

Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind: A Novel Study Guide

Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind: A Novel by Ann B. Ross

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Plot Summary

Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind is the entertaining tale of Julia Springer, a widow in her sixties prepared to enjoy a life of solitude and happiness, in part because her demanding and judgmental husband has passed, and in part because he has left a large estate that Julia had no idea existed. Despite her intentions, Julia's life is turned upside down when the illegitimate son of her deceased husband turns up on her doorstep.

Julia Springer lives a quiet life, the widow of one of the most respected men in town. After forty-four years as Mrs. Wesley Lloyd Springer, Julia has grown accustomed to the respect of those around her and spends quite a bit of her time judging her neighbors. Things change dramatically one morning when Hazel Marie Puckett arrives on her doorstep with Wesley Lloyd's son, telling Julia that since Wesley Lloyd has left them with nothing, she needs to travel to Raleigh and get some type of job training. Without much more information, Hazel leaves the boy with a stunned Julia and drives away.

Distraught over what her friends and neighbors will think, Julia discusses things with Lillian, her housekeeper, who is also her closest friend despite their very different lifestyles and upbringing. Julia also consults Deputy Coleman Bates, her boarder since Wesley Lloyd passed away. All agree that it is better to face the problem of Little Lloyd's paternity head on to avoid whispered gossip, and Bates will look into the whereabouts of Hazel Marie quietly.

As if the arrival of an unknown child is not enough to deal with, Larry Ledbetter, the pastor at Julia's church, seems intent on getting his hands on the money that Wesley Lloyd did not leave to the church. After appealing to Julia's sense of responsibility to the parish, Ledbetter tries another tactic, enlisting Dr. Fred Fowler to meet with Julia and decide whether she is competent to care for herself. The two men arrange to put Julia in a compromising position, and when she misconstrues Fowler's intentions, Ledbetter accuses her of being a danger to the men in town. If Julia will allow someone to be her guardian, then Ledbetter would never have to reveal her dark secrets.

Little Lloyd is taken by his uncle, Vernon Puckett, a televangelist, supposedly to see his mother, but when Hazel Marie arrives, beaten and battered, Julia realizes that yet another man has taken her for a fool. Comedy ensues as Julia, Lillian, and Hazel Marie get the boy back from Brother Vern.

Throughout it all, Julia relies on her friends, including her lawyers, Sam and Binkie. Binkie handles most things for Julia these days, but Sam has been a friend for a long time, and seems to want to be more. Julia has no idea how to deal with this situation, so for the most part she ignores it. Despite her wariness, it is Sam who Julia turns to when things begin to be too much to take.

The money that Julia inherited, that everyone seems to be trying to get their hands on, is also the means to her freedom from all her new troubles. The discovery of a new will



leaving everything to Little Lloyd effectively ends Pastor Ledbetter's conniving plans to part Julia from her money. Brother Vern can lay no claims to the money or the boy, ending Hazel Marie's danger. Though Julia believes that she will be destitute, Sam informs her that she will not, as state law requires that the wife get half of an estate.

In the end, Julia and Hazel Marie wind up living in Julia's home, along with Little Lloyd. The two women share the estate of Wesley Lloyd, as they had shared him in life, though Julia had no knowledge of her husband's mistress or son until the fateful day they had arrived on her doorstep. Julia, once a judgmental and unforgiving woman by nature, has changed, happy to share the fortune her husband had left as well as the family she has always wanted and that her husband will never enjoy.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

In chapter one, Julia Springer, a widow in her late sixties, starts another normal day, spending time catalog shopping, happily settled into her life as the widow of a prominent and important man, Wesley Lloyd Springer. Wesley Lloyd had been buried several months earlier after Julia found him dead of a heart attack in his new Buick. The shock of her husband dying was quickly followed by the shock of the fortune he had left behind. Though Julia has never dealt with anything financial before, she learns quickly, despite the fact that many people, including her church, feel that she should not be handling such a fortune.

As Lillian, Julia's housekeeper of twenty years, prepares lunch in the kitchen, Julia is interrupted by the doorbell. Prepared to tell the woman at the door that she does not want anything she is selling, Julia is floored when the woman tells her that the boy with her is Wesley Lloyd's son and he needs to stay with Julia so that she can go and get trained to do nails in Raleigh. The woman explains that Wesley Lloyd has left her nothing and she has no choice. Thrusting a birth certificate under Julia's nose, the boy's birth mother and father are seen in print: Wesley Lloyd Springer and Hazel Marie Puckett. Before Julia can react, the woman tells the boy to behave and runs to the waiting car. Julia fruitlessly yells after the woman, then when Lillian arrives to see what the fuss is about, tells her to meet what else Wesley Lloyd has left her.

In chapter two, Julia tells Lillian to call the sheriff about the boy. Lillian reminds Julia that by calling the police and making a fuss the entire town will know her business within minutes. Julia relents, but wakes Deputy Coleman Bates, the boarder she had taken in after her husband's death.

Julia explains the situation to Bates and he agrees that it is quite a tale. Asking if Julia had any idea about her husband's secret, Julia vehemently denies any knowledge, saying that no one had any idea. Turning to Lillian for confirmation, Julia is floored when her housekeeper tells Julia that there have been rumors around town for years. The thought that her neighbors have been pitying her or laughing at her is very hard to bear.

In chapter three, Deputy Bates suggests that Julia call the Department of Social Services to take the boy off her hands. Lillian tells Julia that by calling the State the entire town would have proof of the rumors they have heard for years. Julia tries to decide what to do, even considering telling people that the boy is Wesley Lloyd's nephew. Lillian reminds her that the town knows the family history of the Springer family and no one would believe it. After much thought, Julia decides that since she has been stuck with Little Lloyd, she will not shirk her duties as a Christian woman, and will take care of him proudly. At the very least her husband will suffer due to his pride. When Deputy Bates questions how a dead man can suffer, Julia reminds him that Wesley



Lloyd Springer believed in eternal life, and as such, will have to see the way Julia handles the cross she has been given to bear.

In chapter four, Julia calls Sam Murdoch, her friend and retired attorney. The two have been friends since Julia moved to Abbotsville forty-four years ago as Wesley Lloyd's bride. Julia and her husband, along with Sam and his deceased wife Mildred, had spent many afternoons together over the years.

Sam arrives and Julia tells him what has been happening all morning. Once again, Julia is mortified to discover that Sam has also heard the tales about Wesley Lloyd and another woman. Julia is upset that Sam has never told her, but her friend explains that going to Julia with a rumor would not have been the right thing to do. The two discuss things and Julia tells Sam of her plans to keep Little Lloyd while Deputy Bates looks for his mother through unofficial channels.

Julia angrily asks Sam why Wesley Lloyd did not provide for the child and his mother. As the money in the estate had been a shock to Julia, she would not have known if her husband had used some of it to take care of his other family. Sam believes that Wesley Lloyd was a controlling man, one who would not admit fault, or give up control over anything.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

The reader is introduced to the lead character in the novel, Miss Julia Springer, a strong, god fearing, Christian woman with a very strong sense of right and wrong. In Miss Julia's life, there are no grey areas, things are either right, or they are not. Julia is a proud woman, recently widowed after having spent forty-four years married to Wesley Lloyd Springer, an important man in town, which by extension made Julia an important woman. In those forty-four years, Julia did everything that Wesley Lloyd asked, working hard to be the wife that he required, someone to make him proud. Despite this, Julia discovers that her husband was not all that he seemed.

The arrival of Little Lloyd on her doorstep throws Julia's life into turmoil. The discovery that Wesley Lloyd had been involved with another woman over the past ten years and had fathered a child is obviously a shock. Oddly, Julia is more upset about what the information will do to her reputation in town than her husband's betrayal over the past decade. The only part about her husband's betrayal that seems to bother her is that people in town would think that she was somehow lacking as a wife and her husband had only done what any 'normal' man would.

Julia does not seem to be a cruel woman, and can be excused for her lack of concern for the feelings of Little Lloyd when he is left on her doorstep by his mother, Hazel Puckett. The boy's problems seem minuscule in comparison to Julia's, and she has no time to coddle the product of her husband's infidelity. Wanting nothing more than the boy gone, Julia does not do the logical thing by calling the State, because the resulting gossip in town would be too much and would ruin her reputation.



When Julia discovers that there have rumors around town for years about her husband seeing another woman, it is almost more than she can take. Having always been proud of her husband, Julia realizes that she had been walking through town with her head held high while others might have been questioning the very reason for her pride.

The reader is also introduced to other important characters in the novel, one being Lillian, Julia's housekeeper. Lillian has worked for Julia for twenty years and the two share a friendship as well, despite their racial and cultural differences. Julia admits that Lillian is a smart woman, with common sense, something that she herself obviously lacks. Lillian has a mind of her own and is not afraid to express her opinions, something that Julia is loath to do.

Hazel Marie Puckett also makes a brief appearance, when she leaves her son with Julia. The woman is obviously unhappy about the situation, and apologizes for having to do so, but has no other choice. The brief view the reader is granted of the other woman early in the novel does not cast her in a bad light, and it allows one to see another side of the life of Wesley Lloyd Springer, however brief.

The reader learns that Julia rents a room to Deputy Coleman Bates at the suggestion of her attorney and friend, Sam Murdoch. Julia does not need the money, as her husband has left her very wealthy, but Sam does not want his friend to live alone and unprotected, knowing that there are people in the world who would try to take advantage of a widow in her late sixties.

Sam Murdoch is a good friend of Julia's, a widower himself, and clearly cares for her. One is left to wonder, by the comments that Sam sometimes makes, if he would like to be more than friends with Julia. Julia has no intention of becoming involved with anyone, and seems ignorant of the comments that Sam makes, considering them friendly teasing.

Though deceased, the reader gets a clear picture of the type of man that Wesley Lloyd Springer was. Wesley Lloyd was a man in control, one who did not like change of any kind, and never varied from routine. Though he was unfaithful to his wife of forty-four years, even his infidelity was kept to a strict schedule, meeting with Hazel and his son every Thursday for ten years while Julia believed he was working late, preparing for the Friday board meeting at the bank he owned in town. Wesley Lloyd was controlling, and demanded perfection from all those around him, including his wife. Ironically, Mr. Springer displayed the fact that he was imperfect quite clearly.



Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary

In chapter five, Julia asks Sam about whether or not her husband had planned on leaving his estate to the church, as the pastor, Larry Ledbetter, had told Julia. Sam tells Julia that Wesley Lloyd had never mentioned anything of the kind to him, but that there has been talk at the church of contesting the will on the grounds that a verbal promise to the clergy should have some type of weight. Sam also tells Julia that this is another reason he has resigned as an Elder with the church. Trying to separate a widow from her estate, one that Sam is executor of, does not sit well with him. The two go on to discuss the fact that Julia should speak with Binkie Enloe, the attorney that has taken over the practice since Sam's retirement and see what she has heard from Hazel Puckett.

Julia considers the fact that she would have done something about her husband's infidelity if she had known about it, but she had not. Julia believed for forty-four years that she had a happy marriage, though it had not been based on romance but on common sense. Wesley Lloyd had met Julia at the age of twenty-three, still living at home in South Carolina. Looking for a certain type of woman that would support his reputation and provide the type of home he envisioned, Wesley Lloyd had presented his proposal in a business-like manner. Julia had accepted, believing that the two would make a good match. As far as she had known, their life had been happy. Evidently something had been lacking for her husband.

In chapter six, Julia and Little Lloyd head to Binkie Enloe's office after Julia spends a sleepless night worrying about what people will say about her. At the office, Binkie tells Julia that no one, including the church, has filed any lawsuits as of yet, but she has heard some rumors. As there is little that can be done before someone files suit, Binkie tells Julia to let her know if she hears from the boy's mother.

In chapter seven, Julia takes Little Lloyd for a haircut, where the men in the barbershop are speechless. Leonard Conover is also there and speaks to Julia about the possibility of signing her house over to the church as it might be too much for her in her advancing years. Julia quickly puts him in his place, and instructs the barber to give the boy a haircut just like his father, confirming his identity to anyone who had doubts.

Arriving home, Julia finds LuAnne Conover waiting, distraught for her friend at the events that have taken place. Julia calmly questions why a friend would not have told her about the rumors regarding Wesley Lloyd. LuAnne makes a comment about the strain that Julia has been under and the legal remedies that might help her according to her husband, Leonard. Julia informs LuAnne that she is fine and does not need support of any kind. LuAnne tells Julia that she has called the Prayer Chain, and that everyone is praying for her. Julia is sure that everyone will know her business by the end of the day.



Lillian informs Julia that Pastor Ledbetter has called and asked if she can come over to speak to him. Believing that a meeting with her pastor is a good idea, Julia eats and then heads over to the church.

In chapter eight, Julia greets Norma Cantrell, the pastor's secretary and known gossip, telling her that Pastor Ledbetter is expecting her. In the office Julia is happy to know that her pastor is aware of what the situation is in her life and longs for some counseling on the situation. Unfortunately, Julia is shocked when Pastor Ledbetter is more concerned with keeping up the good name of Wesley Lloyd rather than the fact that he has left Julia with a child born out of wedlock after having an affair for over ten years. Pastor Ledbetter suggests that Julia find someone who can handle affairs for her, someone who is not a lawyer, someone that is thinking of her best interests. Julia leaves, realizing that Pastor Ledbetter knew about Wesley Lloyd's adultery, and has excused it.

Chapters 5-8 Analysis

The reader is given some background into the relationship between Julia and Wesley Lloyd. It is clear that though many may have thought the two had a whirlwind courtship, Wesley Lloyd had simply set out to find the type of wife he required. Julia, for her part, had been the only unmarried sister still living at home, and had been more than willing to marry a man that could provide the type of life she wanted. Despite the lack of romance, Julia had believed that she and her husband were happily married until confronted with the evidence of his infidelity.

There is evidence presented that not all are happy about the windfall that Julia inherited when Wesley Lloyd died. Julia has to worry about the fact that Hazel Puckett might have some claim because she fathered his child, and also has to worry about the church, specifically Pastor Ledbetter, who seems to think that the conversations he had with Wesley Lloyd regarding his estate and the church entitled the church. Sam tells Julia about the possibility of the church trying to get some of her money, and Julia discovers that Sam has left his position in the church to avoid a conflict of interest. One can also assume, by the way that Sam speaks with Julia, that he does not want to do anything that would hurt her.

Julia meets with her attorney, Binkie Enloe, and takes Little Lloyd with her, intent on making sure that she does not appear ashamed of the illegitimate child that Wesley Lloyd has left behind. Binkie tells Julia that Hazel Puckett has contacted her, and that if the woman has any evidence of support over the years she might be able to get her hands on some of the estate. Though Hazel has told Julia directly that she has no intention of trying to get anything from her, Binkie is worried that the other woman might be in Raleigh trying to find an attorney that would take her case.

Julia keeps her word, and takes Little Lloyd with her as she goes about her business, making sure that the people in Abbotsville know that she is doing her Christian duty and taking care of her husband's offspring, no matter his history. It is clear that the people she meets are shocked though Julia knows that most of them have some idea that



Wesley Lloyd had been unfaithful for quite some time. It is still unclear what Julia will do about the boy, but for the moment she is intent on presenting her husband's bastard child to the town with her head held high.

This presents a problem when Julia meets with her pastor. Pastor Larry Ledbetter appears to feel true sympathy for Julia's situation, but it quickly becomes clear that the man has ulterior motives. Pastor Ledbetter seems to want Julia to keep the fact of her husband's infidelity quiet, and not tarnish the name of someone who was so important in the church. Julia is angry at her pastor's thoughts, but it is a difficult situation for her. Julia has always been a church-going woman, and thinking differently from what her pastor suggests is right is difficult for her. This is typical for Julia, who, though strong-willed, has always relied on others to give her an opinion to express.

Another small piece of information is revealed, and though it seems insignificant, it will factor into the novel later. Julia first meets Leonard Conover in the barbershop when she takes Little Lloyd for a haircut. Conover suggests that the money that Julia has inherited might be too much for her to handle, and that her house might be as well. Julia is offended, especially as Wesley Lloyd never had much use for Leonard. Afterward, Leonard's wife, LuAnne, is waiting at Julia's home to comfort her in her time of need. During the conversation, LuAnne casually mentions that there are legal remedies that can help Julia in her times of stress, according to her husband, Leonard. Julia brushes the comment off, but it will come back to haunt her.



Chapter 9-13

Chapter 9-13 Summary

In chapter nine, Julia returns home and discusses the events at the pastor's office with Lillian. Deciding that the day has been too much for her, Julia decides to go take a nap. After finding Little Lloyd sleeping in front of Deputy Bates's door, Julia tries to sleep herself, but can't and decides to go for a drive. On the road Julia thinks over recent events, driving aimlessly. Julia finds herself being tailgated by a big black pickup truck. A bit concerned, Julia heads back toward her home and the truck drives off in a different direction.

At home, Julia talks to Deputy Bates about Hazel Puckett. Though there are many Puckett's in the area that have been in trouble, Hazel has no record. Bates suggests that Julia speak to her lawyer about what property Wesley Lloyd owned and they might be able to track Hazel that way.

In chapter ten, Julia, Bates and Little Lloyd drive to Benson's Gap, the area where the Puckett's live. After a few turns, Lloyd recognizes the area and then his home. The three enter, two of them hoping Hazel is home, for different reasons. The house is empty. Bates heads to the garage and tells Julia and Lloyd to wait in the car. Afterward, Coleman Bates tells Julia to drive Lloyd home, as he has found what appears to be blood in the garage and he has called the sheriff.

At home, things are not much better. Lillian is distraught, as someone has broken into the house and torn it apart. Julia's room is in tatters, and Little Lloyd's room is even worse. Julia checks to see if anything is missing and calls the police.

In chapter eleven, the police check the house and Deputy Bates arrives as well. Bates tells Julia that the blood in Hazel's garage is human. Pastor Ledbetter, LuAnne and Sam arrive to make sure that Julia is safe. Ledbetter once again suggests that all of the trouble in the started when Julia took Little Lloyd from his mother. Julia is torn, wanting to share her feelings with her pastor, but knows that he has a different agenda. After Ledbetter and LuAnne leave, Julia and Sam discuss things, and Julia wonders what has changed that would make someone want to ransack her house. Sam reminds her that the only thing different is Little Lloyd.

In chapter twelve, Julia barely sleeps, then prepares herself and Lloyd for church. Julia knows that it will not be easy, and warns the boy that people are nosy. Pastor Ledbetter does not surprise Julia with his sermon about women being the bedrock of the family. The speech is clearly directed at Julia. After the service, Julia introduces Little Lloyd to Ledbetter, and suggests that the pastor might speak next Sunday about men and their place in the home, to the shock of many. Julia and Lloyd leave, only to discover the car that the boy's mother was in parked in front of the house.



In chapter thirteen, Julia discovers Vernon Puckett, known as Brother Vern, sitting on her porch. Brother Vern tells Julia that he has been sent to collect Little Lloyd by his niece, Hazel. Brother Vern is a televangelist with his own show, Fanning the Flame. Vern tells Julia that he is ashamed of his niece's behavior and the life that she lived with Julia's husband, then tells the boy to get his things. Julia is both relieved to have the boy back with his family, and worried about him. Lloyd doesn't seem to like his uncle much, but gets his things and thanks Julia for letting him stay. Before leaving, Lloyd tells Julia that he has everything he came with, but acts oddly when he says it. Julia has second thoughts about letting the boy go with Vern, but the man quickly convinces her that it is for the best. As they are driving away Julia realizes that the car Vern is driving is the same one that Hazel was in when she left Little Lloyd with her. After the car drives away, the strange black truck that had followed Julia drives slowly by her house, startling her.

Chapter 9-13 Analysis

The entire situation that Julia faces is getting to be too much to think about and Julia is having trouble focusing on things. After discussing things with Lillian, Julia decides to take drive through the area. While her mind tries to focus on the situation, a black truck drives up behind her and frightens Julia a bit. Unsure of who is in the truck but with the feeling that she is being followed, Julia heads back toward town. When the truck stops following her, Julia thinks that perhaps she was overreacting, but the truck will return, convincing Julia that there is something to it.

Deputy Bates has some information about Hazel Marie Puckett, but it is only that despite the Puckett family's tendency to get into trouble, Hazel has managed to stay out of it. Bates suggests that the information about the home where Hazel and Little Lloyd lived must be somewhere in Julia's paperwork, and he is right. They take Little Lloyd with them to find the house where he has been living, but discover it empty. The boy is worried for his mother, and Julia is worried that she will be stuck with the boy. In addition, the presence of blood in the garage bodes ominous for Hazel Marie. Bates takes charge and sends Julia and Lloyd home, where the find even a bigger surprise, the house has been ransacked.

Julia is upset, but angry more than scared. Despite her reassurance to Lloyd that there is simply vandals, Julia believes that someone has torn her house apart searching for something.

The news of the break-in travels fast in Abbotsville, and it isn't long before Pastor Ledbetter arrives with LuAnne and Sam arrive. While Sam is there to make sure that Julia is alright, it is clear that the pastor is happy to use the vandalism as another excuse to suggest that Julia has brought events on herself by having Little Lloyd in her home. Julia is torn, wanting to talk to her pastor, but knowing that for some reason he is against her helping the boy. Ledbetter seems to be blaming Julia for keeping Lloyd from his mother, ignoring the fact that Hazel has left the boy behind.



Sam reminds Julia that she is not to blame for keeping a family apart, despite what the pastor says. Julia wonders what someone would possibly break into her home for, noting to Sam that nothing has changed. The attorney points out that the only thing different is the arrival of Little Lloyd.

Pastor Ledbetter continues his assault on Julia and the little boy that has been left with her, using his sermon to speak to the parish at Sunday mass. Julia is aware that all of his words are directed at her, and grows angry. After mass, rather than leaving, she speaks directly to the pastor and gives him a piece of her mind, something that she would never have done before. It seems that Julia, finally free of trying to please her husband, has finally decided that she should please herself.

The arrival of Brother Vern on Julia's doorstep seems fortuitous, as the man claims he is there to take Little Lloyd to his mother in Raleigh. Despite the fact that Julia has been telling everyone that she wishes the boy were not her problem, she feels some sadness at the thought of him leaving, something that surprises her. The boy is a constant reminder of Wesley Lloyd's unfaithfulness, but Julia has gotten used to having him around. This fact, coupled with the sense that Lloyd does not really want to go with his uncle, causes Julia to think twice about letting the boy go with Brother Vern. The man seems to react oddly, then calms a bit and tries to smooth things over, instructing Lloyd to gather 'everything' he has brought with him. Lloyd does, and it is when they are leaving that Julia realizes that the car Vern is driving is the same one that Lloyd and Hazel had arrived in. Julia tries to stop them from leaving, but is too late. Watching as the car drives away, Julia is surprised and a bit frightened to see the black truck that had followed her while she was driving a few nights ago. It occurs to Julia that the people in the truck might not have been following her after all, but might have something to do with the young boy.



Chapters 14-17

Chapters 14-17 Summary

In chapter fourteen, Julia spends a quiet Sunday afternoon, trying to forget about Little Lloyd and her feelings of unease about Brother Vern. Sam arrives and Julia tells him that her troubles have been solved, but the lawyer knows that she is not happy. Sam suggests that Deputy Bates can contact the Raleigh police and check around to make sure that the boy is safe.

The following morning Sam and Lillian arrive at the same time. Lillian is not pleased with Julia for allowing the boy to go off with his uncle. Julia feels guilty enough. Sam suggests she go fishing with him to get her mind off things, but Julia thinks this is a foolish idea. Deputy Bates arrives home after a busy night and tells Julia that Sheriff Frady will be coming over to question her about Little Lloyd and the blood found in Hazel's garage. Julia realizes that by admitting Little Lloyd was her husband's son from the outset she has saved herself some trouble.

In chapter fifteen, Earl Frady and Detective Wayne Peavey arrive to question Julia. Sam warns the sheriff that Julia is trying to help and should be questioned accordingly. Peavey conducts the questioning, informing Julia that the blood and teeth found in the garage have probably been there since Friday, the day she was driving around by herself. Sam is angry that the detective might think that Julia is responsible.

After everyone leaves, Julia is once again having trouble sleeping and heads to the kitchen for some warm milk. A soft knock on the door announces the arrival of Hazel Marie Puckett, battered and missing teeth. The woman tells Julia that she has been in an accident, and just wants to see her son. Julia tells Hazel that Brother Vern has taken Little Lloyd and Hazel is distraught. Julia angrily reminds the woman that if she had told her the truth when she has left the boy with her, then Brother Vern would not have the boy. Hazel is contrite, and Julia is worried for her, as she is in serious pain. With a bit of questioning, Julia discovers that Brother Vern has been looking for something since Friday, and had allowed someone to beat Hazel in order to find it. Hazel has no idea what her uncle is looking for. Despite Hazel's protests, Julia gets her in the shower and into bed, knowing that the woman is in no shape to go looking for her son.

In chapter 16 Julia wakes and sits in the kitchen, thinking about her childless marriage with Wesley Lloyd and the fact that she had prayed for children, only to discover Little Lloyd. Looking for something to eat, Julia discovers the bag that Little Lloyd has carried everywhere with him. Inside there is a book, inscribed by Wesley Lloyd to his son. Lillian arrives and Julia shows her the boys bag. Lillian tells Julia that the boy intends to come back, or he wouldn't have left his prized possessions behind. Julia tells Lillian about the arrival of Hazel Marie, and the two women gather some breakfast for Hazel, then get her into the bath and dressed, all the while being quiet so as not to wake Deputy Bates.



In chapter 17 Hazel Marie relates the tale of her past few days to Julia and Lillian. Brother Vern had driven Hazel Marie to Julia's house to drop off Little Lloyd, but instead of taking her to Raleigh, had taken her to a camp ground, where he repeatedly questioned her about Wesley Lloyd's death and his 'papers'. Julia surmises that Brother Vern wanted whatever her husband had left for Hazel Marie and her son, and Hazel agrees. After a few days, Brother Vern takes Hazel to her house where her cousins are emptying it of all contents. Brother Vern speaks to the two men and leaves, and they proceed to beat Hazel Marie. Julia realizes that the two men, Jerome and Donnie probably ransacked her house as well, looking for something to prove that Wesley Lloyd had included Hazel in his will.

Hazel rests and Julia goes to the drugstore to get some supplies to care for her. Fed up with the constant stares and questions by those around her, Julia tells the pastor's secretary that she needs the supplies because she will be using her home to care for sick cats and dogs, then leaves.

Chapters 14-17 Analysis

Miss Julia tries to put the week behind her, but cannot get past the thought that there is something amiss. Julia tries to convince herself that she is relieved that Little Lloyd is out of her life, but cannot seem to do so. Sam stops by and Julia tries to tell him that she is happy that her problems are resolved, but her friend of so many years can tell that she is not at all comfortable with the situation. The lawyer offers some relief, telling Julia that Deputy Bates can now check into the whereabouts of Hazel, and find out simply enough that the boy is safe with his mother. Julia tries to sleep that night but cannot, and winds up in Little Lloyd's room crying. Julia still tries to convince herself that she does not miss the boy, a living reminder of her husband's infidelity, but she realizes that she has spent her life selfishly and she is truly alone.

Sam's feelings for Julia begin to become more clear to the reader. Though the two have been friends for over forty years, it seems that Sam feels more than friendship for Julia. His light teasing, which Lillian joins, makes Julia uncomfortable, not just because Sam is her friend, but because she has no idea how to deal with romance. Her life with Wesley Lloyd contained no teasing, and seemingly no happiness, just a world of order and expectations.

The arrival of Hazel Marie changes everything for Julia. When the woman arrives injured, Julia does not give a second thought about the fact that the woman was Wesley Lloyd's mistress for ten years or more, only that she needs help. Julia cares for her immediately, not thinking about anything by Hazel and Little Lloyd until the following morning. Only then sitting quietly before Lillian arrives, does Julia reflect on the fact that she had not been able to have children, and had told her husband that she would simply pray for them, as women in the bible had done, never once imagining how a child would come into her life.



The news that Brother Vern had deceived Julia by taking Little Lloyd shocks her, but Julia is more than shocked, she is angry. Wesley Lloyd had deceived Julia for years. She had been blithely unaware of his other life simply because she had been too comfortable to look deeper into things. Hazel's tale of Brother Vern's treatment of her, looking for information about Wesley's Lloyd's estate and his lies about taking the boy to his mother, wake Julia up to the fact that she is tired of being taken for granted, and she decides to handle things on her own.

The investigation by the police into the disappearance of Hazel Marie and the search for the boy notwithstanding, Julia does not tell Deputy Bates that Hazel is in the house, instead keeping her existence a secret. Despite the fact that Julia has no experience in dealing with this type of situation, she feels somewhat responsible for letting the boy go with Brother Vern.

A seemingly insignificant event takes place when Julia goes to the drugstore to get supplies to help care for Hazel. The pastor's secretary, Norma is there, and is very curious as to what Julia is up to. Tired of being hounded, and still angry, Julia answers defiantly that she plans to use her home to take care of sick dogs and cats. Though obviously Julia has no intention of doing so, this sarcastic answer sets the stage for yet another problem that Julia will have to deal with in the near future.



Chapters 18-21

Chapters 18-21 Summary

In chapter eighteen, Julia and Lillian take care of Hazel as best they can and the woman finally falls into a fitful sleep. Julia calls all the Pucketts that she can, pretending she is looking for Brother Vern to conduct a service at her church. When this fails, Julia and Lillian decide to wait for the man's church service to be broadcast that evening. If the show is live, the women will know that Brother Vern is in the area and will drive to the studio. Hazel joins them and they settle in to watch the program, which consists of preaching, singing, asking for money and a special guest. Stedman Jones, along with his wife Leesie and their sixteen children are in the studio, looking for support. As the camera pans the family, the women are startled to see Wesley Lloyd standing with Stedman Jones' children.

In chapter nineteen, Julia, Lillian and Hazel Marie head out with Julia driving, heading toward Spartanburg and the broadcast station. On the way the women stop so that Hazel can relieve herself along the side of the road. A trucker stops to make sure they are alright and Julia tells him they are on the way to a healing service at the station. The driver calls for help on the CB radio and before the women know what is happening they are escorted to Spartanburg by a contingent of truckers. Arriving at the station, Lillian declares that Brother Vern has never seen her, and she will go in and save Little Lloyd.

In chapter twenty, Julia gives Lillian two one-hundred dollar bills as a 'donation' to make entering the building easier and she heads to the door. After she enters, Julia pulls the car to the door and waits. The door bursts open and Lillian and Little Lloyd fly out, leaping into the car with a crowd of people trying to stop them. Julia steps on the gas and the car surges through the crowd, jumps on the highway and flees. Before long the large black truck driven by Hazel's cousin, Jerome, is behind them. With help from Hazel Marie, Julia evades them and they head for Abbotsville.

In chapter twenty-one, Julia tells Lillian that Brother Vern and Jerome might not be finished with them and to stick close. Little Lloyd tells Julia that Brother Vern treated him well, but insisted that Hazel had something of his father's that she wouldn't give to him. All agree that the man is up to no good. The doorbell rings and announces Pastor Ledbetter and another man who he introduces as Dr. Fred Fowler.

The pastor is acting a bit strangely, as is his friend, asking if Julia has been feeling alright. Julia is leery, not trusting the pastor or his friend. Pastor Ledbetter asks Julia to spend some time with Dr. Fowler and show him around town. Julia tells the men she is very busy and will have to see if she has time, and they leave. Sitting in the living room, Julia wonders what the pastor is up to and realizes that he is still after her money for the church. Wondering if the doctor is interested in her as a woman or for her money, Julia decides to find out.



Chapters 18-21 Analysis

Julia takes charge again with the help of Lillian, caring for Hazel Marie as best they can though the woman is desperate to have her son back. Julia calls all the Pucketts that she can, trying to locate Brother Vern to no avail, but realizes that it is the night of his broadcast. Seeing the man live on TV proves enlightening, as Brother Vern has hidden Little Lloyd in plain sight with a visiting family.

Julia, after having spent years leaving every decision to her husband, is proving that she can not only think, but also act on her own. Taking the bull by the horns, the three women drive to Spartanburg to rescue Little Lloyd and reunite him with his mother. Delightful comedy ensues as the trio are escorted to the station by a group of truck drivers, and Lillian rescues Little Lloyd by pretending to be a contributor to the church.

Julia shows her determination and Hazel Marie shows her intelligence when Jerome follows them onto the highway. Julia performs evasive maneuvers as if she is a felon and the women are able to take Little Lloyd back to Abbotsville.

Little Lloyd confirms that Brother Vern had not intended to take him to his mother, and Julia lets the boy know that if she had any idea of the truth she would never have let him leave. The boy tells Julia the same thing that Hazel Marie had; Brother Vern was interested in something of Wesley Lloyd's but Little Lloyd seems not to know what the man was after.

Pastor Ledbetter arrives with the strange Dr. Fowler, and though Julia does not trust them, she cannot help but be flattered by the attention the doctor pays her. Though the pastor's questions about Julia's well being seem odd, Julia lets them pass, though the matter will come up again, leading Julia into yet another problem. Though she is not aware of it at the moment, Wesley Lloyd's death has brought Julia more problems than his illegitimate family.



Chapters 22-25

Chapters 22-25 Summary

Julia heads to the church and announces that she has time to show Dr. Fowler around now. Pastor Ledbetter is obviously pleased, and Dr. Fowler takes Julia's hand so that she can show him around. During the tour, Julia forgets her mission to discover what the doctor wants with her, her head swimming with the compliments the man pays her. In the bridal chapel, Julia seemingly misconstrues the doctor's intentions and leans in as he struggles with her. Pastor Ledbetter bursts in and Dr. Fowler tells the pastor that Julia is as crazy as he thought. Embarrassed at her mistake, Julia faints.

Waking up, Julia is ashamed as she speaks to Pastor Ledbetter, who tells her that Dr. Fowler believes Julia needs therapy before she gets worse. Ledbetter tells a devastated Julia that she suffers from nymphomania, a sin, and that she needs to save herself. The pastor suggests Julia find a guardian to take care of her affairs before something happens again. Julia promises Ledbetter that she will think about it, and begs him not to tell anyone what has happened.

In chapter twenty-three, Lillian arrives at the church and takes Julia home, where she is too ashamed to tell her friend what happened. After thinking things through, Julia realizes that she had not misconstrued the actions of Dr. Fowler and thinks that the two men were toying with her mind. Despite this, Julia is still worried that the pastor might be right about her condition and vows to be careful.

The doorbell rings, announcing Detective Peavey. Peavey has arrived with news of a kidnapping in Spartanburg. Julia excuses herself and goes into the kitchen to warn Lillian and Little Lloyd to stay out of sight. Peavey tells Julia when she returns that no one is really sure what happened in Spartanburg because the uncle of the missing child refused to provide much information. As he leaves, Detective Peavey asks Julia to call him if she hears anything, and promises her that whoever kidnapped the boy will be punished.

In chapter twenty-four, Julia calms Lillian, who is afraid she will go to jail, and Hazel Marie, who can't understand how there could be a kidnapping if Little Lloyd is with his mother. Julia wonders the same, but can't be sure that Wesley Lloyd hadn't made some type of arrangement with Brother Vern before he died. Little Lloyd assures Julia that Brother Vern and his father were not friends, but she decides it is better to be safe than sorry.

Binkie Enloe arrives in a downpour, followed by Deputy Bates. Julia sends Little Lloyd upstairs to his mother, not wanting to spring his return on anyone before they decide what the story will be. While Deputy Bates openly admires Binkie, the lawyer stuns Julia with the reason for her visit. Several members of the church have called, wondering if Julia is healthy and if there is anything they can do to help their friend, who seems to be



growing confused. Binkie also tells Julia that Pastor Ledbetter and Dr. Fowler are talking about determining how competent Julia is. Julia is angry, still believing that the pastor and the doctor have set her up, but does not know what to do about it.

In chapter twenty-five, Lillian tells Julia not to worry, that no one can do a thing to her, and to stop acting like she used to when her husband was alive. The two women go upstairs with food and eat with Hazel Marie and Little Lloyd, deciding to call Sam and Binkie and tell them the truth about the events that had taken place in Spartanburg after Hazel assures Julia that Wesley Lloyd would never make any kind of deal with Brother Vern. Hazel tells Julia that she should be well enough to move on in the morning and might go stay with her mother.

The following morning Julia thinks things over in the kitchen, but discovers Little Lloyd in the pantry, retrieving the bag that he had hidden there. Little Lloyd wonders if Julia can help him with a problem. His father had given him something the night he died, and the boy did not know what to do with it. Julia suggests he give whatever it is to someone he trusts and Little Lloyd surprises her by asking if she will take it. She does, and the envelope he gives her brings yet another problem.

Chapters 22-25 Analysis

Julia intends to find out what the pastor and his friend the doctor are up to as she still can't trust Pastor Ledbetter. She also can't get over the sense that Dr. Fowler was interested in more than her money. In the church, the two men seem very pleased to see her, and Julia is flattered by the attention that Dr. Fowler pays her. Wandering the church together, Julia is sure that the man is attracted to her and despite herself, she reacts to his flirtatious manner. The doctor's reaction to Julia's advances seems out of sorts, and the arrival of Pastor Ledbetter seems convenient as well.

Julia is devastated by Pastor Ledbetter's diagnosis of nymphomania, and horrified that she is so out of control, something she was not even aware of. The pastor suggests that Julia appoint a guardian to look out for her best interests, and she promises to consider it. Later, thinking things through, Julia realizes that it is possible that the men were toying with her, trying to put her into a situation they could use in order to get their hands on her husband's estate. The arrival of Binkie with the news that Pastor Ledbetter is trying to determine if Julia is competent confirms her suspicions, but hurts her at the same time. Lillian points out that Julia is acting the same way she did when Wesley Lloyd was alive, allowing people to run her life.

The idea that the women might be in trouble for taking Little Lloyd back from Brother Vern is something that never occurred to them, and though it seems unlikely, Julia has to worry that Wesley Lloyd might have made some arrangement with Brother Vern regarding the boy's custody. Though it seems unlikely, Julia realizes now more than ever that she did not really know her husband at all. After much discussion, the women decide that the best thing to do is contact Sam and Binkie, tell them the truth, and things will work out.



Hazel Marie's announcement that she and Little Lloyd should be able to leave soon causes a surprising reaction in Julia. Though she seemed very self-centered at the beginning of the novel, it appears that this persona was affected simply to keep people from hurting her. The thought of losing the two people that have come into her life bothers Julia more than she is willing to allow. Julia is still somewhat concerned by what people will think of her, and until she can get past that, things will not be easy.

The troubled Little Lloyd turns to Julia with his problem: what to do with the item his father has told him to keep safe. Julia realizes that she has been quite selfish in assuming she is the only person that has been hurt by her husband and his double life. All thoughts of this leave her immediately when she discovers exactly what her husband has told Little Lloyd to keep safe.



Chapters 26-29

Chapters 26-29 Summary

Julia discovers that the letter Little Lloyd has been keeping safe is a new will that Wesley Lloyd wrote the night he passed away, leaving everything to his son. Julia is devastated, not just because she will lose the estate, but because her husband thought so little of her after forty-four years of marriage. Unsure of what to do, Julia weighs her options; should she divulge the truth about the will, or pretend it never existed and set up some sort of trust for Little Lloyd and his mother?

Lillian notices that Julia is not herself, and asks what is wrong. Unable to tell even her friend of so many years the horrible truth, Julia decides to go see Sam, and does so, with the letter pinned inside her dress, so that no one will find it in the house. At Sam's office, Julia speaks to him about Pastor Ledbetter, without revealing the details of his accusation of nymphomania. The pair discuss how easy it could be for the pastor to request a hearing regarding Julia's competence, and Sam tells Julia that he will handle things with Binkie for her, but not to get too worried.

In chapter twenty-seven, Julia arrives home to discover that Pastor Ledbetter is waiting with Dr. Fowler. Julia is not interested in entertaining and waits for the men to speak their minds. Pastor Ledbetter tells Julia that he has received many phone calls from her friends and they are worried about her strange behavior. That, coupled with her behavior toward Dr. Fowler, makes Ledbetter very concerned, and he suggests that Julia move into a home for the aged that Dr. Fowler operates. Julia tells the two men that she believes they set her up so that they could take advantage of her. Dr. Fowler tells Julia that he has been asked by the pastor to evaluate her mental state, almost driving her to despair, but she cannot answer, as the doorbell rings again.

In chapter twenty-eight, Julia is surprised to find Brother Vern at her door and shows him into the house, all the while trying to figure out a way to get rid of all three men. The pastor and Brother Vern clash immediately, each trying to prove the other a lesser man and preacher. Brother Vern tells Julia that his nephew has been kidnapped and Julia plays along, wondering how that could have happened if the boy was in Raleigh with his mother. Vern shrugs it off, saying he had been planning to take him before he was kidnapped, but has come by to appeal to Julia to help set up a reward. Pastor Ledbetter begs Julia not to rashly decide anything, but she offers a reward to Brother Vern of twenty-five thousand dollars. Pastor Ledbetter is mortified, and begs Julia to reconsider, just as Lillian comes in with more lemonade for the guests. Brother Vern recognizes her and demands that someone hold Lillian and call the police to arrest her for kidnapping.

In chapter twenty-nine, Julia runs upstairs to fetch Deputy Bates as Brother Vern chases Lillian into the kitchen. Pastor Ledbetter demands to know what is going on, while Julia tries to manage things. Deputy Bates does not open the door at first, prompting Little Lloyd and Hazel Marie to open their door and find out what is going on. The commotion



is overwhelming and Deputy Bates finally realizes something is going on and dresses quickly and heads downstairs, revealing Binkie Enloe in his room buttoning her blouse. Binkie heads down with Julia and the Pucketts to discover what is going on.

Chapters 26-29 Analysis

Miss Julia's life is in more turmoil than she could have imagined possible. Discovering that the item Little Lloyd has been holding is Wesley Lloyd's new will, Julia is devastated, not only because she believes herself to be destitute, but also because her husband of forty-four years obviously cared so little for her. Despite the fact that Julia has lived her life trying to please her husband, it is clear that for whatever reason, she could not.

Julia is in a quandary as to how to handle this new problem. The thought crosses her mind to destroy the paper and any evidence of the new will, or to set up a trust for Little Lloyd's education and an allowance for Hazel, but the thought of living a lie for the rest of her life is too much to bear. It seems that no matter which way Julia turns, things continue to pile up on her shoulders.

Going to Sam for advice, Julia is not able to bring the new will to his attention, and realizes that Sam would never consider keeping it a secret. Sam's inherent honesty is something that Julia has never and will never question, unlike her own husband. Sam is a bit concerned about Julia's news regarding Pastor Ledbetter and Dr. Fowler's plans to have her declared incompetent, but promises that he and Binkie will handle things. In the meantime, Sam encourages Julia to stand up to the men.

The arrival of Pastor Ledbetter and Dr. Fowler enlightens Julia about their plans. It is clear that Ledbetter has plans for the Springer estate, and believes that having Julia live in the old folks home that Dr. Fowler operates would be the best solution for everyone. Despite Julia's efforts to stand up to the men, she is still too concerned about what the townspeople would think of her if the pastor passed on the news of her supposed nymphomania.

The arrival of Brother Vern provides comedic relief, first as he and Pastor Ledbetter try to prove themselves more pious, then as Brother Vern requests Julia provide some type of reward for the rescue of his kidnapped nephew. Julia is truly enjoying herself for the first time in ages when Lillian enters and is recognized by Brother Vern as the woman who 'kidnapped' Little Lloyd.



Chapters 30-32

Chapters 30-32 Summary

Deputy Bates tries to figure out what the situation is and keep things orderly as much as possible, with Lillian crying over being arrested for kidnapping, Pastor Ledbetter continuing his assault about Julia's sanity, and Brother Vern demanding justice. Little Lloyd and Hazel Marie join in the mess while Binkie tries to get to the facts. Sam arrives at about the same time, wondering what is going on.

Binkie and Sam agree that there is no kidnapping charge to worry about, as the boy is with his mother, despite Brother Vern's objections. Switching tactics, the televangelist tries to collect the reward that Julia has offered, but is told with no kidnapping there really cannot be a reward. Pastor Ledbetter uses the confusion and the obvious insanity that is going on around him to once again bring up the state of Julia's wellbeing. Dr. Fowler chimes in and states that Julia clearly cannot continue to care for herself and he will testify to that fact.

In chapter thirty-one, Julia asks Sam if the pastor and the doctor can prove she is unable to care for herself and Sam tells her it depends on what they have to use against her. Though Sam and Binkie know that Julia is quite able to take care of herself, the clerk of the court is the person who would assign a guardian for her. The clerk of the court being Leonard Conover, a member of the church. Julia knows that she is doomed if the pastor is allowed to continue with his case and must do something to make him leave her alone. As Pastor Ledbetter has been after Julia's money all along; the only thing she can do is show everyone the new will. When she unbuttons her dress, those present believe that she has finally lost her mind and is undressing in front of them all. Hazel goes to her and asks if she would like to go upstairs and rest, but Julia simply takes out the new will and hands it to Sam.

In chapter thirty-two, Sam announces to all that Wesley Lloyd wrote his last will the night he died, leaving everything to Little Lloyd when he reaches maturity. Until that time, Sam is to be guardian of the boy and take care of the estate. Pastor Ledbetter is stunned, and immediately expresses his sorrow for Julia. He and Dr. Fowler leave quickly, with Pastor Ledbetter speaking quietly of new ministries. Brother Vern changes his attitude, and once again welcomes Hazel Marie, a woman he had done nothing but put down, offering as her oldest male relative to take care of her and Little Lloyd. Hazel instead asks Deputy Bates to swear out a warrant and make it impossible for her uncle to contact her.

Hazel Marie is very upset, devastated that Wesley Lloyd would treat Julia in such a way, offering Julia money and her home, hating the unfairness of the situation. Julia thanks her but tells her she cannot accept charity, she will simply find a way to survive as she always has.



Sam and Binkie can contain their laughter no longer, and tell Julia that despite what the will states, as the wife of Wesley Lloyd she is entitled to half of the estate. Julia is most definitely not destitute, but the lawyers had not wanted to let her in on this fact while the men that were clearly trying to lay claims to the money were present. Julia is relieved and happy that Little Lloyd will be taken care of, Hazel Marie will not have to worry, and everything worked out for all.

Julia, Hazel Marie, and Little Lloyd live in the big house together, a family despite the odd situation that brought them together. Deputy Bates and Binkie continue to see each other, sometime staying at Julia's, sometimes at Binkie's house. Julia no longer cares what the neighbors think, happy with herself and the life she has.

Speaking with Sam about her shameful secret, Sam is happy to let her know that he has a cure for nymphomania, and the two begin to spend more time together, enjoying life and each other's company.

Chapters 30-32 Analysis

All of Julia's problems come to a head at one time, in her own home. The pastor and doctor seem to be handed a golden opportunity to prove that Julia is unable to make sound decisions, based on the activities she has become involved with and the things that seem to be going on in her own home. The added knowledge that Leonard Conover, a man that Julia has no use for and had ridiculed openly early in the novel is now the person that will decide her fate is too much for her to bear. The realization that the money Wesley Lloyd left when he died is more trouble than it is worth frees Julia, and allows her to make the honest decision of handing over the handwritten will.

Pastor Ledbetter and Dr. Fowler are shown for what they are, men who are more interested in money than the well-being of anyone when they immediately lose interest in Julia's mental health. There is no sense in pursuing the charges they had planned to bring forth when there is no monetary gain for them.

Brother Vern also shows his true colors, welcoming Hazel Marie back into the family now that she is going to be a wealthy woman. He also gives up when Sam informs him that though Hazel will raise her son and be his guardian, it is Sam who controls the estate. Coupled with the risk of an assault charge, Brother Vern leaves.

Hazel Marie also proves who she is, despite the reputation she has been branded with as the other woman. Though she had a relationship with Wesley Lloyd for many years, Hazel is obviously a caring person, offering to make sure Julia is cared for and never wants for a thing. Julia is touched, as she herself had considered shutting Hazel out completely, even if only for a moment.

In reality, both women are set for life. The laws for North Carolina provide that Julia will inherit half of the estate despite what the will states. Even after his death, Julia and Hazel Marie will be sharing Wesley Lloyd, though both seem the better for it.



Sam and Julia seem to be developing a relationship beyond their friendship, something that Sam has clearly wanted for some time. Julia is happy, amazed that someone could have that kind of interest in her, and that Sam is nothing like Wesley Lloyd.

Julia, Hazel Marie, and Little Lloyd continue to live together happily in the big house Julia shared with her husband for forty-four years. Despite the fact that Wesley Lloyd's actions could have destroyed several lives, instead they created a family, not the one that Wesley Lloyd wanted, but the one that Julia needed, and those around her share her happiness



Characters

Miss Julia Springer

Julia Springer is the recent widow of Wesley Lloyd Springer, and a respected resident in the town of Abbotsville, North Carolina. After her husband dies and leaves her a surprising fortune, Julia settles into life, happy to no longer have to please anyone but herself. Things change dramatically when the mistress of her late husband and his illegitimate son arrive on her doorstep and Julia is left with no choice but to take the child in while his mother leaves town to find a way to support herself and her son.

At the beginning of the novel, Julia, though not unkind, has little patience for others, casting judgment on those around her as she feels superior to most. Being the widow of such an important man has almost the same value in social circles as if her husband were still alive. Julia has grown accustomed to a certain amount of respect, and in most cases demands it. Though she appears strong, Julia has spent her entire married life doing everything possible to please her husband, and really has no self esteem.

The arrival of Little Lloyd forces Julia to see her marriage and her life for what they truly are, and because of this, Julia changes quite a bit. At first thinking of herself and what others will think of her, Julia gradually begins to think more of the boy and his mother, and what they are going through. Despite being set in her ways, Julia evolves into a person who cares more for others than for herself.

Wesley Lloyd Springer

Though deceased, Wesley Lloyd plays an important role in the novel. Married to Julia for forty-four years, Wesley Lloyd owned his own bank in the small town of Abbotsville and was a very important man in town. Active in the church and very involved in the goings on in town, Wesley Lloyd dispensed advice to all that ask for it and to others that don't. Superior to all around him, Wesley Lloyd lived his life from a platform he erected himself, believing himself better than those around him. No one suffered the will of Wesley Lloyd more than his wife Julia. Julia spent her entire married life making sure that her husband was pleased, though it does not appear that he often was, or at least that he was completely pleased. One of the things that bothered Wesley Lloyd most was his wife's failure to provide him with an heir. Though Julia tried, and prayed, the couple was never blessed with children. Wesley Lloyd, a truly selfish man, handled this situation himself, taking a mistress and having a child out of wedlock.

Even in death Wesley Lloyd works to control those around him by writing a new will the night of his death, leaving his entire estate to his son, Little Lloyd. No one will ever know if Wesley Lloyd was aware that the law in North Carolina states that the spouse is entitled to half of their partner's estate, but it does not seem likely. Control seems to



have been the driving force in Wesley Lloyd's life, and he had always made sure that Julia and his mistress Hazel Marie were dependent on him.

Wesley Lloyd Junior Springer

The illegitimate son of Wesley Lloyd Springer, approximately ten years old, the young man is known as Little Lloyd to Julia and Junior to his mother. Little Lloyd is a quiet boy at the beginning of the novel, having been left with strangers by his mother when she needs to find a way to support them both. Still saddened by the loss of his father, Little Lloyd does not communicate much, and seems to be unsure of his place in life. The return of his mother brightens his mood and seems to bring him out of his shell, allowing Julia to get a better sense of who the young man is.

Little Lloyd is pitiful character at the beginning of the novel, very quiet and shy, often sniffing, and with glasses that don't fit. Though Little Lloyd is viewed through the eyes of Julia, it is not just her perception of him that changes. The return of Hazel Marie brightens the spirit of the boy, allowing Julia and the reader to get a better idea of his feelings as well as his character.

Little Lloyd proves himself to be honest and trustworthy when he reveals to Julia that he has been holding something for his father because he had promised to, keeping the secret even from his own mother. When it seems that Julia will be left destitute, Little Lloyd immediately suggests that his father's wife live with he and Hazel Marie, unwilling to see someone he considers a true friend hurt in any way. Little Lloyd also proves he is a good judge of character when he chooses Julia as his confidant. Rather than trusting his own family, especially Brother Vern, with the will his father had given him, the boy gives it to Julia.

Hazel Marie Puckett

The mistress of Wesley Lloyd Springer and the mother of his illegitimate son, Hazel Marie is a pitiful creature, one who seems to have lived her life the same way Julia has; always striving to please others and never herself. When Hazel is left with no home and no means to support herself or her son, she turns to the only person that she can think of, Julia Springer, to help in a time of need. It is clear early in the novel that Hazel feels badly about having to involve Julia in her problems, not because she feels bad about her own situation, but because she does not wish to hurt Julia.

Lillian

Julia Springer's housekeeper for more than twenty years, Lillian is a true friend, despite the difference in their upbringing and race. Lillian is honest and trustworthy, something that Julia can appreciate and values highly. Whenever Julia is faced with a problem, Lillian is there to offer common sense advice and help in any way possible.



Lillian is the voice of reason for Julia, pointing out the consequences of her plans and making her consider all the different results that might occur. This does not stop Lillian from helping Julia with anything, despite the chance that things might not go as planned.

Sam Murdoch

Julia's long time friend and attorney, Sam Murdoch, is the person Julia turns to most often for advice and trusts without a second thought. Even the discovery that Sam was aware of Wesley Lloyd's infidelity does not break Julia's faith in her friend. Sam helps Julia through the different situations she finds herself in throughout the novel, and displays his character and humor often. It is clear that Sam, a widower, is interested in Julia as more than a friend, but has the patience to wait for Julia to discover new feelings on her own.

Deputy Coleman Bates

A deputy in the Abbotsville police force, Coleman Bates is a boarder in Julia's home. Sam Murdoch had suggested that having a man in the house might be a good idea since Julia had inherited her husband's estate months earlier.

Deputy Bates is honest and caring, and loyal to Julia at every turn. Helping out by searching for Hazel Marie without making it an official investigation so that Julia does not become a focus of town gossip is just one way he helps out.

Deputy Bates meets Binkie Enloe when the attorney stops at Julia's house on business and the two start a relationship. Julia does not approve at first, but comes to realize that judging others is not her job.

Vernon Puckett

Known as Brother Vern on his television program, Vernon Puckett is a televangelist, and Hazel Marie's uncle. Though he presents himself to Julia as a caring relative of Hazel Marie's, vowing to return Little Lloyd to his mother, in reality Brother Vern is looking for whatever Wesley Lloyd might have left his niece in his will. Willing to hold his great-nephew until his niece hands over whatever she has inherited, Brother Vern is devastated to learn that Wesley Lloyd has left his entire estate to Little Lloyd and he has no hopes of getting his hands on a dime.

Binke Enloe

Julia's lawyer, Binkie took over Sam Murdoch's practice after he retired. Though Wesley Lloyd would never consider dealing with a woman, Julia and Binkie have a good relationship and she trusts Binkie to handle things properly. After a visit to Julia's to



discuss rumors around town about Julia's mental state, Binkie becomes romantically involved with Deputy Bates.

Pastor Larry Ledbetter

Larry Ledbetter is the pastor at the Presbyterian church that Julia has been a member of since moving to Abbotsville over forty years ago. Though Ledbetter truly believes that he is acting in the best interest of his parishioners, it is clear that the pastor really has a large ego. After discovering that Wesley Lloyd Springer has left nothing to the church, though he had hinted at such an option in life, Ledbetter turns his attention to Julia. At first Ledbetter simply appeals to Julia's sense of community, but when she is not swayed by the thought of having her name on a new building, or donating her home to the church so there is more parking available, Ledbetter tries other tricks.

Beginning with the arrival of Little Lloyd, Ledbetter believes that Julia might be losing her mind, drifting toward senility. In order to convince others as well, the pastor enlists the help of Dr. Fred Fowler to declare Julia unstable. Ledbetter plans to be appointed Julia's guardian so that he will be administrator of the estate, thus controlling Julia's money.

Dr. Fred Fowler

The psychiatrist hired by Pastor Larry Ledbetter to try and have Julia Springer declared unfit to care for herself. Fowler flirts with Julia, leading her to believe that he is interested in her as a woman, causing Julia to react in a romantic way toward him. Fowler then tries to convince Julia that she is losing her mind, having completely misread his intentions. Fowler is the owner and operator of a home for the aged, and intends to have Julia live in his facility, where he can control her estate with Pastor Ledbetter.

LuAnne Conover

A friend of Julia, LuAnne is well intentioned, though a gossip who thrives on controversy. The arrival of Little Lloyd is very exciting for LuAnne, who surprises Julia by telling her that almost everyone in town was aware of Wesley Lloyd's infidelity. LuAnne means well, but Julia has little patience for the woman, or her pride in her husband's position as the clerk of the court.

Leonard Conover

Married to LuAnne Conover, Leonard is a meek man that Julia has little patience for. Leonard's position as the clerk of the court is one of the things that Julia ridicules the man over, until it is discovered that Leonard is the person who would decide if Julia should be able to live on her own or be committed for her own good.



Objects/Places

Abbotsville, North Carolina

The small town where Julia Springer, the main character of the novel, lives.

Abbotsville Press

The newspaper in Abbotsville, North Carolina.

Spartanburg

The town where Brother Vern films his television show.

First Presbyterian Church of Abbotsville

The church that Julia is a member of, where Larry Ledbetter is pastor.

Raleigh, North Carolina

The city where Hazel Marie intends to get some type of job training.

Buddy's Barber & Expert Depilatory Shop

The barber shop in Abbotsville where Julia takes Little Lloyd for a haircut.

The Presbyterian Women's Prayer Chain

A network of women who pray for each other in times of need, and a quick source of gossip.

Fanning the Flame

The television program produced by Brother Vern Puckett, a televangelist.

Holographic Will

A last will and testament that is hand written. Wesley Lloyd Springer had written his will the night of his death and given it to Little Lloyd for safe-keeping.

Bridal Parlor

The small parlor in the church where Julia responds to Dr. Fowler's advances.

Themes

Pride

Pride is central in the novel *Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind*. Julia Springer is a prideful woman, the widow of one of the most important men in town, Wesley Lloyd Springer. Wesley Lloyd had owned his own bank, and was a central figure in the small town of Abbottsville, North Carolina. Not many people in the area made an important decision without consulting Wesley Lloyd first. After forty-four years of marriage, Julia has grown accustomed to being respected as the wife of such an influential man, and her pride shows.

At the outset of the novel, Julia acknowledges her pride, but feels that she has earned it by being the wife of such an important man. The arrival of Little Lloyd, Wesley Lloyd's illegitimate son, changes things instantly for Julia. The thought that her neighbors and friends might find out about her husband's secret life is made worse when Julia discovers that most of the townspeople have known about it for years. Julia is devastated, not so much for the fact that her marriage was a lie, but because those around her have been laughing quietly behind her back, or worse, feeling pity.

As Julia's life falls apart, pride is her vice. The sense that her life was perfect and she deserved to live above all others is quickly shattered when she discovers the secrets that her husband kept from her. Though she takes the boy in, she does so only so that no one will think less of her. Julia Springer bases her actions and feelings not on what she wants, but on what others will think of her. As the novel progresses, Julia changes dramatically, beginning to understand that her happiness lies not in what those around her think, but of what she thinks of herself.

In the end, pride is no longer a vice for Julia, but a virtue. Julia Springer is proud of herself, not for who she was married to, or because she was an important figure in town, but because she chose to do the right thing and live honestly. By doing so she gained a family and is able to relax and be herself, something she has not been able to do for a very long time.

Forgiveness

In the novel *Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind*, forgiveness plays an important part in the life of the main character, Julia Springer. Julia is a strong-willed woman, who lives her life after forty-four years of marriage as she believes her husband would want her to. Things change for Julia when she discovers that her pious and self-righteous husband has spent the past ten years living in sin, and has fathered a child out of wedlock.

Despite what seems like insurmountable odds to the contrary, Julia is able to forgive her husband's transgressions. Though Wesley Lloyd has passed away and cannot ask for forgiveness, it seems that by the end of the novel Julia has overcome her anger at the



situation her husband has left her with. Even from the outset, Julia was more concerned about what others would think than what the truth of her husband's secret will do to her. Once Julia is able to forgive herself for caring more about what others think than the actual situation at hand, she is able to move forward.

Family

In *Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind*, family is an important theme. Though most think of the classic 'nuclear' family when the word is mentioned, Julia Springer has no such thing. Widowed after forty-four years of marriage to a domineering Wesley Lloyd, Julia is left alone, with no children and no extended family. Her closest friends are her only 'real' family, including Lillian, her housekeeper of more than twenty years, and Sam Murdoch, a long time friend and attorney. Julia believes herself to be happy, and rationalizes any thoughts she has about how life would be different if she had children of her own.

Things change dramatically when Little Lloyd and his mother turn up on Julia's doorstep. Though Julia is devastated when she is faced with her husband's secret life and child, it is more the thought that he had a child and she did not that bothers her. At first, Little Lloyd is a constant visual reminder of his father's betrayal as they look so much alike, but as time passes and Julia begins to get to know the boy, Julia begins to see him as his own person, one that is not like his father at all. Julia is even more shocked to realize that she likes Hazel Marie, the woman that had shared her husband's bed for more than ten years. As the three battle to save each other and themselves from those who wish to destroy them, they grow closer and become a family unit, sharing in the joys of life and the trials that everyone faces daily.



Style

Point of View

Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind is written in the first person, from the point of view of Julia Springer, the main character of the novel. This is helpful to the reader, as it gives one insight into the thoughts and feelings of Julia as her life changes dramatically. At the outset of the novel, Julia is a bit self-involved, and acts superior to those around her. Because the novel is written in the first person, the reader is aware that Julia's superior attitude is based more on a sense of feeling inferior. Julia's bravado is based on trying to seem more in control than she is. The novel being written in the present tense gives the reader a sense of how Julia is feeling, and the fast pace involved.

The novel is written in equal parts dialogue and descriptive passages. The dialogue allows one to see how Julia interacts with other characters and moves the story along at a quick pace. The descriptive passages give the reader an idea of the town in which Julia lives, as well as her opinion of the people that live there. The reader is also given a deeper look into Julia's thoughts and wishes. This is important, as the face that Julia presents to the world is quite different from the way she truly feels.

Setting

Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind is set in the small town of Abbottsville, North Carolina. Several different locations in the town are visited, though most of the novel takes place in Julia's home. Julia is really a shy person, presenting a different face to those around her, and her home is her refuge. The invasion of the Puckett's, living evidence of Wesley Lloyd's betrayal, into her home directly affects Julia's self-esteem. As the saying goes, her home is her castle, and it has been invaded.

The First Presbyterian Church of Abbottsville is also an important setting in the novel. Directly across the street from Julia's home, the church has always been Julia's refuge, but this changes when Pastor Ledbetter tries having Julia declared incompetent in order to get his hands on her estate. In Julia's life, her home and her church are central. As both are no longer a safe haven, she is forced to turn to others to assist her, something that she is not comfortable doing.

Other areas of town are visited briefly, such as the barber shop and the drug store, as well as the area outside town where Little Lloyd and his mother lived before the death of Wesley Lloyd.

Julia leaves town only once, heading to and back from Spartanburg when Little Lloyd is taken by Brother Vern so that the man can get his hands on the fortune of Wesley Lloyd and Julia. It is clear that Julia is much more comfortable in a small town, and unlikely to do much traveling.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is modern, as the story is based in the present. The characters of the novel are from the south, and this is clear in the way that they speak and interact. The different levels of education in some of the characters is evident in the way they speak as well. Julia speaks in a more formal way, careful to choose her words carefully, not only expressing her level of education to the reader, but her maturity and class level. In direct contrast, the character of Lillian, Julia's African American housekeeper, speaks in a slang that is common to the south, also revealing her class and education level. Despite their differences, Julia and Lillian are very close friends, something that is not common in Abbotsville.

As the novel is written from the point of view from Julia, even the descriptive passages are written in her formal way of speech. This allows the reader to view the town and its inhabitants from Julia's point of view, an important factor when reading the novel. Having an understanding of Julia's thoughts and having the novel written with her language and speech pattern, the reader is able to get a better understanding of the characters within.

Structure

Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind consists of thirty-two chapters in varying lengths, from five to fifteen pages. The chapters are numbered, and each contains some type of event that is key to the storyline. The longer chapters tend to have more in the way of descriptive passages, while the shorter chapters either introducing or wrapping up a significant event.

The main plot of the novel is the introduction of Little Lloyd, the illegitimate son of Julia's deceased husband. As Julia had no previous knowledge of her husband's affair, her life is turned upside down with the introduction of the boy to her life, and forcing her to look deeply within herself and find the strength to overcome her misfortune. In the process, Julia discovers that her life is not complete, and by opening her heart and mind, she is able to grow and experience happiness in a life she did not expect.

A subplot within the novel is the many people who are trying to get their hands on the fortune of Wesley Lloyd Springer from different sources. Pastor Ledbetter is trying to find a way to get the money away from Julia, and Brother Vern is trying to find a way to get it from Hazel Marie. Ironically, Julia had never expected a fortune and neither did Hazel Marie. Despite this, both wind up with more than they expected.

The novel is fun to read and entertaining, moving at a fairly fast pace over the course of a few weeks. There are no periods of flashback, though there are times when Julia reflects on her past. The plot is convincing and engrossing, allowing the reader to be drawn into the storyline and become involved in the lives of the characters.



Quotes

"But I tell you, I thought I'd never get over the shock of finding Wesley Lloyd dead as a doornail, slumped over the steering wheel of his new Buick Park Avenue. Steel gray with plush upholstery, parked right out there in the driveway." Chap. 1, p. 2

"Besides, Lillian was a capable, self-assured woman, unlike me, who had to ask Wesley Lloyd what I thought about most every subject. She had a lot of common sense, too, in spite of that gold tooth she had put in a few years back. In fact, I put more stock in what Lillian thought than I did LuAnne Conover, who had to tell anybody who'd listen how important her husband was." Chap. 2, p. 9

"'I've thought about it,' I said. 'And he has some choices. He can stand up for himself and face them down alongside of me. Or he can hide in a closet until his mother comes back. Or maybe he'd prefer to be turned over to the sheriff and social services.' I leaned across the table to catch the child's eye. 'You don't want to go to an orphanage, do you, boy? Answer me that.' 'No'm.' His shoulders shook with the effort to keep from crying." Chap. 3, p. 20

"'It's all a sham,' I whispered, digging out my damp handkerchief. 'All I've ever done was parrot Wesley Lloyd. I've never had a thought or opinion of my own, I realize that now. Maybe if I'd had enough sense to think for myself, I'd have found out about him long before this.'" Chap. 4, p. 26

"I fit into this town like I'd been born to it. Wesley Lloyd Springer's wife has a built-in place, and I slid into it like butter on a biscuit. I learned right quick that everybody in Abbotsville had the same respect for Wesley Lloyd that I had. It didn't matter that other men towered over him or that they had deeper voices and stronger muscles. When Wesley Lloyd studied a loan application, there wasn't a bigger man in town. People listened to him and heeded his advice, and not just in his office at the bank. Town commissioners consulted him, lawyers telephoned him, businessmen pleaded with him, and the First Presbyterian Church of Abbotsville didn't spend a penny without his approval. He was a leader of men, and everybody knew it. And, oh, I'd been so proud of who I was. Julia DeWitt Springer. Wesley Lloyd Springer's wife. Dumbest woman in town." Chap. 5, p. 37

"'Don't think, Norma,' I said as I traversed her office to the outside door. 'It doesn't take long to discuss adultery when the pastor's for it.'" Chap. 8, p. 64

"'You're too hard on yourself, Julia. You were willing to look after the boy...'
'Yes, but I didn't want to. That's the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of it. It's the attitude of the heart that counts, Sam, and you know it as well as I do.'" Chap. 14, p. 109



"I don't mean it act'ally draw you. I mean it what you want it to do. That chile left here intending to come back, 'cause he left what meant the most to him." Chap. 16, p. 131

"Dr. Fowler turned away from the portrait he'd been studying and caught his breath as he brushed against me. He backed against the wall, still holding my hand, and I stepped closer before I could help myself. Drawn by animal magnetism and Old Spice. I'd always been a fool for Old Spice." Chap. 22, p. 187

"'It aint like you to take this sittn' down,' she said. She put her hands on the table and leaned over toward me. 'I thought you gettin' some gumption since Mr. Springer passed and left you more'n anybody can spend in a lifetime. Now you actin' like you used to when he was alive, all shriveled and shrunk up, takin' whatever anybody hand out and scrungin' down on yo'self. That preacher ain't got no hol' over you, so what you doin' actin' like you doin'?" Chap. 25, p 214

"She needs help, and if it takes a court case to get it for her, then so be it. At least I and her church family care enough to prevent any harm coming to her. We mean to take care of her, since it's abundantly clear she can't take care of herself." Chap. 30, p. 257

"Sam Murdoch, let me tell you something right now. I don't need you or any other man to take care of me. I can do that well enough by myself. And I can do ti even better with the help of Little Lloyd and Hazel Marie, if they're willing. I think this house is big enough for the three of us. And Deputy Bates, and Binkie too, if she wants." Chap. 32, p. 269



Topics for Discussion

At the beginning of the novel, Julia Springer is very proud of who she is and the life she leads in Abbotsville. Why and how does this attitude change?

Does Julia look down on people because she feels superior to them?

Who is Little Lloyd and how does he throw Julia's life into turmoil?

What is Julia's relationship with Lillian? Why do you think these two women who seem to be total opposites have the relationship they do?

What does Pastor Ledbetter hope to accomplish by having Julia meet with Dr. Fowler?

Does the character of Hazel Marie Puckett elicit sympathy or anger? Why?

The introduction of a new will seems to mark the end of Julia's comfortable life. What actually happens?