

# **The March: A Novel Study Guide**

**The March: A Novel by E. L. Doctorow**

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# Plot Summary

The March, a novel by E. L. Doctorow, follows an array of disparate characters through the final weeks of the Civil War. As General William Tecumseh Sherman marches his Union troops through Georgia and north through the Carolinas, they are joined by another growing army of followers — freed slaves and displaced well-to-do whites, all of whom are at a loss regarding what to do now that their lives have been turned upside down. There is not one main character or central plot, but rather snippets from the lives of a wide range of characters who are trying to navigate through unique circumstances.

The book opens with Union soldiers looting and burning Fieldstone, the Georgia plantation owned by John and Mattie Jameson, who have fled to Savannah with their most precious belongings. As the troops leave, they are joined by Pearl, the white-skinned daughter of John Jameson and one of his slaves, and the other newly-freed slaves from the plantation, all of whom are unsure of what their futures hold so they simply follow the troops as they travel north, fighting the final battles of the war. In Milledgeville, Georgia, they are joined by Emily Thompson, who is now alone following the death of her wealthy father, her former slave Wilma, and Arly and Will, a couple of Confederate soldiers now masquerading as Union soldiers.

Pearl is taken under the wing of a Union officer named Clarke, who disguises her as a white drummer boy in order to protect her. After Clarke is killed, Pearl finds a letter he has written to his family and becomes determined to deliver it to them when she reaches the North. Pearl and Emily also find purpose by assisting Wrede Sartorius, a brilliant surgeon but cold human being, who eventually seduces Emily and later is called to Washington as a physician for President Abraham Lincoln. When the troops reach Savannah, Pearl is surprised to find her former owner, Mattie Jameson, whose husband has died, and Pearl helps her find purpose of her own and locate her only surviving son, giving them money to return to Fieldstone and rebuild their lives. Pearl's story continues with her relationship with Union soldier Stephen Walsh, who falls in love with her and hopes to help her learn to live as a free white woman.

Arly and Will tag along with the troops, meeting photographer Josiah Culp and his black assistant, Calvin. After Will and Culp die, Arly assumes Culp's identity and hatches a secret plan to shoot General Sherman while pretending to take a photo of him.

As the book draws to a conclusion, the Confederate Army surrenders and the novel's various characters prepare to face their uncertain futures. Arly's plan backfires and he is executed. Emily begins helping at an orphanage, Mattie returns to her now-destroyed plantation, Calvin plans to take over Culp's photography business in Baltimore, and Pearl continues north with Stephen, still set on her mission of delivering Clarke's final letter before embarking on her new life.



# Part One: Georgia; Chapters 1 through 5

## Part One: Georgia; Chapters 1 through 5 Summary

The March, a novel by E. L. Doctorow, follows the lives of several diverse characters as they navigate the last few months of the Civil War. Freed slaves like Pearl, the beautiful teenage daughter of a slave and her master, follow the Union Army as it marches north from Georgia, meeting along the way white Southern refugees whose homes have been destroyed, loyal Unionists and Confederates, famous generals, and a host of others whose lives are forever changed by the bloody end of the war.

The book opens on the grounds of Fieldstone, a Georgia plantation in the path of General Sherman's march through the South. Mattie and John Jameson, having already sent their most prized belongings to a safe location, are preparing to flee with their two sons before Sherman's army arrives to burn the property. After they leave, only the slaves are left, including Pearl, age 12 or 13, who is the illegitimate daughter of her master, John Jameson. When the army arrives, the group is led by an officer and Boston native named Clarke, who watches as his men help themselves to whatever is left in the house and then set fire to it. As they leave, the party loads the now-freed slaves into wagons, but as they are leaving, he looks back to see that Pearl has remained behind, so he scoops her up onto his horse and they ride away.

Chapter 2 introduces Arly and Will, two men under death sentence in Milledgeville Penitentiary. As they are pondering their fates, a group of Confederate soldiers arrive and empty the jail, offering all of the inmates freedom if they join the army and defend Georgia. Arly and Will agree and soon find themselves in a battle with Union soldiers during which Will is slightly injured. Arly takes him aside and they steal uniforms from two dead Union soldiers along with a horse they find next to a river.

In Chapter 3, we meet Emily Thompson, the unmarried daughter of prominent Judge Horace Thompson who lies near death in their home. She and her slave, Wilma, are caring for him when a huge number of Union soldiers arrive in Milledgeville and some of them move into Emily's house, instructing her and Wilma to stay in her father's room. During the night, Emily wakes to find that her father has died and she goes through town, finally finding Wrede Sartorius, a surgeon for the Union Army who orders the soldiers to leave her house and helps her arrange to have her father buried. Afterward, Emily gives some food to the now-free Wilma, who leaves to join the other freed slaves following the Union troops north. Since both parents are dead and her only brother, Foster, has been killed in the war, Emily watches her town being destroyed and realizing that she is truly alone, she packs a bag, gets into a horse and buggy Wrede provided, and heads north also.

Chapter 4 finds Arly and Will entering Milledgeville to find the town crowded with Union soldiers. Wearing their stolen Union uniforms, they join a group for a good meal comprised of food stolen from local homes and they sleep in an upstairs room of a



home that has been taken over by soldiers. Arly learns that the troops will be heading north in the morning but decides that they should stay back and travel with the cooks and ambulances, but when they awaken in the morning, all of the troops are gone. In the street, they are captured by Confederate troops who assume they are Union soldiers.

In Chapter 5, Clarke has taken Pearl under his wing and is determined to keep her safe. He begins to correct her English and decides to disguise her as his unit's drummer boy, which she agrees to do after he explains that as more and more freed slaves trail behind the troops, there will be too many mouths to feed and they will be left behind. Some of the former slaves from her plantation try to convince her to travel in their group, but she refuses and assures them that there is nothing inappropriate between Clarke and herself. When the unit approaches the town of Sandersonville, intent on pillaging it, they are ambushed by Confederate troops and Clarke is captured. Now alone, Pearl slips into the town and finds Clarke's dead body and removes from his hand a letter he wrote while in the town's jail.

## **Part One: Georgia; Chapters 1 through 5 Analysis**

The first few chapters of *The March* introduce several of the characters, set up the overall plot, and introduce the book's major themes. Race is a factor from the beginning as the reader sees the slaves at Fieldstone realizing for the first time that they are now free and observes the dynamic between the slaves and their unfeeling former master and that with the Union soldiers who are liberating them. We also see the beginnings of Pearl's inner conflict regarding her own mixed race as she identifies with her black mother even as others who meet her for the first time sometimes mistake her for a white person. Pearl begins the gradual transformation of her identity as Clarke disguises her as a boy in order to protect her during the march, and again at his direction begins an effort to lose her black dialect and speak more like a white person. In addition, we see the strong connection between Pearl and Clarke, the man who liberates her both literally and figuratively by taking her away from the plantation, taking steps to ensure her safety, and helping her see what her new world might be like if she lives as a white person. This section also establishes the deliberate destruction that the Union army imposed on the South as Sherman's troops pillaged and burned every piece of property with no feeling for the families they were displacing.

The characters of Will and Arly are also introduced, and Arly will be particularly important to the plot. The reader sees immediately that Arly is the cunning one, possessing many big ideas and believing that everything that happens to him and Will has been preordained by God. They serve as the book's comic relief and as examples of how the book's characters must change and adapt in order to survive in the new order of things, as Arly's quick thinking enables them to disguise themselves as Union soldiers. They also represent the fact that an individual's fortunes change rapidly during the chaos of wartime as they go from being condemned men to Union troops to prisoners of their own army.



The characters of Emily and Wrede are also introduced in this section. Emily and Mattie are alike in some ways — they are Southern slave owners whose lives of comfort are now being displaced — but while Mattie is concerned only about her material possessions, Emily is already depicted as having a kinder heart, providing for Wilma before freeing her as opposed to the Jameson family, who simply abandon their slaves to their fate. Her relationship with Wrede will become an important focus of the novel.

Although the character of Clarke dies only a few chapters into the book, his influence on Pearl will last much longer and the letter she takes from his hand will become a beacon for her in several ways as she explores what to do with her new freedom.



# Part One: Georgia; Chapters 6 through 10

## Part One: Georgia; Chapters 6 through 10 Summary

Chapter 6 introduces Marcus Aurelius Thompson and his slave, Sophie. They board a train to travel to Milledgeville, where Thompson plans to confront his brother, Judge Horace Thompson, not realizing he is dead. As they travel, Thompson thinks that it is God who has destroyed their world, with the Union as his instrument.

Chapter 7 reveals that Emily has found Wrede's unit and joined him, helping him care for his patients. She is very attracted to him, but she cringes at the thought of what her father would say about her taking up with a troop of Union soldiers. As they ride, Wrede talks to her about medicine and she finds that she is extraordinarily happy.

Chapter 8 finds Arly and Will guarding Union prisoners, having taken an oath to join the Confederate Army. When the prisoners are taken to a train to be transported elsewhere, Arly and Will slip away and return to the prison camp, where only a few dying prisoners remain. Soon Union troops arrive and are appalled at the conditions of the camp. Will and Arly, now pretending to be prisoners there, are taken to a hospital where Will looks up into the face of a beautiful nurse.

In Chapter 9, Wilma is traveling with many other freed slaves when they come to a bridge. The soldiers stop them and insist that the troops be allowed to cross the river first, but when they reach the other side, they cut the ropes to the bridge, leaving the others stranded. Many people try to swim across the river, but most do not make it. Wilma ends up on a raft that capsizes, but is pulled to safety by a strong black man.

In Chapter 10, Pearl secretly watches as a group of townspeople bury the bodies of the dead soldiers in a trench. She realizes she must tell someone what happened, but when the next troop of Union soldiers come through, she sees no one she recognizes. Finally she steps in front of an officer, who assumes by her uniform that she is indeed a drummer boy, and she tries to use the proper English Clarke taught her to explain that the members of her unit have been killed. Suddenly another officer appears. It is General Sherman, who questions Pearl about why she is upset and she takes him to the mass grave where Clarke and the others are buried.

## Part One: Georgia; Chapters 6 through 10 Analysis

Clarke's prediction comes to fruition in this section when the Union troops destroy the bridge, leaving the freed slaves and others who are following them behind on the other side of the river. Although it has been their mission to liberate the South's black population, the army's leaders now feel incumbered by the growing number of people who are following them simply because they do not know what else to do. Pearl is the



symbol for all of the freed slaves as she wonders what freedom really means, since it is something she has never experienced before, and feels adrift with no idea of where to go or what to do next.

Although she is white and has lived a life of comfort and privilege, Emily is much like the slaves with whom she has joined the march north. For the first time in her life, she is free of the social norms that have guided her in the past and although she feels some discomfort, she also finds that she is happier than she has ever been as she experiences her newfound freedom in the company of Wrede. She is also useful for the first time, becoming an assistant to the medical unit despite her lack of training.

Will and Arly transform themselves once again, this time pretending to be prisoners who have been left behind, and Pearl continues her new identity as a white Union drummer boy whose brief grammar lessons by Clarke enable her to make her disguise believable.





# Part One: Georgia; Chapters 11 through 14

## Part One: Georgia; Chapters 11 through 14 Summary

In Chapter 11, Morrison, an officer on General Sherman's staff, is perplexed by the general taking this strange young drummer boy into their unit, but another officer offers an explanation. Two years earlier, the general had brought his family from Ohio for a visit and his young son had died of typhoid on the trip, so Sherman is thought to be using this boy — Pearl — for solace. While Sherman continues to think Pearl is a boy, the other men soon realize she is a girl and agree to keep her secret, making arrangements for her privacy. When she refuses to reveal her name and speaks rarely, Sherman assumes she has been traumatized by the horrors she has seen, but he is thrilled when she addresses him as Uncle Billy, as his men do. Pearl also continues to work on speaking like a white person.

Chapter 12 opens with the troops on a road on which the Rebel army had placed land mines, causing horrible carnage to Union soldiers. Wrede sets up his hospital in a house and barn while General Sherman orders a group of Confederate prisoners to find the remaining land mines. Arly and Will are driving ambulance wagons for the medical unit and Will has developed a crush on Emily. The "drummer boy" has blood on his foot and appears to be injured so he is taken to the hospital, but Emily realizes "he" is actually a girl and takes Pearl aside to explain that she is having her first menstrual period.

Chapter 13 finds Sherman and his troops approaching Fort McAllister, which they succeed in taking as a last step before marching on Savannah. Sherman is overcome with emotion as he watches the bravery of his men. Arriving at the fort, Sherman sees that many of his men have laid down to sleep amid the dead bodies and he muses about death, revealing that when one of his soldiers dies, he thinks of the fact that it places him at a numerical disadvantage. However, he realizes he cannot be too cavalier about death because his son's death devastated him. As the chapter ends, he looks forward to taking Savannah and wonders where his drummer boy is.

In Chapter 14, Pearl is enchanted with her first glimpse of Savannah. Wilma is spending time with Coalhouse Walker, the strong man who pulled her from the river and has now signed on with the army. He takes good care of her but understands that she will not have sex with him until they are married. He takes her to the river and introduces her to oysters, which she roasts and sells to people in the streets, earning them 13 Union dollars. Although they are still black people in a white world, Wilma begins to relax and enjoy herself a little. Meanwhile Will and Arly have not yet figured out how to get paid since they are only pretending to be in the army. They wander the streets, bemoaning the fact that they have no money, particularly when they come across a brothel. Arly figures out that Will has never been with a woman and tells him about the glories of sex,



although Will feels guilty thinking about it because of his crush on Emily. Wrede, who now has use of the fort's hospital, has realized that Will and Arly could not have been long-term prisoners as they claimed but thinks they might be spies. A man is brought into the hospital with a severe head wound and Emily watches as Wrede performs brain surgery on him. Wrede has little hope that the man will survive, and when they go to talk with his wife, it turns out to be Mattie Jameson. Although Mattie naively believes their lives will return to normal, John Jameson had been angry since arriving in Savannah, and was injured by a soldier guarding the warehouse where their belongings are stored after he learned the Union Army had confiscated it. Mattie is dismayed when she sees Pearl, who has been working with Emily at the hospital, because she had hoped to forget her husband's love child with a slave. Pearl goes to John's bedside and, although he is unconscious, tells him she will never be treated the way he treated her mother and that although she does not carry his name, she will take the Jameson name to glory.

## **Part One: Georgia; Chapters 11 through 14 Analysis**

Pearl's new identity as a boy again proves fortuitous as the great General Sherman, still in pain from the loss of his son, takes a liking to her and becomes her new protector. Although she identifies more strongly with her black mother than her white father, Pearl's white skin affords her the kind of treatment that would not be possible if she were any other freed slave who had attached herself to the Union troops. In fact, the men under Sherman's command keep her secret even when they realize she is indeed a female, largely out of respect for Sherman, who is a strong commander despite his somewhat odd personality. However, Emily puts an end to Pearl's masquerade when she is revealed to be having her first menstrual period.

The reader gets a number of glimpses into the complex personality of General Sherman in this section. A strong and capable leader, he is nevertheless made human by his intense sense of loss after his son's death and his emotional reaction to seeing the bravery of the men under his command. However, he is also a calculating warrior, realizing that the death of even one soldier means his ranks have been reduced and therefore weakened.

The Jamesons, whose plantation was burned in the book's first chapter, make a surprising reappearance in this section. John's foresight in having their most prized possessions moved to a warehouse in Savannah turns out to be his undoing as Union troops have confiscated its contents and his anger results in what might be a fatal injury. Pearl, who has again transformed herself by becoming an assistant in the medical unit, tests out her newfound freedom by speaking to Mattie and the unconscious John in ways she would never have been allowed as a slave.



# Book One: Georgia; Chapters 15 through 17

## Book One: Georgia; Chapters 15 through 17 Summary

Chapter 15 takes place as General Sherman is being hailed as a national hero for his taking of Savannah, but he is oddly dissatisfied because he considers what he is currently doing governance rather than war. He tells his men they will soon be going back on the road to take the Carolinas. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton arrives and is complimentary of Sherman, but unhappy about his army discouraging the freed slaves from accompanying them north. Sherman is livid and, in order to get rid of the former slaves, decrees that each of them shall receive 40 acres of land in a certain section of the South for resettlement. He is starting to feel better when he reads in the newspaper that his six-month-old son has died.

In Chapter 16, Wilma and Coalhouse line up to apply for 40 acres of land, but are told only heads of households qualify. Wilma tells Coalhouse that she would like to move to a northern city, but he says there would be no life for him there. They agree to get married and apply for their land grant.

Chapter 17 returns to Will and Arly, who have been in the brothel for a week, earning enough money to pay for the prostitutes in a poker game, so they are surprised to find that the army has left Savannah. They find an abandoned ambulance wagon and steal a horse to pull it, with Will getting shot in the arm and killing a man in the process, and leave to catch up with the troops.

## Book One: Georgia; Chapters 15 through 17 Analysis

This section does little to move the overall plot forward, but it does shed a little more light on the character of General Sherman, who shows himself to be a true military man rather than a manager, disliking any aspect of the war except the actual strategizing and fighting. However, he is a problem solver, which he proves when he finds an innovative way to rid himself of some of the freed slaves by making them landowners.

The section also brings the story of Wilma and Coalhouse to a conclusion when they agree to apply for a land grant. In the beginning, Wilma has grander ideas for her freedom, dreaming of exploring what life would be like in the North. Coalhouse, who had already saved Wilma's life when they first met, brings her back to reality with a reminder that he is not prepared for any kind of life other than the one they have already led on the South's plantations. They decide to resume a life that is familiar although as free people responsible for their own destinies.



# Part Two: South Carolina; Chapters 1 through 7

## Part Two: South Carolina; Chapters 1 through 7 Summary

In Chapter 1, Sherman has ordered Morrison to lead some troops into South Carolina, but they are trying to keep the Confederate troops guessing about their actual destination. The going is rough because the land is swampy and rain is constant, but Morrison eventually finds the headquarters of General Mower, as ordered by Sherman.

Chapter 2 finds Wrede and Emily in a wagon, waiting for the roads to become passable so they can move again. They had had sex a few nights earlier, but Emily is dismayed that he treated her more like a patient than a lover. She now thinks she has no future with this man. Meanwhile, John Jameson has died and Mattie is traveling in a wagon with Pearl, hoping to find her two sons along the way. After John died, Pearl told Mattie that she could not return to Fieldstone because it was burned to the ground. Since then Mattie has slept almost constantly. Pearl wakes her and says that she must make herself useful to the medical unit, as she herself has done, and also insists that she teach her to read, starting with Clarke's letter.

In Chapter 3, the Jameson brothers, John Junior and Jamie, who are Confederate soldiers, talk about how they used to secretly watch the slave women bathe and they liked Pearl in particular. We also meet Stephen Walsh, a Union soldier who feels despair at the conditions around him.

As Chapter 4 opens, Wrede is performing an innovative procedure to keep from having to amputate a badly broken leg, as is the standard practice, and all the other surgeons watch him. When the coffins arrive to take away the latest corpses, Pearl leads Mattie along the line to see them, and she is relieved when her sons are not among the dead.

In Chapter 5, Arly is carrying the injured Will in the stolen ambulance wagon when the horse's leg breaks. They are moved to a commissary wagon, where Will bleeds to death while Arly talks about God's plan for them.

Chapter 6 introduces Kil Kilpatrick, a food-loving commander who accumulates things for himself as his troops plunder the towns they go through. When he encounters some slaves cooking a delicious pot of food, he signs the cook, French Creole freedman Jean-Pierre, into the army as his assistant cook. Traveling with Kilpatrick is his rambunctious nephew Buster. Morrison arrives with a message for Kilpatrick from General Sherman, and after delivering it, Morrison gets a fever and dies.

In Chapter 7, Arly takes Will's body into a village and sits in a graveyard while he ponders how to bury him. Josiah Culp, a photographer, and his assistant, former slave



Calvin, come along and want to photograph them, but Arly insists on being paid for posing. When Culp refuses, Arly pulls a gun on him.

## **Part Two: South Carolina; Chapters 1 through 7 Analysis**

Emily's life takes another turn in this section. Although she is the daughter of a slave owner and had lived a privileged life before the war, she achieved a new sense of freedom when her father died. Her way of life has ended, and she finds a different kind of happiness through her attraction to Wrede and the satisfying work he gives her to do. However, now that their relationship has become sexual, she sees a different side to him, finding that he is clinical rather than warm. While she continues to admire his abilities as a surgeon, she is beginning to see another side to him. Even though she has taken the enormous step of giving herself to him sexually, she cannot foresee a future with a man who treats her coldly in the most intimate circumstances. Her newfound freedom has become a different kind of prison.

Pearl's relationship with Mattie has also evolved. Although she is the illegitimate daughter of Mattie's husband, Pearl now becomes more of a mother figure to Mattie, whose mental state has deteriorated considerably since the death of her husband. Mattie is better educated than Pearl and has had many more advantages, but Pearl is the clearer thinker under these circumstances. While Mattie cannot conceive of a life different than the one she has always had, Pearl, although she continues to wonder exactly what her new freedom will mean, is able to accept her changing circumstances and make the best of them; so, she takes her former owner under her wing and cares for her as a mother would a lost, frightened child. Mattie, in her emotionally weakened state, allows herself to be led by her husband's slave child, whom she had openly despised in their previous lives at Fieldstone. Pearl also takes another step in embracing freedom by asking Mattie to teach her to read, a skill that she did not need as a slave. She begins with Clarke's letter, which has become a symbol of her freedom since she plans to deliver it to his family in the Northeast.

This section also introduces Calvin, the book's first black character who has not been a slave. Calvin moves somewhat uneasily in the South, enjoying learning the skill of photography from Josiah Culp, but knowing that his dark skin keeps him in constant jeopardy. The character serves as a symbol of the new black face of the South, navigating the thin line between being emancipated and being truly free and equal to whites.



## Part Two: South Carolina; Chapters 8 and 9

### Part Two: South Carolina; Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

In Chapter 8, Sherman and his troops enter Columbia, the intended capital of the Confederacy, and are met with no resistance. As he talks with the city's mayor, he sees a row of cotton bales on fire and sends some troops to put out the flames. After he has set up his headquarters, Sister Ann Marie, the head of a convent school for girls, arrives to ask for his help in protecting the school and he assures her they are in no danger. Later that night, the smoldering cotton flares up again and as the wind carried bits of it, the entire city is soon in flames. Stephen Walsh, who has been assigned to guard the school, leads Sister Ann Marie and the girls out, and he saves the nun when her habit catches on fire. Moments later, Emily is shocked to see Mattie soothing the patients and playing piano for them, causing Emily to reflect on the existence of the soul and she goes to gather her belongings. Pearl and Stephen are also affected by the music and Stephen wonders whether he might survive the war and marry her. Sherman awakens in the morning and, seeing the devastated city, thinks that although he isn't responsible, he is glad it happened, but he worries about the hundreds of blacks that have again gathered to follow his troops into North Carolina. He writes letters to Secretary Seward and others, telling them what happened assuring them that it was the Confederates who had burned Columbia, although he knows he will be blamed.

In Chapter 9, we learn that Arly forced Calvin to dig a grave for Will and Josiah Culp insisted on helping. The strain was too much and he died of a heart attack. Arly then took his clothing and has now claimed his identity and is trying to sell photographs to people along the way as they try to catch up to the Union forces, with Calvin doing all the real work. Calvin realizes that although he is black, he has a great degree of control because he is the only one who knows how to work the photography equipment and he thinks perhaps he can tell someone in command that Arly is not really Culp. As Arly is standing in line to buy food, he sees Emily, now in her mourning clothes rather than her nursing attire and, intending to bed her and take the food she has bought, follows her to what turns out to be an orphanage. Seeing the compelling setting, Calvin sets up the camera and takes a photo. When Arly gets behind the camera, pretending to be Culp, he is very affected by the image he sees of Emily. As the chapter closes, Emily reflects on leaving the hospital. Wrede had argued with her using his usual dispassionate attitude and has done nothing to convince her to stay. She had intended to go back to her home, but had been compelled to help when she had seen the orphanage run by a black woman, yet she knows she would go back if Wrede asked her to do so.



## Part Two: South Carolina; Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

After Will's death, Arly seizes an opportunity when it presents itself and changes character yet again. This time, rather than simply pretending to change allegiance from one side of the war to the other, he takes on the persona of the deceased photographer, Josiah Culp, and he continues to see God's hand in everything that happens to him. His relationship with Calvin is one of mutual need. Arly knows nothing about photography, so he must rely on Calvin's skills in order to continue his charade, and Calvin needs the protection of a white man in order to stay safe in the changing South. Their relationship has parallels to others in the story, including that of Mattie and Pearl, who find themselves needing qualities that the other possesses.

Emily has now found a new calling at a Columbia orphanage and like so many other characters in the book, she has transformed herself into another new persona. When we met her, she had been simply the daughter of a judge, with no discernible skills, but she had been brave enough to leave her life behind with no idea what might lie ahead. Like Pearl, she has chosen to embrace change even though it is frightening rather than aimlessly dream of her old life, as Mattie does. Although the reader is left with the impression that Emily will continue to be a survivor because she has the ability to evolve, part of her remains stuck in her past as she admits to herself that she would return to Wrede if he asked her to do so. Her upbringing as a proper Southern lady continues to affect her and make her willing to submit herself to a man even when he shows no true passion for her.



# Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 1 through 3

## Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 1 through 3 Summary

Chapter 1 introduces English journalist Hugh Pryce, who is covering the war even though Sherman, who hates journalists, limits his ability to send stories back to his paper. He is fascinated with the war and sees similarities with ancient British civil wars. Pryce goes with some troops to a plantation, where the owner sits defiantly on his porch as the troops take massive amounts of food and other belongings from the property, but only a few of the slaves join the troops. As the men are debating whether to burn the property, a small slave boy named David runs from the house and Pryce takes him onto the mule he is riding as the soldiers beat a white woman who comes out to retrieve him.

In Chapter 2, General Kilpatrick and his troops are now escorting Union sympathizers Marie Boozer and her mother, Amelia Treaster, who are using them for safe passage north. Kilpatrick intends to bed both of them, but is delayed when he and some of his soldiers find about 20 murdered soldiers in the forest, along with a note saying, "These were the rapists." After burying them, Kilpatrick returns to the house he has commandeered to find that Amelia has gone out, but he beds Marie. The following morning, Rebel troops overrun their camp and he escapes, still in his underwear, into the nearby woods.

In Chapter 3, Sherman and his army arrive at Fayetteville and he orders that the people and property be treated with respect, with only minimal destruction, but he publicly executes a Confederate prisoner as a message to those who have continued to murder Union prisoners. A boat arrives, signaling that the army has now made contact with other Union forces to the north. Sherman orders that when the boat leaves again, Marie and her mother should be put on it. Sherman also orders the medical contingent, which includes Pearl and Stephen, to go aboard the ship. Pearl, lying in bed next to Stephen, realizes that all she has done since leaving the plantation is attach herself to white men. Meanwhile, Pryce feels encumbered by David, who clings to him constantly, so he abandons him at the Negro encampment, where Pearl finds him crying pitifully and decides to take him with her on the march.

## Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 1 through 3 Analysis

The character of Hugh Pryce, as a journalist, is an impartial observer to the war. However, he breaks the first rule of journalism by becoming involved in the story when he rescues the young slave boy David as he runs away from his former owners and





soon lives to regret his actions when David becomes attached to him. While it is a white woman who tries to keep David from leaving the plantation, he is abandoned by a white man — Pryce — and later rescued yet again by Pearl, who is both black and white, symbolizing the muddled lines of race in the emerging South.

Also in this section, the author includes some important description of the wide array of people who are now traveling with the Union army as it makes its way north. The procession includes all kinds of transportation from rugged army wagons to the fine carriages of the well-to-do Southerners who have been displaced from their homes, and the people include a complete array of those who have been affected by the war — men, women, old, young, black, white, wealthy, poor. In effect, an entire civilization has been uprooted and all its members, who have previously had nothing in common, are now on a common path and facing an uncertain future.

General Kilpatrick is presented as a stark contrast in many ways to General Sherman. While Sherman is concerned with his reputation and the well-being of his troops, Kilpatrick is using the war as a means of enriching himself and indulging all his tastes, including sleeping with as many women as possible.



## Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 4 through 6

### Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 4 through 6 Summary

Chapter 4 finds Arly and Calvin trying to track down General Sherman in order to photograph him. Meanwhile, Wrede Sartorius is closely following the case of Albion Simms, a man with a spike stuck in his head. Wrede feels that removing the spike would result in the patient's death, and even though his mental state deteriorates rapidly, Wrede is fascinated with his case and refuses to send him to a hospital. Kilpatrick and his troops engage in a heated battle with Rebel soldiers, who prove tougher than expected but eventually retreat. Mattie Jameson continues to look for her sons among the dead and wounded soldiers and eventually discovers the body of her oldest son, John Junior. Knowing that the brothers were rarely separated, Pearl searches among the Confederate prisoners, finds Jamie, and reunites him with Mattie. She then gives them one of her prized gold coins and sends them back to Fieldstone to make a new life for themselves.

In Chapter 5, Union and Confederate troops converge on a plantation and a fierce battle erupts, with some Confederate soldiers wearing Union blue to confuse their enemy. Hugh Pryce, determined to get a close-up view of the battle, runs into the middle of the fracas and climbs a tree to get a better view, but is killed when a cannonball brings the tree down upon him. Pearl takes care of David and wonders what she will do after she completes her mission of delivering Clarke's letter to his family in New York City.

Chapter 6 finds Calvin musing about Arly, thinking he is crazy but a genius at turning himself into someone else when the need arises. He hates having to travel with Arly, but realizes that in this part of the country it would be impossible for him to function as a lone photographer because he is black. Late at night, Arly wakes to see hundreds of Union troops quietly marching by and thinks General Sherman and his army are retreating, and he intends to go to Goldsboro, where he thinks he will have his opportunity to photograph Sherman. Calvin, hearing Arly talking to himself about his plan, thinks perhaps that will be his opportunity to tell Sherman who Arly really is, and he thinks about returning to Baltimore and taking over Culp's photography studio, which Culp left to him in his will.

### Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 4 through 6 Analysis

Pearl achieves ultimate redemption as the story of the Jameson family concludes in this section. Despite her status as the family's former slave, her father's refusal to claim her



as his daughter, and Mattie's disdain for her, she has helped Mattie cope with her situation and continues to support her when she learns that one of her sons has been killed. Rather than saying good riddance to the family, Pearl finds the other son and gives him all she has in the world, her last gold coin, to enable him to take his mother back to Fieldstone and start over there. However, she makes sure to tell him that he should remember that it was she — the person who would seem to have the least ability to provide any kind of help and the least incentive to do so — who made their return home possible. After the Jamesons leave, Pearl continues to move forward, as she has done throughout the book, pondering what kind of future she will forge for herself after she reaches the North and delivers Clarke's letter to his family. Although both have uncertain futures, Pearl is contrasted with Mattie as one moves forward and the other retreats to look for a life that is now gone.



# Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 7 through 9

## Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 7 through 9 Summary

In Chapter 7, the Battle of Bentonville has been bloody, with much loss of life on both sides, but General Sherman, who is becoming moody and agitated, thinks his strategy was still the right one. Learning that the 16-year-old son of a Confederate general has been killed, he writes a heartfelt letter of condolence to the general. Meanwhile, David, who has become fascinated with Albion, watches as Albion uses the heel of his hand to drive the spike in his head into his brain. Later, Sherman meets with other Union generals to devise a plan for a final push that will end the war, and when he sees Arly and Calvin's photography outfit outside, he tells the generals they should all pose for a picture together. Calvin delays the process as long as possible but eventually Arly gets behind the camera, where he has replaced the lens with a gun. He injures Colonel Teack and Calvin is blinded by a shot, but Sherman is unharmed. The next day Arly is executed by firing squad. Calvin is spared until the extent of his involvement can be determined, but before he has healed sufficiently, Wrede is ordered to accompany Sherman to the Union Army's headquarters. He is upset at having to leave the field, and also about the loss of Albion, and he decides to have Stephen returned to his regiment when he returns to his unit.

In Chapter 8, Sherman tells Wrede he has brought him to this meeting to subtly evaluate General Grant's health. After eating lunch, the group boards a riverboat where Wrede is surprised to find President Abraham Lincoln, who looks old and worn after the stresses of the war. The generals meet privately with Lincoln about their plan to end the war while Wrede waits and wonders about the president's health. After their meeting, Lincoln talks with Wrede about his concerns over his wife's health. As he prepares to leave with Sherman, Wrede learns that Lincoln's concerns and his respect for Wrede's abilities mean that he is being reassigned to the Surgeon General's office in Washington. As the chapter ends, Wrede muses about how the war has affected Lincoln and thinks that he has never felt this sad for anyone.

In the book's final chapter, the doctor who replaced Wrede has ordered Stephen to return to his regiment and Pearl to go home, but they decide to ignore the orders in the hope that the confusion surrounding the army's last push will enable them to find a place for themselves in the march. They are also in charge of Calvin, whose sight has not yet returned and hopes to escape attention too. Realizing that Calvin's old mule will not enable them to travel farther, Pearl offers her last remaining gold piece to buy a new one. Word arrives that General Lee has surrendered to General Grant and shortly after that Lincoln has been assassinated. Sherman, now in Raleigh, tells his troops about Lincoln's death and they threaten to destroy Raleigh in their anger, but are stopped.



Sherman meets with Confederate General Johnston and they work out terms of surrender. Meanwhile Wrede, now in Washington, is called to Lincoln's bedside but leaves when he realizes nothing can be done to save him. In preparation for their continued trip north, Stephen begins subtly gathering provisions, and Pearl teaches young David to say simply "yes" and "no" when asked a question, rather than "yes'm" and "no'm." As the book concludes, Stephen, Pearl, Calvin and David split from the march and head north. Calvin is beginning to regain his sight and says he can make a good living from photography. Although he offers to let Pearl and Stephen join him, they decline but decide that David, as a black child, will be better off staying with Calvin. Stephen plans to study law and thinks Pearl should study medicine, adding that even though she is free now, the world will have to catch up to her.

## **Part Three: North Carolina; Chapters 7 through 9 Analysis**

The character of Albion symbolizes the suffering, divided South, with the spike lodged in his head dividing his brain and his thoughts just as the war has divided the region and its people. Removing the spike would be fatal for Albion, just as ending slavery will also end the lifestyles that the plantation owners have always known. Although in many ways, Albion appears to be fine — able to sit up, speak, and interact with others — his condition continues to deteriorate until he can no longer bear the changes taking place in his body and he takes matters into his own hands by driving the spike into his brain. In many ways, Albion parallels the character of John Jameson, whose inability to bear the changes in his way of life ultimately leads to his death.

The reader also meets President Lincoln in this section and we see that he, too, is much like the South in that his body has been ravaged and worn down by the war just like the cities and countryside destroyed by Sherman's army. In a cruel twist of fate, Calvin loses his sight — the one sense he must have as a photographer — but eventually sees the world coming back into focus gradually, just as a photograph comes into focus as it develops. Arly's story also comes full circle; when he first appeared, he was slated to be executed for sleeping on duty and in the end, despite the cleverness that has sustained him throughout the novel, his grand plan to kill General Sherman puts him before the executioner again.

The book ends with the story of Pearl and Stephen, and in particular with a resolution of her identity confusion. Although she has embraced her black side with her plan to care for David, her white skin means that the child does not identify with her as a mother figure. Instead, he identifies with Calvin, a black man. In the end, Pearl decides to use her freedom to live with Stephen as a white woman, although she still does not know exactly what this will mean for either of them, since it is likely that any children they have will be black. Pearl is the face of the new South, struggling with being pulled between past and future, and forging a new identity one small step at a time, as reflected in Stephen's remark that the world will have to catch up with Pearl.



# Characters

## Pearl

Pearl is a girl around 12 or 13 years old who is a slave on the Jameson plantation all her life until she is freed by the Civil War. She is a "white-skinned Negro," the daughter of her mother, a slave, and her white master.

Pearl is the closest thing the book has to a protagonist, since she is the only character whose story continues from the beginning of the novel to its end. She is both excited about her newfound freedom and fearful of it because she has no idea what it will bring for her. She is also ambiguous about her own race, identifying more with her black mother but recognizing that her physical appearance causes most people to think she is white, and she is somewhat uncomfortable with knowing that her ability to pass for white has many advantages.

Pearl is happy to be free, but like many of her fellow former slaves, is quite unsure about what this will mean and what her next steps should be. She finds a temporary direction when she decides to deliver Clarke's letter to his family in the North, but has no idea which direction she will turn when she leaves their house. Even though she has a strong, even defiant personality, she comes to realize that in the weeks immediately after gaining her freedom, she has survived solely by attaching herself to a series of white men, including Stephen Walsh, whom she plans to marry as the book ends.

## Clarke

Clarke is the commander of a troupe in General Sherman's army who leads the burning of the Fieldstone plantation and takes its slaves, including Pearl, with them on the march north. A native of Boston, he goes along with the pillaging actions of his men, but finds their joy disturbing because he likes order and discipline and is uncomfortable with the chaos that surrounds him. He is immediately intrigued by young Pearl, especially her confident stance that makes it appear as if she owns everything around her. Before he is killed by Confederate troops, he writes a letter that Pearl takes from his hand after she finds his body and determines to deliver it to his family.

## Arly

Arly is introduced as a prisoner who has received a death sentence for sleeping while on picket duty until he is freed on the condition that he join the Confederate Army and defend Georgia. A cunning, ingenious con man at heart, he is quick to recognize and take advantage of opportunities when they arise, a trait that enables him to survive for a time but proves to be his ultimate undoing.



Arly believes that all his actions are guided by God, including his plan to kill General Sherman after he assumes the identity of the dead photographer Josiah Culp. When his plan goes awry, he is executed by the Union army.

## **Will**

Will is a 19-year-old man who escapes a death sentence for desertion in exchange for joining the army to defend Georgia. He comes under the protection of fellow prisoner Arly, who takes him along in his many scams. Will is an innocent farm boy who learns the ways of the world from Arly, but ultimately bleeds to death from wounds he receives.

## **Emily Thompson**

Emily Thompson is a single woman who is left alone after both of her parents die and her only brother is killed in the war. With her world destroyed, she joins the thousands of people following the Union Army north from Georgia and becomes attracted to surgeon Wrede Sartorius. After becoming his assistant and eventually being seduced by him, she leaves after realizing how cold he really is and finds a sense of purpose working in an orphanage.

## **Wrede Sartorius**

Wrede Sartorius is a colonel and surgeon in the Union Army. He is an extremely skilled doctor and a thinker who is far ahead of his time, but is interested only in the scientific aspects of medicine and has little regard for human feelings.

## **Wilma Jones**

Wilma Jones is a 22-year-old freed slave who formerly worked for the Thompson family. Like many others, she follows the Union Army north from Georgia and although she is attracted to the idea of living in a northern city, she ultimately plans to marry Colehouse Walker, another former slave who saves her life during the march, and start a farm with him.

## **Coalhouse Walker**

Coalhouse Walker is a large, strong former slave who saves Wilma's life and falls in love with her. He rejects Wilma's idea of moving north, feeling that there is no place for him in a city, and instead takes advantage of the Union's offer of 40 acres of land, which he plans to farm with Wilma.



## **General William Tecumseh Sherman**

General William Tecumseh Sherman leads the large Union army that works its way through the South, battling Confederate troops and destroying much of the property in their path. He is a true soldier at heart, having little interest in the managerial side of things and preferring the strategy of battle.

## **Stephen Walsh**

Stephen Walsh is a Union soldier who falls in love with former slave Pearl and plans a life with her after they reach his native New York City.

## **Mattie Jameson**

Mattie Jameson is a Southern woman who has lived a life of wealth and privilege on a Georgia plantation until the war puts an end to her way of life. After her husband's death, she joins the march to the North and is taken under the wing of her husband's slave child, Pearl.

## **John Jameson**

John Jameson is the owner of Fieldstone plantation and is displaced when Union troops free his slaves and burn his home. He dies after being injured in an altercation in Savannah.

## **John Junior and Jamie Jameson**

John Junior and Jamie Jameson are the sons of John and Mattie, and soldiers in the Confederate Army.

## **General Judson Kilpatrick**

General Judson Kilpatrick is a Union officer who takes advantage of his position to accumulate belongings from the homes he raids and bed as many women as possible.

## **Josiah Culp**

Josiah Culp is a photographer who is documenting the war.





## **Calvin**

Calvin is a black man from Baltimore and Josiah Culp's assistant.

## **Hugh Pryce**

Hugh Pryce is a British journalist who is traveling with the troops and documenting the war.

## **David**

David is a slave boy, age 8 or 9, who is rescued by Hugh Pryce when his plantation is raided and ultimately ends up with Calvin.

## **Albion Simms**

Albion Simms is a soldier who survives an injury in which a spike is lodged in his head but eventually cannot bear the loss of his mental faculties and drives the spike further in, killing himself.



# Objects/Places

## Fieldstone

Fieldstone is the Georgia plantation of John and Mattie Jameson where Pearl and others work as slaves until the Civil War freesthem.

## Milledgeville Penitentiary

Milledgeville Penitentiary is the prison from which Arly and Will are freed in exchange for joining the Confederate Army.

## Lt. Clarke's Letter

When she finds Lt. Clarke's dead body, Pearl removes a letter from his hand and pledges to deliver it to his family in New York City.

## Gold Coins

Before leaving Fieldstone, Pearl receives two gold coins from a fellow slave; she later uses one to purchase a donkey and the other to help her former owners return home and start a new life.

## Savannah, Georgia

Savannah is a city on the Georgia coast where several of the freed slaves get their first glimpse of life off the plantation.

## Josiah Culp's Camera

Photography is a new phenomenon at the time of the Civil War, and Josiah Culp's camera becomes an important part of the plot as a means of documenting the war and as the means by which Arly intends to kill General Sherman.

## 12 Washington Square

12 Washington Square is the address of Lt. Clarke's family in New York. When she finds his final letter addressed to them, Pearl sets out on a quest to deliver the letter to that address and it becomes a pivotal point in her exploration of her new freedom.



## **Slave Whip**

A slave whip is a particular kind of whip used to punish slaves before the Civil War emancipates them.

## **Columbia**

Columbia is a city in South Carolina that was to be the capital of the Confederacy. It is burned after Sherman occupies it.



# Themes

## The Effects of War

The central theme of *The March* is the myriad of ways in which the Civil War impacts the lives of the book's diverse cast of characters and the South itself. Much of the focus is on the natives of the South, as their individual lives and, in fact, their entire civilization, are being uprooted as Sherman's troops march through the region, but the reader also sees how their experiences impact the Union soldiers and officers.

The war has the greatest effect on the lives of Pearl and her fellow slaves, who are now free but do not yet have a real sense of what that will mean for them. Their freedom means they have been displaced from the only lives they have known, and the only homes they have known, so they somewhat aimlessly begin following Sherman's army toward the North because they simply do not know what else to do. For the first time in their lives, they have choices, but they don't really know what those choices are or how to make them. Although her family has been on the opposite end of slavery, the war also brings freedom to Emily Thompson, who finds that she now has the ability to leave her old, stifled way of life behind and find a sense of purpose in helping others. Mattie Jameson's world is also turned upside down, but her reaction is very different from Emily's. While Emily chooses to accept and embrace the changes brought by the war, Mattie strains against them. She is unable to imagine a different kind of life and ultimately returns to her now-destroyed home to try to recreate the life she has always known.

The author also spends a great deal of time describing the physical affects of the war on the South itself. As Sherman's army makes its way across the Southern states, it leaves a wide path of destruction in its wake, burning homes, killing livestock, and either stealing or destroying anything of value. The people who are left or who choose to remain will have no choice but to rebuild the physical structures as they rebuild their lives.

## Shifting Identities

At various times throughout the novel, several characters experience a shift in their identities, sometimes purposefully and sometimes quite by accident. Pearl's identity is a bit murky from the beginning because of her mixed parentage. As the daughter of a slave and her master, Pearl considers herself black — and is treated as such by everyone around her — but her white skin fools those who do not know her as a slave. For that reason, Clarke is able to disguise her as a white drummer boy to keep her safe on the first part of the march, and her identity as a female is revealed only when she has her first menstrual period. Pearl struggles not only with her racial identity, but also her identity as a slave versus a free person, because although she is happy to be free, she has no experience other than that of her life on the plantation, so she has no idea



what the life of a free person will be like or how to respond to the changing world around her.

Arly and Will change identities a number of times in their quest to survive. Although they are Rebel soldiers, they take Union uniforms and pretend to be prisoners of war in order to escape. They soon find that living as someone you are not is complicated; for example, they can travel with the Union Army, but not collect a paycheck, but they continue to evolve from one identity to the next as they find it necessary. After Will's death, Arly takes on the persona of photographer Josiah Culp, a plan that enables him to eventually make an attempt on General Sherman's life and leads to his execution.

To a lesser extent, Emily and Mattie also take on new identities. When the characters are introduced, they are privileged Southern women whose lives are being torn apart by the war, and as the plot progresses, they find themselves living lives that are completely foreign to them by helping the army's medical unit. Unlike Arly's propensity for changing identities as a means of conning others, Emily and Mattie take on new personas as a necessity for survival in the new world in which they find themselves.

## Racial Divide

Race is an obvious theme throughout *The March* and it affects the book's black and white characters alike. Almost every character is struggling with racial issues in some way as they begin to adjust to the emancipation of Southern slaves and what that means for the country as a whole.

Pearl is the character who most directly personifies racial divide because as the daughter of a slave and her owner, she is both black and white. Throughout the book, she crosses color lines as she tries to decide which race she identifies most closely with, but in the end she realizes that she must choose one or the other as she moves forward. Her decision to live as a white woman is owed mostly to her relationship with Stephen, although she realizes that race will become an issue again if she bears a black child, and she gets a preview of how that might affect their lives when David rejects her as a parental figure, preferring Calvin instead.

Many of the characters who come from the North are horrified by slavery, but they nevertheless are not ready to treat blacks as their equals. Sherman and his troops would not have accepted Pearl as their drummer boy if her light skin did not make her appear to be white, and Calvin realizes that as much as he detests and mistrusts Arly after he begins impersonating Josiah Culp, he needs a white man as protection and would not be accepted as a photographer if he were on his own.

## Choice

The changes brought about by the Civil War mean that many of the characters in *The March* have no choice but to accept a different way of life, and much of the book is



about how they react to the choices that are now before them. Some embrace their choices and others struggle with them.

Pearl, Wilma, Coalhouse and the other slaves have never had choices before, so they are understandably a bit confused about how to make them now that they are free. They follow the Union troops toward the North not because they have specific destinations in mind, but because they do not know what else to do now that they have been displaced by their emancipation. Some characters choose to seek vastly different lives — Pearl by moving north with Stephen and living as a white woman — while others return to more familiar lives, such as Coalhouse and Wilma, who stay in the South to work a farm.

Some of the book's white characters also face choices for the first time in their lives. Emily has lived a life of privilege, but she has simply drifted along before the war places different options before her. While she could return home and pick up the threads of her old life, she chooses to live differently because she finds true fulfillment for the first time when she begins helping others in Wrede's surgery and in the orphanage.

# Style

## Point of View

The March is written in the third person. The narrator is omniscient and can relay to the reader both the actions and the thoughts and feelings of the characters.

There are many characters in the book, some with major roles and some with minor ones. Since the action moves often from one character to another, the reader has an opportunity to see the book's events from the point of view of a wide number of people — black and white, young and old, rich and poor, male and female. This is very important because it provides the broadest possible perspective on the final days of the war and how the sweeping changes taking place in the country affect the lives of the book's diverse characters.

## Setting

The book is set in three Southern states during the American Civil War. When it opens, General Sherman's army is making its way through Georgia, burning everything in its path and picking up an odd collection of freed slaves and other refugees along the way. Although a work of fiction, the book also includes a great deal of documented history such as Sherman's occupation of Savannah and other specific locations.

The book's second section takes place in South Carolina and the final section in North Carolina. Again, the book's characters follow the documented path of Sherman's army as it occupies cities such as Columbia, South Carolina and moves on to Raleigh, North Carolina. Along the way, the action takes place on plantations, in cities and small towns, in prisons and makeshift military hospitals, and in the homes taken over and often destroyed by Union troops. The author uses a wide variety of settings as a device for exploring the ways in which the war affected not only the characters depicted in the book, but also the actual geographic locations in which significant events took place.

## Language and Meaning

The author of The March uses language that is appropriate for the time period in which the novel takes place. Much of the vocabulary is challenging for younger readers and the sentences are often long and complex.

The dialogue can be confusing because the author does not use quotation marks to indicate when characters are speaking. The dialogue of the book's black characters can also be difficult to understand because it is written phonetically — for example, "You see dem eagles? You git a passel of dese and you c'n fly lak de eagles high, high ober de eart — das what de eagles mean on dese monies." However, once the reader gets used to these style choices, the book is easy to comprehend.

## Structure

The book is divided into three parts that are titled according to the state in which the events take place. Part One, Georgia, is divided into 12 unnumbered chapters, while Part Two, South Carolina, and Part Three, North Carolina, each have 9 chapters. The chapters are of varying lengths, but most tend to be short.

The novel does not have a true plot, but rather follows the lives of a number of diverse characters who make the march north with General Sherman's army. Only one character, Pearl, is seen throughout the book, but she cannot be considered the main character because like the others, she appears only sporadically.

The sheer number of characters makes it a bit difficult for the reader to keep up, particularly because some appear only briefly and are not important to the story, but are simply seen in short vignettes and then disappear. This is especially true of the Union officers, some of whom reappear here and there as the book proceeds while others do not. The pace is fairly steady and even, and the book is easy to read even though it includes a number of challenging words.





## Quotes

"And then with the team away, the carriage rolling down the gravel path, Mattie turned, lifting the hem of her robe, and mounted the steps only to see that horrible child Pearl, insolent as ever, standing, arms folded, against the pillar as if the plantation was her own."

Page 5

"Dr. Stephens's house was dark. She rattled the doorknob, peered in the windows. She ran to the back. The stable was empty. There was no more Dr. Stephen. There was no more Milledgeville."

Page 29

"Will sat down cross-legged in the grass and set about the best meal he had had since leaving home. His mouth full, his chin dripping with grease, he considered the possibility that all men are brothers."

Page 38

"When the war is won, the authorities will work out the legalities for freed slaves to own their own land. But now if they trail along they are too many mouths to feed. The young men we can enlist, but the women and children and old men, they will fall by the wayside and then where will they be? So it's best this way."

Page 44

"The slave quarters were still standing. And if she was free, wasn't she free to go back if that's what she wanted? To starve, if she wanted to? To be John Jameson's slave child again, if she wanted to?"

Page 44

"He smiled and shook his head. We know so little. Our medical service is no less barbarous than the war that requires it. Someday we will have other means. We will have found botanical molds to reverse infection. We will replace lost blood. We will photograph through the body to the bones. And so on."

Page 59

"Sitting with crossed legs on a barrel, a cigar in one hand and a cup of wine in the other, Sherman contemplated how matter-of-factly his men accepted the dead that they could lie down, so casually, beside them. All of them asleep, though some forever."

Page 88

"As a general officer I consider the death of one of my soldiers, first and foremost, a numerical disadvantage, an entry in the liability column."

Page 89



"Yet the city that made him so cheerful filled her with misgiving. They were still black in a white world."

Pages 93-94

"Mattie didn't know how, when they got back to Fieldstone, the place would get up and running again, John having sold off all the working hands. She knew, of course, that there might never again be slaves but she couldn't quite see how anything could be done without them. And so when she imagined the war over and a return to their home, as often as not in her imagination the slaves would still be there. She would read in the papers the bad tidings for the Confederacy but somehow she couldn't connect it to a whole change of Southern life. She would, for a moment, and then the connection would dissolve and the war would seem to her, however horrible, a temporary thing, an interruption only, without any great consequences."

Page 108

"In all of this Wilma Jones felt the smallness and insignificance of her own purposes on this morning. But that is the slave still in me, she thought. I must watch my own thinking — I must be as free in my soul as I am by law."

Page 123

"It was all in hideous accord, the urban inferno and the moral dismantlement of his army. These veterans of so many campaigns, who had marched with him hundreds of miles, fought stoutly with nothing less than honor, overcoming every conceivable obstacle that nature and the Rebs could put in their way — they were not soldiers now, they were demons laughing at the sight of entire families standing stunned in the street while their houses burned."

Page 182

"They stood looking at the burning mansion. You know, Colonel, Sherman said, when I was posted here maybe twenty years ago, I fell in love with a girl who lived in this very house. Of course it was not to be, but hers were the softest lips I have ever kissed."

Page 184

"He was not shocked. He'd been months on the march and the fact of fair-skinned Negroes no longer surprised him. In this strange country down here, after generations of its hideous ways, slaves were no longer simply black, they were degrees of white. Yes, he thought, if the South were to prevail, theoretically there could be a time when whiteness alone would not guarantee the identity of a free man. Anyone might be indentured and shackled and sold on an auction block, the color black having been a temporary expedient, the idea of a slave class itself being the underlying premise."

Pages 188-189

"Wrede shook his head and, with a gesture indicating that they should remove the body, threw off his apron and, with barely a glance at Emily, left the room. His departure, having given her the clear impression that death was a state that did not interest him, left her openmouthed with shock."

Page 190



"But a black man taking pictures would not have been tolerated in the first place. The pretense that he, Calvin, was only assisting the white man was necessary if there wasn't to be trouble where folks were already in no mood. So, endangered as he felt himself to be, he needed this madman as much as the madman seemed to need him, though for what mad reason it was impossible to say."

Page 204

"Yet to someone watching the processions of men and wagons and gun carriages, broughams, buggies, and two-horse shays, it became apparent that not merely an army was on the move but an uprooted civilization, as if all humanity had taken to the road, black women and children trudging along beside their go-carts, or pulling, oxenlike, their two-wheeled tumbrels, and white citizens of the South in their fine carriages overloaded and creaking with bundles and odd pieces of furniture."

Page 239

"An you the big North city boy, Stephen Walsh. Else you would know what I see on this march ain't what a slave child don't see beginning wif the day she come into this world."

Page 249

"That's right, brudder two. It will keep you awhile. And you will have your whole life to 'member it was me, Pearl, got you your freedom to go home."

Page 290

"Making photographs is sacred work. It is fixing time in its moments and making memory for the future, as Mr. Culp has told me. Nobody in history before now has ever been able to do that. There is no higher calling than to make pictures that show you the true world."

Page 308

"He had the weak, hopeful smile of the sick, a head of wildly unmanageable hair, he wore a shawl over his shoulders and house slippers, and Wrede Sartorius realized with a shock, this was not the resolute, visionary leader of the country whose portrait photographs were seen everywhere in the Union. This was someone eaten away by life, with eyes pained and a physiognomy almost sepulchral, but nevertheless, still unmistakably, the President of the United States."

Page 331

"And so the war had come down to words. It was fought now in terminology across a table. It was contested in sentences."

Page 348

"He touched her face and brushed the tears. Nothing stays the same, he said. Not David, not Sartorius, not the army on the march, not the land it trods, not the living, and not even the dead. It's always now, Stephen said with a sad smile for poor Albion Simms."

Page 356



"If I live white, how free am I?

Freer than the other.

Free everywhere 'cept in my heart. Is that freer than my mama Nancy Wilkins?

You will have to let the world catch up to you."

Page 362



## Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast the characters of Emily and Mattie. Include their backgrounds, their personalities, the choices they make, and how they react to the changes the war brings to their lives.

What is the significance of the gold coins Pearl receives at the beginning of the book? How is the way she chooses to use them important to her character?

Discuss the relationship between Pearl and Mattie. What is their relationship in the beginning and how does it evolve as the book proceeds? Who do you think holds the power?

Photography was a fairly new science at the time the novel takes place. Discuss the ways in which it is significant to the book's plot, major themes, and characters.

Wilma says that she must be as free in her soul as she is by law. What does she mean? Why is this difficult for the freed slaves depicted in the book? Include at least three black characters in your discussion.

Provide a character analysis of General Kilpatrick. What role does he play in the book? How does the author contrast him to General Sherman? Why is this character important to the plot?

Discuss Emily's relationship with Wrede. In what ways does it free her? In what ways does it diminish her? Why does she leave him and why does she think she would return if he asked her to do so?