

Maud's Line Study Guide

Maud's Line by Margaret Verble

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Plot Summary

The following version of the book was used to create this guide: Verble, Margaret. *Maud's Line*. First Mariner Book, 2015.

Maud's Line, by Margaret Verble, is the story of a young Cherokee woman who lives on Indian allotment land in Oklahoma and yearns for a better life. Her life in Oklahoma is filled with hardship and violence, but also with the love of her family. When a handsome white man comes to town, Maud learns what is really important in life.

As the book begins, Maud and her brother Lovely are working in the garden when they hear their cow bawling in the field. They discover that someone has taken an axe to the cow's back and left it to die. When Maud tells her extended family of the event, they agree that the Mount brothers are responsible for the cruel act. Shortly after the cow is killed, a handsome stranger, who comes to town peddling his wares, enters Maud's life. Maud falls instantly in love with the educated and, to her eyes, worldly man named Booker. One night the local schoolhouse catches fire and Booker is accused of arson simply because he is a stranger. As a result, he is forced to stay in the area and he and Maud begin a relationship. On the night of the fire, Maud's father and uncle go over to the Mounts to kill some of their pigs in retaliation for the cow. In turn, the Mounts leave a dead dog on Maud's kitchen table. When Lovely buries the dog and then becomes ill, the family believes he has been exposed to rabies.

Maud continues to see Booker, but when the Mounts are found murdered and Mustard is suspected of committing the crime, Booker leaves town to think about whether or not he can handle Maud's way of life. Unfortunately, the letter he leaves for Maud gets ruined in the rain and she does not know why he has left, so she has no idea if he will come back. Meanwhile, Mustard leaves town to avoid arrest and Maud is left to care for their home and Lovely in his absence.

While Booker is gone, Maud begins a sexual relationship with Billy, an Indian boy she has known for years. However, she is already pregnant with Booker's baby. Maud tries to get her aunts to help her get rid of the baby, but they refuse. She then decides that Billy would make a good father, so she plans to pass the baby off as his, all the while still longing for Booker to return. Lovely begins to act strangely, as though he is mentally ill. He sees relatives who are long dead and hears voices that are not there. The entire family is concerned about him, but there seems to be little they can do. Lovely's girlfriend breaks up with him due to his strange behaviour. Lovely is aware that something is not right and fears he is going mad. This leads him to take his own life.

With Lovely gone and no sign of Booker returning, Maud becomes depressed at the thought caring for a baby with Billy. Eventually, her family becomes concerned for her. Her great-uncle's wife brings her a horse to ride saying that it might help her to dislodge the unborn baby. However, the horse is a gentle creature and the baby does not abort. Instead, Maud finds herself settled by her daily rides and her mood evens out. She becomes resigned to the birth of the baby and life with Billy.



Later, Maud learns that her father did, in fact, shoot Claude Mount, but that Claude himself shot John by accident. Her father briefly returns to town to tell Ryde that he is going to seek out the outlaw Pretty Boy Floyd to join his gang. When Booker learns of Maud's pregnancy through Mr. Singer, he returns for Maud. He convinces her to marry him and leave her life behind for life in the city. Maud concludes that what she really wants out of life is to live in a place where someone loves her, so she leaves with Booker and signs her allotment land over to Billy.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Maud's Line, by Margaret Verble, is the story of Maud, a young Cherokee woman living on her family's allotment land in Oklahoma and yearning for more excitement. Chapter 1 begins with Maud, a beautiful young woman, and her brother Lovely working in the garden when they hear their cow bellowing. The two grab their guns and run to the cow only to find that someone has taken an axe to her back and left her to die. She puts the poor creature out of its misery and then jumps into action to save the meat and arrange to store it at an ice house in town. Maud laments their lack of electricity and running water. Maud has kept enough of the meat at her house to prepare a meal for her extended family, and they begin to arrive for the meal. The family agrees that it was the Mount boys who killed the cow because they have a history of doing such things. Maud's great-uncle Ame says that their mother is part Comanche. The elders believe that revenge will do no good and the younger family members defer to them. The family agrees that it would be best to lie to Mustard about what happened to the cow so that he does not go after the Mounts. They also decide to tell him that it was Lovely that shot the cow and not Maud. Maud and Lovely go to bed and, sometime in the night, Mustard stumbles in and passes out on the floor. Maud puts a pillow under his head and leaves him there. The next morning Maud makes breakfast. Mustard indicates that he was in a fight. Maud helps her father to eat his breakfast and then tells him they had to shoot the cow. Lovely rolls a cigarette for his father and Mustard asks for his Banjo lighter.

Two days later, Maude is in the yard tending to a cut on her leg and worrying about whether it will scar when she sees a wagon with a bright blue canvas. The wagon approaches her house and she worries for a moment about her safety. The driver of the wagon is a handsome, smartly dressed young white man. The two talk about the flooding that occurred in 1927 and Maud uses the conversation to learn more about the stranger, who finally introduces himself as Booker Wakefield, a peddler. Booker shows Maud his wares and gives her a spool of red thread in exchange for water. Maud has no money to buy anything, but admires the Woodbury soap and a radio that Booker stands close to her to demonstrate. She tells him she prefers books and Booker tells her that he is a reader, too. He shows her a copy of *The Great Gatsby* and agrees to take a book in trade for it. Maud directs Booker to Mr. Singer's house saying that Mr. Singer likes to read, too, and often lends her books. Booker leaves and Maud regrets not finding out if he is married. Later, Lovely comes home and the two talk about Booker. After dinner, the family sits on the porch while Maud and Lovely read.

During the night, there is a fire at the schoolhouse and people gather to watch it. Lovely talks to Gilda Star, a girl he likes. Maud runs into Claude Mount who grabs her arm and says he heard that her uncle Ryde is saying the Mounts killed their cow. By morning the school has burned to the ground. Maud hears some men talking about a peddler and they speculate that he started the fire. Maud tries to stick up for Booker. Mr. Singer arrives and people give him all of the details of the fire. As she waits for Lovely to finish



his conversation with the Starr family, Maud notices a white woman talking to Mr. Singer and some other men and realizes she is accusing Booker of starting the fire. As they walk home, Lovely tells Maud he's taking Gilda to a dance. They realize their father is gone and wonder where he is. Maud stops to talk to her aunt Nan and Nan says that Ryde did not come home, either. They worry that the men have gone after the Mounts. Maud turns the conversation to Booker.

When she arrives at home, Maud sees that the gate is open and wishes she had her gun with her. Instead of going into the house, she finds Lovely and they go back to the house with the gun Lovely keeps in his saddlebag. Lovely goes into the house and finds a dead dog lying on the kitchen table. They are certain the Mounts are responsible. As they talk, Lovely mentions he has a cut on his finger from a thistle. Then, he buries the dog. When Mustard gets home he yells at them for lying about the cow. Mustard tells them that he and Ryde went to kill some of the Mounts' pigs to get revenge for the cow. Lovely tells him the Mounts got even by killing a dog and leaving it on the table.

In Chapter 2, Maud rides into town with Ryde on the day of the dance. They talk about a "dirty" book found in a safe in the burned school. Maud walks around town talking with friends and browsing in stores, all the while looking for Booker. When she arrives at the dance, she sees Booker's wagon. She dances with several boys but continues to check that Booker's wagon is still there. When there is a break in the music, she goes to Booker's wagon and realizes he is there to sell his wares. Maud feels a bit jealous when she sees him talking to other people, so she tricks Billy Walkingstick into going over to the wagon with her. The sheriff approaches and takes Booker away in connection with the burning of the school. Maud tells Billy that arresting Booker is unjust and Billy criticizes the law. She and Billy wander away from the dance and neck on the steps of a building.

The next morning Maud and Lovely talk about the dance and Lovely says he danced with Gilda all night. Lovely says that Gilda is a Christian and gave him her Bible to read. Maud encourages him to read it for the interesting stories, but believes the Christian religion is full of hypocrisy. However, she feels she is "too mixed blooded" to be a part of the Keetowah religion (p. 69). As a result, she doesn't think much about religion except to hope that something will move her toward a better life, which she believes will be a combination of good looks and education. Mustard wakes up and says that he won some money betting on a fight. He plans to use the money to buy a dog. Maud talks to Lovely about Booker being in jail. They agree that he was arrested because he is a stranger. Mustard returns with news about a litter of puppies that he heard about. He also tells them that John Mount has been seen with a bandage on his hand.

The next morning Maud plans to go into town to find out more about Booker. As she walks toward town, Maud sees Booker's wagon parked by Mr. Singer's barn and then sees Booker walk out of the barn. He tells her that Mr. Singer got him out of jail, but that he is not allowed to leave the area. Mr. Singer has given him a job selling potatoes, so he will be in the area for a while. They talk some more and Maud learns that Booker is a schoolteacher in Arkansas. Booker asks if he can call on her and Maud tells him that he can. They agree to meet at the cemetery. That night Maud leaves the house on the



pretense of taking the newspaper to Nan. She carries a stick with her to protect herself from snakes. As she walks she thinks about her mother dying from a snake bite.

Booker arrives on horseback and dismounts to let Maud ride. Maud looks down at Booker and thinks that she knows what she wants to do with the rest of her life. That night, Booker kisses her before they part and they make plans to meet again the next day. Maud arrives at her house to find Lovely reading Gilda's Bible on the porch. They both know a little about Christianity since they had been taught to tell people they were Christian if they were asked. Lovely tells Maud their father is going to go put a down payment on a puppy later in the week. Maud goes to bed. After some time passes, she realizes that Lovely never came in, so she goes to find him. She finds him standing in the yard staring toward the river. The next morning Lovely is exceptionally quiet.

Maud and Booker meet again. When they pass Nan and Ryde's house, the family waves. Maud introduces Booker. Later, Booker and Maud talk about her family and she says that Ryde automatically likes Booker because Ryde does not like the sheriff. She also says that Ryde will tell her father about her and Booker. When she gets home, Maude again finds Lovely reading the Bible. The next morning Mustard leaves to pick out his dog. Lovely is again acting strangely. Maud introduces Booker to Lovely, but she does not take Booker into her house. Booker and Maud sit on the porch while Lovely goes off to do some work. They hear Lovely yell from the barn. When they reach him, he is lying on the ground and he has a gash on his head. Lovely claims to have been attacked, but they are not able to find anyone. Lovely claims the man was yelling before he attacked, but neither Maud nor Booker heard anyone yell.

Mustard arrives and Maud introduces him to Booker who holds out his hand. Mustard does not shake his hand because it is not an Indian custom. Mustard says very little to Booker and Booker leaves. Mustard tells Maud he thought she would end up with Billy and then tells her about the dog he picked out. He asks Maud to hide the remainder of the money he needs to pay for the dog. The next morning, Mustard asks about Lovely's wound, but Maud distracts him with questions about his dog. When Mustard leaves Maud asks Lovely what really happened in the barn. He asks her if she ever hears people around their house. Lovely does not feel well and decides to stay home and rest for the day. Lovely later vomits and it seems clear he is ill. Booker comes for Maud again and Maud learns that his wife died in childbirth and he does not have a girlfriend in Arkansas. Maud likes that he was married once because it makes him seem more stable.

Analysis

Verble opens Maud's story with a scene designed to draw the reader in through strange events and action. Maud, the protagonist, and Lovely, her brother, discover that their cow has been attacked and that someone has chopped the poor beast's back with an axe and left it to die. This incident draws the reader in since the cow being attacked with an axe is certainly outside of the ordinary and a lot of action occurs surrounding putting the cow down and saving the meat. The scene is described in vivid detail giving the



reader a clear picture of the maimed cow with her back broken by the axe and “three wide, angry gashes” across her spine with a stalk of grass sticking up from one of them (p. 8). When Maud shoots the cow, the author describes the way that the blood and brains splatter, which emphasizes the violence of the act and its effect on the characters.

The opening scene also serves to introduce the characters of Maud and Lovely and to illustrate the differences between them. Maud is extremely practical and dependable. She jumps into action and urges Lovely to shoot the cow since she knows her father will want to hear that it was Lovely and not Maud who did the shooting. Lovely, however, is a very gentle young man who is too tender to shoot the cow that the family cares enough about to have named Betty. While the author may be suggesting his nature through his name, the book explains that Lovely is a common name for men in her family and has nothing to do with his nature. In keeping with her strong personality, when Lovely cannot bring himself to kill Betty, Maud does so herself and then thinks quickly to save the meat she knows her family will need. This act shows that Maud is both tough and resilient. The cow's death sickens Lovely.

In addition to being tough, practical, and dependable, Maud is also a woman who wants much more out of life than she currently has. Maud, her brother, and her father, Mustard, live in a rundown house that embarrasses Maud. She avoids letting people into the house so they cannot see just how bad it is and she hates that they do not have electricity or indoor plumbing. She loves to read and wishes she could get an education and get out of Oklahoma. She and Lovely are both well-read and often spend time talking about the books they have read and making recommendations to one another about what to read next. She has big aspirations, but sees no way to get out of her present situation.

Lovely, on the other hand, does not seem to want more than the life they have and, as the story goes on, he becomes more and more mentally unstable. The first clue to Lovely's mental state that the author provides is Maud finding him standing silently in the yard staring toward river in the middle of the night. The next morning, Maud finds Lovely on the porch without his boots on and insisting he is not going to wear boots that day. The first truly frightening experience in regards to Lovely's behaviour occurs in this section of the book when Maud and Booker hear Lovely yelling in the barn. They find him with a gash on his head and wildly swinging as though to fight something off. However, they are unable to find his attacker, which leads the reader to believe there was no one there in the first place. With this strange event, the author provides more concrete evidence that Lovely is, in fact, mentally ill. His symptoms of seeing and hearing people who are not there suggest that he may be schizophrenic.

Verble's introduction of Mustard, Maud's father, is handled in such a way that he is not a central character, but his actions greatly impact Maud and Lovely. Mustard is a heavy drinker who enjoys a good fight and works as little as possible. His idea of fatherly advice revolves around how to fight, drink, and be dishonest. He seems to care for his children and enjoys talking to them as is evidenced by the way he seeks out a conversation with Maud regarding dogs while they sit on the front porch. However, it



also seems clear that he is chiefly concerned about himself. Maud and Lovely are cautious around their father because of his temper and have developed an unspoken means of communication when it comes to their father's moods.

Verble also introduces Booker as a character. Booker is an educated white man who is a stranger to the area, making him irresistible to Maud. Booker is charming and funny. He tells Maud a story about naming his horses to make her laugh and put her at ease. Maud sees the bright blue canvas of his wagon as a symbol of happiness and thinks that no one would have chosen such a color unless they wanted to make others happy. He is clearly a kind man since he gives Maud a spool of thread in exchange for a bit of water and then agrees to trade her a new book for one of her used ones. Since Maud's house is shabby, he probably knows that she does not have money to spend. Booker is probably initially attracted to Maud because of her good looks, but when he discovers she enjoys books, he is further drawn to her.

The author uses Booker's first meeting with Maud to set the time frame in which the story takes place. She accomplishes this by discussing a great flood that occurred in 1926. The flood was so devastating that people are able to bond over the events by talking about how they were affected and what they did to survive. Not only does the discussion give Booker and Maud a chance to get comfortable with one another, but it also informs the reader that the story takes place in the 1920's during prohibition.

Because Booker is a white man, he allows the author to speak about interactions between races and the theme of racism existing among all peoples. Maud's family does not immediately accept Booker because of the color of his skin and the fact that he does not know anything about native customs. When Booker first meets Mustard he holds out his hand to shake, but Mustard ignores it. Maud later explains to Booker that her father does not shake hands because it is not an Indian custom and they only shake hands when they are trying to appear white.

Another example of racism existing among all peoples occurs when the family discusses who might have killed the cow. They agree that the Mount brothers committed the crime and one of the reasons given for this belief is that their mother is Comanche, a pronouncement made in hushed tones. This indicates that though the Cherokees and Comanches are both Native Americans who share a similar history, there is animosity between tribes.

Verble also introduces the character of Billy, an Indian boy Maud has known for some time. Verble describes Billy as being very handsome, which is the reason that Maud uses Billy to try to make Booker jealous at the dance. Billy clearly has feelings for Maud since he offers to buy her the soap she has been longing for at full price rather than letting Maud purchase it at the discounted price that Booker offers. Billy is also very charming and the combination of his charm and good looks leads to Maud necking with him in spite of her feelings for Booker. Perhaps it is simply her natural attraction to Billy that causes this behavior, but it may also be that Maud does not feel like she has a chance with an educated white man like Booker. Though she desperately wants to



move away from the Indian allotment land, perhaps she does not truly believe that can happen and so, for the moment, she settles for Billy's company.

With the death of the cow, a plot of revenge and murder begins and the author introduces the theme of revenge being destructive. The death of the cow leads to Mustard and Ryde killing the Mounts' pigs, which leads to them leaving a dead dog on Maud's kitchen table, which will eventually lead to the Mounts being murdered. The elders of the family seem to be aware of the destructive nature of revenge since they come to the conclusion that Maud and Lovely need to lie to Mustard about how the cow died so that he will not seek revenge against the Mounts. In introducing this story Verble foreshadows future events involving Lovely and the dead dog. Before burying the dead dog, Lovely tells Maud that he has been pricked by a thorn and has an open wound on his finger. Mention of such a detail puts the reader on alert that this small injury will play a bigger part as more of the story is revealed.

The theme of revenge helps to illustrate how violent the world Maud lives in is. Maud is aware of the violence around her and longs to get away from it all. The author provides clues as to the violence of Maud's life in that she and Lovely seldom go anywhere without carrying a gun; they cannot even go for a walk without at least carrying a stick to scare away poisonous snakes. In fact, Maud's mother died violently from a snake bite. Verble describes the scene in a flashback. The snake was hiding under a rosebush when it struck her mother and she was left to die there on the ground. The author juxtaposes the beauty of a rose with the violence of Maud's mother's death in an image that will later prove to later haunt Lovely as he loses his grip on reality.

In opposition to the theme of the destructive nature of revenge is the theme of family sticking together. From the start of the story it is obvious that Maud's large family plays an important role in her life. In saving the meat from the cow, one of her first thoughts is to hold enough of the meat back from the ice house so that she can serve a family meal for her extended family. When the family gathers in Maud's yard they bring dishes to pass and the conversation is congenial. During this dinner, the family makes a communal decision lead by the elders to lie to Mustard about how the cow died and about who actually shot the cow. The family makes these decisions to prevent Mustard from getting himself in trouble and also to protect Lovely from his father's ridicule.

In addition to the family meal, the author also provides examples of the theme through Maud's care for her family. When Mustard comes home drunk and passes out on the floor, Maud puts a pillow under his head so that he can sleep more comfortably. Then, in the morning when he is too shaky to drink his coffee, Maud holds the cup to his lips. After Lovely gets a gash on his head during the incident in the barn, Maud protects him from her father by redirecting the conversation away from Lovely's injury to the subject of dogs, which she knows her father cannot resist.

Another theme that Verble utilizes in telling the story is the idea that education is the key to a better life. Maud and Lovely are both very well read. The author frequently includes titles of classic books and authors they have read. His education is one of the things that draws Maud to Booker as she sees him as a way to a better life. She loves the fact



that he is a schoolteacher and treats the position with reverence. It is Maud's desire for a better education that causes her to cry when the schoolhouse is burned down; she feels a strong connection to the place and has good memories of learning there.

Maud shows great curiosity about life and especially about literature. When Maud hears about a book that was found in the safe at the burned school she is very curious about it. Ryde tells her that it is a "dirty book" containing scandalous tales told by people on their way to church. Even though the book was considered inappropriate, Maud thinks she would like to read it. The book the author is referring to here is Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Mr. Singer, one of the characters introduced in this section, also supports the theme of education leading to a better life. Mr. Singer is also Native American, but he lives in a nice home and has a housekeeper, so Maud sees that it is not merely her skin color that keeps her in the situation she is in. Mr. Singer is an educated man and has an extensive library from which Maud frequently borrows books. His books represent Maud's only opportunity to better educate herself. The community treats Mr. Singer with deference as shown when he arrives at the scene of the fire. Townspeople provide him with every detail of the fire. He seems to know this would be the case since he does not arrive at the scene until the morning rather than standing around throughout the night to see the fire for himself.

In one instance, the author clearly states the theme during a discussion of religion. Both Maud and Lovely know something of Christianity because they have been instructed to fake being Christian around white people when asked. Maud does not hold with any religion. She believes Christianity is hypocritical but says she is too mixed blooded to follow the Indian religion. Instead, she feels that it is education that will lead her to a better life and not religion.

Discussion Question 1

What about Booker interests Maud besides his attractiveness?

Discussion Question 2

What is the relationship between Mustard and his children like? How might this affect Maud's view of the world?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Lovely begins acting strangely? Is it simply due to his absorption in reading the Bible or is something more happening?

Vocabulary

bawling, vain, paternal, disposition, doused, distress, disfigurement, precaution, peddler, transaction, salvaged, escort, commotion, intuition, piquing, animosity, hypocrisy, brood, suspicious, primal



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3 begins with Maud cooking breakfast when Lovely comes in. Lovely refuses breakfast and Maud and Mustard go about their chores while Lovely continues to lie on his cot. Maud walks to Nan's house. Ryde entered their baby into a beauty contest. Maud thinks about having babies with Booker, but hopes that will be far into the future. Booker and Maud leave for a picnic. While they talk, Renee, Maud's cousin, runs up to tell them that John Mount was bitten by a rabid dog. Maud realizes the rabid dog was the one found in her house. Maud tells Booker about the event, but he does not really understand the feud. Maud worries that Lovely has contracted rabies.

Maud is worried about Lovely, but she wants to stay with Booker instead of facing what is going on at home. They go to Booker's wagon and stop just short of making love. When they return to Maud's house, Lovely is on the porch and he is not sure if the doctor came to see him or not. Booker offers to spend the night on the porch to help with Lovely, but Maud sends him away because she is afraid her father will return drunk. The next morning Maud wakes up to find that she is alone; Mustard never came in and Lovely has left. She decides to go see John Mount to determine if he has rabies. When she gets to the Mounts' house she finds both men dead. She covers them with a quilt from the bed. Her father's Banjo lighter is lying by the bodies. Maud thinks about her mother and how she had said that people have to "rise to difficult conditions and keep going" (p. 108). However, Maud just wants to get away from all the violence. Maud goes back to her house and finds the doctor and Booker there. She is embarrassed that Booker has been inside the house. The doctor does not think Lovely has rabies. However, the doctor is concerned about Lovely's mental health. Booker wants to stay with Maud, but she makes an excuse so that he leaves with the doctor.

Lovely tells Maud their mother came to visit him. He says he thinks that all of their dead ancestors are near. This makes Maud remember the bodies. She asks Lovely if he knows where Mustard is and Lovely says he was there the night before. He does not remember if he went anywhere with Mustard. Maud does not tell him the Mounts are dead. Maud decides to go to her grandfather Bert's house for help with the bodies. Bert says that he and Ame will take care of the situation. He asks Maud to find out if Ryde took part in the killings, but not to let him know about it if he was not involved. Maud tells Viola about Lovely's illness. Viola says she does not expect Ame and Bert to say much about what they are doing when they return because they will try to protect the younger people. She says that both Ame and Bert believe education is the way to go because they grew up illiterate. When they arrive at Maud's house Lovely seems better. Viola stays the night.

During the night Lovely gets up and leaves the house in the pouring rain. He does not return. Viola believes he is "tetched" (p. 124). The next day Bert and Ame return. When Maud asks how things went, Bert responds by saying the Mounts had five pigs who had



not been fed. They consider going to look for Lovely, but do not believe they will be able to track him because of the rain. Later, Booker comes to see Maud. She tells him that Lovely is gone. Maud invites him to stay and they go inside. The doctor arrives and tells him that the Mounds are dead. He found human bones in with the pigs.

Booker goes to get the sheriff while the doctor stays with Maud. Maud tells him that Lovely is gone. The two talk about Viola's father having been a medicine man and about old remedies.

Booker comes back with the sheriff. The doctor and the sheriff leave after a brief conversation. Lovely returns and tells Maud he was visiting Nan and Blue. Booker tells Lovely that the doctor found human remains at the Mounds' place, but Lovely does not seem surprised.

The doctor and sheriff return and the sheriff informs Booker that he is no longer under suspicion. They have discovered that the fire at the school was set by children. He tells Maud he believes the Mounds were murdered because he found a quilt burned in the still. When the sheriff asks Maud where Mustard is, she says he may be at work, but that she has not seen him because he has been off seeing a woman. When the sheriff tells Booker he can go, Maud can see he wants to stay, but she tells him to leave. He is obviously upset by the situation. She is concerned that Lovely will say something that will get someone in trouble for the murders. The sheriff questions Maud, but she claims not to know anything. He then questions Lovely before leaving. Lovely tells Maud that he told the sheriff he left the house during the night because he thought he heard a woman calling him. He tells Maud the woman was their dead grandmother.

In Chapter 4, Maud avoids seeing Booker because she is afraid she will have to lie to him about the murders. However, she finally goes to the potato barn to see him. They make love urgently. After that, they are together often. They talk about their future together and it is one with books, children, electricity, and plumbing. He expresses loving the rebellion of having an Indian maiden for a girlfriend. The sheriff comes to Maud's house looking for Mustard. Booker tells him that Mustard has gone to work in the oil fields. Maud says they have not heard from him, but that he may be staying with his sister Matilda. Maud says she does not know Matilda's last name because she is a Seminole.

The sheriff leaves and Booker asks Maud if she thinks Mustard could have done it. She says no. After Booker leaves Maud continues to think about the situation. She feels grateful to her grandfather and great uncle and loves Mustard for having stood up for Lovely. Then she thinks about her future with Booker. They plan to marry and she resolves to write to her sisters to tell them. She worries about leaving Lovely behind. That night she wakes to Lovely having a nightmare. He tells her he was dreaming about drowning and says he feels like he is losing his mind

The sheriff comes again and tells them Mustard is not with Matilda. Maud insists she has not seen Mustard and they invite him to search the property. The sheriff says he thinks that Ryde will talk if he gets him drunk. Booker reminds him that alcohol is illegal.



The sheriff leaves and Booker asks Maud if there is something she needs to tell him. Maud says that she does not know if Mustard killed the Mounts, but that Ryde's family will starve if he is put in jail. Booker offers to go talk to Nan, but Maud tells him Nan will not talk to him because he is white. Maud wakes the next morning to find Lovely did not return during the night. She walks to Nan's house and learns that Ryde has been arrested

Maud walks to the potato barn and tells Booker Lovely did not come home. Booker takes Maud to see Gilda. Gilda says she has not seen Lovely and that he did not show up for church on Sunday as he had promised. She says that when she saw him last he was ranting about the Mounts coming back and killing them all and that he sometimes acts strangely. Booker tells Maud that he wants to know the whole story about the Mounts because he knows she is keeping things from him. She tells him the whole story, but she lies about the quilt. Booker says he needs to think about the situation.

The next day Lovely comes home. He is dishevelled and claims to have been at Blue's allotment in a circle of trees Blue had taken them to when their mother died. He thinks something is happening to him. Maud makes food for Lovely and waits for Booker to come, but he does not. At bed time, Lovely says he is going to sleep in the chicken house because it is safer. Maud convinces him not to.

The next morning Maud wakes up feeling queasy. She goes back to bed and when she wakes, Lovely is gone. She goes to the potato barn and Booker's wagon is gone. Mr. Singer gives her a letter from Booker, but she cannot bring herself to read it. She goes home and finds Lovely waiting for his dinner. He says that Booker was already gone when he got to work. The next morning Maud is sick again. She realizes her monthly cycle is late. She goes to see Nan and tells her that Booker is gone, but not that she may be pregnant. Ryde comes home and asks if Maud has seen Mustard. He then tells her that Claude accidentally shot John when he was trying to shoot Mustard. Mustard shot Claude. Ryde took no part in either killing. Ryde says he told the sheriff that Mustard went to the Osage Hills, but knows he did not because "Mustard hates them particular Indians" (p. 180).

Analysis

In this section, the author further develops several of the characters, including Maud, Booker, and Lovely. Verble further develops Maud through her growing relationship with Booker. When Booker is detained due to the fire at the schoolhouse, he is forced to stay in town longer, which enables him to begin seeing Maud. Their relationship rapidly becomes a full blown love affair with Maud sneaking away to see him. Part of the reason that Maud initially arranges secret meetings with Booker is that she worries about him meeting her family and making judgments about her based on their behavior. This worry continues even after Booker has met her father and brother. For example, she worries about Booker seeing her father drunk because "she knew full well how drunkenness looked to most white people" (p. 100). Even when Booker asks her to tell him the entire story surrounding the murders and her family's involvement, Maud



continues to hide certain details from Booker, such as the quilts and that she believes her father was involved. In fact, when Booker asks if she thinks Mustard could have killed them, Maud tells him no.

At the same time that Maud tries to keep Booker from knowing too much about her family, particularly after Mustard is suspected of murdering the Mounts, she dreams of a future with him. When Maud visits Nan as the family is getting ready to take their baby to a beauty contest, she thinks about what it would be like to have babies with Booker, but hopes that will be far into the future. Her thoughts foreshadow an actual pregnancy, which is revealed later in this section. Maud and Booker do plan to marry and Maud is so confident in their relationship that she tells Nan and writes to her sisters about her impending wedding.

Booker, too, is developed through his relationship with Maud. Since the story is told from Maud's perspective, what the reader learns about Booker is filtered through Maud's lens. In some ways, Booker has an idealistic view of Indians and likes the idea of having an Indian maiden as a girlfriend because it makes him feel rebellious. But, Maud can see that Booker is uncomfortable with her family's Indian ways and that he does not understand the violence that is a part of their lives. At the same time, it also seems that Booker truly does want to understand Maud's life better and does not like being kept in the dark about what is going on with her family. However, when he hears more of the story, he is even more uncomfortable and begins to wonder what he has gotten himself into by getting involved with Maud. Yet, when the sheriff continues to question the family about Mustard's disappearance, Booker's love for Maud leads him to lie to the sheriff and say that Mustard is working in the oil fields.

The author uses Booker's discomfort with the whole situation to inject a bit of humor into the otherwise dark murder plot when Maud finally tells him most of the story of the feud that led to the murders. Maud tells Booker about the dead dog being left on the table and then says telling him about it slipped his mind. Booker responds flippantly with, "That happens. Dead dogs in the kitchen are as common as biscuits" (p. 96).

The character of Lovely continues on a downward spiral into mental illness. The doctor is the first person outside of the family who notices his instability. When he mentions his concern to Maud, she tries to brush it off as Lovely being dreamy and wanting to be someplace else. Yet, this does not seem to be the case with Lovely, so Maud is perhaps projecting her own desires onto her brother in an attempt to deny that he is ill. Lovely talks to Maud about having seen their dead mother. He also starts wandering away for lengthy periods of time and seems uncertain of where he has been when he returns home. This leads Maud to wonder whether he might have gone with Mustard when the Mounts were murdered since Lovely remembers seeing Mustard but cannot remember if he went anywhere with his father. Lovely's deteriorating condition leaves Maud with no one to confide in since she is afraid to tell Lovely anything about the murders that he might later repeat to the wrong person. In addition, Lovely begins to exhibit symptoms of paranoia. On one occasion he is adamant that he needs to sleep in the chicken coop because it is safer. The only place Lovely feels better in is the circle of trees on Blue's land where he and Maud found comfort after their mother's death.



As the plot concerning Lovely's mental health advances, Verble explores a theme that is central to Maud's story, the theme of women keeping families together. Throughout the novel, the men in Maud's life are constantly leaving while the women stay behind and keep their families and homes going. Lovely becomes one of those men when he starts to wander due to his mental illness. He leaves the house in the middle of the night and even during rainstorms without telling Maud where he is going, which leaves Maud behind on her own to continue doing the chores around the house and move on with her life. Mustard, too, leaves Maud behind when he runs to avoid being arrested. When the sheriff comes to question Maud about Mustard's location, she tells him that Mustard has been seeing someone and that it is common for Indian men to "lay out," which means that they often stay somewhere other than their own homes. This concept of "laying out" is frequently mentioned in regards to male members of Maud's family, including her mysterious Uncle Gourd who is often mentioned in the novel, but whose house stands empty because he is "laying out" at his current girlfriend's house.

Maud knows that it is typically the woman's job to keep a family together, and perhaps that is why she seeks to get away; she may not want to take on that particular responsibility. And, yet, when she thinks of marrying Booker and going to live in the city, the one thing that concerns her is that she will be leaving Lovely behind to care for himself.

Verble also delves deeper into the theme of racism existing among all peoples by looking at the way Maud's family interacts with both white people and Native Americans from other tribes. When Booker offers to go talk to Nan about the sheriff wanting to speak with Ryde, Maud informs him that Nan will not talk to him because he is white. Booker is taken aback by this because he is certain that Nan spoke to him when he stopped at her house to peddle his wares. Maud asks him to think again about the encounter and he realizes that Nan's children spoke to him, but Nan did not. This reluctance to speak with white people is likely due to mistrust. Several times throughout the book the author mentions that relations between whites and Indians is tentative at best. A few times characters mention the way that the law is set up for white people. Maud has also previously stated that she has been taught to say she is a Christian if a white person asks her. Maud's family has passed down stories of the Trail of Tears through the generations, so they have built up a mistrust of white people.

The author points out, though, that Maud's family does not only hold some racist tendencies toward white people, but also toward other Native American tribes. For example, Maude states that she does not know her Aunt Matilda's last name because she is a Seminole. This indicates that Matilda's status as a Seminole outweighs the fact that she is a family member and prevents her niece from getting to know her. Later, Ryde states that he told the sheriff that Mustard went to the Osage Hills. He has provided this information as a means of misleading the sheriff because he knows full well that Mustard would never go there because, as he states, "Talley don't know how much Mustard hates them particular Indians" (p. 180).

As the plot surrounding the murder of the Mounts continues to develop, the author shows the way that revenge is destructive through the way in which the events have



escalated from an injured cow to the murder of two men. When Maud learns that John Mount may have been bitten by a rabid dog, she immediately fears for Lovely's health as he has been ill and she wonders if he has contracted rabies. This fulfills the foreshadowing that occurred in the first section of the book when Lovely mentions having been poked by a thistle just prior to burying the dog found in their kitchen. After Lovely becomes ill, the feud escalates from the dead dog to the Mounts being found dead. From there, Mustard's act of revenge leads to Maud becoming entangled in the murders because she is the one who finds the bodies and tells her grandfather so that he can dispose of the bodies in an attempt to keep Mustard from being arrested.

Throughout the escalation of plot, Maud's family continues to be there for her. In fact, the murders occur because Mustard stands up for his son. In thinking about the murders, Maud realizes that her father killed the Mounts as a way of standing up for Lovely who he believes contracted rabies because of the Mounts leaving a dead rabid dog on their table. This realization causes Maud to feel a surge of love for her murderous father because he has finally shown some concern for a son he always thought was weak. Bert and Ame stand behind Maud when they dispose of the bodies in order to keep Maud's father from being charged with the murders. Further, they ask Maud to find out if Ryde is involved so that they can protect him, too. When the men go out to take care of the bodies, Viola stays with Maud. In this way, the two women take care of one another; Viola is not home alone and Maud has help with her ailing brother.

The author is mindful of keeping Maud's inquisitive nature and desire to better her life through education present even as the plot thickens. When the doctor stays at Maud's house while Booker gets the sheriff, Maud and the doctor have a conversation about one of Maud's relatives having been a medicine man and about old remedies. Maud enjoys the educated nature of the conversation and it helps her to pass the time though she is undoubtedly worried about what the sheriff will find.

In addition to Maud's conversation with the doctor, Verble also reinforces the theme of education being the key to a better life when Viola discusses the way that Bert and Ame grew up. Both men lack any formal education and are illiterate. This causes Maud to remember sitting on her grandfather's lap while he listened intently to her reading. She had always thought this was his way of helping her to learn to read, but this revelation leaves her wondering if perhaps her grandfather was learning from her. Viola also states that Bert and Ame are not likely to say much about the events surrounding the disposal of the bodies because they want to protect the younger generation. Both men believe that the young should be sheltered from the violence of the old ways and directed instead toward getting an education.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Maud initially try to pass off Lovely's mental instability as his simply being dreamy and wanting to be in a better place? What does Lovely's deteriorating condition mean for Maud?



Discussion Question 2

What observations does the author make about the way Indian customs differ from the customs of white people? How do these customs affect Booker as an outsider?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Maud hesitant to tell Booker the entire truth about the murders? How does Booker react when he finds out more of the story? Do you think he has left because of Maud's family's involvement in the deaths?

Vocabulary

agitated, illusion, ensure, rabies, cogitations, veered, visualize, wiry, precaution, saliva, jumpy, welts, predicament, fending, contentment, plagued, concerned, pensive, ambition, sympathetic



Chapter 5

Summary

Chapter 5 begins with Maude still feeling sick in the morning. She feels as though a baby might hold her and Booker together. Maude takes his letter outside to read it, but when she sets it down to pick up some tomatoes it is swept away by the wind and then ruined by the rain before she can read it. Lovely finds her crying in the barn and puts her to bed. When she wakes Viola is sitting at her bedside. When Maud feels better she offers to walk Viola home and then goes to Mr. Singer's house. Mr. Singer tells her that Booker was agitated and said he needed time to think. He did not say where he was going or if he would return. Mr. Singer lends her some books before she goes in an attempt to take her mind off her troubles.

Maud and Lovely go to the icehouse to get some meat. Billy is there and calls Lovely. Lovely asks Billy to take Maud and the meat home so he can stay in town to see Gilda. Maud is irritated and tries to rush him off by saying she has to go invite her family for Sunday dinner. However, as they ride home Billy talks about his family and Maud warms to him. Billy asks about Booker and Maud tells him that Booker is gone. When they arrive at Maud's house Billy stays to help her cut the meat. Maud discovers she enjoys being with Billy and finds him charming. They drink some wine and Maude thinks about living a different life. They begin kissing and then make love. Afterwards, they talk for a long time.

Lovely returns drunk. Billy helps her settle him onto his cot and then leaves. The next morning, she wakes up and looks at the crack in the ceiling above the bed, imagining it is a road leading to Oklahoma City. She plans to talk to Lucy about her pregnancy. She spends the day preparing for the family dinner. The entire family arrives for dinner and it is a pleasant night. Maud feels content and forgets for the time being about wanting to go somewhere else. She talks with Nan and Lucy about Lucy's pregnancy and she thinks Viola probably told them about her morning sickness, which irritates her. As they talk, Maud realizes she does not like children. Lucy suggests that there is a lot that can happen in the beginning of a pregnancy.

That night as she tries to sleep she thinks about how a baby would tie her down if Booker does not return. She contemplates marrying Billy. When she wakes the next morning the crack in the ceiling reminds her of a snake. Lovely is gone again and does not come in for the noon meal. Later, Maud sees Billy coming up the road so she climbs up into a tree to hide from him. He eventually leaves. She spends the rest of the day reading the Cherokee history book and notes a formula for causing a miscarriage.

Maud goes to return Mr. Singer's books hoping he will have heard from Booker. He is not at home and she asks his housekeeper Miss Lizzie, a black woman, when he will return. Lizzie says she does not know. Lizzie recognizes her as being the granddaughter of a woman she knew well, so she invites her to have some lemonade



and wait for Mr. Singer. Lizzie knows Maud is looking for Booker and tells her which way he went. Mr. Singer does not come home and Maud leaves. Maud stops at her grandfather's house and tells Viola and Lucy that Lovely is gone again. The family is worried about him. Viola says she will send men out to look for him if he does not return by Saturday. The talk turns to where Booker might be and then she tells the women about her conversation with Lizzie. They continue to talk and Maud takes comfort in the familiarity of being with family.

Analysis

Having discovered that Booker is gone and unable to read the letter he left for her, Maud is confused as to whether or not he will ever come back. She is, at this point, fairly certain she is pregnant with Booker's baby. At first, she sees the pregnancy as a positive thing and something that could bind Booker to her, but as the days pass and he does not return, Maud grows to hate the baby she is carrying. Because Maud aspires to more in life than simply living on her family's allotment land, she believes a baby will tie her down and make achieving her dreams of leaving for a place where people are educated and have luxuries impossible. However, this does not stop her from quickly beginning a love affair with Billy.

Maud seems to take up with Billy almost too quickly after Booker's departure, yet the relationship is logical considering Maud's condition and the fact that she is now spending so much time alone with Booker and Mustard gone and Lovely coming and going. Perhaps she is lonely and her pregnancy causes her to look for the security that Billy's familiarity offers. Maud's relationship with Billy lends itself to the idea of women holding a family together. With a baby on the way, Maud is about to start a family of some sort whether she likes it or not. She recognizes her duty to the baby even though she hates the thought of having it, which causes her to contemplate marrying Billy. In fact, it is Billy's talk of his own extended family that makes Maud warm to him as they ride home from the ice house. When Billy shows that he can also be helpful by helping her to cut the meat for the family dinner, it is almost as though she cannot help herself and she finds herself in bed with him.

Verble also continues the theme of family being there for one another as Maud finds herself more and more alone. When Maud is distraught over the letter being destroyed and ill with morning sickness, Lovely cares for her by putting her to bed and getting Viola, who comes to sit with her. Later, when Maud again hosts a family dinner, she finds herself almost liking where she lives because of the warm comfort and familiarity she finds in being among her large family with its familiar sounds. Maud hosts another family dinner considering that she is now almost completely alone and has no money coming in. Lovely is working only sporadically due to his illness and Mustard is gone entirely. Yet, Maud does not hesitate to share what little she has with those she loves. She seems comfortable in the knowledge that in sharing what she has with her family, they will later share with her if the need arises.



The theme of education being the key to a better life is briefly touched on in Maud's conversation with Mr. Singer. Mr. Singer offers her more books and suggests that she read some history, including a book on Cherokee history. His book suggestions indicate that he, too, wants Maud to learn as much as she can. In offering her a book on Cherokee history, he indicates that the history of their own people is as important as any other topic she can learn about. Maud's visits to Mr. Singer's house also allow the author to provide further insight into the idea of racism existing among all people when Maud meets Mr. Singer's black housekeeper, Miss Lizzie. Maud is at first uncomfortable with Lizzie because she believes that adult black people do not speak to anyone but their own kind. The author shows that people's preconceived notions about other races are not always correct when Lizzie tells Maud she knew her grandmother well and then invites her to have some lemonade. Lizzie knows that Maud is looking for Booker and tells her the direction he left in. She seems sympathetic to the young woman's plight.

The title of the book begins to take on a dual meaning. To this point, Maud's Line seemed to refer only to the area in which Maud lives. The boundaries of her allotment land is often referred to as "the line," which leads the reader to believe that the title is talking about the land on which Maud lives and the boundaries that confine her. However, in this chapter, Maud lays on the bed and notices a crack, or line, in the ceiling. When she first looks at the line, she imagines it to be a road leading to Oklahoma City and beyond. This notion occurs before Maud begins to feel hopeless about the baby she carries and the prospect of Booker returning to take her away. The world still seems full of possibilities. Later, after Maud begins to doubt that Booker will come back and she begins to feel a sense of hatred toward the baby, she sees the crack as a snake. This happens after Maud begins a relationship with Billy and starts to feel like she will be trapped where she is. The fact that she sees it as a snake is significant since a snake is what killed her mother. Maud may feel as though the baby she carries is a snake and it is killing her chance of a better future.

Discussion Question 1

How does Maud initially feel about her pregnancy? Do her feelings change?

Discussion Question 2

What does Maud see the crack above her bed as at the beginning of the chapter? What does it change to later?

Discussion Question 3

What does the author suggest about the way Indians feel about dating, mating, and marriage? How do the roles of Indian women and Indian men differ?

Vocabulary

dozy, nauseated, grit, pelted, quaking, swale, retched, stunned, irritation, overtake, beheadings, conserving, lassoed, whetstone, charming, easygoing, intentional, ribbing, gossipy, antics



Chapter 6

Summary

Chapter 6 begins with the date Maud and Booker set for their wedding just sixteen days away and Booker still has not returned. Maud knows that if he plans to return he will be back by then. She feels hopeless stuck on her “pitiful patch of Indian land” (p. 213). She misses Booker, Lovely, and her father. Billy comes to her house and they make love again. Afterward they sleep and when Maud awakens the crack in the ceiling looks like it has grown. She knows that if she is not pregnant already she will be soon.

Maud goes into town to see Gilda and asks if she knows where Lovely is. Gilda informs her that she and Lovely broke up because he has gotten so strange. Lovely did not take the break up well. Maud then goes to Mr. Singer’s in hopes he has seen Lovely. Mr. Singer asks if she has heard from Booker. He tries to comfort her by saying that perhaps she should move on to another young man. Maud begins to cry and Mr. Singer tells her that he had asked about having the wedding on Mr. Singer’s front porch before he left. Maud goes to Bert’s house to avoid being home when Billy comes. Lucy goes into labor and Maud is pressed into assisting Viola with the birth. Maud finds the birthing process appalling.

The baby’s birth causes the family to shift living arrangements for a while and Bert, Ame, and Blue move into Maud’s house and she stays at Nan’s to care for Nan’s children. Her grandfather tells her that Billy has been coming to her house every night. Maud looks for Booker’s wagon every day and considers marrying Billy. However, she knows that he will, like most Cherokees, want to find a piece of land and stay there forever. Her life would remain the same.

As Maud walks home she thinks about how squaw root is supposed to be useful for causing a miscarriage. She remembers having seen some in Blue’s woods. Maud writes a letter to her aunt to tell her father about Lovely being missing. Then she thinks about how settled she feels after being with Billy and how tired she is of men leaving. She resolves to get the squaw root the next day. Maud goes to look for the squaw root. She arrives at Blue’s circle of trees and finds tattered pieces of Lovely’s clothes and boots on the ground as well as chewed bones. When she returns home she stands in the house feeling disconnected and wonders if Lovely felt that way.

Maud goes to Viola and tells her about Lovely. She then tells Viola she went to the woods to find squaw root, but says she does not know how to use it. Viola asks if she thinks Lovely killed himself. Viola sends the men to retrieve Lovely’s body. The family decides to bury Lovely themselves. Maud’s pregnancy is beginning to show and she begins to feel a hatred for where she lives. She is miserable and thinks she does not blame Lovely for killing himself because at least he found a way out. She grabs scissors and bobs her hair to look like women in the cities.



The next morning Maud plans to go tell Mr. Singer and Gilda about Lovely. She talks to Gilda first and informs her that Lovely was afraid he was going mad and committed suicide. She then goes to Mr. Singer's house, but there is no one home. She falls asleep on his porch while waiting for him. When she wakes, Mr. Singer gives her a letter from Booker. Before she reads the letter she tells Mr. Singer about Lovely.

She leaves with a new book and the letter. The letter indicates that it is actually the third letter Booker has written and that he thinks she is the one that is angry. He asks her to write to him, but the address he supplies is not complete since she has no idea what city he is in. At home, she checks her mailbox, which she seldom does, and finds a letter from Booker with a Tulsa postmark. She feels faint and sends Renee to get Nan. Nan reads the letter for Maud and it contains very little personal information, so Maud is angry. She asks Nan to help her get rid of the baby. Nan says that Booker might want a baby, but Maud wants him to want her. Nan says that Billy is a good worker and that he will not care that the baby is not his since he is full-blooded Cherokee. As they sit, one of the children tells her that Billy is headed toward her house with a wagon carrying furniture and a dog. Maud bursts into tears and runs to the smokehouse to be alone.

Analysis

This section of the novel serves mainly to address Maud's downward spiral and growing depression since Booker has left and she has discovered she is pregnant. Though Maud can see that all the signs of a pregnancy are there, she still denies, or perhaps hopes, that she is not pregnant. Yet, she continues to carry on an active sexual relationship and knows that if she is not already pregnant, she soon will be. Her actions indicate that she knows she is pregnant and that there is no turning back at this point.

Billy proves to be entirely devoted to Maud, who still is not sure she wants to be with him. She is repeatedly told by her relatives that Billy would make a good father and husband, but she cannot bring herself to marry him. She knows that a life with Billy means that she will remain right where she is for the rest of her life and never achieve her dreams. Meanwhile, Billy is so completely in love with Maud that he stops at her house looking for her every night while she stays at Nan's house after the birth of Lucy's baby.

While the author includes a theme of women keeping the family together while men wander away, Maud is actually the one who is frightened of not being able to leave because she knows that Billy will want to stay where they are. Maud attributes this to his being a nearly full-blooded Cherokee who will eventually "want to squat on a piece of land, hug it like a blanket, and not give it up" (p. 225). While this seems in direct contrast with the author's theme, it portrays Maude as an independent woman who longs to break out of the role that has been set before her as a woman. It also exemplifies the growing independence of individuals that was a hallmark of the 1920s, and so is in keeping with the time period the novel is set in.



Verble uses Maud's pregnancy as a way of further discussing Indian customs surrounding families. When Nan suggests that Billy might be a good husband, Maud reminds her that the baby she carries is not Billy's. Nan responds that "he's too full-blooded to care" (p. 252). The author goes on to explain through the narrator that a Cherokee man of that time period would typically act as a father-figure to his sister's children since he would know for certain they were related to him by blood, and so would not care who fathered the children in their own houses. Maud figures this may be one of the only good things about the way men in her life tend to come and go.

Maud does take marriage to Billy under serious consideration, but only because she thinks it may be her only option as the date she and Booker had set for their wedding comes and goes. In addition, while she looks for ways to rid herself of the baby, Maud starts to accept the fact that she will be a mother soon. The prospect frightens and disgusts her, particularly after she is pressed into service when Lucy goes into labor. She finds the whole process of birth extremely gross and after witnessing it, she becomes even more depressed about her situation. As her depression grows, Maud looks at the crack in her ceiling and it seems to grow as well, further supporting the idea that the crack represents Maud's state of mind.

Maud still cannot accept that she may never leave her allotment land, so in a fit of anger and frustration she grabs a pair of scissors and chops her hair to resemble the stylish bob that was popular among flappers in the 1920s. She also cuts her skirts to a shorter length like the dresses the women in the cities wear. Maud seems to have decided that if she cannot go to the city, she will bring some of the city to her.

At the end of the chapter, Billy brings his dog and some of his furniture to Maud's house. This causes Maud to burst into tears because she knows that Billy is settling into the role of her mate and her fate seems even more set in stone; she will be stuck on her allotment land for the rest of her life married to an Indian man who will never want to leave.

The other major event of this section is Lovely's death. The author builds a sense of impending doom leading up to Maud's discovery of Lovely's body. There is increasing mention of the fact that Lovely has been gone for a few days. Maud talks to several people about Lovely and no one has seen him, including Gilda who tells Maud that she and Lovely broke up because of his increasingly strange behavior. When Gilda tells Maud that Lovely did not take the break up well, the reader has a sense that Lovely may not simply be out wandering.

Lovely's body is found in the circle of trees where he has found solace before, which indicates that his death is most likely a suicide. He likely wanted to be in a place where he felt peace at the time of his death. While Lovely may have been seeking a peaceful death to escape his mental illness and avoid being institutionalized, the author portrays the event as somewhat violent. Lovely's clothes and boots are tattered and his bones have been chewed. This description brings to mind the murder of the Mounts since they were ultimately fed to the pigs and the doctor found only scraps of them.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Lovely kill himself? Why do you think he chose to do it in Blue's tree circle?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Maud cry when she finds out Billy is bringing furniture and a dog to her house?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Maud want to be rid of the baby?

Vocabulary

distracted, cluster, significance, reliable, errand, wince, protest, appalling, gourd, abort, resolved, routinely, glimpse, reassurance, disconnected, verses, bob, spanned, destiny, embankment



Chapter 7

Summary

As Chapter 7 begins, Maud returns home to find Billy in the barn and his dog guarding the front porch. Billy's furniture has been moved in and his trunk is sitting where Lovely's cot had been. Maud grows increasingly sad over Lovely's death and is comforted only when she and Billy have sex. However, the sex always ends in tears. She thinks about getting rid of the baby but does not want to go back to Blue's woods to get more squaw root. Nan still refuses to help her, so she asks Viola for help. Viola talks about how many Indians have died at the hands of white men and then ends the conversation. Maud receives a letter from her sister Peggy saying she saw Mustard recently. Maud does not receive any more letters from Booker and figures he is with a city woman.

Billy notices Maud's growing abdomen and comments on her pregnancy. Maud turns the conversation away from the baby and distracts him with sex. Maud starts jumping off the porch several times a day hoping that she will dislodge the baby. The sheriff comes to Maud's house and asks if Maud has seen Mustard. He tells her that Mustard was seen in the feed store. He says that Mustard's hand was badly injured and it appears he will not be able to work on the oil rigs any more.

Maud goes to Mr. Singer's house to return a book. Lizzie asks if she has heard from Booker and Maud is taken aback by the personal question. However, Lizzie has been nice to her so she talks to the woman. Maud then goes to Mr. Singer's library and borrows a medical dictionary hoping to find information about how to rid herself of the baby. As she walks home she feels the baby move and it makes her cry. Maud goes home and looks at the medical dictionary and discovers it is of no help. She thinks about how she has killed many animals, but has never killed anything she could not use. She had been raised to believe that killing for any other reason is wrong.

The next day Maud talks to Nan about the sheriff's visit. Nan says that Mustard came to see them after the sheriff left their house. Nan gives her some money that Mustard had left for her. Maud goes to talk to Ryde about what her father plans to do now. Ryde tells her that Mustard plans to go to the Cookson Hills to look up Pretty Boy Floyd, a criminal accused of robbery. Maud becomes even more irritated over the pregnancy and Billy stops showing interest in having sex with her. He finally explains that it seems wrong to have sex with her when she is pregnant, which gets her to admit that she is pregnant.

Maud becomes depressed over the next several days and stops doing any work around the house. Viola brings her a horse and suggests that if Maud rides the horse often she might miscarry. The horse's name is Leaf and she is a gentle creature. Maud rides the horse to Lovely's grave and tells him that if the baby is a boy and lives she will name it after him. Maud rides the horse every day, but does not miscarry. She resigns herself to the birth and tells herself that Billy will be a good father. Maud's grandfather gives her a



paper that moves her mother's allotment into her name and tells her to hang on to her allotment and not let any man take it from her.

Billy gives Maud a hand carved cradle for Christmas and she wonders if he does not understand that the baby is not his. Maud avoids going to Mr. Singer's house because she does not want them to feel sorry for her because of the pregnancy. However, she finally goes because she needs to return books. Lizzie asks her about the baby and she claims it is Billy's. Maud misses having Lovely to talk to about books and ideas, so she is glad she has Leaf to relieve her boredom. Maud and Billy spend New Year's Day at Bert's house. When they return home Maud sees car tracks in the dust, but there is no car in her yard. During the night she lies in bed hating the baby and wishes the crack in the ceiling would open her belly so she can take the baby out and give it to someone who wants it.

The next morning Maud sees a bright blue car drive up to the cattle guard. Maud hides behind a sheet hanging in the house. Booker finds her and tells her he has come for her. He says that Mr. Singer called him and told him about Maud's situation. Booker explains that he left to think about things. He did not feel he could adjust to Maud's way of life and having to lie to the law. Maud says that if living there is not good enough, perhaps she is not good enough. Booker says he thought she wanted to leave. Maud explains that what she really wants is to just be with people who love her and the place does not matter.

Booker asks if the baby is his and Maud says it is. He gives her a diamond ring. She tells him that Billy has been taking care of her. She worries about leaving him because he has been so good to her. They argue a bit about Maud's relationship with Billy. Finally, Booker convinces her to leave. She packs a few things. Before she goes, she leaves her allotment paper on the table with the word "yours" written on it.

Analysis

In the final chapter of the book Maud continues to be upset by her situation. She slides into a deep depression that causes her to cry often, which disturbs Billy. She and Billy also fight frequently, but their fights always end in sex. Maud desperately wants to rid herself of the baby she carries, but she cannot bring herself to go to get the squaw root she needs since it would require her to go back to the woods where Lovely died.

Maud does ask her aunts for help in aborting the baby, but both Nan and Viola refuse. While their refusal may seem out of place with the theme of family being there for one another, Verble explains their reluctance through a story told by Viola who talks about how many Indians have died at the hands of white people. She never comes right out and says "no" to Maud's request. Instead, she tells Maud that she will not play a part in ending the life of an Indian baby. In other words, she is telling Maud that Indians cannot afford to be killing one another when white people have already killed so many of them. Her story may also indicate that she believes that Booker, a white man, would also be at fault in the death of the baby since he left Maud.



Maud continues to look for ways to abort the baby and even resorts to jumping repeatedly off the porch thinking it may dislodge the baby. Maud's actions do not come without the repercussion of guilt for Maud. At one point, she thinks about how she has always been taught that the only reason to kill something is if there is a use for the thing being killed, such as killing an animal for food. She knows that killing for any other reason is wrong. As Maud grows more depressed, her view of the crack in the ceiling continues to reflect her mood. When she is at her worst and hating the baby she carries, she looks at the crack in the ceiling and imagines that it is a crack across her body. She wishes she could open it wider so that she could scoop the baby out of her belly and give it away.

Finally, when dependable Maud becomes so depressed that she even stops doing her chores around the house, her family intervenes in an attempt to help her. This is in keeping with the theme of family being there for one another. Maud's grandfather sends Viola to her with the gift of a horse. Viola tells Maud that riding the horse may help her dislodge the baby, but in reality the gift is more likely meant to give Maud some peace and a way to forget her troubles for a while. One of the first places Maud rides the horse to is Lovely's grave where she tells her brother that if the baby lives and is a boy, she will name it after him. This indicates that Maud probably knows that riding will not end her pregnancy and that she has begun to truly plan for her future with the baby. The horse gives Maud another living creature to bond with. In the end, Bert's gift serves to settle Maud and relieves some of her depression.

Maud's visit to Lovely's grave resolves the plot line regarding Lovely's mental illness since it represents her coming to terms with Lovely's death. She has come to believe that his death helped him to escape his troubles and that he is somewhere that is a better place, as is evidenced by the fact that she talks to him while at his graveside. Mustard's plot is resolved when he returns briefly to the area to leave some money for Maud with Nan and tell Ryde what he plans to do next. The author adds a detail here that further ensconces the book into the 1920s and provides some realism when she writes that Mustard plans to join up with the notorious criminal Pretty Boy Floyd, who was a famous bank robber of the time. Mustard does not take the time to see Maud while he is there, which ties into the theme of women keeping a family together while men wander. However, his leaving money for Maud shows that he still cares for her and is concerned about her welfare.

The final plot to be resolved is the story between Maud and Booker. When Booker returns, the author reveals why he left in the first place. Booker was disturbed by the involvement of Maud's family in a crime and the way they so easily lied to the law. He was not sure he could be with Maud if that is what life with her would require. He returns when he learns from Mr. Singer and Lizzie that Maud is pregnant and the baby is his. Not only does Booker love Maud, he also feels a sense of responsibility to her and her unborn child. Through Booker's return, the author returns to a familiar symbol in the bright blue color of Booker's vehicle, this time a car. Maud instantly knows by the color of the car approaching her house that it is Booker. Her initial reaction to his return is to hide from him. She is embarrassed about her condition and may feel guilty at having taken up with Billy in Booker's absence.



When the two reunite, the author gets in one last comment about the roles of women and men. When Maud explains to Booker that Billy has been taking care of her, he is upset by the notion that she has been sleeping with another man. Yet, when Maud questions him about whether or not he has been with other women, he replies, "It's different for a man" (p. 299). Maud does not immediately jump into Booker's arms and is even a bit hesitant about leaving with him. She is afraid that he has returned only because of the baby. She questions whether or not he really wants to be with her and if perhaps she is not good enough for him since where and how she lives obviously is not. Maud finally concludes that what she really wants from life is to be with people who love her and that all of the luxuries like a nice home do not matter if there is no love.

Maud's final act before leaving her allotment is a gesture that acknowledges how good Billy has been to her; she writes the word "yours" across her allotment papers and leaves them on the table. Though the author does not explicitly say it is Billy she is signing the land over to, it seems the logical conclusion since he is the only person she knows will be coming to her house. And, since she takes the cradle Billy carved with her, it is clear she harbors warm feeling for him and is grateful for the care he has shown her.

Discussion Question 1

How has Maud's relationship with Lizzie changed throughout the course of the book? Why has it changed?

Discussion Question 2

What conclusion does Maud come to about where and how she wants to live her life? What events have shaped her conclusion?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Maud leaving her allotment land to? Why does she do this?

Vocabulary

patrolling, hunkered, flapper, apparition, infuriated, chagrined, envisioned, distressed, resolved, arose, spigot, endured, complications, exception, anxious, neutered, arc, jabbering, saddled, sandstone



Characters

Maud

Maud is a beautiful young woman who is a member of the Cherokee nation, though of mixed blood. She lives with her father, Mustard, and her brother, Lovely, on her mother's Indian allotment land in Oklahoma. Life there is hard for Maud and she feels surrounded by violence, especially in the wake of the murder of the Mount boys. Her home is shabby and has no running water or electricity. She longs for a better life in the city where she can be educated, have all of the luxuries she imagines city people have, and get away from the violence that surrounds her. She is well read and often borrows books from her neighbor, Mr. Singer, which she often discusses with Lovely.

Maud is a very practical woman who thinks quickly to save the meat from a cow she has to put down and is always mindful of doing her chores around the house. However, when she meets Booker, a handsome and educated white man who comes into town as a peddler, she throws caution to the wind and enters into a relationship with him that leads to an unwanted pregnancy. After Booker leaves town, Maud seeks solace in an affair with Billy, an Indian boy she has known all her life. Her practical nature returns to some extent and though she tries to cause a miscarriage, she eventually decides that Billy might make a good father for her baby and so she tries to pass the unborn baby off as his.

By the time Booker returns, Maud has come to the realization that it does not matter where she lives as long as she is surrounded by people who love her. She feels a loyalty to Billy for his kindness, but she is in love with Booker, so she leaves Billy her allotment land and runs away to the city with Booker.

Lovely

Lovely is Maud's brother. He is described as having a gentle nature, which often puts him at odds with his father, Mustard. When the family's cow is gravely injured, Lovely is incapable of putting the animal down because he cannot bring himself to shoot her. When Lovely buries a dead dog left in the family's house by the Mount brothers, there is some speculation about whether or not he has contracted rabies since it is rumored that one of the Mount brothers was bitten by a rabid dog. As Lovely is treated for having come into contact with the rabies virus, he begins to act strangely; he sees relatives who have passed away and hears voices. This eventually causes his girlfriend to break up with him.

Lovely does not recover from his illness and fears that he is going crazy. He goes to a circle of trees in Blue's woods that has special meaning to him and takes his own life. Maud finds his body and believes he has killed himself to avoid being institutionalized.



Booker

Booker is a white man who comes into town as a peddler. He is well read and he and Maud bond when talking about the books that Booker sells. Booker is well educated and is a school teacher in Arkansas when he is not peddling. Booker likes the rebellious feeling of having an Indian maiden for a girlfriend, but he is disturbed by the violence that exists in Maud's life. When her father is suspected of murdering the Mount brothers, Booker finds himself needing time to think, so he leaves. Though he leaves Maud a letter explaining his feelings, the letter is ruined and she is unable to read it. As a result, Booker never hears from Maud and thinks she is angry with him. However, when he learns of her pregnancy, he returns and convinces her to come away to the city with him.

Mustard

Mustard is Maud's father, a hot-headed man who loves to fight and hates to work. He often comes home drunk and bruised from having been in a fight. Mustard doles out "fatherly advice" that revolves around fighting, drinking, and dishonesty. But, he does love his children and when Lovely is believed to have contracted rabies because of the dead dog the Mounts left in the kitchen, Mustard seeks revenge. This leads to him being suspected in the murders of the Mounts and needing to leave town just when Maud is struggling with her unwanted pregnancy and having been left behind by Booker. Mustard returns briefly and leaves money for Maud with Nan. He then goes off to seek out Pretty Boy Floyd and join up with the outlaw.

Billy

Billy is the Indian boy that Maud seeks solace in when Booker leaves town. Billy is a good looking young man that Maud has known all her life. At one point, Maud uses him simply to make Booker jealous, but then finds herself in a sexual relationship with him after Booker leaves and she feels lonely. Billy genuinely loves Maud and treats her well. It is unclear whether or not he knows that the baby Maud is carrying is not his own, but Maud speculates that he will not care anyway because of Indian customs. When Booker returns to take Maud away with him, Maud leaves Billy her allotment land.

Nan

Nan is one of Maud's aunts. She and her husband Ryde live close to Maud. Maud often spends time with Nan and tries to convince her to help rid herself of the unwanted baby. However, Nan refuses to help.



Ryde

Ryde is Nan's uncle and is married to Nan. He is Mustard's closest friend and goes with Mustard to seek revenge against the Mounts; however, he is not actually involved in the deaths. When Mustard returns to the area briefly, Ryde is the one he seeks out to discuss his plans before he heads out again.

John and Claude Mount

John and Claude Mount are brothers who are feuding with Maud's family. They take an axe to the back of the cow Maud's family owns and leave the creature to suffer and die. This sets off a chain of events that leads to Mustard seeking revenge against them. When Claude tries to shoot Mustard he misses and shoots John instead. Mustard then shoots Claude and leaves town to avoid arrest. Maud is caught up in the murders when she discovers the bodies.

Mr. Singer

Mr. Singer is a wealthy man who lives near Maud. He owns an extensive collection of books and often lends them to Maud. When Booker is accused of burning down the school Mr. Singer bails him out of jail and gives him a job. It is Mr. Singer who eventually informs Booker of Maud's pregnancy.

Lizzie

Lizzie is Mr. Singer's housekeeper. She is a black woman, which gives Maud pause in developing a relationship with her. However, she proves to be a kindly woman and the two build something of a friendship over the numerous times Maud visits Mr. Singer's house to borrow books and glean information about Booker. Lizzie tells Booker that the baby Maud is carrying is his.

Bert

Bert is Maud's beloved grandfather who believes that his grandchildren need to be educated to break out of the lives they currently live. When Maud discovers the bodies of the Mount brothers it is Bert she goes to for help.

Ame

Ame is Bert's brother and Maud's great-uncle. He helps Bert to get rid of the bodies of the Mounts and also helps with the retrieval and burial of Lovely's body.



Viola

Viola is Ame's wife. She is the first in the family to find out about Maud's pregnancy since Lovely fetches her to help Maud when she suffers from morning sickness. When Maud becomes depressed about the pregnancy, Viola brings her a horse to ride saying that it might cause the baby to abort.

Renee

Renee is Nan's daughter and Maud's younger cousin. Renee is sent to deliver the news of one of the Mounds having been bitten by a rabid dog to Maud.

Gilda

Gilda is Lovely's girlfriend. She is from a Christian family and convinces Lovely to read the Bible. When Lovely's odd behavior becomes too much for her, she breaks up with him.

Dr. Ragsdale

Dr. Ragsdale is the man who discovers the Mounds' bodies after Bert and Ame attempt to dispose of them by feeding them to the hogs. He is one of the first people outside of the family to comment on Lovely's strange behavior.

Sheriff Talley

Sheriff Talley is responsible for investigating the murder of the Mounds. He frequently visits Maud's house to question her about her father's whereabouts.



Symbols and Symbolism

Blue Wagon Cover

Booker's bright blue wagon cover symbolizes happiness for Maud. When she first sees it, she is certain no one would ever choose that color unless they wanted to make people happy. While Booker is town, Maud continuously looks for the blue of his wagon cover in hopes of seeing him, and each time she sees it, it makes her happy. Maud first realizes that Booker is gone when she looks for the blue of his wagon cover at Mr. Singer's and does not see it. After that, she becomes depressed about her future. When Booker finally returns, it is in a bright blue car. His return and assurance that he loves her and wants to marry her makes Maud happy again.

Snakes

Snakes are significant to Maud because they represent the violence that surrounds her life on the Indian allotment land. Maud cannot go out of the house without at least carrying a stick to frighten the poisonous snakes away. Maud is especially wary of snakes because her mother died from a snake bite.

Dead Dog

The dead dog Maud finds on her kitchen table represents the feud between her family and the Mounts. The dog is believed to have transmitted rabies to Lovely and is the cause of Mustard going to seek revenge against the Mounts, which leads to Mustard murdering Claude Mount and leaving town.

Books

Books are a symbol of education. Maud is a voracious reader and seeks to educate herself by the only means possible, reading Mr. Singer's vast collection of books. When a handsome peddler aptly named Booker comes to town and proves to be an educated school teacher, Maude immediately falls in love with him and sees him as a way to escape her difficult life.

Crack in the Ceiling

The crack in the ceiling above the bed in Maud's house is a symbol of Maud's state of mind as the story progresses. When it is first mentioned, Maud sees it as a road to Oklahoma City and beyond. She is still hopeful about her future and believes she will eventually leave for a better life. After she begins to fear that Booker will not return and she accepts that she is pregnant, she sees it as a snake. Later, as her pregnancy



progresses, she looks at the crack and imagines it is a crack across her body that she wishes she could open up so that she can take the baby out and give it to someone who wants it.

Maud's House

Maud's house is a symbol of her embarrassment over the hardscrabble life she lives. Maud does not allow Booker into her house at first and is mortified when he goes in when she is not home. She worries that he will see the cardboard that covers holes and the overall shabbiness of the place and judge her for it.

Cradle

The cradle that Billy carves for Maud's baby is a symbol of his love for her. It is unclear whether or not he knows the baby that she carries is not his, but he loves her and takes the time to carve a cradle, which he gives her for Christmas. When she eventually leaves with Booker, Maud takes the cradle with her, perhaps taking a bit of the love Billy has shown for her with her also.

Shared Meals

Maud's large extended family often shares meals where everyone brings a dish to pass. These meals are a symbol of the way that Maud's family is always there for her and provides her comfort regardless of what is going on in her life.

Banjo Lighter

Mustard's Banjo lighter is a symbol of Mustard himself. He carries the lighter with him wherever he goes. When Maud finds the lighter next to the Mounts' bodies, she knows for certain her father was involved in their killings. When Maud retrieves it from the scene, she hopes to erase evidence of her father having been there. However, when the sheriff later visits her house she knows the fact that the lighter is there and Mustard is not is evidence in itself, so she tries to hide the lighter from him.

Woodbury Soap

Maud covets the Woodbury soap that Booker sells from his peddler's wagon. For Maud, it represents luxury and beauty, two things she is sure she can have if she is ever able to leave the Indian allotment land.



Settings

Oklahoma

The main setting of the novel is the state of Oklahoma, specifically eastern Oklahoma. Maud and her family live on their Indian allotment land in the river bottoms. They live in a rural area and farm the land. The area is crawling with poisonous snakes making it dangerous for Maud to go walking without carrying a stick to scare off the snakes. Maud hates the rural area she lives in and longs to move to the city where she believes she can live a better life with indoor plumbing, electricity, and an education.

Maud's House

Maud's house is a ramshackle building that she shares with her father and brother. She is embarrassed by the poor condition of the house and is reluctant to let anyone outside of the family inside. There are pieces of cardboard covering holes. Maud often lies in bed looking at a crack in the ceiling above the bed. The house has a porch that she and Lovely often sit on while reading books. When people come to Maud's house they are generally entertained on the porch and in the surrounding yard.

Mr. Singer's House

Mr. Singer's house is one of the nicer houses in the area as he is a wealthy man in comparison to Maud's family. He has a large library from which he often lends Maud books. He also has a housekeeper, which indicates he is somewhat wealthy. Mr. Singer's house is also located on a farm and he has a barn from which he sells potatoes. Maud spends time at Mr. Singer's house when she goes to borrow books and, later, to talk to Mr. Singer and Miss Lizzie often after Booker disappears.

Booker's Wagon

Booker's wagon is covered by a bright blue tarp that catches Maud's attention from the moment she sees it. Booker lives out of the wagon as he goes from place to place peddling his wares. Inside he has set it up so that he can sleep between the shelves that display his wares and he sometimes takes shelter from the rain in there while he reads books. One side of the wagon is covered in books and the other side contains general items such as thread, cloth, and soaps.

Nan's House

Nan lives within visual distance from Maud's house, so Maud often spends time there. The author provides very little description of the house, but the reader can assume it is

somewhat like Maud's house. Maud finds spending time at Nan's among her cousins and other extended family members comforting as it is a familiar place.



Themes and Motifs

Family Is There for One Another

One of the major themes in *Maud's Line* is that of family being there for one another. At the beginning of the book, Maud shares her house with her father and brother on her mother's allotment land. Their home is surrounded by several extended family members on the neighboring allotment lands. Their family is close knit and sticks together through some very difficult situations.

As the novel begins, Mustard is shown to be a father who loves his children, but he has some serious flaws. He is frequently drunk and enjoys fighting. He has very little work ethic. He is hot-tempered, so Maud and Lovely have learned to be careful of their father's moods. In spite of all his flaws, Maud respects him as her father and takes care of him. On one occasion, he stumbles in late at night and passes out on the floor. Maud gets out of bed to place a pillow under his head so that he can sleep comfortably. The next morning she helps him to eat his breakfast when he is too shaky to hold his coffee cup without spilling.

Maud is an excellent example of a person who is there for her family not only in the treatment of her father, but also in the way she takes care of Lovely through his physical illness and his deteriorating mental health. She does her best to keep him safe and is patient with him when he exhibits odd behavior like wanting to sleep in the chicken coop.

Maud also cares for the members of her extended family in that twice during the course of the novel she invites them all over for meals at her house. This is in spite of the fact that Maud has very little of her own, yet she shares the meat she has with those she loves. In return, they bring dishes to add to the meal. The mood at these meals is always congenial and that of a loving family enjoying each other's company.

When Maud struggles after her father is suspected in the murder of the Mounts and she is left to care for Lovely on her own, her extended family steps in to help her. Maud's grandfather, Bert, and her great uncle, Ame, try to help Maud and Mustard by disposing of the Mounts' bodies. This shows that they are standing by their family members since their involvement could also get them into trouble with the law. Later, when Lovely begins to act strangely and wander off for extended periods of time, Maud's extended family offers advice and comfort. And, when Lovely is found dead, they retrieve his body and take care of the burial so that Maud will not have to.

Revenge is Destructive

Throughout the novel, the author shows how revenge is a destructive force. Maud's family feuds with the Mount brothers. When they take an axe to the back of one of Maud's cows, a cycle of revenge begins. Mustard takes revenge on the Mounts by



killing some of their pigs. In turn, the Mounts then leave a dead rabid dog on Maud's kitchen table. When Lovely is thought to have contracted rabies from the dead dog, Mustard and Ryde go to the Mounts' farm to exact revenge. When Claude Mount tries to shoot Mustard, he misses and shoots his own brother and then Mustard shoots him.

This cycle of revenge not only leads to the death of two men, but it results in Mustard running from the law leaving Maud and Lovely to fend for themselves. Maud's life is disrupted by the escalating violence of these acts of revenge until she fears that she, too, could be arrested. Maud feels a need to keep her father safe, so she picks up his Banjo lighter, which has been left at the scene of the crime, and tells her grandfather about the murders knowing that he will take care of the bodies. For the remainder of the novel, Maud is plagued by visits from the sheriff looking for her father. These visits keep Maud on edge and she constantly fears that her role in the hiding of evidence will be discovered.

The cycle of revenge is also destructive to Maud's relationship with Booker. Booker is disturbed by Maud's family's involvement in the murders. Maud lies to Booker when he asks if she thinks Mustard was involved and hides details of the murder from him, such as having covered the bodies with quilts. Booker's love for Maud leads him to lie to the sheriff when he comes looking for Booker. When all of this becomes too much for Booker, he decides he needs to think more about being involved with Maud and leaves town. Maud does not know where he has gone or why, so she eventually becomes depressed at having been left alone and pregnant.

Women Keep Families Together

Maud's Line explores the ways in women keep families together by looking at the interactions between men and women in Maud's family. Throughout the novel there is a great deal of mention of men "laying out," which means that they temporarily live elsewhere while seeing women (or "sparking" as it is called in the novel). This is apparently very common, even causing Booker to comment on the number of men from Maud's family who are missing. One of Maud's uncles, Gourd, never really makes an appearance in the novel, but is mentioned often because his house lays vacant while he is "laying out" with his current love interest. Booker even teases Maud that perhaps Gourd does not even exist.

Maud is left to keep her family together as best as she can when Mustard leaves after having killed Claude Mount. She takes care of the house and animals while also looking after her ailing brother. She continues to care for the house even after Lovely starts to wander off.

Maud is frustrated at being trapped in the traditional role of a woman in the Cherokee tribe. She longs to break free and get away. She feels as though the baby she carries will tie her down and make it impossible for her to achieve her dreams. When her attempts to abort the baby are unsuccessful, Maud begins to accept her responsibility



as a woman and contemplates marrying Billy, whom her family frequently tells her will be a good father and husband.

Education is the Key to a Better Life

One of the themes in Maud's Line is the idea that education is the key to a better life. Maud is well-read and thirsty for knowledge, yet she knows she lacks the formal education she would need to truly change her life. Maud tries to learn as much as she can through reading, often going to borrow books of all kinds from Mr. Singer's extensive library. She has read countless books by a number of classic authors and enjoys discussing the books with Lovely. After Lovely dies, one of the things Maud misses most about him is having someone to talk about books with.

Mr. Singer represents what an education can do for a person, regardless of their ethnicity. Mr. Singer is also an Indian, yet he is clearly educated and that has led to him living a comfortable life and being treated with deference by others in the community. He is respected by those around him and can afford luxuries like books and a housekeeper.

Maud's reverence for education is one of the things that causes her to fall in love with Booker, who is an educated school teacher. When she learns of Booker's vocation, the author describes Maud as thinking of the title "school teacher" in the same way that one might think of the title "priest." Maud sees him as a way of breaking free of her hardscrabble life. She longs to move to the city where she can have the luxuries that a good job can afford, like electricity, indoor plumbing, and an education.

The elders in Maud's family also see the value of an education for the younger generation. Both Bert and Ame were raised with no formal education and neither can read. They want the younger people in their family to pursue an education and Maud remembers Bert encouraging her to read as a child by sitting and listening to her read aloud. Maud's aunts comment on the way that they are trying to raise the younger generation for education rather than violence.

Racism Exists in All Ethnicities

Through Verble's telling of Maud's story, she provides several examples of the ways people in all ethnicities hold certain prejudices or racist views. While a reader might initially expect to find ways in which whites hold racist views toward Native Americans in the story of a Cherokee woman, Verble makes a point of showing that some Native Americans have their own prejudiced views, too. Maud's family frequently mentions that they do not interact with other tribes, even going so far as to say they hate some of them. For example, Ryde misdirects the sheriff to the Osage Hills when he is searching for Mustard knowing full well that Mustard would never go there because he hates the Indians of that area. These tribal prejudices have even resulted in Maud not knowing the last name of one of her aunts because she is a Seminole.



Maud also has been raised to be wary of white people. She and her family believe that the laws have been written for white people and that Indians are only hurt by them. Her mother taught her to tell white people that she is a Christian if she is asked so that she can avoid any trouble with them. Maud's aunt Nan even refuses to speak to white people and has her children speak for her when Booker comes to sell her wares from his peddler's wagon.

When Maud meets Miz Lizzie, Mr. Singer's black housekeeper, she is uncertain of how to react to the woman. She believes that adult black people do not mingle with anyone outside their race, so she is reluctant to speak with the woman. However, her prejudices are broken down when Lizzie proves to be a kindly woman.

Styles

Point of View

Maud's Line is told in third person limited point of view from the perspective of Maud. The author does not reveal what characters other than Maud are thinking or feeling except by their actions. The reader's view of characters other than Maud are colored by Maud's own perception of the people she comes into contact with. Telling the story from Maud's perspective allows the reader to connect with Maud as a character and understand her life and dreams for a better future. The story is told in past tense, which is appropriate since the story is set in the 1920's. The plot is developed in a straight line format with no flashbacks except when Maud has a brief memory of her mother's death. This event is not told in a scene, but rather as a thought Maud has while the plot of the story continues to move forward in time.

Language and Meaning

The language of Maud's Line is straight forward and simple, reflecting Maud's lifestyle and education. There is a moderate amount of dialogue interspersed among longer passages of descriptive text. The dialogue is written to reflect the accent of the people of the time in Oklahoma. For example, "fer" is used in place of "for." Characters from outside of the area of who are of a higher education level than Maud and her family, such as Booker and Mr. Singer, are written without the use of the Oklahoma accent.

Structure

Maud's Line consists of seven chapters that are numbered rather than titled. Chapters are each approximately 40 pages in length. The main plot of the story follows Maud through her love affair with Booker and the resulting pregnancy. There are two subplots: the murder of the Mount brothers and Lovely's decline into mental illness.

Quotes

And the Mounts' mama, Ame claimed in almost a whisper, had more than a little Comanche in her.

-- Ame (chapter 1)

Importance: Ame says this when the family is talking about who might have injured the cow. This statement shows that there is animosity between the different tribes.

Maud and Lovely were used to Mustard's parental advice. It included 'Cut up, not crossways,' 'Hit 'em before they know yer mad,' and 'Stomp 'em if you can; yer a lot less likely to break a hand.' They saw his recommendations as signs of affection but tried not to dwell on them.

-- Narrator (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote exemplifies Mustard's personality as well as the relationship that he has with his children. Mustard is a man who loves to fight and who also loves his children, so he believes giving them advice about how to fight will help them. The children, however, recognize his advice as loving, but know better than to fall into a life of violence as he has.

She did hope there was a force that would propel her into a better life, but she felt like that could only be a combination of pleasing looks, some education, and her wits.

-- Narrator (chapter 2)

Importance: This quote occurs after Maud has a discussion with Lovely about reading the Bible. Maud does not believe in any particular religion. Instead, she believes in the power of education combined with her own ingenuity to get her ahead in the world and out of the hardscrabble life she has been living.

Next to the heel was her father's lighter.

-- Narrator (chapter 3)

Importance: This quote occurs when Maud discovers the bodies of the Mount brothers. The fact that the lighter is left at the scene of the murder is important because it is proof that Mustard was involved in the crime since he does not go anywhere without his lighter.

The whole world was booming. And she was scaring buzzards away from human meat.

-- Narrator (chapter 3)

Importance: This quote occurs shortly after Maud finds the Mounts' bodies. She is thinking about the way her mother was thankful for the simple things she had, but Maud is different. Maud wants more than what life has to offer in Oklahoma. She longs to live in the city where people have electricity and progress is being made and there is not so much violence.



We ain't raising you kids fer killing. We're raising ya fer book learning.
-- Nan (chapter 4)

Importance: Nan says this to Maud after Bert and Ame dispose of the Mounts' bodies. Maud is feeling guilty because it was she who put the quilts over the bodies so that Bert and Ame had to burn them, which causes suspicion when the sheriff found scraps of the quilts in the still. Nan is explaining to Maud that no one expects her to know how to handle a murder since they have been trying to raise the younger generation to rely on education rather than violence. This quote is an example of the theme of education being the key to a better life.

If I worried about every disappeared man in your family, I wouldn't have any space left in my head.
-- Booker (chapter 4)

Importance: Booker says this to Maud after she urges him to worry about Lovely being missing rather than the murders. At this point, several of the men in Maud's family are gone, which provides an example of the theme of women keeping families together while the men leave.

If Booker didn't return, a baby would tie her to the bottoms, the heat, the dirt, and the hardship, for the rest of her life.
-- Narrator (chapter 5)

Importance: This quote occurs after Booker leaves and Maud discovers she is pregnant with his baby. Maud is distraught over the pregnancy because she knows that having a baby on her own will ruin her chances of changing her life.

Maud began to feel the comfort that familiarity and family bring, a comfort she sorely needed.
-- Narrator (chapter 5)

Importance: This quote occurs after Maud has been to Mr. Singer's house looking for information about Booker. She is unsettled and worried about her future, but after spending time with her aunts doing ordinary things and chatting, she feels better. This quote is an example of the theme of family being there for one another. At a time when Maud is feeling low, her family lifts her spirits.

But he was no wild Indian with movement in his veins; he was a Cherokee, and a fairly full-blooded one. As forward thinking as he seemed, he would eventually, she thought, want to squat on a piece of land, hug it like a blanket, and not give it up.
-- Narrator (chapter 6)

Importance: This quote is about Billy. Although Maud feels genuine affection for Billy and believes he would be a good father to her baby, the prospect of a life with him makes her feel stuck. She knows that if she stays with Billy, she will never achieve her dream of a better life.



She knew Cherokee men weren't too bothered by who'd fathered the children in their own homes. Mostly, they parented their sisters' kids, their certain blood kin. That, Maud supposed, was the upside to their everlasting comings and goings.

-- Narrator (chapter 6)

Importance: This quote refers to the possibility of Billy acting as the father of Maud's baby. Nan suggests that Billy would make a good father, but Maud says the baby is not his. Nan points out that most Cherokee men do not care about such things. This quote plays into the theme of women staying and men leaving because it indicates there may be an upside to the behavior, at least in Maud's case.

I want to be with people who love me. That's more important than plaster on walls and rugs on floors.

-- Maud (chapter 7)

Importance: This is the conclusion that Maud comes to when Booker finally returns. She realizes that regardless of her surroundings, she can only be happy if she is loved. Only after Booker convinces Maud that he does love her does she make the decision to leave with him.