigration compared to those who embrace their new country and new life, such as Karl.



Part 1, Chapter IV

Part 1, Chapter IV Summary

In Chapter IV: The Settlers' Holy Days, though Karl has tilled the last of the meadow on his claim that autumn, breaking thirty acres, he dreams of tilling the oak stand to the east of the house, but he knows he must wait until his sons are old enough to do a grown man's full day of work. The church stands one and a half miles from their house, close enough that they can hear the bells even when they do not attend church. Chisago Lake parish receives a new minister, Johannes Stenius, straight from Sweden. The first wedding he preaches is that of Sven, the son of Danjel, Kristina's cousin, so Karl and Kristina attend the wedding. During the reception after the ceremony, Kristina does not feel out of place at Danjel's house, though she is usually uncomfortable around people who only speak English. She speaks to Ulrika, the Swedish wife of the Baptist minister, who confesses that she has been sexually tempted by another man since her husband does not please her physically. Meanwhile, Jonas Petter warns Sven that he should have taken a claim nearby because the treacherous and warlike Sioux are near Meeker County where Sven is taking his new bride, but Sven claims he will befriend the natives. Staying after everyone else leaves, Kristina confides in Danjel that she wants to pray to live a few more years but is afraid of angering God; Danjel responds that God will reclaim her soul whenever it suits him. He also encourages her to pray for Karl when she confesses that she is worried about his soul since he trusts only himself and does not pray.

Part 1, Chapter IV Analysis

Karl's dreams of tilling the last of his claim, the oak stand to the east of the house, foreshadows his attempt to do so in his old age, especially as he thinks that he must wait until his sons are old enough to be more useful. The mention of the bells is also an instance of foreshadowing as they play a role in the novel much later, during the Sioux war. The Lutherans get a new minister straight from Sweden, and this accounts for some of his views which surface later in the narrative. Karl and Kristina attend the first wedding he presides over since it is the wedding of Sven, Kristina's cousin. One of the difficulties of immigration is addressed in this chapter as the narrator mentions Kristina's discomfort around people who only speak English. Ulrika, Kristina's friend and the former prostitute of Ljuder parish who is now married to a Baptist minister, is introduced in this chapter as well, and she plays a significant role in several portions of the novel. Jonas Petter's warning that Sven should not move to Meeker County because of the large presence of Sioux in that area foreshadows Sven's fate at the hands of Sioux warriors. Kristina's piety is again evidenced by the fact that she stays at Danjel's house after everyone else leaves because she wants to talk to Danjel about her spirituality. Kristina expresses her desire to live longer for her family, and Danjel encourages her to pray but reminds her that God will still act according to His will. Kristina also receives encouragement to pray for Karl since she worries about his soul as he does not pray.

since he trusts only himself and not God. Karl's lack of religion foreshadows his attitude toward God once Kristina is no longer able to monitor him.



Part 1, Chapter V and VI

Part 1, Chapter V and VI Summary

In Chapter V: The Tomahawks are Being Sharpened, their twelfth winter in America, that of 1861-1862, is the most severe that Karl and Kristina have experienced. Though they are only in their thirties, years of hard work make them much older than their years. When Samuel Nojd, the old hunter, tells Kristina that hunger is so bad for the Indians this winter that they are eating their own children, she feels white Christians must accumulate a heavy burden before God for the way they treat the Sioux. Nojd and Karl argue about the price of sheepskins since Karl wants a higher price because Nojd's dogs killed them on Karl's land, but Nojd objects that Karl's land was stolen from the Indians. Kristina sees the truth in each man's words as white intruders drove the Indians from the land which was rightfully theirs. A sand cliff on the west shore of Lake Chisago is shaped like an Indian head which makes the settlers apprehensive since they cannot make him go away as they did the flesh and blood Indians. The settlers have no clue that out west at the Sioux camps are suffering from great famine this winter. The hunters and warriors take out tomahawks with black stars on the blades which signal sure death to the enemy, sharpening their weapons on a grindstone.

In Chapter VI: Kristina Deserts Her Milking Stool, though Kristina often feels an ache in her lower abdomen, one day while finishing her milking, the intense pain becomes overwhelming, and she begins bleeding between her legs. She calls for Karl, who carries her inside, but Kristina dissuades him from sending for the neighbor's wife, insisting it cannot be serious since it is not a miscarriage; she never told Karl about the pain in her abdomen since her last miscarriage. The next morning, Kristina's bleeding stops, but since she is still weak, Karl sends for Manda Svensson, the neighbor's wife, who advises Kristina to lie still. Kristina does not worry about herself, unconcerned with what sickness hastens her departure when God calls her from the world; however, she feels God will allow her to stay in the world a bit longer because her family still needs her.

Weakness forces Kristina to stay in bed, leaving her indoor chores undone. Karl worries about his wife and tends to her, while Marta sees to the cooking for the family. By the end of January, Kristina is able to do some small chores. When Ulrika visits, she is shocked by Kristina's illness and claims her friend does not rest long enough between childbeds. When Kristina tells her friend about her bleeding and pain for the past year, Karl is shocked that he was never told of her trial. Talking to Karl about taking his wife to a doctor, Ulrika recommends Dr. Farnley, the new doctor in Stillwater. Though Kristina objects to visiting the doctor because it is God's decision how long she lives, she agrees when Ulrika reminds her that Karl and her children still need her. Ulrika agrees to accompany her friend to talk to the doctor about Kristina's ailment. Though Ulrika reassures her, Kristina is uneasy and feels indecent at the idea of undressing in front of a strange man and allowing him to touch her private parts. As soon as a milder day



dawns, Karl drives Kristina to Stillwater. Her first visit to a doctor feels like emigration as Kristina accompanies her husband without conviction and half in regret.

Part 1, Chapter V and VI Analysis

The winter of 1861-1862 is the most severe that Karl and Kristina have endured since their immigration, but the Indians suffer even more than the white settlers. As Kristina talks to Samuel Nojd about the trials faced by the Indians, she believes white Christians will be held accountable for the way they treat the natives when they face God. Karl and Nojd argue about whether Karl's land is rightfully his; though Karl paid the government for his land, the government stole the land from the Sioux. The cliff that looks like an Indian frightens the settlers and serves as a symbol of the ferocity and endurance of the Indians. Meanwhile, the settlers remain ignorant of the fact that the Sioux warriors are sharpening their tomahawks and preparing for battle, foreshadowing the Sioux attacks against the white settlers who have invaded their land.

In Chapter VI, Kristina is overwhelmed by the abdominal pain that has secretly bothered her for over a year, since her miscarriage. Karl worries as he carries her from the barn into the house, though she has never told him about experiencing this pain in the past. Kristina stays in bed for some time because she is weakened by this illness, but when Ulrika visits and Kristina confesses that the pain had been bothering her for a long time before this instance, Ulrika persuades Kristina to visit the doctor, assisted by Karl's insistence as he is shocked that his wife never before told him of her pain. Ulrika agrees to accompany Kristina to the doctor's office since Kristina is so nervous, and this chapter foreshadows the visit to the doctor and the seriousness of Kristina's illness. As Karl drives her to Stillwater so she can go with Ulrika to see the doctor, Kristina mentally compares the journey to immigration as she accompanies her husband without conviction and half in regret.



Part 1, Chapter VII and VIII

Part 1, Chapter VII and VIII Summary

In Chapter VII: Has God Inflicted This Upon Us?, Karl waits restlessly in Pastor Jackson's living room while waiting for Ulrika and Kristina to return from Dr. Farnley's office. As two hours pass, he is anxious about what is taking so long, but just as he decides to go to the doctor's office, Kristina and Ulrika return. After explaining their delay was due to so many people waiting to see the doctor, Ulrika pulls Karl aside to talk to him privately. Explaining whether Kristina lives or dies depends on Karl, Ulrika shares the doctor's message that Kristina's illness is due to her miscarriage and childbirths before, and she will die if she goes to childbed again so he must refrain from impregnating her. Angry that Ulrika tells him how to care for his wife, Karl thanks her, having nothing else to say, because what can a man say when he is banished from his wife forever? Karl and Kristina do not get a chance to talk until they get home, and when Karl asks about her doctor visit, Kristina claims she does not want to talk about it because it was embarrassing. Karl is relieved it is not an incurable disease, but Kristina is distraught that she is now a useless woman and Karl no longer has a wife. Karl tries to comfort her, knowing he can no longer enjoy his wife though doing so confirms that they are still in love. Wondering if God has inflicted this on them, Kristina suggests the doctor does not really understand her ailment; however, Karl insists she must get better, and they go to bed in the same room but in different beds on opposite sides of the room. Before going to sleep, Kristina prays God will allow the doctor's medicines to heal her. She asks if it is really God's will that she and Karl never again be together as a married couple, though they have always cherished and been faithful to one another. Kristina prays that God does not take her and leave her children motherless yet.

Chapter VIII: The Letter from Sweden is written to Karl from his sister, Lydia Karlsson on 2/19/1862 to inform him that their mother died and was given a quiet funeral. She begs him not to forget his sister since there are now only the two of them left.

Part 1, Chapter VII and VIII Analysis

Karl's anxiety while waiting for Kristina and Ulrika to return from the doctor's office reveals his love for his wife and suggests that he would be lost without her. When they finally return, Ulrika privately explains to Karl what the doctor said because Kristina is too modest and too ashamed to tell her husband that she cannot have any more children or even sleep intimately with Karl because her next childbed will kill her, according to Dr. Farnley. When they return to their home, Kristina is unwilling to talk about her visit to the doctor, and though Karl is relieved her illness is not incurable, she is distraught that she is now useless as a wife. Kristina disbelieves that God would allow this and maintains that the doctor is wrong about her illness, but Karl insists they follow the doctor's instructions because it is important for Kristina to get better, despite the physical denial he suffers. Kristina prays that night, asking if it is God's will to separate



her and Karl as husband and wife and begging for more time with her family because she does not want to leave her children motherless. Ironically, the next chapter is a letter that Karl receives from his sister, informing him that their mother has died, leaving Karl and Lydia motherless. This ends the first part of the novel, setting the precedent that each part is concluded with a letter to or from Karl's sister, Lydia, who still resides in Sweden.



Part 2, Chapter IX

Part 2, Chapter IX Summary

Part 2: The Astrakhan Apples Are Ripe begins with Chapter IX: The River or the Font? in which the Swedish immigrants of the St. Croix Valley are divided on religious matters. When Baptist revivalist, Fredrick Nilsson, who was exiled from Sweden in 1851 for preaching immersion comes to preach in Chisago Lake, Johannes Stenius, the Lutheran pastor, forbids any of his parish to open their homes to "this uncouth, unschooled sailor who was not ordained as a church official" (p. 79). This results in at least ten members of his parish offering a room where Nilsson can preach, and twenty Lutherans leave their church and are baptized after listening to Nilsson preach. When Pastor Stenius issues stronger orders, especially regarding men watching their wives since women are more easily led astray, Karl speaks out that the settlers do not obey the clergy in America as they did in Sweden, but Stenius haughtily replies that he only obeys God. The congregation is threatened with a serious disruption, and many blame the pastor's rigidity for causing it.

After her doctor visit, Karl ensures that Kristina follows the doctor's orders. She begins to feel stronger within a few weeks and her bleeding stops. While Kristina is tending to spring cleaning one afternoon, Manda Svensson visits to ask for Kristina's help because her soul is troubled after hearing Nilsson preach since she feels he is right; however, her husband wants to remain a Lutheran, and Pastor Stenius is pressuring her to baptize her six-month-old son as a Lutheran. Unable to let her neighbor leave uncomforted, Kristina shares her own beliefs: that there are many religions but only one God. She advises Manda to wait until her husband does not object to her getting baptized. Some time later, the Svenssons make a deal; the son is baptized in the old religion and the wife is baptized in the new. After attending a baptismal festival of Ulrika's brethren in Stillwater, Kristina discusses religion with Ulrika, who believes the Baptist denomination is correct. Though unsure what she knows with certainty, Kristina decides she will remain with her baptism and her God until the end of her days.

Part 2, Chapter IX Analysis

Part 2 is titled The Astrakhan Apples Are Ripe, indicating the significance of the Astrakhan apple tree in these chapters of the novel. Chapter IX begins the chapter by describing the religious division among the Swedish settlers in the St. Croix Valley. This disagreement is increased when Swedish revivalist Fredrick Nilsson comes to preach the immersion of Baptism, swaying many members of the Lutheran faith. This leads to Pastor Stenius issuing orders against conversion, and his sense of authority is derived from the power of the clergy in Sweden since he has recently immigrated; however, the clergy does not possess the same power in America. When Karl mentions this to Stenius, however, the pastor insists that he answers to God, not man. Many members of the congregation blame Pastor Stenius' attitude for the disruption.



As Kristina begins to feel better, her neighbor, Manda Svensson, visits with a moral dilemma: she has heard Fredrick Nilsson preach and no longer believes the Lutherans are correct in their interpretation of God and religion. She is also concerned because Pastor Stenius is trying to force her to baptize her six-month-old son as a Lutheran, and her husband does not wish to convert to Baptists. Kristina, unable to dismiss her neighbor without attempting to comfort her, shares her belief that religion is man's invention and each person must find God on their own. Eventually, Manda convinces her husband to allow her to convert to Baptism by agreeing to have their son baptized as a Lutheran. When Kristina attends a conversion ceremony in Stillwater, she is disturbed by the process of immersion, and though Ulrika explains why Baptists are correct, Kristina decides that she will remain with her baptism and her God until death, though she is unsure whether the Baptists or the Lutherans are correct. This decision further proves Kristina's faith in God as she sees her relationship with her Creator as personal and believes the choice of religion does not affect that connection with her God.



Part 2, Chapter X and XI

Part 2, Chapter X and XI Summary

In Chapter X: The Astrakhan Apple Tree Blooms, the Astrakhan apple tree bears fruit for the first time that warm spring. Kristina's mouth waters in anticipation of their ripening in August when her children will first taste fruit from a tree from her home country and she will "be able to show her children how she had transplanted part of her childhood from the Old Country to the New" (p. 92). While Kristina fully recuperates, there is no change for Karl, since he knows her next childbed will kill her so they cannot share a bed. Both miss the bodily contact they have shared for twenty years, and though Karl dreams of being with his wife, he endures his denial for months as Ulrika's warning resounds in his ears.

One evening in May, Kristina informs Karl that she wants to be his wife again. Though he tries to dissuade her out of fear for her health, Kristina insists that only God rules her life, and God's will dictates that married people be together. Dazed by the demand in his body, Karl surrenders to his wife and yields his body.

In Chapter XI: Kristina Is Not Afraid, it is a June evening as Kristina walks a path along Lake Chisago, looking in vain for a lost cow. As she turns homeward, Kristina stops to rest because she is tired from the day's chores. Now that she is certain she is with child, she must tell Karl, though he will be afraid. She plans what to say to her husband, intending to be confident and insist he share her confidence and trust God because she is in good hands. As she finally continues toward home, Kristina is frightened by a figure, but it is only Karl. As they walk home together, she tells him all she wants to tell him, sharing her unwavering confidence that she will survive her ninth childbed. When she prays that night, Kristina asks God to reassure Karl because he is terrified by the news of her pregnancy. She will do all she can to help her husband, but she is so tired.

Part 2, Chapter X and XI Analysis

When the Astrakhan apple tree bears fruit for the first time in Chapter X, Kristina is very excited for the fruit to ripen so she can share a piece of her childhood in Sweden with her children in America. This continues the foreshadowing of the importance of this tree. The tree also serves as a symbol of Kristina's Swedish heritage, and her desire to share it with her children is fueled partially by pride at bringing part of the Old Country to America with her.

Though Kristina fully recuperates, Karl still does not share her body because he is worried that he will impregnate her which will, in turn, kill her. Ulrika mentions the subject to him as he drives her to Center City one day, and Karl is embarrassed by the topic. Therefore, it is no wonder that he yields his body when Kristina offers to join him in bed one night; though he attempts to resist at first, Kristina's strength, due to her utter



faith in God, overwhelms him and leaves him powerless to refuse his wife's advances. In the next chapter, Kristina realizes she is pregnant while searching for a lost cow, and she plans how she will tell Karl, knowing he will be frightened. She shares her news when her husband comes in search of her, and as her knowledge foreshadowed, Karl is absolutely terrified. Kristina prays that night that God will reassure Karl, again displaying her devotion; however, her admission that she is tired, combined with her pregnancy and the doctor's earlier warning, foreshadow Kristina's death.



Part 2, Chapter XII

Part 2, Chapter XII Summary

In Chapter XII: And A New Civil War Broke Out, the cause was the government's promise to pay the Sioux \$70,000 in 1861 for land, but when the debt went unpaid in 1862, the Sioux suffered famine during the frigid winter. Though the gold arrives at Fort Ridgely on August 18, 1862, it is too late; the day before, the Sioux "had begun to exact their claim in settlers' blood" (p. 107). The war with the Sioux begins on Sunday, August 17. Danjel is with his son, Sven, in Meeker County, when six Sioux arrive on Sven's farm. Sven goes to pick potatoes for them since they usually beg for food, but they kill Sven and Danjel in the field. In the house, they kill Ragnhild, Sven's wife, cutting the fetus from her womb, and they slaughter all of the children before stealing all the food they can find.

The war in Minnesota begins on August 17 as the Sioux attack settlers because of their hunger. On the night of August 18, William J. Sturgis of Company B of the Fifth Minnesota Regiment carries an Indian alarm from Fort Ridgely because the fort is completely surrounded by Indians. Sturgis is one of eight survivors out of a company of forty-five men to return to the fort after attempting to fight the Sioux at Red Wood Ferry. As Sturgis carries the alarm, he stops at the homes of settlers to warn them of the dangers of the Indians attacking. Sturgis reaches Fort Snelling on Tuesday afternoon, travelling 120 miles in fifteen hours and earning a place in Minnesota's history for his hasty ride to warn the people of the Sioux uprising, and thus saving thousands of lives.

Standing like a guardian, the Indian cliff watches his proud people be degraded to beggars as the white invaders steal the Sioux's lands. The settlers see the cliff as a monument of the natives' savagery; they can banish the Sioux but not this Indian, who remains long after the settlers die. Panic spreads among the settlers when they learn of the Sioux uprising, and the Indian scare spreads across the St. Croix Valley during a few days in August. The Indian cliff seems to grow in height, causing people to believe he is coming to life as the Sioux arise to drive out the intruders and reclaim their land.

Part 2, Chapter XII Analysis

The first section of Chapter XII explains that the government does not pay the Sioux for their land in 1861 as promised, causing the Indians to suffer greatly from famine during the winter of 1861-1862. The money for the Sioux finally arrives at Fort Ridgely on August 18, 1862, but it is already too late; the Sioux's war against the white settlers who invaded their land begins on August 17. The first attack is made in Meeker County against Sven and his family, including Danjel, who is visiting to help his son with the harvest. The narrator's description of how the Sioux kill Sven and his family demonstrates their savage nature, though their cause is shown to be justified. Only Olof, Sven's younger brother, manages to escape death. The next night, William J.



Sturgis is sent from Fort Ridgely to Fort Snelling to convey a message detailing the Indian attack and their need for reinforcements. Because Sturgis was part of the initial attempt to fight the Sioux the previous day, he has witnessed their atrocious crimes and understands the urgency of the situation; therefore, he earns a place in Minnesota's history by travelling 120 miles in only fifteen hours, thus saving the lives of thousands of settlers. Meanwhile, the Indian cliff still intimidates settlers as they cannot banish this monument as they have done to his people. As news of the attacks reaches the settlers, they panic, and the Indian cliff appears even more frightening as it seems to grow in height, causing the settlers to believe it is coming to life. They know the Sioux are seeking vengeance against the whites for stealing their land, and the Sioux arise in their attempt to reclaim their land from the intruders.

Part 2, Chapter XIII and XIV

Part 2, Chapter XIII and XIV Summary

In Chapter XIII: Every White Man Must Die, Karl worries about Kristina while shocking wheat in his field on Wednesday, August 20, since she is sick in bed with abdominal pain and bleeding, which signals another miscarriage. He sends Johan to Stillwater to fetch Dr. Farnley or Miss Skalrud, a Norwegian midwife. Karl thinks only of the doctor's warning as he works until Petrus Olausson runs up to warn Karl that the Sioux are uprising; Indians have been murdering settlers. As Olausson rushes off to warn others, Karl cannot imagine leaving everything he owns, and he cannot leave with Kristina sick in bed. When Karl enters their bedroom, Kristina assures him she will get well, though she lies motionless and is sad about losing the baby. Wondering why the church bell is ringing in the middle of the week, she reminds him what she told him, yet Karl is not sure God can be trusted. When Johan returns from Stillwater, he announces that Dr. Farnley and Mrs. Skalrud have both fled due to the Indian scare, but he retrieved a childbed remedy from Dr. Caldwell, which Karl immediately administers to Kristina. While their children sleep, Karl stays awake to watch his wife and give her medicine. Kristina grows delirious during the night and stops asking about the church bell which continues to ring intermittently, and forgetting about the Indians for long periods of time, Karl is occupied only by watching over Kristina. On that same Wednesday, Chief Shakopee and his warriors dance war dances around their campfires on the shore of Lake Kandiyohi as he brags about how many white skulls he smashed with his tomahawk during the day.

In Chapter XIV: While Karl Oskar Kept Night Watch, the church bell resumes ringing on Thursday morning as Karl continues shocking wheat, and when Jonas Petter and Algot Svensson approach, they inform Karl that the women and children are being evacuated while the men gather to fight the Indians since few soldiers can help them due to fighting the South in the Civil War. When Karl explains he cannot go because Kristina is sick, Algot offers to take Karl's children with him to the church, where they are building a defensive wall to protect the women and children. When Karl learns the Indians have attacked in Meeker County, he worries about Danjel and Sven, but soldiers will not find the decaying bodies for another two days. Karl's children are evacuated and only Karl remains on his farm to tend to his wife. The farm seems desolate and deserted as chores go undone, and whenever he takes a break from watching Kristina, Karl looks to the west at the Indian cliff. Though he has always followed the command to help himself, Karl no longer decides what happens to him; what happens decides over him.

Karl finds Kristina awake and talking to herself, but it is obvious that she no longer recognizes him. Another day passes without change, but Karl sees no imminent threat of the dangers of the Sioux. Kristina still does not recognize her husband on Tuesday, August 26. Living in the events closest to him, Karl does not know what day it is when the report finally comes that the Sioux have been put down, but he hears the news from settlers returning to their deserted farms. It is as if the Indian attacks had not pertained



to him since he never left home, and he is the only settler in the St. Croix Valley who remained at home during the Indian panic that August as he "kept watch over his wife as long as her life lasted" (p.140).

Part 2, Chapter XIII and XIV Analysis

Karl's concern for Kristina returns when she takes to her bed, sick with abdominal pain and bleeding which signifies another miscarriage. He sends his son to Stillwater to fetch help, and while Johan is gone, Manda Svensson visits and confirms that Kristina has miscarried again. Recalling the doctor's warning and fearing for his wife's life, Karl is even more frightened when Petrus Olausson stops by to warn him of the Sioux's attacks against settlers. Olausson is abandoning his farm to escape the Indian's vengeance, as many of the settlers are doing. Though Kristina is unwell and depressed over losing the baby, she assures Karl that God will take care of her, yet Karl still is unsure whether he can trust God. The church bell can be heard signifying the Indian attacks to warn settlers, but it simply confuses Kristina since her husband does not tell her about this new danger.

Learning that help from Stillwater will not come since the doctor has fled due to the threats of the Indian attacks, Karl relentlessly tends to Kristina, causing her to feel guilty for causing him so much trouble, but allowing him to forget about the Indians for long periods of time. Unfortunately, the Sioux do not forget the settlers, gathering that night to celebrate the deaths of four hundred white settlers that day. When Karl returns to work the next morning in Chapter XIV, several of his neighbors visit to inform him the settlers are evacuating the women and children to the church where they will build a defensive wall to protect them. Since Kristina cannot leave her bed, Karl stays behind to keep watch over her while sending his children to safety with the neighbors. He is concerned for Sven and Danjel when he learns the Sioux began their attack in Meeker County, but he is unaware that they are already dead since their bodies are not found for another two days. Karl neglects his chores while tending to his wife, causing their farm to seem deserted like so many others, and perhaps this is what saves him, as he feels no imminent threat from the Indians. Kristina's condition worsens to the point that she no longer recognizes her husband. Karl's concern for his wife prevents him from being affected by the Sioux attacks as he lives in the events most important to him, Kristina's health, and does not even know what day it is when his neighbors return to their homes, informing him in route that the threat has been eliminated. Karl is the only settler who remains at home during the attacks due to his concern over his wife's welfare and his fear of her death. The worsening of Kristina's condition foreshadows her imminent death.



Part 2, Chapter XV and XVI

Part 2, Chapter XV and XVI Summary

In Chapter XV: The Astrakhan Apples Are Ripe, Kristina knows Karl for the first time in three days when the sun rises. Her breathing short and rapid, she tells him she dreamt she was back in Sweden, swinging on the ox thong she used to put up in the barn. When she asks for water, Karl feels her skin and realizes she is feverish, but he has used all of the medicine. As Kristina begs Karl to hold her because she is falling out of the swing, he assures her she is safe. Kristina's dream changes from joyfully swinging in her father's barn to being flung into the sea from a ship crossing the ocean, and she wonders why Karl does not help her since he wanted this and, as his wife, she must obey him. Kristina must survive her tenth childbed before she can rest, but sleep is the only cure. Kristina remains comatose for a long time with her hand curled around Karl's fingers, but she has not been conscious long enough for Karl to beg her to stay with him and not die. When she wakes, she assures him she is getting better and only needs sleep, but she is upset because she can tell he has not been sleeping. Noticing that the Astrakhan tree is ripe, Karl brings an apple to Kristina, who does not bite into it at first, but when she does, she realizes it is like the apples from her parental home in Sweden. She moves it to her lips again, but her mouth stiffens and her eyes twitch as her breath weakens. She drops the apple so Karl retrieves it, but when she drops it again, he leans over to see she is no longer breathing. Karl begs Kristina to stay with him, yet she is motionless and breathless. He stands rigid, disbelieving that his wife is dead.

In Chapter XVI: The Third Coffin, Karl stands in the log cabin he first built for his family which is now used as a workshop. Using boards intended for a new family home, he constructs a coffin for his wife, the third he has ever built. The first was for his four-year-old daughter who died from hunger in the homeland, and the second was for his brother who died in America. Years later, he builds a coffin for his wife who bore his children, who he lived with for twenty years on two continents. She had trusted God, but Karl believes God tricked her as she has now been taken from her husband and children; now he knows "God is nothing for a human being to put trust in" (p.149). Karl works diligently through the night, building a final home for his wife.

Part 2, Chapter XV and XVI Analysis

Kristina appears to be getting better in Chapter XV, recognizing Karl for the first time in three days, but as her dream becomes a delusion, Karl notices she is feverish and her breathing is irregular; unfortunately, there is no medicine remaining for her. Kristina thinks she must survive but is too tired to refrain from sleeping, and she was not awake long enough for Karl to beg her to stay with him. She assures him she is getting better when she awakes again. Noticing that the Astrakhan apples are ripe, Karl retrieves one for Kristina in an effort to make her feel better, and when Kristina bites into the apple, she recognizes the taste from her parental home. Immediately after this recognition,



Kristina's breathing weakens and her eyes twitch as she drops the apple, and though Karl recovers the apple, he soon realizes that Kristina is gone, even as he begs her to stay with him. Karl stands in disbelief that his wife has left him, but Kristina's death fulfills much earlier foreshadowing that has taken place throughout this novel. In the next chapter, Karl constructs a coffin for Kristina, using boards intended for their next home in her final home. He recalls the two coffins he has built before, one for his four-year-old daughter back in Sweden, and one for his brother in America. As Karl builds this third coffin, this one for his beloved wife of twenty years, he decides that God is not trustworthy; Kristina believed God would take care of her, but God betrayed her trust and allowed her to die. Karl's newfound disdain for God has been foreshadowed throughout the novel as Kristina was concerned with his eternal soul since he was not, and now it seems that no one will be worried about Karl's soul as he definitely is not.



Part 2, Chapter XVII, XVIII and XIX

Part 2, Chapter XVII, XVIII and XIX Summary

In Chapter XVII: Song Under Thirty-Eight Gallows, Fort Ridgely and New Ulm are relieved in the end of August, and Little Crow is defeated at Wood Lake on September 23. In the bloodiest Indian war in North America, over one thousand white settlers are killed and thirty thousand are left homeless. Of 303 Sioux sentenced to death, President Lincoln offered a reprieve to 265, and the other thirty-eight hung at Mankato on December 26, 1862. As the prisoners were led to the gallows, they sang in unison until their last moment, the song dying as thirty-eight men dangled from ropes. "The song of the thirty-eight under the gallows ropes at Mankato was the death song of the Minnesota Indians. Thus ended their last attempt to drive out the intruders and take back their land" (p. 152). The Indian cliff, though, remained, blocks falling from its eyes to lie at the base of the cliff as though mourning the decline of his people while a new race takes the place of the vanquished. He still stands, mourning his dead eternally.

In Chapter XVIII: One Man Did Not Wish to Submit, Karl's children assist with their mother's chores while things only she knew how to do go undone. The papers begin reporting victories for the Union in the Civil War, but conscription is issued at last because more soldiers are needed. Some merchants, like Klas Albert, want the war to continue forever because he has made great profits. Karl does not like Klas or other merchants as he feels they take advantage of their fellow immigrants. After Kristina's death, Karl withdraws from society, trying to learn how to live the rest of his life without his wife, and though weeks, months and years pass, Karl still misses Kristina and is disappointed when he compares the past to the present. He speaks aloud to her, claiming she would still be alive if she had used common sense instead of trusting God, but he remembers her answer: "Don't worry about me, Karl Oskar. I'm in good keeping" (p. 157).

As Karl scrubs the floor on Whitsuntide Eve, Ulrika visits, and though she refrained from mentioning Dr. Farnley's admonition at Kristina's funeral two years earlier when she last saw Karl, she now tells him that he caused his own difficulty in disobeying the doctor out of carnal weakness. Karl objects and explains that Kristina came to him, though he still blames himself for not using better sense. When Ulrika says God will forgive his sin of weakness, Karl is outraged and insists he will never forgive God for taking Kristina from him. Ulrika is frightened by Karl's blasphemy, but when her attempts to comfort him are met with disdain, she leaves silently because it is impossible to talk sense to "a man who did not wish to submit- a man who hated his God" (p. 162).

In Chapter XIX: The Letter to Sweden, Karl writes his sister, Lydia, on April 23, 1865 to tell her the Union has defeated the Rebels, but Abraham Lincoln was assassinated and his murderer also killed. The settlers are now safe from the Indians as well. His children are well, but Karl will never get over losing Kristina. Since the war ended, the country is



improving, and the government promises good times. Hoping Lydia is in good health and reminding her to write soon, Karl signs his letter as a devoted brother.

Part 2, Chapter XVII, XVIII and XIX Analysis

Chapter XVII returns to the Sioux war, explaining how the Sioux were defeated in September, ending the bloodiest Indian war in North America, as well as the Sioux's last attempt to reclaim their stolen land. Though 303 Sioux receive death sentences, the President offers a reprieve to 265 of them, so only thirty-eight are hanged at Mankato on December 26, 1862. They sing as they walk to the gallows, the death song of the Minnesota Indians, but the Indian cliff remains, blocks falling from its eyes like tears, as it mourns the destruction of his people to this day.

In Chapter XVIII, Karl deals with his wife's death by withdrawing from society more and more as the Civil War continues to rage. His dislike of Klas Albert and his occupation foreshadows Klas intruding upon Karl's life in a most unexpected and unwelcome way. Karl continues to mourn Kristina and wishes she had not trusted God, though he can hear her voice assuring him that she is in good hands. Two years after Kristina's death, Ulrika visits and finally chides Karl for ignoring the doctor's orders and impregnating his wife. As a result, Karl explains that Kristina came to him, though he still blames himself, but when Ulrika suggests God will forgive him, Karl's lack of trust in God is more evident than ever as he blasphemously proclaims that he, Karl, will never forgive God for taking Kristina away from him and their children. Ulrika is shocked and frightened, leaving when she realizes she cannot comfort this man who hates his God. Karl writes to his sister in the final chapter of Part 2, telling her that the Union has won the Civil War, but President Lincoln was assassinated. The Sioux war has also ended. Though his children are well, Karl will never recover from losing Kristina, but the country is improving and the government promises they will experience better times now that the bloodshed has ended. Karl professes his devotion as he signs his letter, also reminding Lydia to write again; however, no additional letters from Lydia are seen in this novel.



Part 3, Chapter XX

Part 3, Chapter XX Summary

In Chapter XX: The First Child to Leave the House, Klas Albert convinces Karl to buy an amazing new invention, and Karl's children are amazed as Klas assembles the kerosene lamp and shows them how to use it. The lamp brings much pleasure and satisfaction since it allows them to steal a few hours from the dark to spend at useful occupations.

As Karl yields his largest crop in 1868, his home parish suffers famine as a result of the worst crop failure in over one hundred years. Thinking about the difference between famine in the Old Country and the overabundance in America, Karl decides to send a load of wheat to the hungry in Ljuder, and when he discusses it with Klas Albert, Klas offers to handle the freight and delivery; then, he informs Karl that Marta has agreed to marry him next Saturday. The years have fled, and Karl did not realize his daughter had reached marriageable age. Karl sorts through his wheat, choosing the best to send to Sweden because he understands what hunger means. He now also understands why Klas Albert offered to pay the freight since Klas should feel honored to marry the daughter of the first settler at Chisago Lake, especially as he failed to ask Karl for permission. Karl disapproves of Klas Albert's occupation, plus he still needs his oldest daughter at home; however, Klas possesses a map of Ljuder that Karl requests in exchange for his daughter, and Klas agrees, though he does not understand why Karl wants it and Karl opts not to enlighten him. Karl covets the map since "he would never again see the place where he had been born, but it was some small consolation to have it on paper where he could look at it" (p. 174).

When Marta marries Klas Albert a week later, Karl is disappointed at the short engagement, and when the couple leaves for their home in Center City, Karl entertains his guests. Mr. Thorn and Samuel Nojd argue about the Sioux war, causing Jonas Petter to offer to tell a story to calm the dispute. Jonas Petter's forbidden story is about a young couple who cannot conceive. When they learn the husband is infertile, he hires a young soldier to impregnate his wife, paying the soldier based on the gender and number of offspring. The wife gives birth to male triplets, and all three parties are well pleased, having received what they want and need.

Part 3, Chapter XX Analysis

After persuading Karl to purchase a kerosene lamp which proves to be very useful, Klas Albert spends a lot of time at the Nilsson Settlement, presumably teaching Karl's children to use the contraption, and when Karl decides to send some of his crop to his home parish because they are suffering from famine and he understands the devastation of hunger, Klas offers to pay the freight. Though Karl does not understand why Klas does this, it soon becomes clear when Klas informs Karl that Marta has



agreed to marry him. Karl is displeased with the situation because he disapproves of Klas' occupation as seen earlier and he still needs his oldest daughter at home; yet, rather than object to the marriage, Karl makes a simple request from his future son-in-law: he wants the map of Ljuder parish that Klas Albert brought with him from Sweden. This allows Karl to see the place he grew up and to which he will never return, and the map plays a large role in Karl's old age. Marta quickly marries and leaves her father's home, and Jonas Petter diffuses a dispute between Mr. Thorn and Samuel Nojd at the reception by telling a strange story about a surrogate father which ends well for all involved.



Part 3, Chapter XXI

Part 3, Chapter XXI Summary

In Chapter XXI: The Bridal Crown With Precious Stones, the Swedish population at Lake Chisago doubles within a couple years due to the famine in Sweden which, along with Lincoln's Homestead Act, causes many to emigrate. Karl is happy he sent wheat to his home parish when he hears tales of the misery of famine in Sweden, such as how the rich steal even mothers' milk from the poor, causing many of the poor children to die. After being widowed last winter, Ulrika is considered well-to-do, and since she has not visited the Nilsson homestead in several years, Karl visits her while on an errand in Stillwater. Ulrika complains that, while she has earthly goods, she has lost her husband, and when Karl asks about her four American children, Ulrika expresses pride at the fortunate marriages of her three daughters but is angry at her son for choosing to be an animal trainer in a circus instead of a pastor as she wishes. Though she wonders whether Karl has reconciled with God, Ulrika does not ask because she recalls his behavior during their last meeting.

After Ulrika convinces Karl to stay for dinner, she shows him a notice in the paper about an immigrant from Ljuder who anonymously presented a bridal crown to the village church, and they both make conjectures about who it could be. When Karl wonders how much the crown costs, Ulrika admits it cost \$900, confessing she is the donor. She made the donation anonymously because the people of Ljuder would not have accepted the gift from her since she was the parish whore. Since Karl asks why she donated the crown, Ulrika explains that she must forgive the people of Sweden for the way they treated her just as God forgave her sins. Closing her eyes and imagining the wedding ceremony on Whitsuntide when the crown will be used for the first time, Ulrika feels she "has exacted payment for the life she has been denied. Every time a young bride wears her crown in Ljuder church, Ulrika is indemnified" (p. 191). Having found resurrection through each virgin bride, Ulrika is finally vindicated and has been turned into the eternal crown-bride.

Part 3, Chapter XXI Analysis

Because of the famine in Sweden, there is a great influx in immigrants to Lake Chisago, and Karl is happy he sent wheat to Ljuder parish when he heard the devastating stories some of these new settlers share. While in Stillwater, he visits Ulrika who has been recently married, and they discuss their lives since it has been some time since they last met. Ulrika is upset with her son because he has chosen to be an animal trainer instead of a preacher, and though she wonders whether Karl has reconciled with God, she is afraid to ask, recalling his previous violent outburst. Ulrika shows Karl an article in the newspaper about an anonymous immigrant donating a valuable bridal crown to the village church of Ljuder, and when Karl wonders how much the crown cost, Ulrika tells him, confessing she is the anonymous donor. She claims it is her offer of forgiveness for



the way she was treated by the people of Sweden, but actually, she feels it is a vindication of herself since only the chaste may wear it, whereas she was far from chaste while living in Sweden; the crown allows Ulrika to vicariously lived the life she was denied.



Part 3, Chapter XXII and XXIII

Part 3, Chapter XXII and XXIII Summary

In Chapter XXII: The Farmer and the Oak, Karl's four sons grow into men, and they speak English fluently while Karl forgets more and more English and reverts to speaking Swedish, pretending not to notice how it embarrasses his children. The new language expels the old, even in how Karl's children call their home Nilsson Settlement rather than New Duvemala. With his sons grown, Karl can wage war against the oak stand as he has planned for years. He hooks his team of horses to the largest tree and begins clearing the last piece of his land; his farm will be completed once the oak grove is cleared. Karl and his sons work on clearing the oak grove through the autumn, and by late November, only one oak, one of the largest, remains. As the tree falls, Karl's left leg does not move fast enough and he is trapped beneath the tree. His sons cut him free to find him in pain but alive, thanks to having fallen into a small hollow which prevented the great tree from crushing him. His sons carry Karl home after his last full working day. While staying in bed for a few months, Karl tries various remedies but is kept awake by the pain for the first few weeks until the pain begins to abate somewhat. His sons attend to the chores during the winter until Karl can return to work in the spring, but he can only do the easier chores as his body is invaded with excruciating pain each time he attempts to straighten. In a prayer, Karl tells God that this is not the way to change him. He blames God for injuring his back, asking how anyone can expect him to trust God now, and will never praise what God has done to his back or Kristina. "You've bent my body, God, but not my soul. You can kill me, you can rob me of my breath, but you cannot make me say you're just. You can never bend my soul. Never in eternity. Amen" (p. 201).

In Chapter XXIII: The Letter to Sweden, Karl tells Lydia that he has left his farm to Johan who has taken over where Karl left off. The rest of the children are still at home, except Harald, who works for the railroad in St. Paul, and Frank, who works in a timber company office in Stillwater. Though Karl is not old, he is worn from wear and works a little each day. Money has been good since the war, and his farm yields plenty of crops. He often thinks of his birthplace and would sometimes like to visit, but he has become accustomed to the freedom in America where all are equals. He claims the Swedish government use propaganda to make things appear bad in America to prevent people from leaving Sweden, but Karl has never regretted his emigration. Karl encourages his sister to write more frequently since they are the only two left and must continue to write as long as they are both alive.

Part 3, Chapter XXII and XXIII Analysis

In Chapter XXII, Karl loses some of his connection to Sweden, his children now calling their home Nilsson Settlement instead of New Duvemala, and he embarrasses them by forgetting English and frequently reverting to speaking Swedish. Karl's sons are finally



fully grown so he undertakes the chore of clearing the oak grove as previously foreshadowed; unfortunately, Karl is felled by the last tree, receiving an injury to his back that will plague him for the remainder of his life. This injury prevents Karl from doing many chores, and though he finally prays, his conversation with God is one of defiance as he claims that God will never bend his soul, despite bending his body. The final chapter of Part 3 is another letter to Lydia from Karl in which he tells her that he has given his farm to Johan, his oldest son. Things are going well in America, and though Karl misses his homeland, he has grown too accustomed to life in America to visit and has never regretted his immigration. His request that his sister write more frequently since they must continue to do so as long as they are both alive foreshadows his pending death.



Epilogue, Chapter I and II

Epilogue, Chapter I and II Summary

In the first chapter of the Epilogue, The Map of Ljuder, Charles O. Nelson, a Swedish-born farmer in Minnesota, lies in his bed at Nelson Settlement, though it is the middle of harvest season, because the laborer finally rests since his injured back no longer allows him to work; however, his bed is positioned so that he can look out his window over the fields. He looks at the new white house one hundred yards away where his oldest son, the new owner of the farm, lives with his wife and children. Though Charles wanted to build that house for his wife, he never did after he used some of the wood for her coffin, and his sons, John and Dan, built the house he had planned. Nelson Settlement is the oldest place at Lake Chisago, and Charles watches inactively, missing the activity and work of his younger years. He listens to his grandchildren play; there will be a dozen grandchildren once the unborn come into the world. His back pain disturbs his sleep, and he must wait until it eases somewhat in the evening before making his daily inspection of the property.

To pass the time more quickly, he unfolds the map of Ljuder parish, which he received from Klas Albert in exchange for the hand in marriage of Mary, Charles' oldest daughter. Carefully tracing the roads on the map of his old home parish where he spent his youth, Old Nelson becomes Karl Oskar Nilsson of Korpamoen again, strolling over his native land and thinking "here I was rich and well pleased with my life. Of what use are my poor days now" (p. 215). Putting the map aside, he tries to find a more comfortable position, but there is no escape from the pain today. He recalls moving from one continent to another, and though he was once Karl Oskar Nilsson of New Duvemala, he is now the old man at Nelson Settlement with only the move to the next world remaining. He knows he will die here, in America. Returning to the map, Charles thinks of meeting a seventeen-year-old girl in the village who would eventually become his wife. Now, he visits her several times each year at the Swedish cemetery where he sits with her, knowing that soon his body will be buried next to hers, though he is unsure whether they will truly meet again in the afterlife as she always believed.

In his bed, Charles looks at his fields and is pleased as he thinks of how he has changed the land and that it will continue after he is gone. His thoughts return to Sweden, and he thinks that perhaps he should have visited his homeland before it was too late; instead, he must be satisfied with the map of Ljuder parish, so he thinks of his weekly walk to visit Kristina at her parental home in Duvemala until they finally married and he no longer needed to walk that road. After their wedding, Karl and Kristina settled at his parents' home in Korpamoen until they immigrated to America, and in that country, he sat beside her in her illness and begged her not to leave him, but she could not stay. As the sun sets, Karl rises from his bed and begins his evening walk around the settlement to ensure all is well.



Chapter II of the Epilogue: The Last Letter Home is written to Lydia Karlsson on December 20, 1890 from one of Karl's neighbors, Axel J. Andersson. Axel promised to write Lydia when Karl died, and Karl died on December 7 in his sleep after living for sixty-seven years, one month and seven days, forty years of which were spent on this land in Minnesota. His children, their spouses and his grandchildren were present when he was buried on December 15. He is much missed, but he told Axel that he was ready to die when Axel visited him the night before his death. Karl often spoke of his sister, and though a stranger, Axel reaches his hand out to Lydia in friendship and wishes her well.

Epilogue, Chapter I and II Analysis

In the Epilogue, Karl Oskar Nilsson is referred to as Charles O. Nelson to demonstrate the absolute submersion in and submission to American culture. His farm is called Nelson Settlement, no longer New Duvemala. Due to his back injuries sustained while clearing the oak stand to the east of the house, Karl can no longer work, watching his fields through the window while lying in his bed instead. Most of Karl's children have married and had children of their own, and Karl enjoys listening to his grandchildren play around the house that Johan has built for his family, following the plans Karl developed for the house he had intended to build before Kristina died. To pass the time before going on his evening walk around the premises, Karl unfolds the map of Ljuder parish and reminisces about his youth spent in a different country. This map symbolizes Karl's homeland and his youth, allowing him once again to become Karl Oskar Nilsson of Korpamoen, though he knows he will die in America. Karl recalls meeting a beautiful girl in Sweden, though now he visits her in the cemetery several miles away. He knows that she always believed they would meet again in the afterlife, but Karl is unsure, indicating that he still has not reconciled with God. Karl mentally returns to the time when he courted Kristina, recounting their marriage and their immigration all the way until he sat beside her, begging her not to die. Once the evening arrives, Karl arises, his pain somewhat assuaged, and begins his walk around his land, ensuring that all is well.

The final chapter of "The Last Letter Home" is a letter to Lydia, appropriate as this is the last chapter in the Epilogue; however, this letter is not from Karl. The letter is written by Karl's neighbor, Axel J. Andersson, who promised Karl that he would write Lydia to inform her of Karl's death once Karl left the world. Axel relates the circumstances surrounding Karl's death, professing Karl to be a good man who will be missed by his family, and thus fulfilling the earlier foreshadowing that Karl would soon join his wife in death, though it remains unknown whether Kristina was right about their reunion in the afterlife.



Characters

Karl Oskar Nilsson

Karl Oskar Nilsson is the main character of "The Last Letter Home". He is a Swedish immigrant from Ljuder parish who is the first settler at Chisago Lake. When the Civil War breaks out, Karl wants to enlist to serve his country, but Kristina objects to him becoming a murderer because she worries about his eternal soul. Luckily for Kristina, Karl's lame leg causes the doctors to reject him for service. Karl argues with Samuel Nojd about whether the land was stolen from the Indians or rightfully belongs to the settlers who bought it as the Sioux, suffering from famine during the harsh winter, sharpen their tomahawks. When Kristina gets sick and the doctor forbids her from getting pregnant again, Karl endures the deprivation out of concern for his wife. Karl receives a letter from his sister, Lydia, in Sweden, informing him that their mother has died. After Kristina convinces Karl to yield his body to her, Karl is terrified when Kristina tells him she is pregnant some time later. When Kristina miscarries the baby, Karl tends to her as she is stuck in bed, sending their children to safety with a neighbor since the women and children are evacuated due to the Indian attacks. Karl is devastated when Kristina dies, and as he builds a coffin for his wife, Karl decides God is not trustworthy because Kristina trusted God to take care of her and God allowed her to die. When Ulrika chides him for killing his wife by yielding to his carnal desires, Karl claims he will never forgive God for taking Kristina from him. Karl writes Lydia that the Civil War is over and the government promises good times.

Karl receives a map of Ljuder parish from Klas Albert when the merchant marries Marta, his oldest daughter, and the reason Karl wants the map is because it is consoling to have the place he was born on paper, though he will never return to his homeland. With his four sons grown, Karl undertakes the task of clearing the last of his land, an oak stand to the east of his house, but his back is injured when he is trapped under the last tree; however, he still refuses to submit to God. Karl writes Lydia that he has given his farm to Johan, his oldest son, and though he misses Sweden, he has never regretted his immigration. American culture overtakes Swedish culture as Karl grows old. He is too pained to work much, so he spends his days watching his grandchildren play and recalling his youth while looking at his map of Ljuder parish. Though Karl still misses Kristina, he knows he will soon be buried next to her. Each evening, he walks around the settlement to ensure all is well. Karl dies in his sleep on 12/7/1890 at the age of 67 to the great sorrow of his family and friends.

Kristina Nilsson

Kristina Nilsson is one of the main characters. She is Karl Oskar Nilsson's wife and the mother of their children. She immigrates to Minnesota with her husband when he decides to do so, though she does not really want to leave the country of her birth. When the Civil War breaks out, Kristina objects to Karl becoming a murderer because



she worries about his eternal soul. Luckily for Kristina, Karl's lame leg causes the doctors to reject him for service. Kristina has the utmost faith in God and prays daily to live longer for her husband and children. When Kristina gets sick, bleeding between her legs, Ulrika convinces her to go to the doctor who warns that her next childbirth will kill her, but this causes Kristina to feel like a useless woman as she can no longer be a wife to her beloved husband.

Though many Lutherans are swayed to the Baptist faith in Part 2, Kristina decides to stay with her baptism and her God until she dies. When the Astrakhan apple tree from her parental home in Sweden produces fruit, she is excited for the opportunity to share some of the Old Country with her children when the fruit ripens. After fully recuperating, Kristina convinces Karl to yield his body to her, but Karl is terrified when Kristina tells him she is pregnant some time later. As the Sioux attack settlers in an attempt to reclaim their land, Kristina miscarries the baby, and Karl tends to her through her illness. Kristina's condition worsens, and she dies shortly after the Sioux are defeated.

Ulrika

Ulrika is Kristina's friend. Though she is married to Baptist Pastor Jackson, she was a prostitute when she lived in Sweden's Ljuder parish. After convincing Kristina to go to the doctor when she is ill, Ulrika accompanies her friend and explains the situation to Karl when they return from the doctor's office. Several years after Kristina's death, she chides Karl for killing his wife by yielding to his carnal desires and is shocked by his blasphemous response. Ulrika donates a bridal crown to the church in Ljuder parish as a vindication of herself and the life she was not permitted to have in Sweden.

Marta Svensson

Marta Svensson is one of Karl and Kristina's neighbors. She visits Kristina several times when Kristina is sick, offering her medicinal advice, and she comes to Kristina to discuss her spiritual dilemma before converting from a Lutheran to a Baptist.

Lydia Karlsson

Lydia Karlsson is Karl's sister who still lives in Sweden. She and Karl correspond sporadically throughout the narrative, and Karl's neighbor, Axel J. Andersson, writes to her to inform her of Karl's death.

Johan Nilsson

Johan Nilsson is the oldest son of Karl and Kristina, and Karl gives his farm to Johan once he becomes too old and injured to work.



Marta Nilsson

Marta Nilsson is the oldest daughter of Karl and Kristina, and she helps Karl with the household chores after Kristina dies. Eventually, Marta marries Klas Albert.

Klas Albert

Klas Albert, a merchant in Stillwater, was Karl's neighbor in Ljuder parish in Sweden. He gives Karl a map of their home parish as a gift when he marries Karl's daughter, Marta.

Danjel

Danjel is Kristina's uncle whom she talks to often about spirituality. He is killed in the first Sioux attacks in Meeker Country along with his son, Sven, and Sven's family.

Axel J. Andersson

Axel J. Andersson is one of Karl's neighbors, and he writes to Lydia to inform her of her brother's death.



Objects/Places

Lake Chisago

Lake Chisago, Minnesota is the main setting of this novel. This is where Karl and Kristina settle, and they are the first settlers at Lake Chisago.

Stillwater

Stillwater is a town near Lake Chisago where Karl often travels for business. Ulrika lives in Stillwater, and Karl takes Kristina to town when she is sick to visit the doctor.

Sweden

Sweden is the country that Karl, Kristina and many of their neighbors in the St. Croix Valley immigrate from.

Civil War

The Civil War breaks out at the beginning of the novel to abolish slavery, and though Karl wants to enlist, he is rejected due to his lame leg. The war has little effect on the Minnesota settlers in this novel.

Sioux War

The Sioux War consists of Sioux Indians attacking settlers in an attempt to reclaim their land when the government does not pay them for the land as they promised. Many white settlers are killed, and though the women and children in Lake Chisago are evacuated, Karl stays on his farm to tend Kristina who is very ill. Eventually, the Sioux are defeated.

Astrakan Apple Tree

Kristina grows an Astrakhan apple tree from a seed she brings to Minnesota from her parental home in Sweden. When the tree produces fruit, she is happy to have the opportunity to share part of the Old Country with her children. Karl brings a ripe apple to Kristina while she is ill, but she dies shortly after taking a bite.



Indian Cliff

A rock cliff shaped like an Indian sits above Lake Chisago, and the settlers see it as intimidating since they cannot banish it as they have the Sioux. During the Sioux war, the Indian seems to grow in height, but when the Sioux are defeated, large boulders fall from its eyes and pool at its feet as though it is mourning the demise of its people. The Indian cliff remains long after the white invaders are dead.

Ljuder Parish

Ljuder parish is the area in Sweden where Karl was born and raised. Ulrika is also from Ljuder parish, but she was the parish prostitute. When Ljuder parish suffers from famine, Karl sends some of his wheat crop to them. Ulrika anonymously donates a bridal crown to the parish church because she feels it vindicates her and allows her to reclaim the life she was not allowed to have.

Oak Grove

The oak grove is thirty acres to the east of the house which is the last of Karl's land not used for farming. Karl waits until his sons are grown before clearing the grove, but while felling the last tree, Karl is stuck beneath the tree and sustains an injury to his back which plagues him for the remainder of his life.

New Duvemala

New Duvemala is the name Karl and Kristina give to their settlement at Lake Chisago in honor of Kristina's family home in Sweden; however, when American culture usurps Swedish culture, Karl's children and neighbors call the land Nelson Settlement. When Karl grows too old and sick to work, he gives the farm to Johan, his oldest son. Both Karl and Kristina die at New Duvemala.

Duvemala

Duvemala is the name of Kristina's family home in Sweden.

Korpamoen

Korpamoen is the name of Karl's family home in Sweden.



Map of Ljuder Parish

When Klas Albert marries Marta, Karl requests his new son-in-law give him the map he possesses of Ljuder parish. Though he does not explain why he wants it to Klas Albert, Karl finds consolation in having the place he spent his youth on paper, though he knows he will never see his homeland again. Once Karl is old and mostly bedridden due to his injured back, Karl spends much of his time looking at the map and reminiscing about his youth spend in Ljuder parish, including his courtship of Kristina.



Themes

Immigration

One of the most important themes in "The Last Letter Home" is obviously immigration as the main characters and most of the minor characters are Swedish immigrants who have settled in Minnesota. Moreover, the main focus of the novel seems to be the difficulties these immigrants face after relocating their families halfway across the world. After becoming American citizens, these immigrants change their new country even as America changes these individuals. When the Civil War breaks out, the Swedish settlers form their own company, likely to demonstrate their loyalty and patriotism. In Chapter II, Kristina's thoughts make it evident that she did not want to immigrate but was coerced by her husband, and her discomfort with the English language reveals one of the difficulties of assimilating into American culture. Anders Mansson's death is attributed to his inability to adhere to the immigrant's first rule: not to regret one's immigration. The letters between Karl and Lydia reveal another trial that immigrants faced, being separated from family.

For Kristina, her Astrakhan apple tree represents her family home in Sweden, and when it produces fruit for the first time, she is excited by the prospect of sharing something from the Old Country with her children. An apple from this tree is the last thing Kristina eats before dying, after dreaming of her home and the tumultuous sea journey to America. Karl's dislike for Klas Albert stems from his belief that Klas takes advantage of his fellow immigrants in his occupation as a merchant during the Civil War. When Ljuder parish suffers from famine, Karl sends food to them because he remembers what it means to be hungry from his time there. Karl receives a map of Ljuder parish from Klas Albert in exchange for Marta's hand in marriage, and the reason Karl covets this map is for the consolation of having his birthplace on paper, though he knows he will never see it again. While Karl insists he does not regret his immigration and that returning to Sweden would be difficult because he has grown accustomed to American freedom, he spends much of his old age gazing at the map of his birthplace and reminiscing about his youth which was spent there, revealing that the longing for one's home country never completely dissipates.

Religion

An important theme in "The Last Letter Home" is religion, especially as the beliefs of Karl and Kristina are compared and contrasted. Since Kristina does not approve of the Civil War because punishment belongs to God alone, she does not want Karl to enlist because she is worried about his eternal soul; however, Karl believes that war is alright since it is for the greater good, the abolition of slavery. Karl does not have the same faith in God as Kristina, though he attends church with her. Although Kristina is not afraid of death, she prays daily that she will be granted a longer life to enable her to care for Karl and their children. She also believes the whites will be held accountable



before God for how they treat the Sioux Indians, forcing them from their lands and demolishing their culture. When the doctor tells Kristina she must not get pregnant, she wonders if it is God's will to separate her and her husband, but ultimately, she trusts in God and assures Karl He will take care of her when she convinces her husband to yield his body, causing her to become pregnant again.

In Chapter IX, many settlers in the St. Croix Valley convert from Lutherans to Baptists, but Kristina believes religion is an institution created by men and each person must find God on their own, leading to her decision to stick with her baptism as a Lutheran and her God until the end of her life. Since Karl is terrified when Kristina tells him she is pregnant, Kristina prays that God will reassure her husband, but though she trusts God throughout her illness, Karl is unsure whether God can be trusted. After Kristina dies, Karl decides God is not trustworthy because he tricked Kristina and allowed her to die. When Karl expresses this opinion to Ulrika, she is shocked at his blasphemy, and years later, she refrains from asking if he has reconciled with God because she is scared of his reaction. Even after being injured by a tree which causes back pain, Karl still rejects God, telling his Creator that He will never bend his soul regardless of what He does to his body. Though Karl hopes that he will meet Kristina again in the afterlife as her grave marker claims, he is unsure if it is true because he has lost faith in God.

War

Throughout this novel, war is a recurring theme which takes a less dominant role when compared to the daily lives of the immigrants. Civil War breaks out as the novel opens, and though Karl wants to enlist, his wife objects to him becoming a murderer. Luckily for her, his lame left leg prevents him from joining the war. News of the war reaches the settlers, but most of the settlers in the St. Croix Valley are too old to enlist, and the war does not affect them greatly. Karl dislikes merchants who want the war to continue forever because he feels they take advantage of their fellow immigrants. When the Civil War finally ends and the Union emerges as the victor, Karl writes his sister about the government's promise of better times, though he is upset that President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated.

While the Civil War still rages, another civil war erupts in Minnesota between the displaced Sioux Indians and the white settlers who have invaded their lands. Because the government fails to pay the Indians the money promised to them, the Sioux suffer greatly during the particularly harsh winter of 1861-1862, causing them to attack and murder many settlers. Women and children are evacuated, but Karl remains on his settlement to tend to Kristina who is very sick after miscarrying a child. Kristina dies shortly after the Sioux are defeated. Thirty-eight Sioux warriors are hung at Mankato on December 26, 1862, ending the Indians' last attempt to reclaim their land from the white invaders.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of "The Last Letter Home" is third person, omniscient and reliable. This is evidenced by the fact that the narrator knows the thoughts, feelings, beliefs and even prayers of the individual characters being focused on at that particular point in the narrative, usually Karl or Kristina. This point of view is important because the focus of the novel is on the hardships faced by the immigrants, and providing the characters' thoughts and feelings allows reader to better empathize with the difficulties they endured and why certain aspects of immigration were particularly trying.

The novel is written using mostly exposition with approximately a quarter of the story being told through dialogue. This is effective as it allows the narrator to fully explore each character's thoughts and feeling, in addition to providing the author with the opportunity to present background information about the Civil War, the Sioux War and the actual characters. The viewpoint of the novel is focused mainly on Karl and Kristina with some deviations to other characters, such as Ulrika, and even groups like the Sioux.

Setting

This novel is set in Minnesota, in the real world in the second half of the nineteenth century. The characters are mainly Swedish settlers who have immigrated from the Old Country, and they are constantly at odds with the Sioux Indians whose land has been stolen by the government and sold to these settlers. Most of the main characters in the novel are farmers, but Klas Albert is a merchant and Ulrika is a former prostitute. These poor farmers are enticed to emigrate from Sweden by the promise of prosperity in the New World.

Lake Chisago, Minnesota is the main setting of this novel. This is where Karl and Kristina settle, and they are the first settlers at Lake Chisago. The oak grove is thirty acres to the east of the house which is the last of Karl's land not used for farming. Karl waits until his sons are grown before clearing the grove, but while felling the last tree, Karl is stuck beneath the tree and sustains an injury to his back which plagues him for the remainder of his life. New Duvemala is the name Karl and Kristina give to their settlement at Lake Chisago in honor of Kristina's family home in Sweden; however, when American culture usurps Swedish culture, Karl's children and neighbors call the land Nelson Settlement. When Karl grows too old and sick to work, he gives the farm to Johan, his oldest son. Both Karl and Kristina die at New Duvemala. Sweden is the country that Karl, Kristina and many of their neighbors in the St. Croix Valley immigrate from. Ljuder parish is the area in Sweden where Karl was born and raised. Ulrika is also from Ljuder parish, but she was the parish prostitute. When Ljuder parish suffers from famine, Karl sends some of his wheat crop to them. Ulrika anonymously donates a



bridal crown to the parish church because she feels it vindicates her and allows her to reclaim the life she was not allowed to have. Duvemala is the name of Kristina's family home in Sweden. Korpamoen is the name of Karl's family home in Sweden. Stillwater is a town near Lake Chisago where Karl often travels for business. Ulrika lives in Stillwater, and Karl takes Kristina to town when she is sick to visit the doctor. A rock cliff shaped like an Indian sits above Lake Chisago, and the settlers see it as intimidating since they cannot banish it as they have the Sioux. During the Sioux war, the Indian seems to grow in height, but when the Sioux are defeated, large boulders fall from its eyes and pool at its feet as though it is mourning the demise of its people. The Indian cliff remains long after the white invaders are dead.

Language and Meaning

The language used in this novel is casual for the time period in which it is set, due to the lack of education of most immigrant farmers; however, it may seem formal at times in comparison to the way language is used in modern times. The sentences are constructed in broken grammar quite often, especially in dialogue, indicating the difficulty of learning a new language for the Swedish immigrants. This style of language aids comprehension as it provides an example of one difficulty immigrants faced as well as allowing the reader to fully understand how the characters feel and why. This language tends to characterize the individuals, the time period and the hardships of immigration.

The novel is written using mostly exposition with approximately a quarter of the story being told through dialogue. This is effective as it allows the narrator to fully explore each character's thoughts and feeling, in addition to providing the author with the opportunity to present background information about the Civil War, the Sioux War and the actual characters. The language used in "The Last Letter Home" is quite effective in conveying the confusion and difficulty of adjusting to the customs of the new country while remembering and missing one's homeland. Overall, the language is fairly easy to understand and quite useful in revealing how the characters feel.

Structure

This novel is separated into a preface, three parts and an epilogue, and it consists of 230 pages. Part 1 encompasses Chapters I-XI, Part 2 contains Chapters XII-XIX, and Part 3 is comprised of Chapters XX-XXIII. Two chapters make up the content of the Epilogue. Each of the three parts and the Epilogue end with a letter to or from Karl's sister, Lydia, in Sweden, and these letters are generally short, about two pages long, while the rest of the chapters average about ten pages in length. The chapters are titled according to the contents discussed within each chapter, and though they are fairly short, they tend to be monotonous at times as they are extremely detailed and filled with foreshadowing that often seems irrelevant at the time. Each chapter encompasses a period of time ranging from days to years, and the chapters of Part 3 span much longer time periods than the earlier parts of the novel.

"The Last Letter Home" by Vilhelm Moberg is an emotional narrative about the lives of a Swedish family who immigrated to Minnesota, searching for a better life. Karl and Kristina Nilsson struggle to make their land support their family while raising their children in the midst of the Civil War and the Sioux war against white settlers. When Kristina dies, Karl must learn how to continue on without his helpmate of twenty years. "The Last Letter Home" is a novel which touches the heart as it details the trials that immigrants faced after enduring the difficulty of relocating their families halfway across the world.

The pace of the novel is quite slow, but it is fairly easy to read, despite seeming to drag occasionally. The novel contains flashbacks to time spent in the Old Country, as well as the characters' hopes and fears from the past. Overall, the novel is entertaining and emotional once the reader grows accustomed to the monotony of the descriptions and the author's tendency to spread a topic over a long period before explaining its significance to the narrative as a whole.



Quotes

"Thus, in turn, the immigrant-citizens were changed by their new country. They changed the country and the United States of America changed them."

Preface, page xxxii

"War! Never could a war have started at a more inopportune moment. But whatever happened, he must plant the spring wheat today. A new crop must grow; people would need bread next year also."

Chap. 1, p. 5

"Old Abe was calling him. Being a citizen he was called on to shoulder his duties. For an honest man there could be only one reply to the call."

Chap. 1, p. 8

"It's more decent to volunteer before they begin drafting. I'd be ashamed to be forced."

Chap. 2, p. 14

"Anders Mansson had been the first Swedish settler in the St. Croix Valley, but no grave opened for him under the silver maples in the settlers' cemetery. He himself undertook the one emigration that remained for him. One single decision had decided his life, the great decision to emigrate, the irrevocable, the irreversible. To him had been put a strong command which he was unable to follow, the first commandment in the emigrant's catechism: Thou shalt not regret Thy emigration!"

Chap. 3, p. 34

"But the war delayed all activity, all building in this part of the country. There must be an end to destruction and ruination before new undertakings could be started; one could not build a new house while the old was still burning."

Chap. 4, p. 36

"Once more Kristina had had the experience that she and Uncle Danjel were united in some marvelous way, they belonged together: They had both given up this life for another. They had gone through the world- they lived for another world, for one their eyes could not see."

Chap. 4, p. 46

"The whites had brought the Indians cholera, smallpox, and venereal diseases; if they also came with Christianity the Indians must think it was some new devilry. No wonder they were suspicious and resisted! At least the Church might have saved them from the missionaries who plagued them with the catechism; Christians ought to show their neighbors some mercy. Worst of all, of course, were those damned French trappers- they even used captured Indians as food for their dogs! Those confounded hunters thought this the easiest way to carry dog food with them!"

Chap. 5, p. 51



"Silent, they knew each other's thoughts. So it had been many times. Perhaps they understood each other best in silence. In speech they had difficulty in finding words, in speech they never came close enough. But in a moment like this there was no need for words; between them was nothing left that words could explain. In moments when there was nothing to say they came closest to each other. Then they felt most strongly what they meant to each other."

Chap. 7, p. 72

"Great excitement followed in the Lutheran congregation; some twenty members, after hearing Nilsson preach, left the church and were baptized, and others wavered in their Lutheran faith. Women especially were open to the former sailor's preaching. And Pastor Stenius issued still stronger warnings from his pulpit: His flock must consider its eternal welfare and not be blinded by the Baptist will-o'-the-wisp; women, with their inherited ignorance, were more easily a prey to this convert-maker. Each time a woman was led astray, Pastor Stenius could hear the angels cry in heaven and the devils roar with joyous laughter in hell."

Chap. 9, p. 80

"There were said to be more than a hundred religions in America. But there was only one God. In her heart she felt there could only be one. Yes, she was absolutely sure of it! Those hundred religions could therefore be nothing but people's inventions which God didn't pay any attention to. God could never have meant that the teachings of the Prince of Peace should cause strife and disunity and quarrels among people. And he surely did not intend that ministers should start fighting about a human soul as soon as it was born into the world. The ministers were wrong in fighting with each other for innocent babes in their cradles. Nor did she believe a person's eternal salvation depended on membership in one congregation of another. Each one must seek God until he or she found him, and then she would know what was right; then she need no longer worry about eternity."

Chap. 9, pp. 83-84

"Both missed deeply the bodily contact they had shared for twenty years. After being together and having satisfied their desires, often the moments of their deepest confidences arose when they could say things otherwise suppressed through embarrassment. Then they opened to each other all that was otherwise locked in. They spoke of the life they had shared, in the Old World and in the New, they spoke of death which awaited them sometime, death which would separate them. And they talked of eternity which had no end. Then Kristina would speak of her soul's conviction: Death would not separate them forever, only for a short time. They would meet again. They would meet in the life that would last—eternity. The meeting of their bodies had for them become the moments of intimacy which opened their souls to each other."

Chap. 10, p. 94

"This is a moment of meditation for her, a moment to think over what has just happened to her. For something has happened: She is pregnant again. She has just become sure: God has created a new life in her. The last time this happened she had sinned gravely, and he chastised her and took back his creation. This time she has received assurance



that she is again worthy. She enjoys God's confidence again. She has received his grace; he trusts her. The curse has been removed from Kristina and she is again a blessed woman."

Chap. 11, p. 102

"From this Sunday, August 17, 1862, the young state of Minnesota had its own civil war. A setting hen's nest was robbed by hungry Indians- and the owner became the first victim. The great Sioux uprising was started by people who had gone hungry, and hunger was its cause. The Call to Alarm: All through the gloom and the light The fate of a thousand Minnesotans was Riding that night. (Freely after Longfellow)."

Chap. 12, p. 112

"He had seen it all, with these very eyes which now tried to penetrate the darkness as he rode toward St. Paul. He felt those sights would be with him always, he could never shake them off, they proved to him man's powerlessness when such forces were let loose."

Chap. 12, p. 116

"God ruled their lives and everything on earth. But Karl Oskar was not sure a person could trust God. He could not believe as his wife did. Kristina had given herself into the Lord's hands. Was she right in doing so? They would now be finding out. Soon they would know: Was God to be trusted?"

Chap. 13, p. 126

"All his life until now he had followed this command: You must always help yourself! Always use your common sense and your strength! In every situation you must only trust your own ability. Never give up in danger! Never think there is no use going on! Always try once more! Never lose heart and say, there is nothing more I can do. But these days he no longer made decisions as to what happened around him. What happened decided over him. He kept watch on the chair beside his wife's bed, he walked outside and looked to the west. And what he did did not help him any more."

Chap. 14, p. 137

"Only when dead was a red man valued highly. Before the uprising no white would have offered a tenth as much for a living Indian."

Chap. 14, p. 139

"There was something very important he wanted to tell his wife, something he wanted to ask her. During all the time he had been watching at her bed he had had the words on his tongue, in his thoughts he had spoken them innumerable times, mumbled them to himself, whispered them, stammered them: Don't die and leave me! Stay with me yet! It was she herself he wanted to ask. Unlike Kristina he could not ask another One."

Chap. 15, p. 144

"[Kristina] trusted in God, but he tricked her. She was a credulous child who surrendered to her Father in heaven. But the Father failed her. He let her die. Now I know what happens to one who trusts in God Almighty. If she hadn't done so, she would be alive."



"She was taken from me and the children because she trusted in the Lord."
Chap. 16, p. 149

"Above Ki-Chi-Saga's water the Indian rose, rigid and silent in his sorrow, the prisoner chained in stone. He did not weep human tears, it was not water that flowed from his eyes, it was not drops of an evanescent fluid. He shed tears of stone—indestructible, eternal as the cliff itself. In these was his complaint—his sorrow over his people's destruction, their decay and death. A new race had come to take the place of the vanquished. Thus one people obliterates another from the face of the earth, and the earth sucks the blood of the dead, and turns green and blossoms as before for the living. The Indian head still stands, green-wreathed in summer, bare and naked in winter. From his eyes still fall the boulders that gather at his feet. In his eternal petrification the Indian to this day mourns his dead."
Chap. 17, p. 153

"You didn't take care of Kristina. You got her with child again. That's why you're single and alone!"
Chap. 18, p. 159

"The boy could not understand why he wanted it, and Karl Oskar did not wish to enlighten him: He would never again see the place where he had been born, but it was some small consolation to have it on a paper, where he could look at it. A paper was better than nothing to the farmer from Korpamoen who must die on another continent."
Chap. 20, p. 174

"In Sweden the rich stole even mother's milk from the poor. It was no wonder such great hordes had escaped across the ocean to the New World."
Chap. 21, p. 184

"For more than twenty years Karl Oskar had cleared wild land in America, hoed, plowed, cut. Now he had started with the last piece. He was nearing the end. When the oak grove had been cleared and tilled his farm would be completed."
Chap. 22, p. 196

"You cannot do anything to change my mind. You've bent my body, God, but not my soul. You can kill me, rob me of my breath, but you cannot make me say you're just. You can never bend my soul. Never in eternity. Amen."
Chap. 22, p. 201

"I am glad I left home while my blood was youthful, my emigration I have never regretted for a single moment."
Chap. 23, p. 203

"He had lived and worked one day at a time, and thus the days had fled and gathered into one great, heavy pile: old age. And that pile pressed a person down to the ground. A day came when one was no longer useful, when one lived to no one's joy, when one was only in the way here on earth, an annoyance to oneself... He was closed out from



the present and had nothing to hope for from the future."
Epilogue I, p. 209

"The map of Ljuder, spread over the blanket before him, had the shape of a heart. Somewhere near the center of that heart lay a farm where the old emigrant had taken his first steps on earth. The old man in the bed was shut out from the present and had nothing to expect from the future. To him remained only the past. Again he found the paths of his childhood. Charles O. Nelson, Swedish-born farmer in Minnesota, was old, lame, and stooped, and moved with difficulty over the ground of his new homeland. But here in his bed he walked freely and unencumbered over the roads of his native village."
Epilogue I, p. 213

"Nelson is regretted and missed much because he was a Man of Order and Just. He had much concern for his Children and Grandchildren. He has also fulfilled his obligations rightly and with good sense and no one can step forth and blame him. I visited him the evening before he left. He had told me many times he was ready to Die."
Epilogue II, p. 229



Topics for Discussion

Why is this novel titled *The Last Letter Home*?

How do the Civil War and the Sioux War affect the Nilsson settlement and Karl Nilsson's family?

Why does Kristina die, and how does Karl react to her death?

Who is Ulrika, and how is her situation in America ironic?

How do Karl and Kristina feel about the Old Country compared to the New Country?

Describe Kristina's religious beliefs and attitude toward God. Compare and contrast this with Karl's beliefs and attitude toward God.

Why is Karl Nilsson called Charles Nelson in the Epilogue? What is the significance of the author changing the names of his characters for the final twenty-five pages of the novel?