

Mrs. Mike the Story of Katherine Mary Flannigan Study Guide

Mrs. Mike the Story of Katherine Mary Flannigan by Benedict Freedman

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Plot Summary

Mrs. Mike, the Story of Katherine Mary Flannigan by Benedict and Nancy Freedman is a traditional coming of age saga set in the wilderness of Alberta, Canada. Sixteen-year-old Katherine Mary O'Fallon travels via train from the civilization of Boston, Massachusetts to the wilds of the Great Northwestern Territory to visit her Uncle John in hopes that the cold and dry air will ease the painful symptoms of her pleurisy. She heads off on her journey with a blind courage, a sense of adventure, a desire to experience worldly events, an opinion of life as a fairy tale, and a young impressionability.

While at her Uncle John's ranch, she falls in love with Sergeant Mike Flannigan and they are soon married. Sergeant Mike receives orders from the Canadian Government which send him even further North to a place called Hudson's Hope. The trip proves brutal with the frigid air and the snow. Katherine's pleurisy stabs her in the chest and Mike takes her to the Howard's cabin to rest. He diagnoses a collapsed right lung and nurses her back to health. Katherine depends on Mike for everything.

In Hudson's Hope, Katherine plays assistant to Mike's oral surgeon when the Indian brave named Atenou suffers an abscessed tooth. Mike gets out the instruction manual and quickly studies how to pull a tooth. Katherine sees Mike's anxiety for the first time. She knows he is capable. However, this is the first time she witnesses a lack of sureness in her husband.

Hudson's Hope residents experience a dry springtime and a forest fire begins to rage. Sergeant Mike orders everyone, including his pregnant wife, to wade into the widest part of the Peace River where they should be safe. He is not able to save everyone and thirty-seven men, women, and children die in the fire. The rebuilding process begins with the community closer on emotional and spiritual levels.

Katherine is pregnant with their first child and they head to a place called Grouard on orders from Mike's employer. On their way, Katherine feels labor pains. Mike promises to get her to Peace River Crossing where Mrs. Mathers is a trained nurse who can deliver the baby. When they arrive, Katherine does not like Mrs. Mathers' bedside manner and Mike thinks of a Plan B. Mrs. Carpentier, a Cree Indian midwife, comes to help Katherine in labor and delivery. Katherine thinks of Mrs. Carpentier as a fairy godmother and she nicknames her Sarah after the mother of a race in the Bible.

When the family of three Flannigans arrives in Grouard, Katherine has a premonition when they pass the cemetery. She sees herself walking through the gates. She quickly shakes this off and proceeds to meet her new neighbors and friends.

Katherine meets Constance Beauclair, the only other white woman in Grouard, and becomes good friends with her. Constance reminds Katherine of the mother of sorrows because she has already had four families and many of her nine children have died.



Katherine learns a great lesson from this woman on survival and distinguishing between what is important in life.

Mike thinks Katherine needs some help around the house and he asks Kathy to go the Mission church and orphanage to inquire about bringing one of the girls home. Katherine finds a fifteen-year-old girl named Anne, Mamanowatum in Indian, which means Oh-Be-Joyful. The girl is on punishment row in the orphanage when Katherine first sees her. Yet Katherine is drawn to this girl for her storytelling abilities with the younger children on the row. Katherine also comes face to face with her own lack of important decision-making skills.

Oh-Be-Joyful's boyfriend, Jonathan is a proud Indian character whom most at the orphanage think a bad influence. The sisters do not want the girl to be treated as an Indian woman is treated by the man in their life. The women are made to do all the heavy lifting and they are beaten.

When Jonathan enters the Flannigans' life, he is given a chance by Sergeant Mike and Katherine. When Jonathan is accused by a man named Cardinal of attempting to shoot him with an arrow, Mike intelligently proceeds to find out the truth. The Indian men come to a satisfactory conclusion on their own.

Katherine's visions of a fairy tale life are dimmed when she visits Sarah's witch doctor shed or workroom to receive the squaw tea that is helpful in easing the discomfort of childbirth. Katherine learns many lessons from Sarah. This time she learns that not everything which is pretty is good for you and not everything which is ugly is bad for you. Katherine sees and smells the decay of dead plants and animals in this nightmarish scene.

Mrs. Marlin enters the shed to ask for poison to kill her unborn baby. Sarah does not give it to her at first; however, Sarah knows what can happen to an unwanted child who lives. Sarah agrees to give it to Mrs. Marlin.

Sarah's son, Larry, gets caught in a bear trap, from the knee down. Sarah, a strong and sturdy Indian woman, uses a saw to amputate her son's leg, in order that he may live. When Katherine witnesses this horrid scene, she thinks that she will never be the strong mother who is her friend Sarah.

Mike is called away to apprehend Cardinal from the Blackfoot Territory, where he is accused of baiting and switching less valuable furs for the more higher quality ones. When Cardinal is locked in jail back in Grouard, Jonathan is blamed for stabbing him with his knife in the neck and killing him. Jonathan is then locked in a cell, much to the dismay of his girlfriend Oh-Be-Joyful. It is not until Katherine is in labor with her second child that the group finds out the truth of who killed Cardinal.

Mrs. Marlin visits Katherine after the birth of the baby and she tries to steal the infant, saying that it is her child. The spirit of her dead baby went into this one and the little boy belongs to her. Mrs. Marlin is so upset that she confesses to killing the father of her baby, Cardinal, in his jail cell.



The McTavish brothers return to Grouard from Scotland and bring with them valuable books. Katherine chooses to read the history of China, the world's oldest civilization. Katherine begins to feel the need for escape.

Soon, an epidemic of diphtheria ravages the village. The Flannigans' children die and Katherine finally feels a desperate need to escape. She returns to Boston, Massachusetts. However, the peoples, places and things of Boston seem foreign to her. She realizes the culmination of the great many lessons she learned over the past four years in the Northwest Territory. She realizes what true love is and she returns to Mike.

Tragedy continues to steal the lives of the villagers. This time, war takes the lives of Constance's sons, Paul and Timmy, and the birth of twins claims the life of Constance's daughter Madeleine. The flu steals Constance from the earthly world but before it does, Constance asks Katherine and Mike to take the twin babies.

In the end, Katherine finds peace within herself as a woman. She realizes that she is only one thread in the larger fabric of life. Yet, all threads cross each other, similar to the knot she ties when she sews. Katherine's journey from child to woman ends with her gaining control of her emotions, becoming an independent thinker, and knowing that it is not the big things in life that matter. It is the smaller things of daily life that make a life and make happiness.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

Sixteen-year-old Katherine Mary O'Fallon and her baby Cocker Spaniel Juno travel via railroad from Boston, Massachusetts through Montreal and on to Calgary, Alberta on a 30-day train journey which takes her through the blizzard of 1907 for an extended visit with her uncle John Kennedy in the Great Northwestern Territory of Canada. The worst winter in fifty years, according to the old Scotsman who shares a coach with Katherine, delays their trip on several occasions when the snow stops the engine cold.

Katherine's mother agrees to send her young daughter on this journey with the permission of Katherine's doctors. The young lady suffers pleurisy and the cold dry climate of Alberta, the doctors say, will be good for Katherine's lungs. Mother and daughter view Alberta on a map of North America, only to find the mapmaker had not much work to do in Alberta, as compared to Boston, Massachusetts.

The first landscape that Katherine beholds, after the snow, ice, and wind is a herd of hundreds of cattle, bundled together along a stock fence. They are all dead. Katherine's thoughts turn first to Juno, her puppy, who she illegally stowed in her big lunch basket so he could ride in her coach instead of in the designated baggage car. Next, she thinks of her mother. She abruptly stops those wheels of her mind from turning. She instead thinks of the home she is leaving with its boarding room beautifully decorated with flowers for those poor souls down on their luck. She cries, not only for the visually impaired lady who previously rented the room and who could no longer engage in her sewing activities, but for all the sadness in the world. Katherine begins to eat the cookies that her mother made. She cries more because the cookies are her favorite kind.

When Katherine meets her Uncle John, she listens to his stories and begins to feel comfortable on the cutter ride. When they get close to Calgary, the weather turns warm. "It will chinook," Uncle John explains. Katherine later learns that the chinook winds blowing from the west cause a thaw to set in and she is glad to see the snow melt. Warm, spring-like air and a rainbow lighten Katherine's mood and she thinks of the North as a land of magic. However, with such a rapid thaw comes flooding, especially from the Red Deer River. Katherine later learns that many cattle have either drowned or been trampled by the stampede in their efforts to escape the rushing water from the river.

Chapter One Analysis

The weather during Katherine's extended train ride and once she is newly situated at her uncle's ranch foreshadows both the suffering and joy Katherine will experience on her coming of age trip up North. The dismal, gray snow blowing, the pale sky, the frozen



earth, and the brutal and harsh conditions paint a depressing picture of an environment which parallels or contributes to Katherine's sadness. Furthermore, the warm chinook winds work to lighten Katherine's mood until she learns of the flooding which kills the livestock. In general, the journey itself and the dramatic shifts in the weather act as a metaphor for Katherine's coming of age tale. Katherine's journey will be one symbolizing the end of her innocence and the beginning of her adult life.

There is a dichotomy between Boston, Massachusetts and Calgary, Alberta. The map that Katherine and her mother view is a symbol of this dichotomy and this dichotomy is a symbol of the great change that Katherine will experience when she moves from childhood to adulthood. The language the author uses to describe the map comes entirely from Katherine's young patterns of thought. Indeed, the whole point of view is expressed through the mind of Katherine.

Mrs. Mike introduces the concept of irony in the first chapter. Katherine's mother reluctantly agrees to send her daughter into the wilderness of the North; she does so with the permission of Katherine's doctors. The sixteen-year-old girl suffers pleurisy and her physicians advise her that the cold dry climate of the North will benefit Katherine's lungs. As Katherine travels to Calgary for a healthier and more vigorous life, the irony arises when new challenges unfold.

The color red carries the symbolic meanings of both courage and danger in this chapter. Katherine is indeed courageous, whether she knows it or not, by traveling such a distance in such harsh conditions away from the home her mother created. Red is also a symbol of danger and loss, as the mud is turned red with the blood of the livestock who stampede and are drowned during the rapid thaw and rising river. The Red Deer River is another reference to the symbolism of danger.

Katherine chooses to wear a red plaid dress with blue ribbons in her hair so that her Uncle John will recognize her when she departs the train. The red of Katherine's dress and hair color represent her courage. The overall image is reminiscent of the red, white and blue of the American flag, the flag of the country from which Katherine travels. These colors are a symbol of her innocence. They represent who Katherine is when she first arrives in Canada.

The voice of Katherine rings through the verbiage. Her teenage emotions ranging from sadness, to anxiety, to light and cautious humor shine through in Chapter One. Her deep sadness stems from the smaller reasons for her unhappiness. Her young mind experiences a snowball effect when her thoughts first move toward missing her mother, then toward the seamstress who loses her vision, toward eating her favorite cookies, to finally feeling sad for all the sadness in the world. Her dog Juno is her only comfort.



Chapters Two through Four

Chapters Two through Four Summary

In Chapter Two, Katherine is introduced to both Johnny Flaherty and Sergeant Mike Flannigan. Johnny Flaherty is Uncle John's cook and Mike Flannigan is the sergeant of the Northwest Mounted who carries a passed-out Johnny home. Katherine sees the red coat of Mike's uniform and thinks he is an Englishman, a British peeler or someone off to a fox hunt. This insults Mike and he calls Katherine a "little chit" (pg. 19.) Katherine cannot help but recognize the attractive and physical qualities of Mike. The two work to sober the hung-over Johnny with black coffee and a dousing with water from the pump, while "profanity and water ran down the dripping mustache into the drain" (pg. 20.)

Needless to say, Katherine is not impressed with Johnny. When Johnny regains some sobriety, he apologizes to the lady for his behavior. When Uncle John finds Johnny, a war of words ensues. Afterward, Katherine sits down to dinner with her uncle and Sergeant Mike. Her Uncle John tells a war story about the flapjacks Johnny made while the two of them were on patrol.

The conversation turns to the notion of taking Katherine shooting with the new twenty-two that Johnny bought for her in town. Sergeant Mike tells Katherine she will not be in any need for ammunition because she can use currants in the seven pies she baked. Katherine takes a bite of pie, only to feel as if pebbles were in her mouth. She may be too embarrassed or too stubborn to spit them out right away and so she stands here with her mouth shut, feigning a gulp. Mike whispers in her ear for her to spit them out and to cook them next time.

Katherine is angry at Mike and she fantasizes how she will take revenge upon him. When a knock comes at the door, Mildred MacDonald introduces herself to Katherine. They go for a horseback ride and race until Katherine suffers pain from her pleurisy. Katherine loses the race. Mildred worries over Katherine but Katherine decides not to enlighten her over her health condition.

The girls' conversation turns toward Mildred's engagement to lawyer Richard Carlton. Katherine wonders how someone feels when they know they desire marriage such as the question, "Do you think about him all the time and try to remember how he looks and what he's said?" (pg. 30.) Mildred asks Katherine if she is in love because she gives a good description of it.

In Chapter Three, Johnny shows Katherine how he cooks and she helps him make a mulligan stew. When Katherine sees Mike again, a few days later, he brings Katherine a gift of mackinaw pants and they go hiking. Mike teaches Katherine about nature as they hike to where a family of beavers works on their dam. When a beaver is caught in a trap, Mike springs to action. Katherine is shaken by the incident. Mike attempts to comfort her. He teaches her of the Indian tradition whereby one gives back to where a



creature lives, a part of what is taken, or trapped, so that when the spirit returns, it will see that the hunter repaired what he could.

Mike's words soothe Katherine and he kisses away her tears. It is their first kiss.

In Chapter Four, Katherine's uncle allows her to go to a dance with Mike, in his roundabout way. Katherine and Mike ride their horses to the dance; Katherine is the only white girl there and she receives many proposals from the men, including marriage proposals. A fight erupts between George Bailey and Bull MacGregor, over an Indian girl named Marthe Germaine. Bull beats on Marthe and Katherine insists that Sergeant Mike throw Bull in jail. Mike does not; Katherine is in disbelief.

Back home, inside her uncle's ranch house, Katherine does not listen follow the order that Mike gives her to change out of her wet clothes. "I waited there, miserable and shivering, because I wanted Mike to come in and see that I hadn't done what he told me" (pg. 58.) Mike soon asks Katherine's uncle if he can marry Katherine. When Katherine finds out, she throws a fit and tells Mike to simply ask her and she will give him an answer. Sixteen-year-old Katherine says yes, and proceeds to break the news to her mother.

Chapters Two through Four Analysis

The color red appears in Chapter Two with the coat that is half of Sergeant Mike's uniform. The uniform and its color are both a symbol of courage such as the courage of Mike in his job as sergeant for the Northwest Mounted. When Katherine mistakenly and flirtatiously identifies the coat with that of an Englishman, the red of the coat symbolizes the dawning of new love. Another symbol of love, that of the camaraderie of men, is linked to the flapjacks that Johnny cooks. Uncle John tries to make Katherine understand why it is so important to keep Johnny around despite his bad habits. The courage of the men in the war together and the unique bonds they share will not be broken because of this love between men.

In Chapter Three, the love between Katherine and Sergeant Mike blossoms in the great outdoors when the two go hiking. Mike teaches Katherine how to appreciate nature, as he does, until she sees what man can do when a beaver is trapped in a spring-like contraption. The beaver's eyes are missing; a bird has plucked them from its sockets. Katherine cries and it is Mike's turn to comfort her. He kisses away her tears and the story of their love advances as the authors bring the two closer together on a different level.

Chapter Four brings Katherine's adolescent realization that marriage makes a girl into a woman. She thinks about her new name, Katherine Mary Flannigan, and she thinks about her mother's name, Margaret O'Fallon. In her mind, she ponders that the bond between mother and child is gone. They are two different women. The language and meaning here represent Katherine's adolescent way of thinking. There is a sadness at

leaving behind her youth, and an impatience to become a woman, yet marriage is only one step in Katherine's journey to womanhood.



Chapters Five through Six

Chapters Five through Six Summary

After the marriage, Katherine and Mike begin their journey via train to Edmonton and a dog-sled caravan to Lesser Slave Lake, per orders from Mike's employer, the Canadian government. Katherine leaves her dog Juno with her friend Mildred because the dog is simply too civilized to live on the trail. Two nuns, on their way to the Mission at Peace River Crossing, seek a space for themselves on one of the sleds. Although the sleds are packed, a man named Baldy Red comes to their rescue. Sergeant Mike knows Baldy as a con man; however, Katherine refuses to believe that this nice man is anything but sincere.

Entering the village of Athabaska, Katherine witnesses a natural phenomenon around the sun, which Mike terms sun dogs. "The sun was already low when a circle of pale, silvery light sprang up around it. A little later, within this giant loop, four smaller shining circles appeared. In each circle a small unreal but gleaming image of the sun shone" (pg. 67.) Mike tells Katherine that the Indians believe these are evil stars which attempt to kill the sun. Odds are ten to one, Mike continues, there will be a blizzard in the morning. It was true.

Stranded in the village, Katherine and Mike stay in a cabin with the other travelers, including Baldy Red. When Katherine talks with Baldy, she is less likely to believe his motives are honest. Later in their journey, Mike asks Baldy about the bottles in his chests that make up the nun's seating arrangement. Baldy says they are empty and no whisky is allowed to be carried up north, by law. Since Mike is not on duty, he does not arrest Baldy. He waits until they reach Jussard, where the Mounted Police can deal with the situation. The Police do not check the chests where the nuns are seated. At Peace River Crossing, Mike sneaks out of the cabin. While Katherine is unsure of his activities, word reaches Hudson's Hope that Baldy's bottles were indeed empty.

The struggle of the long journey begins to wear on both Katherine's physical body and her mind. "Pain was white, white and cold, and it was around me like a winding sheet. Something beat at my ears and dripped into my mind" (pg. 73.) It was Mike's voice; he tells her they are near the Howard's place of residence, where they will rest.

At the Howards, Mike diagnoses Katherine, saying that a Mouny has to be a little bit of everything up in this country. He thinks her right lung has collapsed and he wants her to wear a dog harness as a brace to keep her posture upright. With her shoulders pulled back, she may not be so tired.

While seated at the Howards' dinner table, Katherine hears a low wailing sound which increases in pitch until she can stand it no more; she screams and screams until the Howard men run outside of their home. She laughs. The wailing sounds come from the wolves outside; they cry because the smell of burned horse flesh ignites their desire to



eat. However, they cannot get inside the barn, which has burned down and killed five of the Howards' horses. Mike tells Kathy he will take her back in the morning. When morning lifts however, the last night is forgotten. They travel on to their final destination. Katherine is stronger and Mike is proud of her. After three months of traveling through oftentimes brutal weather, they reach their new home. A sense of happiness runs through Katherine as she views the Peace River, the beautiful natural scenery, the log cabins, and the store.

Mike introduces his wife to Joe Henderson at the store. When Joe throws an empty bottle at the Indian woman standing behind the stove, Katherine immediately wants to leave. The Indian woman says, "It bring much honor to house if Sergeant Mike and Mrs. Mike eat." Katherine takes off her coat and sits back down. Katherine meets Tommy Henderson, Joe and the Indian woman's toddler son, and discovers that Mike likes children.

Mike tells her the story of Joe Henderson, his first wife and the other Tommy Henderson. Joe's first son died of diphtheria and Joe blamed his wife for not caring for the boy properly.

Chapters Five through Six Analysis

The first action in Chapter Five is a symbolic one. Katherine is forced to leave her dog Juno back in Alberta with her friend Mildred. Juno is too civilized to survive life in the wilds of the north. In the beginning, Juno was Katherine's only comfort and joy. She is relinquishing some of her youth and moving forward into her life as a wife. A further end to Katherine's innocence is the moment when she meets Baldy, is touched by his actions regarding the nuns, then finds out he is a con man. Katherine's naiveté is vanishing.

The sun dog phenomenon acts as a telling detail regarding life in nature. The sun dogs are a sign of looming weather. It is through these and other signs that people can predict the weather. Both the weather and the scenery act as a metaphor for life. The weather threatens to take Katherine's life when her right lung collapses, according to Mike. In their growing love, Mike acts as Katherine's caregiver in all respects and Mike realizes that Katherine grows to become as strong as the weather.

In Chapter Six, the weather and nature are symbols of Mike, this man Katherine has married. Katherine realizes this after the wolves' cries threaten her sanity. "It was that night that I really became his wife, for I knew that this white land and its loneliness were a part of Mike" (pg. 79.) Katherine further realizes that they have only each other, and this is the way it is supposed to be in their marriage. The wolves' cries also signified the sound of loneliness to Katherine. She felt that she, too, needed to cry and scream with them in their loneliness, for she had no mother.

When Katherine witnesses the ill treatment dished out by Joe Henderson to the Indian woman, she is incensed and reacts immediately by wanting to distance herself from the



behavior. In this chapter, the Indian woman is mistreated and thought to be second-rate. When Katherine discovers the history behind Joe Henderson's life, she takes a few more baby steps into her personal journey toward womanhood. She will most likely not be so quick to judge those she does not know. People's lives can be quite complicated and Katherine begins to see more sides to a person's story than the initial first reaction.



Chapters Seven through Eight

Chapters Seven through Eight Summary

On Mike's first day at work in Chapter Seven, Katherine decides she will make sandwiches for lunch and bring them to her husband. As she prepares the food, a six-year-old Indian girl visits her home. Katherine offers the shy girl a sandwich, which she stuffs in her mouth. Before Katherine knows it, thirty Indians are seated in her home. This is the first of what becomes a weekly luncheon and tea party.

In March, the land begins its thaw and Mike takes Katherine on a hike to see the rock shaped like a buffalo head. On their way, Mike points out a thin stream of moisture rising from snow bank. Katherine sees and is in awe to find that Mike has such Indian-like instincts that he identifies this as the breath of a bear hibernating. The two hear noises that sound like glass splintering. "Below us a long strip of white earth heaved like a huge writhing snake. White sandstone cliffs looked down as it pushed upon on itself, splitting cakes of ice loose. In the open space water moved. It was the Peace River crunching and gnawing at the ice layer that covered it" (pg. 95.) Katherine continues, "This experience made things different for me. Things I had thought of as static, lived, had a violent insurgent life of their own. The river was like the bear; it hibernated for the winter" (pg. 95-96.)

As they head back home, they see the Indian trappers returning from their trapping journey. The Indian women greet the men, only to find their backs loaded down with fur pelts. Katherine cannot believe her eyes when she sees one man harness a woman to the sled. The woman takes the place of one of the dogs who is too tired from the long journey. Mike tells Katherine that things are slowly changing for these women. However, Katherine desires to make the lives of these women better.

In the spring and summer months described in Chapter Eight, mosquitoes rule the land. This means no skirts or dresses for Katherine, only overalls, gloves, and hats with cheesecloth hanging down. Mike fastens very fine cheesecloth over the windows of their home. The swarms of mosquitoes keep all humans and animals miserable until night falls, when cooler weather keeps the pests away.

Katherine weeds her garden, in full mosquito garb, and sees something she thinks may be a red clover. She does not pull it up. Rather, she waits until she can show Mike to find out what it is. When Mike pulls up, they walk the way of the river toward the Beaver Indian reservation, where Katherine does what she thinks of as her missionary work. Katherine and Mike arrive at the Indian village and draw a crowd. Chief Mustagan greets Mike with a ceremonial gesture of the hand. Katherine discovers that last week's cheesecloth, which was tacked up on the windows of the chief's home, is now cut up and used as edging for Indian dresses. Katherine admonishes Oo-me-me, the chief's wife, saying that the cheesecloth belongs to the windows. Oo-me-me does not understand what the windows need with pretty dresses. Mike finds this amusing. He



crafts a story about Father Lacombe, the first white man to enter the Territory and teach the Indians about garbage cans.

Shortly thereafter, a brave enters the chief's house with news of a woman lost in the woods now for three days. The men quickly act and plan a search for this woman, who is most likely dead from the mosquitoes.

Chapters Seven through Eight Analysis

In Chapter Seven, the language chosen to describe the scenery during the thaw makes nature come alive. Indeed, the Indians believe that each element in Mother Nature has a personality all its own. Some places and things are inherently evil and others inherently good. Katherine thinks the Peace River is angry. Mike says, "Not angry. It shakes winter off as we rub sleep from our eyes" (pg. 95.) The places in nature are given emotions and human feelings and/or characteristics throughout the novel, which is a literary device called personification.

Through Katherine's voice, the authors utilize a simile comparing Mike to Katherine's mother. It is unclear if Katherine realizes how true the comparison is to her overall young relationship with Sergeant Mike.

In Chapter Eight, the Red Clover that Katherine cannot bring herself to pluck from the ground is a symbol of health and vitality. Traditionally, Red Clover is used to treat diseases and ailments such as cancer, whooping cough, respiratory problems, and swelling of the skin. Red Clover works to eliminate excess fluid in the lungs as well.

Katherine and Mike continue their student-teacher relationship as she learns more and more about nature and how much her husband knows about this world that is eons away from her hometown of Boston. Seen through the eyes of Katherine, and heard through her voice, the reader gains a deeper understanding of not only the missus but of her woodsman husband as well.



Chapters Nine through Ten

Chapters Nine through Ten Summary

In Chapter Nine, Katherine sees Chief Mustagan's best hunter, Atenou, suffering from a toothache. Mike and Katherine give Atenou many glasses of whiskey, and then hog-tie the brave to the chair. Mike finds his instruction manual, gets out the dental instruments, drinks some whiskey himself, and pulls Atenou's abscessed wisdom tooth.

Mike and Katherine hear a terrorized scream. This time, it is not Atenou screaming in pain. Instead, it is a man riding a horse, carrying a bear cub who is being chased by the mother bear. Mike yells for the man to drop the cub and finally the cub is released to the ground. The Flannigans invite the man in for whiskey. The man is Ralph Peters, who initially calls himself a prospector, on his way to the Yukon. Ralph is a shoe salesman from Detroit, Michigan who decides to try his luck at mining gold.

Atenou pulls his tooth out of his small pouch, and shows it to Ralph. Atenou tells of his native superstitions regarding the tooth of wisdom - powerful, good medicine. The tooth, according to the brave, can cure pain between bones, can make a woman love a man, and can protect against grizzly bears. In fact, Atenou says, "Bear no come where is this tooth. No like, strong medicine" (pg. 119.) The shoe salesman from Detroit seems thoroughly sold by the idea.

In Chapter Ten, the authors mention the fact that the Territory erects no traffic signs and hires no traffic cops. The navigation tools here include only the sun during the day and the stars at night. According to Mike, people can predict the time, their direction and the weather by using nature's elements.

The couple lies out on a blanket stargazing in while Mike gives Kathy an astronomy lesson. She learns how to identify the Pole Star, which is the basis for navigation. They name different constellations: the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, Cassiopeia's Chair, and Hair of Berenice. Katherine also learns that the Pole Star is the North Star, and it does not move all night; the other stars move around it.

When Katherine asks why, Mike asks her if she prefers the scientific explanation or the story of the Indian Beavers. On a night as magical as this one, Katherine says she prefers no science lesson. Mike begins the story of Indian superstition.

Chapters Nine through Ten Analysis

The language, here in Chapter Nine, and throughout the novel, reflects the personalities and motivations of both the characters delivering and receiving the message of communication. The language is a mirror image of the time period, the early 1900s. For example, "What's the matter with you, Atenou? You look like the last rose of summer" (pg. 111.) This simile is one that delivers a powerful message to the Indian, in a manner



that the Indian understands. It is lighthearted humor portrays Mike as someone capable of communicating and getting all manner of people to open up and relax.

Katherine, for the first time, sees her husband in a position of worry that he may not be able to handle the task before him. Mike needs a drink of whiskey to help him relax before he plays oral surgeon to his new patient. Katherine, in turn, is worried and takes a drink, too. Yet, Katherine watches how capable her husband acts when he studies the instruction book and proceeds to pull the wisdom tooth.

Irony and perhaps the whiskey, rear their heads when Ralph Peters, the salesman from Detroit, appears genuinely interested in the Indian superstitions of Atenou regarding his "tooth of wisdom." Katherine feels proud of Atenou and she says that he drives a shrewd bargain with the salesman.

In Chapter Ten, as the couple ponder the natural ways of navigating direction in the Territory, this acts as a metaphor for the dramatic change in direction their lives will take with a new baby. The very fact that Katherine spots the Little Dipper in the sky first is symbolic of her pregnancy. Furthermore, Katherine knows about the pregnancy before Mike does and her identification of the Little Dipper is consistent with her state of mind.

The Indian story regarding the birth of the North Star is also symbolic. The spirits are shining down on the couple for they are blessed with the news of a pregnancy and eventually a new baby. The couple's thoughts are magical and joyous right now, parallel to the magic and wonder of the night skies above.



Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven Summary

As Katherine witnesses the fair winds blowing the grass, she realizes that she smells smoke. When she runs to Mike's office, wild animals join her on the human footpath. Just as Katherine sees Mike, he instructs her to go to the widest part of the river in front of the store. He tells her to wade into the middle and wait for him. Katherine heads to the river, praying.

The gathering of people in the river witnesses the fiery destruction of the Hudson's Bay Company store. The wild animals that hesitated at the river's edge hesitated no longer. Moose, deer, otters, mink, bears, wolves, and lynx joined the humans in the water. The fire moves toward the river and the brightness and heat torture the waders. The next day, Mike picks Katherine up, puts dry clothes on her, and feeds her soup. They lie under the sky on blankets with smudge pots burning. Mike doctors Katherine's burned face and neck with a compress saturated in strong tea.

Joe Henderson, his body ravaged by the fire, learns that his second Tommy was killed in the fire along with the toddler's mother and aunt. Joe Henderson, once again, blames the death of his Tommy on the mother. Mike attempts to rationalize with this grief-stricken man, to no avail. Thirty-seven graves with the same number of wooden crosses are prepared for the fallen. Chief Mustagan gives credit to Sergeant Mike for saving the people of Mustagan.

Chapter Eleven Analysis

The forest fire is not only a symbol of destruction. It is a symbol of strength, revealing the cyclic nature of life, balance, spirituality, and emotions uncontrolled. The blazing fire is strong in its aggression to destroy whatever may lie in its path. True balance results from the solidarity of the living, moving creatures. The people and animals become one unit, fighting for the same end result, to save lives. There will be balance when the people move past their pain and rebuild their lives and community. Strength and survivorship come into play as the people struggle to regain control.

In Katherine's coming of age journey, the element of spirituality introduces itself here. Katherine prays, for the first time in the novel. She prays to God, and she prays to the religion of Nature. Katherine's acceptance of that which she cannot control, and her ability to give the hardship to an omnipresent force larger than herself are signs of her entrance into adulthood. Katherine's instincts are growing as she is able to quickly deduce the presence of the fire.

The language and diction are more mature in this chapter, as Katherine grows mentally, physically and spiritually into a woman and mother. The language and meaning reflect Katherine's growing intelligence. The description is also vivid and alive. "The fire danced



on the edges of the river; the water was gold. Ripples mirrored the flames, glittering red and orange. Everything was intensified. Color!" (pg. 129.) Also, "Sound was the only thing that could travel through the color and live. Animals and humans cried with the forest, with the trees as they strained, as they broke, with the trapped creatures" (pg. 129.)

The wildfire symbolizes emotions that are out of control. This is plainly seen with Joe Henderson's reaction to the death of his second son Tommy. He blames Tommy's mother, once again, and his anger is as heated as the fire itself. Katherine's emotions run the gamut of feeling sorry for those whose loved ones are lost, to feeling an intense and stronger love for her husband, to feeling confused about what has happened. Mike's emotions come from his feelings of uncertainty over whether he was able to do all he could for the people he serves as sergeant. Many different emotions are expressed and sorted through before the rebuilding process can begin.



Chapters Twelve through Thirteen

Chapters Twelve through Thirteen Summary

In Chapter Twelve, the couple head to Grouard on orders of transfer from the Government. One night, while Katherine thinks of the person she has inside of her, she feels her first cramp from the pregnancy. She is angry with Mike because of the thought that she will have her baby on the trail, not the city and because she wants a woman to help her. Mike shakes off Kathy's anger and rationally tells her that if she were near birth, her pains would be fast and close together. The two make it to Peace River Crossing, where a former female nurse named Mrs. Mathers is there to help.

When they reach Peace River Crossing, Mrs. Mathers does not give a good first impression. She states that Katherine is not made for child-bearing; she doubts if she will take the baby out of Katherine alive. Mike makes different plans with Katherine's consent. He telegraphs a midwife named Mrs. Carpentier and asks her to come up from Grouard. Two nights later, as the midwife is on the trail, Katherine's labor pains become more intense.

Katherine suffers so much pain that her mind thinks of the woman at the bedroom door as Sarah from the Bible. Katherine feels peace. She relaxes and listens intently to Mrs. Carpentier's voice as she describes the squaw root mixture that Katherine drinks. Katherine holds onto the voice so she does not enter the darkness again. When Mike tells Katherine that it is all over and they have a baby girl, Katherine smiles and sees her baby for the first time.

Mrs. Carpentier diapers the baby girl in moss, which is held in place with little pants. Instead of using talcum powder, the midwife uses pounded tea leaves. When Katherine says that the midwife must have had a lot of children, Mrs. Carpentier replies that she had seventeen of her own and she delivered hundreds into the world. Only one child was lost. He was that of Mrs. Mathers in the very same house.

The Flannigans name their daughter Mary Aroon in Chapter Thirteen. Katherine believes that the name Mary is the most beautiful name in the world. Before the Flannigan family leaves Peace River Crossing, Katherine asks Mrs. Carpentier if she can call her Sarah, the woman from her Bible who was a mother to an entire race. Sarah agrees.

When they arrive in Grouard, the first landmark visible to Katherine is the little cemetery on the hill. As they pull up to their new home, Sarah greets Katherine and helps her into their new cabin. Sarah feeds her and makes proper introductions to the Beauclaire family and others. Katherine asks who planted the beautiful garden outside her new home. Mike explains that Mrs. Marlin, who is ill, planted the garden. The next morning, Katherine's garden is wilted and dull, eliminating last night's enchanted feelings. When Katherine asks Mike about this, he tells her that Mrs. Marlin is not right in the head.



However, she went to great depths to find the beautiful flowers, pull them up, and place them outside of Katherine's home as a welcome gift. Katherine feels the magic and enchantment of their new home is still intact.

Chapters Twelve through Thirteen Analysis

Mike continues his roles of caretaker and father figure for Katherine in Chapter Twelve. In fact, Mike still calls Katherine a "girl" on many occasions. With the birth of their baby, Mike holds more knowledge than Katherine regarding the speed and duration of labor pains. This is rather ironic. Mike is always trying to please Katherine, and she is becoming comfortable in their roles. Katherine experiences mood changes during her pregnancy, as do women in any time period of the world at large. The classic symptoms of pregnancy, labor and delivery work to make this novel a timeless piece of literature.

The squaw root Indian drink, the moss for diaper, and the pounded tea leaves for powder all symbolize the magical, enchanted qualities of the birth of a brand new baby. Katherine feels contented and happy. Another symbol used in Chapter Twelve is what the Indians term Eteomami or Water Flowing Three Ways, or the Peace River Crossing, which is the point where three rivers converge. This represents the birth of a new baby girl, the Flannigan family, and the peace that the family experiences.

Her lesson for not being so quick to judge others, as she had Mrs. Mathers, is repeated once again. There always seem to be reasons for the way people act and who they become in life. This novel provides enlightenment on what kind of a person Katherine becomes as well.

In Chapter Thirteen, the name that Katherine chooses for her daughter, Mary, connects to one of the themes of the novel, which are the balance inherent in life and the balance between tragedy and blessings. Mary has Christian roots in the name of the mother of Jesus Christ. It can mean wished-for child. Mary can also mean sea of sadness or sea of bitterness.

The momentary glimpse of the future that Katherine beholds as she views the sparkling cemetery foreshadows actions taking place later in the novel. Katherine has what is called a premonition, as is evidenced by the following quote, "There was the tiny distant figure of a woman walking through the graveyard gate, and for a second I thought it was me" (pg. 150.)

The significance of Lesser Slave Lake results from Chapter One, when Katherine's mother asks Katherine not to venture to these parts of the country, for her mother had lived and died in those parts. This is the foreshadowing that took place in the first chapter.

Another example of foreshadowing is the garden of flowers planted by Mrs. Marlin. The flowers have no roots, no stalks and no leaves. They are simply blossoms stuck in the ground. This presents a feeling that something may be temporary where no roots will be planted.



Chapter Fourteen through Sixteen

Chapter Fourteen through Sixteen Summary

Constance Beauclaire goes to Katherine's cabin to borrow liniment for Georges' sprained foot. Constance picks up Mary Aroon and is reminded of her baby Suzanne. Katherine inquires about Suzanne and Constance tells the story of her trip to America from France when she was only eighteen years old, the same age as Katherine. Constance loses her whole family to smallpox on the boat over from France. Constance says, "Women up here speak of their first family, their second family, their third family. Counting the baby boy I lost that first winter, I've had four families. Nine children. They're out there" (pg. 158.) She waves to the graveyard. Diseases such as the measles, scarlet fever, and typhoid claimed the lives of her other families.

Katherine remembers that her mother told her there are people in the world who are born to sorrow; Constance is one of them. On a positive note, Constance states, "These big things, these terrible things, are not the important ones. If they were, how could one go on living? No, it is the small, little things that make up a day, that bring fullness and happiness to a life" (pg. 158.) Constance invites Katherine and Mike to the Mission for midnight mass.

Just then, Mike kicks open the door to the cabin, carrying Timmy, who is crying. A grizzly bear killed his hunting buddy, Jerry West. Timmy grieves for his friend and feels sorry that he could not do more to help save Jerry's life. At the Mission later that night, Katherine notices the crude Mother of Sorrows wood carving. She sees a warmth and beauty to this religious décor unlike the coldness of expensive marble pieces. Katherine sees the face of Constance in the Mother of Sorrows and she is prompted to pray.

In Chapter Fifteen, Mike wants a girl from the Mission to help Katherine with her domestic duties. Katherine eventually hires a fifteen-year-old girl named Mamanowatum, in Indian, Anne in English. The Mother Superior speaks with Katherine about her choice. She wants to know whether Katherine simply pitied the girl, and so chose her. Katherine, in child-like fashion, impulsively interrupts the Mother Superior when she speaks. The Mother is determined to have a conversation with Katherine that is logical, so she tells Katherine that if she does not ask why Anne is being punished, then the Mother will go ahead and tell her. Katherine is embarrassed and angry with herself for acting like such a child.

Katherine proceeds to find out that Anne, or Mamanowatum, is a rather wayward child who has fallen in love with the son of a rebellious 'breed leader who waged war against the Canadian government." The son, Jonathan, calls Anne a klooch. To the Mother Superior at the Mission, a klooch implies the tragedy of filth, dirt, ignorance and superstition. Anne cannot marry Jonathan because it would be a tragedy to send a Mission girl into the life of an Indian woman.



In Chapter Sixteen, Katherine pats herself on the back, for Mamanowatum or Oh-Be-Joyful in Indian, proves to be a good choice. Everyone in the family likes the fifteen-year-old girl. It isn't until Katherine discovers the fine valuable animal pelts on her front porch that she realizes Jonathan is near. Katherine tells the girl that she does not want her to become a klooch; however, the girl tells Mrs. Mike that the word klooch means woman and particularly, an Indian woman. Katherine tells Oh-Be-Joyful that she is neither a klooch nor a woman. Instead, she is a fifteen-year-old girl. Katherine tries to persuade the girl to stay away from Jonathan as long as she remains in their house.

When Katherine goes to Mike's office, she overhears him talking to Cardinal. Cardinal complains that Jonathan is trying to kill him. Rumor has it that Jonathan says Cardinal steals from his traps. Mike decides to find Jonathan to figure out the truth. Katherine thinks if Mike locks Jonathan up, then her problem will be solved. Jonathan will stay away from Oh-Be-Joyful. Mike finds a sick, hungry and battered Jonathan and brings him home to dinner. Mike explains to Katherine that Jonathan went back to his traps in order to catch the thief in action. Cardinal saw Jonathan sleeping near his traps and beat him up. Once convinced that Cardinal is the thief and batterer, Jonathan begins shooting arrows at Cardinal.

Cardinal comes to the Flannigan home and finds Jonathan there. Jonathan tells the story of Pee-Shoo, the big cat that killed his gray wolf cubs. "My arrows, they follow him, they let him not to rest. In terror must he live now until the day my pity, she guide arrow into the wicked, frightened heart of Pee-Shoo" (pg. 189.) The next day, the Flannigans hear that Cardinal has left Lesser Slave Lake to trap further up north.

Chapter Fourteen through Sixteen Analysis

The storytelling theme continues with the history that Constance shares with Katherine regarding the death of her whole family when she is almost eighteen years old. Katherine looks distressed at the story of Constance, however, this lady from France attempts to soothe Katherine's sadness by saying, "Don't look like that, Katherine Mary. It happened such a long time ago, twenty-five years. I can talk about it now, tell it as if it were a story, because so many years of living have passed between me and that little French girl" (pg. 156.)

Constance wants no pity. Instead she has grown into a woman with the wisdom to accept the things she cannot change. She has learned how to put the pain behind her and move on. When Constance tells Katherine that the living is in the small things, she is relaying an important lesson in Katherine's coming of age journey. Constance becomes a mother figure and role model for Katherine. In the previous chapter titled Chapter Thirteen, Katherine tells Constance that her mother lives in Boston and that Constance is very much like her mother. Margaret O'Fallon and Constance Beauclair are women who are older and have completed the life's journey that Katherine is currently living.



Katherine, up to this point in the novel, begins to apply the knowledge she has gained from her family, her friends, her husband, and from nature. In Chapter Fifteen, Katherine comes face to face with her lack of decision-making skills. This revelation is, in itself, a sign that she is growing up and able to analyze herself. Although, at this stage, she is unsure of exactly how to change what needs to be changed in order for her to make educated decisions.

When Katherine tells Oh-Be-Joyful that she is not a woman, rather she is a fifteen-year-old girl, the situation is ironic because Katherine is only three years older than her charge. The journey to adulthood appears to have less to do with age than it does experiences, life's lessons, and family background. Oh-Be-Joyful could indeed have a better sense of herself at age fifteen than Katherine does at age eighteen.

Katherine acts in a manner of which the sisters at the Mission would approve. She tries very hard to be the adult but she is not true to herself. This makes her uncomfortable. She decides that she cannot do anything with Oh-Be-Joyful and so Mike will have to do something with Jonathan. Sergeant Mike, in his wisdom and respect for the Indians, is a man who decides to find out the truth before jumping to conclusions and imprisoning men falsely. Here, Mike's lack of action relating to imprisonment leads the way to a peaceful solution between Cardinal and Jonathan, for Cardinal leaves. Jonathan's stubbornness and determination prove to be great qualities for life in the wilds of the Territory.



Chapters Seventeen through Nineteen

Chapters Seventeen through Nineteen Summary

During the long winter in Chapter Seventeen, Katherine gets to know her five-month-old daughter. Mrs. Mike is pregnant again and seeks help from Sarah and her squaw root medicine for labor and delivery. Sarah's workroom smells of decay and the décor consists of dead plants, animals and other items belonging "at the bottom of swamps, under rocks, or in nightmares" (pg. 192.)

Mrs. Marlin comes to the door of Sarah's shed in search of bad medicine. She wants to terminate her own pregnancy, and Sarah finally helps her by giving her the medicine she seeks. Sarah explains to Katherine that when she did not give the medicine to a woman in the past, the woman tried to mangle her own baby. Sarah took this baby and tried to heal it; she could not heal the damage already done.

In Chapter Eighteen, mail arrives in the winter and it is a much anticipated event. Katherine receives a mirror from her mother as a Christmas present. When Katherine sees her reflection, her mother immediately comes to mind. Katherine sees a stronger version of her young self but still does not quite recognize herself.

As Katherine and Oh-Be-Joyful bathe Mary Aroon, an Indian comes to the Flannigan house with news that Larry Carpentier is caught in a bear trap. Katherine leaves to go to Sarah's cabin to see if she can help. Katherine hears the screams from Larry and when she goes inside, she witnesses Sarah sawing off Larry's leg above the knee. Katherine faints. When she comes to, Mike and Father Grouard, from the Mission, are there. Father Grouard will make Larry a wooden leg and Mike will tend to Larry's stock while he recuperates.

In Chapter Nineteen, Larry becomes comfortable with his wooden leg and gives the Flannigans half a cow to repay them for their kindness. Katherine goes to the barn to milk Bessie the cow and when she returns home, she sees a Blackfoot Indian sitting on her porch. He is in search of Sergeant Mike, for Cardinal is up to his old thievery tricks again. Mike prepares to go to the Blackfoot Indian territory to arrest Cardinal. Katherine feels sad and wonders if Mike really loves her. When Mike tells Katherine that he will not go if she does not want him to, Katherine realizes that Mike loves her, and will keep his promise to return within two months. Besides, Katherine knows that Mike is the only capable policeman to bring in the criminal.

Mike returns in only six weeks time, and Katherine wants to hear the story behind Cardinal's apprehension. After the story and while the Flannigans are relaxing at home, Constable Cameron bursts in through the door, delivering the news that Cardinal was found murdered in his cell, with a hunting knife in his throat. They distinguish the carvings on the handle of the knife and discover that Jonathan Forquet is the owner of the weapon. Much to Oh-Be-Joyful's dismay, Sergeant Mike arrests Jonathan.



Chapters Seventeen through Nineteen Analysis

In Chapter Seventeen, Sarah's shed, in Katherine's mind, is symbolic of a witch's den, a place of white magic and sorcery that brings to mind the dichotomy of good versus evil in childhood fairy tales. Katherine continues learning her lessons that help her to eliminate her young thought patterns, which are rooted in black and white. She learns to see the shades of gray in between the two extremes.

Katherine's reflection in the mirror, in Chapter Eighteen works as a validation to herself of who she is becoming along her journey. She witnesses strength in her appearance. Underneath her physical appearance sits the strength in character that grows. Although, when Katherine witnesses Larry's leg amputation, she instinctively knows that she cannot ever do something like this to her own flesh and blood. She also thinks that Sarah is a stronger person and a better mother than she. This comparative thinking may be a part of her young thought process, or it may be that Katherine instinctively knows who she is and of what she is capable. The fact that Katherine denies her ability to engage in such an activity is also a turning point for her. Mike is able to complete the amputation which Sarah began. Katherine separates herself from Mike at this juncture. Whereas before, on more occasions than not, Katherine acted and thought like Mike in her life. She draws the line here.

Chapter Nineteen sheds light on Katherine's initial reaction to Mike's two-month trip. It is selfish and childish. She thinks only of herself and how scared she will be with Mike gone while she is pregnant. Katherine's wisdom and her belief in her husband make her second reaction a logical and well-thought out choice. Katherine grows to think of other people such as Mike and his adventurous side, Cardinal and his capable apprehension, and the greater good of the Indian people from whom Cardinal steals.

Sergeant Mike, once again, performs his job well. The storytelling theme continues in this chapter, when Katherine wants to hear the tale of Cardinal's apprehension. When Mike tells Katherine stories, it is a way for Katherine to continue to live vicariously through her husband. The arrest of Jonathan for the death of Cardinal in his cell shows the integrity in Sergeant Mike's character; Sergeant Mike has a job to do and he will uphold the law, no matter the consequences in his personal life.



Chapters Twenty through Twenty-Two

Chapters Twenty through Twenty-Two Summary

In Chapter Twenty, Katherine begins labor and delivery with Oh-Be-Joyful begging her forgiveness through tears. In her delirium of childbirth, Katherine feels the pain as throbbing colors of gold and purple, the agonizing colors of violet and red. The northern lights dance during the birth of the Flannigan's son. When Katherine hears a wailing and moaning sound, Mike tells her that Mrs. Marlin desires to see the baby. Katherine wants to show off her son, however, at first, Sarah will not let her. Katherine insists and both Mrs. Marlin and Oh-Be-Joyful are allowed entrance into the room.

As Oh-Be-Joyful holds the baby, Mrs. Marlin grabs him from her. Mrs. Marlin gets ready to leave with the baby when Mike and Oh-Be-Joyful intervene. Mrs. Marlin tells the group that the baby is hers. She drank the black poison to kill her baby and her baby's spirit entered this child. The baby is hers. Oh-Be-Joyful tells her the baby is not hers. Mrs. Marlin admits that Cardinal was the father of her baby. She also admits to stabbing Cardinal in the neck while he is in jail. For this, Oh-Be-Joyful is truly joyful.

In Chapter Twenty-One, the first fruits of corn feast is a huge party which includes food, drink, games, dancing, and fun. Oh-Be-Joyful and Jonathan have not been together much since his release from prison and she tells Katherine she feels shame for not believing in Jonathan's innocence. She says Jonathan knows that she did not believe in him and the insult is difficult for their relationship to overcome. Jonathan wants Oh-Be-Joyful to know and understand him. "He wanted his woman to understand him, not with her intellect, not with her emotions, but directly, soul to soul" (pg. 231.)

It is not until Katherine discloses that she likes Jonathan that Oh-Be-Joyful decides to attend the first fruits of corn feast. When Oh-Be-Joyful dances in line with the other single men and women, the hesitation, inhibition and shame that once plagued her relationship with Jonathan evaporate. The couple head off into the woods together when the dance is over, where he builds her a tepee of willow, adorning the floor with balsam and furs.

A gray wolf begins hanging around the Flannigan's house in Chapter Twenty-Two and Mike is determined to get him after he raided the turkeys at Larry's place. Mike sets his bait, a dead rabbit laced with strychnine. The next morning, the wolf approaches the rabbit, circles it, and hoists his leg over it, relieving himself. Mike says this is an expression of contempt by the wolf. Mike says he'll be damned if he allows a wolf to sneer at him. Mike sets other traps, only to find continued sneering.

Mike is tense as he tries to complete a report he is working on. The wolf and dog are howling, Mary Aroon bumps into her daddy, making his careful penmanship messy, and she spills the bottle of ink he uses to write. Mike gets angry and runs after Mary, who is in front of Kathy. Mary lies on the bed on her stomach; Katherine flings herself down on



top of Mary. Katherine experiences the worst spanking of her life. Katherine finds this funny later on.

To make up for his anger, Mike takes the family sledding. They enjoy themselves thoroughly until they return home and Mike finds wolf dung close to their front porch. He sets a final trap. When Mike returns home, Katherine shares the good news that Juno had her puppies. Mike looks at them and realizes he needs to go outside and retrieve the wolf trap, for he no longer wants to kill the father of Juno's puppies.

Chapters Twenty through Twenty-Two Analysis

The northern lights flashing in the sky in Chapter Twenty are a sign of good luck, for the birth of the baby, and for Oh-Be-Joyful. The lights symbolize truth and beauty. For Katherine, the beauty comes from her colorful experience of labor and the awe of her son entering the world. For Oh-Be-Joyful, light is shed on the truth behind who killed Cardinal. Her Jonathan will now be freed.

The feast in Chapter Twenty-One signifies a thanksgiving celebration for the Indians. They give thanks for the first thunder, the rain, and the ripe fruits of the earth. Since then, the first person to hear the thunder calls for a feast. This represents a time of celebration and solidarity between the community and Mother Nature.

Chapter Twenty-Two brings continued maturity for Katherine in how she relates to Mike. She speaks her piece, for instance, when she thinks Mike should not kill the gray wolf. She sees Mike as more of a man now than guardian. She says that once Mike realizes the gray wolf is father of Juno's puppies, he will most likely take the credit for saving the wolf's life, even after so many attempts to kill the animal. Katherine thinks more for herself now. For example, she even doubts that Mike's last trap set for the wolf would work. After all, none of the others had been successful.



Chapters Twenty-Three through Twenty-Five

Chapters Twenty-Three through Twenty-Five Summary

In Chapter Twenty-Three, the McTavish brothers return from Scotland to stay in Grouard. They bring valuable books with them and offer some to Katherine, who chooses *The History of China, Vols. I, II, and III* as her winter reading. Katherine knows that her interest is in China, the world's oldest civilization. Katherine loses herself in the world of China. She imagines herself in the many roles of which she reads. Katherine relates the stories to Mike, who, try as he might, cannot understand her fascination.

A knock at their door brings a woman named Wiya-sha who tells Mike that her baby is sick and choking. Mike leaves to take care of the many sick people who suffer or die from the diphtheria epidemic. He tries to keep his wife and children quarantined during this time. A woman with a dead baby in her arms knocks on Katherine's door, in search of medicine. Katherine sends her away, for she has no medicine and has not the means to help this woman. The woman falls in the snow and an owl flies over the Flannigan cabin. The woman laughs. Katherine feels cursed, for according to old Indian superstition, an owl flying over a house brings death.

The Flannigan's children die in Chapter Twenty-Four of diphtheria. Katherine is angry at the country and at the fact that they do not live in a town. Mike tells Katherine she should go to help Barbette, Constance's daughter, who is sick, however upon their arrival, they find Barbette dead. Katherine realizes she loves Mike, she wants to hug him and comfort him, but she knows she cannot. They walk into the village to share food with the villagers. They find much sickness and death.

Mike moves the cribs out of their home in Chapter Twenty-Five and he even removes Mary Aron's drawings. The couple visits the grave sites of their children, positioned in a new row on a hill of the cemetery that Katherine remembers first seeing three years ago. She wonders, "Hadn't I known then for a moment? Hadn't I seen myself wandering through the rows?" (pg. 265.) She thinks about Constance's dead children and her first, second, third, and fourth families. Katherine questions herself as to why she did not take her children away from this country then.

Katherine and Mike's relationship continues to suffer for Katherine believes that Mike knows she blames him for bringing his family to this country where every year epidemics take lives. Mike grieves through his accordion music and Katherine grieves to herself. Katherine hates the accordion. She thinks it has taken her place and the children's places in his heart.

Steve Brooks brings a man named Randy Nolan to the Sergeant's house after he's attacked by a grizzly bear. Katherine thinks up a plan to escort this man to Boston,



where he will receive proper medical care. Mike does not wish Katherine to go, however, he thinks it may be best if she feels it is what she needs. The half of the village that does not die of diphtheria goes to see Katherine off as she heads on her journey back to her mother's home. Sarah simply tells Katherine to come back. Katherine wonders how she knows.

Chapters Twenty-Three through Twenty-Five Analysis

As James McTavish returns to the country he loves in Chapter Twenty-Three, Katherine visits China, a faraway land where every detail consumes her. When Katherine says that people are the same the world over, including their feelings and emotions, she begins to feel restless. What she does not realize is that a geographical solution to any problem is not always the best cure for what ails a person.

The potential gravity of the epidemic has Katherine scared, worried, and left with a helpless feeling. The owl flying over their cabin is a symbol of death. The fairy tale of Katherine's childhood is coming quickly to an end.

The color gray finds prominence again in Chapter Twenty-Four, as it symbolizes closeness to death. The many references to this color include: the gray patches on the throats of the diphtheria patients, the gray faces and skin of those stricken with the disease, and the gray starving dog which kills and is killed.

Katherine misses the civilization of Boston and she misses her mother. This is evident in the story she tells Ralph about the train going to Grandma's house in Boston. This is a symbol for escape for Katherine, which has been on her mind ever since she read about China. Katherine loses most of her innocence when her children die and she feels Mike has let her down. He cannot save the children from death. Katherine blames Mike for bringing their family to this country of Grouard, so far from any civilized town. She blames him for lying to her. Her prince charming, she realizes, is a mortal man, like any other. Her childhood fantasies of life with Mike in this great country give way to the cold reality of life in the wilds.

In Chapter Twenty-Five, Katherine is more able to apply the lessons of her life. She realizes there are things that she should have paid attention to when they first occurred. For instance, the story of Constance's four families gives Katherine a hindsight eureka moment. The thought of the premonition she had when she first saw the cemetery in Grouard makes her wonder why she did not heed the hidden message before her children died. Katherine learns to trust her own intuition now; she cannot blindly follow her husband Mike anymore because she will not be acting in a manner true to her adult self.

Katherine seeks to escape what she feels is a terrible place for her to live. The grizzly bear victim, Randy, is her ultimate escape. Her motivation for sending the telegram to his sister in Boston is purely selfish. Her desire is to escape the territory of Grouard and

head back to civilization. What better way than to use Randy for this purpose, without hurting the feelings of Mike and her other friends.

Mike is a man of honor and he loves Katherine enough to remain quiet about his deepest fears. Mike loves Katherine enough to let her go, for he knows that if you love something, it is fine to set it free. If Katherine comes back to him, then it is meant to be. Mike wants Katherine to be happy. Just as Katherine experienced the pain of love when she delivered her babies, Mike is now experiencing the pain of loving someone.



Chapter Twenty-Six

Chapter Twenty-Six Summary

In Boston, no one asks Katherine about the last four years of her life. At a homecoming party, all elements appear foreign to Katherine. The lights seem artificially bright and harsh to her after the soft glow of candles in the Northwest. The crowd, the noise, the scents, and the decorations overwhelm Katherine to the point where she goes out on the front porch. A youth named Dick follows her and when he pulls her close, bending his face down toward hers, she laughs and roughly pushes him away. Katherine enters the house, goes to her room, and feels proud of her strength. She compares her life in Alberta where she was pampered and treated delicately to who she is in Boston currently feeling healthy and strong. She realizes there are no men like Mike in Boston and she cries.

Katherine's mother enters her room for some one-on-one time. Katie tells her mother that she loves Mike and wishes he were there. Her mother disapproves of the life her daughter has been living and she says she thinks of Katie's happiness only. Mike should come to Boston permanently. It is not possible, Katherine says. Margaret O'Fallon prohibits Katherine from returning to Canada.

Miss Ivy, one of the tenants at the house, accuses someone in the house of stealing from her room. Katherine's mother argues with the woman, and Katherine quietly slips from the house, craving a walk by herself. When she gets thirsty, she goes up to a mansion to ask for a glass of water. The doorman asks if Katherine saw the No Trespassing signs. Katherine walks away, remembering how hospitable the people of Alberta were.

Katherine sits down to lunch with everyone in the house. Her sister burns some toast, and everyone creates a commotion. Miss Ivy fans the smoke, saying she is sensitive to it. Katherine wonders what she would have done if she had to stand in a river all day with her skin burning. Katherine realizes how alien the people are to her. Katherine realizes that the Northwest country is what makes her husband Sergeant Mike Flannigan. She has to see Mike and explain everything.

Katherine leaves Boston and goes home to Grouard.

Chapter Twenty-Six Analysis

The climax of the novel occurs when Katherine experiences the foreign sights, sounds, and lives of those people who inhabit the Boston of her true youth. The people here are alien to her. They complain, whine and argue over the minutest details of life, for they experience nothing as big as what Katherine has experienced over the past four years. The homecoming party lights, the crowd, the noise, the scents, and the decorations overwhelm Katherine. She experiences the rude, snobby, and inhospitable



behavior of the man who refused her water at the mansion. In her comparison of Boston to Alberta, she finds there is no comparison. The places are miles and miles from each other on all levels that matter to Katherine.

Katherine has arrived as an adult woman at her true home with her husband Mike in Grouard.



Chapter Twenty-Seven

Chapter Twenty-Seven Summary

In August of 1914, Britain declares itself at war. Constance and Georges Beauclaire's sons, Timmy and Paul, enlist. Constance's daughter Madeleine dies after giving birth to twins. Then, Paul Beauclaire is killed in action. Next, Timmy dies in action. Katherine delivers the telegrams to Constance each time.

The Flannigans never speak of their dead children; they never share the good memories. When Timmy dies, Katherine remembers when she first met him. She reminds Mike about the puppy Timmy held up for them to see, and Mary Aroon which she held up for him to see. The Flannigans begin to remember and talk about their children.

In 1918, a flu epidemic hits the village. Constance Beauclaire suffers the virus and dies. Before she dies, she tells Katherine that she wants her and Mike to take the twins. After Constance dies, Katherine cries for one of the dearest friends she ever had. Mike and Katherine take the kids home with them.

Chapter Twenty-Seven Analysis

The deaths of the Beauclaire children make Katherine initially ask the question, "Why?" In the wisdom of her adulthood, she knows there is no answer. Katherine has gained the ability to accept the things over which she has no power.

Right before Constance dies, Katherine finally understands something Constance said to her when they first met. Constance emphasized the fact that she and Kathy were the only two white women. Katherine did not like it when she said that, but now Katherine knows what she meant. She says, "You and I came to this country. We have known other things. The rest were born here, so they live here. But we chose it, you and I, and we are the only ones" (pg. 295.)



Chapter Twenty-Eight

Chapter Twenty-Eight Summary

As the Flannigans enjoy children, Georges and Connie, in their home once again, Jonathan Forquet walks into their cabin, carrying a baby in his arms. He delivers the news that Oh-Be-Joyful died of the flu. He wants Kathy and Mike to take the baby, who Oh-Be-Joyful named after Kathy. The couple calls the baby Kate and takes her in as part of their family.

The next day they go sledding in the same sled in which they took Mary Aroon and Ralph years before. The sled becomes a magic cutter for the children gliding on a frozen sea. Georges plays captain yelling orders at Connie, who in turn yells things to the trees, snow drifts and clouds.

Mike senses something in Katherine. She tells him it hurts a little. Little Connie asks what hurts her, a pin? Katherine says, "No ... Happiness" (pg. 302.)

Chapter Twenty-Eight Analysis

The big white cloth of the North stretches across a loom and Katherine thinks of all the people as the threads that hold it together. This is a symbol for community and life. Another symbol for life in Katherine's mind is the knot of the gathered threads that she makes when she sews. She realizes that life is not a straight line. Rather, it crosses and recrosses. There is a pattern in life which is created by memories and events.

Katherine's coming of age journey culminates in the magic and fantasy of childhood being passed on to her three children, as Georges and Connie use their imaginations to turn the sled into a cutter on the sea. Katherine is able to accept life as it comes and see herself as not one woman who chooses her destiny, but rather she sees herself as a small part or one thread of something so much larger. Life is so much larger than one individual.

Finally, life is painful because of love. When one loves, a relationship thrives. When tragedy strikes and one loves, one feels the pain of the loved one as if it were one's own. Here Katherine sees the great metaphor of love being equal to pain where pain equal to love.



Characters

Katherine Mary Flannigan

Sixteen-year-old Katherine is the main character, beginning her coming of age journey as a teenager who travels from Boston, Massachusetts to the wilds of the Great Northwestern Territory of Alberta, Canada. She heads off on her journey with a blind courage, a sense of adventure, a desire to experience worldly events, an opinion of life as a childhood fairy tale, and a young impressionability. Her teenage mind is quick to judge the outer appearance of other people, places and things. In the beginning, she is like clay that is not yet sculpted.

Katherine finds she is attracted to Sergeant Mike Flannigan. He is physically attractive to her yet she acts stubbornly and defiantly against any orders he gives her. She is, in essence, flirting with him. She naively thinks her destiny is her own. She thinks she has control over more than she really does. At the end of her journey into womanhood, she realizes how much she does not choose her own place in the world; rather, she is woven into the fabric of life and love, as are all others in the world.

Katherine's adolescent impressionability paves the way for Mike to mold Katherine into who she becomes on the trail. However, it is Katherine's growing love for Mike that enables the union between man and girl, or man and woman. Katherine becomes Mike through her time with him and the lessons he teaches her. To young Katherine, love equals a transformation into that which is loved. It is not until the Flannigans' children die of diphtheria and Katherine flees Canada to return to Boston that she breaks free from her dependence upon Mike. Here, she realizes she truly loves Mike and it is her choice to return to him. The pain and love become one and the same.

Katherine learns her lessons well. She becomes a woman who rationally thinks for herself and does not react so hastily in her judgments of others. Katherine's fairy tale slowly comes to an end, with each new tragedy and unusual character entering her life. The harshness of life on the trail such as the snow, the cold, the mosquitoes that kill, the epidemics of disease, the wild animals that mangle, maim and kill, and the forest fire are significant events that work to put an end to Katherine's innocence. The characters, such as Sarah, the medicine woman, and Constance Beauclaire, the mother of sorrows, leave indelible marks on Katherine.

The last four years of her life with Mike transform her into the twenty-year-old woman she was meant to be. Katherine is physically, mentally and spiritually strong at the end of the novel. She has physically, psychologically, and spiritually entered womanhood.

Sergeant Mike Flannigan

Sergeant Mike is the tall, strong, and handsome Northwest Mountry with whom Katherine falls in love. Sergeant Mike naturally places himself in the positions of



caretaker, guardian, teacher and father-figure to the sixteen-year-old girl with whom he falls in love. In fact, all throughout the novel, Mike calls Katherine "girl," showing that he reinforces and welcomes the notion of his role in Katherine's life. Mike is a confident man who knows who he is and where his responsibilities lie.

Sergeant Mike is a physically powerful and intelligent man and Katherine feels safe with him. The strength he shows Katherine up until the time when he is forced to play orthodontic surgeon to the abscessed tooth of the Indian brave Atenou begins to give way to the infallibility and humanness of his character. Pulling the tooth proves to be rather anxiety-provoking for him and so he calms his nerves with a drink of whiskey. Katherine does the same.

Mike constantly shares the wisdom of his twenty-seven plus years with Katherine and she is a willing student. Throughout the novel, Mike and Katherine become one, on physical, emotional and spiritual levels. Mike teaches his wife how to survive on the trail, how to not judge people so quickly without knowing them first, and how to pray to the gods inherent in Nature, as well as many other lessons.

Most of Mike's promises to Katherine come true. When their children die in the diphtheria epidemic, however, Katherine initially loses faith in her husband. Mike's wife blames him for bringing his family to this evil countryside and she is more than disappointed that he has failed his family. When Katherine decides to flee Grouard, Mike feels sad and worried, but he never shows his true emotions. He instead holds the wisdom that if he lets his wife leave, it may be good for her. If she loves him, she will return.

Mrs. Carpentier (Sarah)

This is the full-blooded Cree Indian woman who is an experienced midwife that delivers both of Katherine's children. After Mary Aroon is born, Katherine asks Mrs. Carpentier if she can call her Sarah, reminiscent of the Sarah in the Bible, who was the mother to a race. Katherine thinks of Sarah as a fairy godmother even after visiting Sarah's dark and dusty workroom which looks and smells of decay.

Sarah has the physical and emotional strength of a mother which Katherine knows that she cannot ever be. When Larry, Sarah's son, is caught in the bear trap, Sarah proceeds to use a saw to cut off her son's leg, in order that he may survive. And he does.

Sarah remains friends with Katherine and she takes care of Mike when Katherine decides to go to Boston. Sarah asks Katherine to come back to Grouard after Boston, for she knows that Katherine is attempting to escape after the death of her children.



Constance Beauclaire

Constance Beauclaire is the only other white woman besides Katherine in Grouard. While Katherine does not particularly like her reference to this fact when she first meets Constance, Katherine understands, at the end of the novel, why she states the words. Constance means that she and Katherine chose to live in this country but the others were born there.

Constance is considered the mother of sorrows by Katherine because she has had four families with nine children and most of them died. It is Constance who teaches Katherine that the big tragedies are not what matter in life; it is the smaller things in daily life that matter.

Constance asks Katherine and Mike to take the twins that were born to her daughter Madeleine before she dies in the flu epidemic.

Margaret O'Fallon

Mrs. O'Fallon is Katherine's mother, who sends her daughter off on her adventure with the blessings of Katherine's doctors. She sends Katherine to Alberta so the cold dry climate can help her daughter's pleurisy. When Katherine returns to Boston after four years, her mother wants her to stay in Boston with them. She does not think the geography of Canada's Northwest Territory is fit for a young woman raising a family. She feels that Katherine's happiness will come from civilization and not the wilderness. She no longer knows her daughter at the end of the novel and vice versa.

Oh-Be-Joyful, Mamanowatum, Anne

She is the fifteen-year-old Indian girl who Katherine brings home from the Mission to help with the baby and housework. Oh-Be-Joyful is in love with Jonathan, a proud and tenacious Indian of whom the sisters at the Mission do not approve. The sisters want to keep Oh-Be-Joyful away from Jonathan because they do not want for her to end up a kloochee. Kloochee simply means Indian woman. However, the Indian men are known to make the women do all the heavy lifting and to beat their women. This is against what the Mission stands for. The Mission names Mamanowatum, which means Oh-Be-Joyful in Indian, the new name of "Anne" because they name all of their orphans after saints in hopes that they will do the right things in life.

Oh-Be-Joyful is finally able to leave and begin her life with Jonathan after his innocence is established in the death of Cardinal. Oh-Be-Joyful later dies of the flu and Jonathan brings their baby who is named Kathy to the Flannigans so they can take care of her.



Uncle John

John Kennedy is Katherine's uncle, her mother's brother, whom Katherine goes to visit. Uncle John indirectly introduces Katherine to love. First, Katherine meets Sergeant Mike at her uncle's ranch. Second, her uncle tells the story about why he tolerates the behavior of Johnny Flaherty's drinking binges. There is a bond between the men who served in the war together. Johnny is also a terrific cook.

Jonathan Forquet

The Blackfoot Indian who Oh-Be-Joyful is in love with. Jonathan is not well-liked by the sisters at the Mission because of the sins of his father who waged war against the Canadian government. Jonathan is proud, tenacious, and stubborn, yet he knows who he is. After Oh-Be-Joyful dies of the flu, Jonathan brings their infant daughter named Kathy to the Flannigans for informal adoption.

Mrs. Marlin

This is the woman whose escape from the Territory is the loss of her mind. She plants the garden with no roots as a welcome gift for the Flannigans when they first arrive in Grouard. Later she visits Sarah to get the poison to abort her baby, attempts to steal the Flannigan's son saying he is her child, and admits to killing Cardinal, thus setting Jonathan and Oh-Be-Joyful free.

Cardinal

This is the thief who steals Jonathan's trapped animals for the skins. Cardinal is the reason for Jonathan's retaliation against him. Jonathan shoots arrows at Cardinal, causing Cardinal to report his actions to Sergeant Mike. Cardinal is scared away from Grouard by Jonathan when he hears the story of how Jonathan will never stop his revenge. Later, Cardinal is arrested by Mike in a different geographic location and placed in jail for baiting and switching the trapped skins. When Cardinal is stabbed to death in his cell, Jonathan's knife is found at the scene. It is not until Mrs. Marlin attempts to steal the Flannigan's newborn son that Jonathan's innocence is established. Mrs. Marlin admits to killing Cardinal, the father of her aborted baby.

Mildred MacDonald

This is the young girl who Katherine meets and befriends at her Uncle John's ranch. Mildred is engaged to Richard Carlton, a lawyer. Mildred plays matchmaker between Sergeant Mike and Katherine by relaying messages from each to the other. Mildred is also a symbol of the impatience of youth, as she is anxious to get married to her fiancé.



When Katherine and Mike leave for Hudson's Hope, Mildred adopts Juno because the trail is not a place for a civilized dog.

George Bailey

This is the white man whose Indian woman was stolen from him by Bull MacGregor when he was out of town for an extended business trip. George fights Bull at the dance. George Bailey, Bull MacGregor, and the Indian woman are a source of confusion for Katherine and Mike because the Indian woman is torn between her love for George and her hatred for him due to the fact that he is not strong enough to fight Bull and win her back. To add further confusion, the Indian woman refuses to go back to George because she is afraid that Bull will kill him.

Bull MacGregor

As the former business partner of George Bailey, Bull MacGregor steals George's woman. Bull represents physical strength. He beats the Indian woman repeatedly and she thinks he will kill her if she leaves him. The Indian woman asks Mike to arrest Bull however, Mike knows that she will not file a complaint. She will stay with this man who treats her poorly. This is another source of confusion for Katherine.

Baldy Red

This is the thief who cons people into purchasing horses or cows and then turns around and steals them back. Baldy Red appears jovial and kind to Katherine when he offers the nuns two seats on his cutter as the group travels to Peace River Crossing. Baldy is a source of interest for Katherine and she decides to get to know him better because of the inconsistency between his apparent personality and his criminal secrets.

Chief Mustagan

Chief Mustagan is the leader of the Blackfoot Indian tribe. He thinks highly of Sergeant Mike and Mrs. Mike. Chief Mustagan listens to Mike's story about the silver trash can and knows that Mike, with his storytelling, brings happiness to everyone.

Oo-me-me

She is Chief Mustagan's wife and mother of his children. She dies with her children in the forest fire.



Atenou

As Chief Mustagan's best hunter, this brave suffers an abscessed tooth that Mike pulls. Atenou goes on to sell his Indian superstitions regarding his tooth of wisdom to Ralph Peters, the shoe salesman from Detroit, Michigan. Later, Atenou delivers the bad news of those killed in the forest fire.

Ralph Peters

This man is the self-proclaimed prospector and shoe salesman from Detroit, Michigan who passes by the Territory on his way to the Yukon to try his hand at mining gold. Peters picked up a bear cub and was chased by mother bear until he dropped the cub to the ground per Mike's orders.

Mrs. Mathers

Mrs. Mathers is the trained nurse who Mike originally thinks will help Katherine deliver their baby. However, Mrs. Mathers does not have the bedside manner of a good nurse. She instead scares Katherine by telling her that she may not deliver a live baby. Years before, Mrs. Mathers' son was delivered stillborn.

Mary Aroon Flannigan

This is the first baby born to the Flannigans. Mary Aroon dies in the diphtheria epidemic.

Ralph Flannigan

This is the second child of the Flannigans. Ralph also dies in the diphtheria epidemic.

Constable Ned Cameron

This is a policeman in Grouard who tries to rescue Jerry West, Timmy's hunting buddy when a grizzly attacks and kills Jerry. Constable Ned is not as capable as Mike in his job and he is a source of irritation to the group who walks to the Mission because he cannot cease talking about the grizzly bear attack, much to the dismay of Timmy Beauclaire.

Timmy Beauclaire

One of Constance's sons, Timmy is present when his friend Jerry West is killed by the grizzly. Timmy feels much guilt over not being able to help his friend more. Timmy later



enlists in the service and goes to war, where he is killed in action. Timmy is another of Constance Beauclaire's children who die.

Madeleine Beauclaire

One of Constance's daughters, Madeleine dies after giving birth to twins.

Georges Beauclaire

This is Constance's husband.

Jerry West

This is the hunter friend of Timmy Beauclaire's who is killed by the grizzly bear. Jerry West's death is a source of guilt for Timmy.



Objects/Places

Montreal

Montreal is the last place of civilization Katherine's leaves on her journey from Boston to Alberta. They spend eighteen days of pulling the train out of drifts and scraping ice off of the wheels on their way to Calgary. This is one of the many signs of trouble ahead.

Calgary, Alberta

Calgary is the Great Northwest Territory of the Canadian wilderness until 1905 when the town becomes civilized. In 1907, Katherine heads to Calgary. She is thrilled to go to a place that has been civilized for only 2 years. This is a sign of Katherine's sense of adventure.

Boston, Massachusetts

Boston is the place symbolic of Katherine's childhood. It is the place from which she departs and leaves behind the fantasies and wonders of youth in search of her true identity as a woman.

Map

Before Katherine leaves on her trip, she looks at a map with her mother. The map symbolizes Katherine's desire to experience new sections of the world. She fantasizes about places far and wide.

Brutal weather conditions on train ride

The snow, ice, wind, and temperatures below forty degrees on the train ride north represent the conflict between Mother Nature and man. This man versus nature element foreshadows the continual fight between the two throughout the novel.

Pale sky and frozen earth

This is a use of imagery which creates surroundings that are depressing and sad. This works hand in hand with the color gray.



Uncle John's ranch

This is the place where Katherine meets and marries Sergeant Mike Flannigan. This is also the place where she learns some cooking lessons from Johnny Flaherty.

Currants

The rock-hard currants in the berry pies that Katherine makes are a symbol of her youth and innocence. She does not know to cook the currants before placing them in the pies.

Hudson's Hope

Katherine receives her first taste of what life will be like in the wilderness. The forest fire rages here and kills thirty-seven of the members of the community.

Hudson's Bay Company Store

Katherine meets Joe Henderson who is the owner of the store. She witnesses his poor treatment of the Indian woman who is the mother of his child, Tommy. Later, all is lost in the fire, including the lives of mother and child. Joe Henderson is more than distraught at the death of his second Tommy.

Buffalo Head Rock

This is the place where Mike takes Katherine hiking in Hudson's Hope. They witness the spring thaw giving life to the river. Katherine witnesses nature come alive.

Mosquitoes

The mosquitoes, which carry disease that can kill, are one of the elements in the conflict between Mother Nature and man.

Red Clover

The Red Clover is a symbol of health and vitality. Red Clover is known to help respiratory problems and reduce excess fluid in the lungs.

Constellations in Night Sky

Katherine delivers the news of her pregnancy under a starry sky with Mike.



Forest Fire

The fire symbolizes destruction, strength, and balance in life. The people in the community band together and their solidarity makes them stronger as a group than as individuals. There is also a spiritual aspect to fire.

Peace River Crossing

This is the place where Katherine gives birth to Mary Aroon and meets Mrs. Carpentier, whom Kathy nicknames Sarah. Peace River Crossing is the point where the Hart, the Smoky, and the Peace waterways flow together.

Grouard

Katherine and Mike make Grouard their home after orders come to them for this transfer. The Flannigans children die of diphtheria here.

White, sparkling cemetery on the hill

This is the first part of Grouard Katherine sees. She has a premonition of herself walking through the cemetery's gates. This foreshadows much to come in the future.

Katherine's garden planted by Mrs. Marlin

Mrs. Marlin places flowers with no roots on the ground of the Flannigans' homestead. The next morning, the flowers petals are wilted, whisking away any enchantment Katherine felt on their arrival to their new home.

Sarah's shed

This is the place where Sarah mixes her medicines. This is also the place where Katherine learns that the looks of something do not imply whether it is good or bad for a person.

The Mirror

Katherine's mother sends her a mirror for Christmas. Katherine's reflection is a validation to her of her strength.



Northern Lights

The Flannigans' son, Ralph, is born when the Northern Lights are in full dance. This is considered to be good luck by the Indians; however, Mrs. Marlin suffers a complete break from reality during this time, as she thinks the spirit of her dead baby has gone into Katherine's baby. Mrs. Marlin thinks the baby is hers.

Squaw Root

This is the magical medicine that Sarah makes. It helps ease the pain of childbirth.

Books on China's history

The books symbolize the escape that Katherine desperately wants from the countryside of Grouard.



Themes

Coming of Age

The classic coming of age theme follows a child's growth into adulthood where innocence is replaced by a wisdom not previously known. Katherine begins as a naïve, adventurous, and highly impressionable sixteen-year-old girl whose body suffers the painful symptoms of pleurisy. Katherine embarks upon a physical, emotional, and spiritual journey which culminates in her transition into an enlightened woman who comes to terms with a harsh reality. She realizes that she is only one thread among the many that make up the fabric of life and humanity.

Through her relationship with Mike, Katherine is at first his willing student, eager to learn all she can about nature and the man for which she has feelings. Katherine is impressionable and through the first half of her life with Mike, she desires total oneness with him. She, in fact, wants to become him. As tragic events unfold before her eyes, she begins to see herself as different from him. In fact, after the death of their children, she begins to subconsciously blame him for bringing his family to such an uncivilized place. In the end, when Katherine escapes to Boston, she realizes that the people, places, and things of civilization are alien to her. She is a grown woman who is now able to think through and make important decisions that coincide with her true adult identity.

Love and Pain

The notion of love and pain being one and the same is a theme carried out through the novel. From day one, when Katherine leaves her mother, the love between mother and daughter causes each an emotional pain. In the end, when Katherine escapes to Boston, her love for Mike produces the same sort of emotional pain.

This type of psychological pain can only occur when love is involved. The many bonds between mother and child, wife and husband, friend and friend, man and man, and woman and woman are made through the emotion of love. Loving someone can cause a person to feel the pain of the loved one. This is evident in Katherine's relationship with Constance Beauclaire who is the mother of sorrows in Katherine's mind because so many of her children have died. In the end, Katherine accepts guardianship of Constance's grandchildren through her love for Constance.

When Katherine's children die of diphtheria, her love for them causes her so much pain that all she can think to do is escape and blame her husband for the tragic misfortune. Her love for her husband is hidden underneath her love for her children at the time. Katherine quickly realizes her place in this world through the love of Mike.

Katherine, a woman at the end of the novel, accepts that love is pain. Love cannot be the fairy tales of her childhood any longer. Katherine now passes her love and the magic of fairy tales along to her adopted children.



Courage

Courage is a theme which winds its way throughout the novel. Katherine holds a blind courage in the beginning when she heads off to territories unknown. In the final chapters, Katherine embraces her courage, for she knows herself better by then and heads back to the land for which she has grown as fond of as her husband.

Mike is courageous by nature. His job is that of a Northwest Mountry, which can be extremely dangerous at times. Courage comes with the territory of his position and courage also comes with the people of the Great Northwest Territory itself. The many conflicts that occur between man and nature out in the wilderness such as wild animal attacks, brutal weather, flooding, fires, and the epidemics of disease, have the power to make survivors more courageous, insane or willing to escape the geographic location altogether.

Katherine, on her journey into adulthood, finds more courage to handle the many tragic events of the Great Northwest. Her courage is nurtured by her husband and inextricably linked to the courage of Sergeant Mike. For in reality, the couple is married and have become one. Mike has taught her well.



Style

Point of View

The author uses a first-person perspective, speaking through the voice of Katherine Mary Flannigan in the narrative. The author alternates between the dialogue of all characters and Katherine Mary Flannigan. The point of view is tightly woven with Katherine's character and indeed, contributes to the reader's knowledge of Katherine as a girl, Katherine on her coming of age journey, and Katherine as a woman.

Mike is always seen through Katherine's eyes. His and her voice become the same voice through the narrative; they become the married couple. They become one. Katherine blends her being into the being of Mike.

The reader hears Katherine's thoughts through this one-on-one point of view. The entire piece is Katherine speaking to other characters and indirectly to her audience. She shares her innermost thoughts with her audience, bringing the reader along on her journey. The use of this type of point of view fosters a friendship between Katherine and the reader where a true love is created between fictional character and audience.

Setting

The novel is set in the time period of 1907 and spans four years. It begins with a train trip from Boston, Massachusetts to Calgary, Alberta. The trip takes Katherine over a month due to brutal weather conditions on the way. At her Uncle John's ranch in Alberta, Katherine witnesses the Chinook winds which warm and melt the snow, causing the Red Deer River to flood and kill the livestock.

Sergeant Mike takes Katherine to Hudson's Hope, a place further into the north of Canada, where a dry spring provides perfect conditions for the forest fire that engulfs the town. The couple travel to Grouard, even further north into Canada, where the wilderness spreads for many miles. It takes days to get to the nearest town. It would take months to receive a shipment of medicine and the mail only comes once a year.

The mode of travel is consistent with the time period. Trains are used where tracks are laid. Cutters, sleds, and Husky dogs are used for caravans into the wild areas. Canoes are used to travel the rivers from place to place along the waterways.

Language and Meaning

The language and meaning conforms to each step along Katherine's intellectual journey. When she is sixteen years old, her thoughts, diction, and speech correspond to that of a sixteen-year-old girl. The words are simple and yet portray powerful messages.



As Katherine grows in age, her vocabulary expands and she is able to communicate more complex ideas in a more intellectual manner.

Some Indian characters speak in a broken type of speech. This is consistent with how the Indians of this area talk and is believable. The description and imagery is deeply embedded in the wilderness and time period. For instance, the authors express the movement of one of the Indian girls as bounding off like a deer.

The authors use this language to make the trees, rivers, mountains, and forests come alive in the novel. For instance, the river is given emotion when the thaw arrives and huge blocks of ice are catapulted into the air. Katherine believes the river is angry. Mike disagrees, saying that the river is only rubbing the sleep from its eyes after a long winter.

Structure

The novel is composed of twenty-eight chapters, which naturally follow a chronological order of events and activities that span the four-year-period between Katherine's ages of sixteen and twenty. Each chapter varies in length, from six to twenty pages.

The plot includes many events and actions that work to move the story along. Natural disasters, epidemics of sickness, death by wild animal, death through childbirth, flooding, and forest fires are some examples of large, tragic events that permeate the lives of the characters. Other actions that move the plot along include the actions of the people in the community. Crimes of thievery, smuggling, and murder work to carry out the purpose of Katherine's ultimate coming of age.

The description is awake and alive, giving static objects, such as the trees, elements of movement. The main conflict which the authors carry through the entire novel is the conflict of man versus nature. The fights between man (or woman) and nature are among the most vicious.



Quotes

"He was leaning on me and I was helping him to the couch, when a girl rode up on a pony and banged on the door" (pg. 28.)

"Words, it was just words again. Or maybe it was in myself. I had made the unhappiness, and now I made the glad feeling that was all through me. I thought about it for awhile" (pg. 36.)

"'He said your eyes were as gray as the breast of a dove.' That was poetry, and it thrilled me. 'Did he really, Mildred?' Mildred hesitated. 'Well, he said gray as a whisky-jack; it's a bird too'" (pg. 37.)

"It was something I had not known, this melting away into feeling" (pg. 50.)

"He covered the cases with buffalo robes and seated Sisters Margaret and Magdalena on their improvised throne" (pg. 65.)

"I'm not the best judge of horseflesh in these parts," he went on grinning, "but I'm the best judge of who's the worst judge...and that's the way I keep body and soul together" (pg. 68.)

"They could listen to tortured horses and wolf pack in full cry, and it didn't bother them. But a girl's screams had chased them from their home in stumbling panic" (pg. 78.)

"Because I wanted to be like Mike and then, after our lives had been lived, maybe I'd be Mike" (pg. 79.)

"When he held me, we were crushed into one, one body with one heart beating through us. And that's the way it had to be with our minds and our feelings" (pg. 79.)

"But she bounded off like a deer, stopping a safe distance from the cabin to turn and stare" (pg. 89.)

"Millions of tiny, shallow holes appeared in it as it sweated" (pg. 91.)

"Tormented, the river strove to free itself" (pg. 95.)

"A storyteller, him bring gladness to all hearts" (pg. 108.)

"He had told me once he was a policeman, not against man, but against Nature" (pg. 131.)

"Truly I felt that I had lived a hundred years and could give advice to my own mother now" (pg. 150.)



"There was a foreign grace about the way she stood and walked, and her soft eyes had a veiled, preoccupied air that you find in people who live in the past" (pg. 152.)

"The bitter pessimism the women of Grouard had adopted didn't touch me" (pg. 190.)

"There's something in this country that nails you down and keeps you here" (pg. 248.)



Topics for Discussion

Trace the symbolism of the color red throughout the novel.

In a way, this novel is a set of stories, or anecdotes within a main work of fiction. Discuss three anecdotes that the authors use to move the story forward. How do the anecdotes work to develop characters and keep the action alive?

Review the lessons that Katherine learns in her journey.

What does the color gray symbolize? How does its symbolism change throughout the novel?

What are the means of escape in the novel?

Compare and contrast Katherine in the beginning of her journey with the Katherine at the end of her journey.

Discuss the notion that love is pain.