

One Thousand White Women Study Guide

One Thousand White Women by Jim Fergus

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Plot Summary

In the year 1874, the head of the Cheyenne Sweet Medicine tribe, Chief Little Wolf, journeyed to Washington D.C. with a proposal for President Grant. Dressed in full, colorful Indian regalia, Chief Little Wolf presented his plan to give the government one thousand horses in exchange for one thousand white women. Hoping to end the fighting between the white man and Indians on the American plains, Little Wolf felt that if white women could merge with his tribe and bear children of mixed blood, the new children might bond the two races. Indians and whites would then begin to truly assimilate and learn to live together peacefully. President Grant's wife fainted in shock over the audacity of his daring proposal, not to mention his bizarre and somewhat terrifying appearance. However, in recognition of his peace making efforts, President Grant awarded Little Wolf the Presidential Peace Medal.

Not surprisingly, news of the Chief's proposal caused public outrage, since white women married to wild savages was an unthinkable and ghastly concept. However, after considerable discussion with his closest advisers, President Grant saw the logic of the plan, and quietly formed a new agency, naming it the "Brides For Indians" project, or "BFI." To fulfill their end of the contract with the Cheyennes, the government solicited women from jails and mental institutions to form the first "installment" of white brides for the Cheyennes.

May Dodd, the rebellious daughter of an ultra-wealthy family in Chicago, was abducted and committed by her father to a lunatic asylum. May's two illegitimate children are taken from her, and she is diagnosed as promiscuous, or morally perverted.. The asylum's conditions and so-called medical treatments are intolerably abusive and cruel, perhaps truly bringing about insanity for those patients who are sane when they arrive. May Dodd feels she was improperly and unfairly incarcerated at the asylum and, seeing an opportunity to escape, applies to become a Cheyenne wife. An asylum employee, Martha, who believes May was improperly institutionalized, helps to forge the release documents that provide May with the freedom she has dreamed about. Knowing she will be prosecuted for the forgery if she stays, Martha also joins the BFI. Leaving Chicago with Martha for the wild west and a new life, the journals May kept from March of 1875 through March of 1876 form the story of her days as a white woman living among the Cheyenne Indians. May begins her journal while riding a train on the first leg of her courageous journey. Grisly horror, irrepressible joy, stunning beauty and savage horrors define May's year as the bride of Chief Little Wolf. Through May's journal, Fergus also makes us familiar with May's colorful assortment of friends, as well as some hilarious moments on this wild ride of a story.



23 March, 24 March, 27 March 1875

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May Dodd having borne two children out of wedlock, refusing to marry or to leave their father, Harry Ames, is kidnapped and committed to an asylum. May does not know whether Harry was complicit with her father, or perhaps a victim himself. May and her



friend, Martha, forging the necessary documents, both join the BFI mission. Under contract, the white brides agree to bear one child or spend two years with their Indian husbands.

May is now free to write of her anger without fear of reconfirming her insanity. Her new friends are English bird expert, Helen Flight who, unable bear children, has joined the program to conduct research. Ada Ware, dressed in black, and young Sara Johnstone, unable to speak, are both from the asylum. Other new friends include the Irish Kelly twins, convicted of prostitution and grand theft; southern racist Daisy Lovelace; Gretchen Fathauer, a large, boisterous Swiss woman; Euphemia Washington, a powerful black woman, and Narcissa White, a sanctimonious missionary.

23 March, 24 March, 27 March 1875 Analysis

May Dodd is highly educated with a gift for writing. Although she does not believe she is insane, there may be a slight tinge of lunacy in the detailed quality of her writing. She was raised by an emotionally-absent father. Her lover, Harry Ames, is strikingly different from her father, which may explain her attraction to him. It is not clear whether May is paranoid or really was ill-treated and railroaded into the asylum. Her writing hints that she was somewhat out of control, or at least out of touch with reality.

Martha, who is single and likely to remain that way otherwise, is looking forward to a husband and family. Knowing she could be prosecuted for forging May's release documents, she has nothing to lose. The scenes going by, as the train crosses through city, farm, and into the great open plains, mimic May's internal experience of escaping into space and freedom.

Her assortment of new friends is nicely balanced. There is a strong, conscientious black woman, an absurd, mean-spirited southerner, a pretty young mute, a large aggressive Swiss woman, twin Irish convicts with an attitude, Martha from the asylum and the obnoxious Narcissa, who plans to bring the savages around to her form of righteous Christianity



March 31, 3 April, 8 April and 11 April 1875

March 31, 3 April, 8 April and 11 April 1875 Summary

The abusive treatment by military escorts makes May think she may not mind living in the wilderness. She enjoys watching the wild and romantic cowboys herding cattle. The train is stopped so the men aboard can shoot buffalo from the windows. The men are celebratory, but May finds the slaughter ugly and wasteful.

Although the government's stand is that the brides will live as missionaries among the Indians, people are viewing them as whores. Her female host rudely warns May not to discuss the mission in front of her children. Given their treatment by so-called "civilized" people, May looks forward to living among savages.

Heading for Ft. Sidney, several women have defected, frightened by the degraded, drunken fort Indians. Phemie's army hosts say free Indians are much different from fort Indians, and the Cheyennes are considered some of the handsomest and cleanest of all of the tribes.

Their next train is spartan, symbolic of their movement away from civilization. The women are anxious, silent and apprehensive. Daisy Lovelace indulges in her "medicine," clinging to her poodle. The Kelly sisters are quiet, and Narcissa silently prays. Phemie, however, remains calm and unshaken, strong from the many trials of her life. Phemie begins to sing an old Negro slave song, about this train being bound for glory. The women eventually join in.

March 31, 3 April, 8 April and 11 April 1875 Analysis

The cowboys hold a flashy attraction for May, which brings to mind her earlier description of Harry being "rough around the edges." However, the buffalo slaughter done just for fun brings out her more negative opinion of men, in general.

May would like respect as a volunteer in an important experiment, but realizes people need someone to look down on. When the lieutenant's wife suggests that discussing this shameful mission will corrupt her children, May's pride overcomes any physical hunger. She brushes off the soldiers' lewd remarks, remembering she is used to doing unpopular things. Each event in her journal is helping to shape the story's elements of prejudice, sanity and sexuality.

The trip is becoming rougher, the terrain more barren, and the increasing roughness of the journey foreshadows even worse conditions. Phemie's slave song presents the women with a dichotomy. The train bound for glory could mean freedom and happiness, or could very well simply mean their demise, and they have no way of knowing which.



13 April and 17 April, 18 April and 19 April 1875

13 April and 17 April, 18 April and 19 April 1875 Summary

At Fort Laramie, the uncomfortable women sleep on wooden cots. May is not so upbeat now, pondering the past which led her here. Writing to Harry, May hopes to return to him in Chicago after her mission is finished.

The women are imprisoned at the fort for safety from the Fort Indians, who are drunken and abusive, selling their own women to the highest bidder. May meets Captain John Bourke, who doubts white women can change the Indian culture, warning that, after three hundred years, the American Indian has learned only vices from the white man. Helen Flight discusses the barbaric treatment of birds who give feathers for fashion, upsetting Lydia Bradley in her fashionable hat.

May "desires" the Captain, although he is engaged to Lydia. After mistakenly thinking Bourke is propositioning her, it occurs to May that her behavior really is, and has always been, inappropriate. She considers that perhaps her family was correct in having her committed. However, secretly she confides in Hortense her attraction to Bourke, discussing their mutual love of Shakespeare. During an evening stroll, May tells Bourke they will not know one another long enough for their backgrounds to matter, but hers does matter to him.

13 April and 17 April, 18 April and 19 April 1875 Analysis

The symbolism of worsening conditions portends a future of rough living ahead. The dusty, arid Fort Laramie compared to the lushness of Illinois is such a stark contrast that it has forced May to question her decision.

The initial excitement is over, and May's emotional pain surfaces over what has been done to her that led her to this point. Not knowing the truth is the most painful part. May is overly aggressive sexually for a woman of that era. Her misunderstanding of the Captain's suggestion that there is still time to refuse is comical, but her personal problems may be her addiction to the game of hunting and capturing men, perhaps unaware of the consequences of her actions. Even though, in her April 18 entry, May acknowledges she might have a problem. She proceeds to indulge in romantic fantasies in her letter to her sister, apparently unable to control it. She seems to have a one-track mind.



May has never gotten enough love, making appropriateness a lesser consideration. Her comments that she cannot have Bourke imply to the reader that she certainly will have him, this being just part of the game she plays. May is a complex personality, and though her behavior may be foolish, she is quite aware and bright. May's self-indulgent drama, such as "Where our arms had touched and now parted it was like tearing my own flesh from the bone," reveals the possibility that she is out of touch with reality .



20 April, 21 April 22 April and 23 April 1875

20 April, 21 April 22 April and 23 April 1875 Summary

Bourke and the group depart Fort Laramie, Lydia waving and wearing a featherless bonnet. May rides up front with the teamster, Jimmy, who discusses the topography, and stops the wagon so Helen can shoot birds for specimens. The spring wildflowers and greenery raise May's spirits, as she imagines living with her babies on the banks of a creek, viewing this mission as an astonishing adventure.

Bourke insists the savages can only be civilized if they are subdued in battle by a superior force. Gretchen comments that they are about to see a superior force, at which they all laugh. Bourke wants May to read Shakespeare with him. May admits the "appearance of impropriety," is low on her list of concerns, and she is stirred by her feelings for Bourke. She tells Martha that each time she has fallen in love, she is accused of madness. Martha fears May will leave the group for Bourke, but May promises never to leave her. Narcissa White gossips about May's relationship with Bourke, which May feels is due to envy.

Daisy shares that her daddy owned two hundred "niggahs" and did not fight in the war himself, but sent his two best slaves, who immediately jumped to the other side, which she feels is predictable of their kind. Silently, May and the Captain agree Daisy's daddy deserved his dismal fate.

20 April, 21 April 22 April and 23 April 1875 Analysis

Somehow, Lydia's featherless hat is comical, and the reader is glad to see her brought down a peg. The mood of May's writing has lightened considerably, being on the last leg of their journey to their husbands. There is a sense of plenty, with bountiful birds, wild game, lush green and water, that brings a new hope to the women. The reader is beginning to see the extreme ups and downs of May's world.

Although he will facilitate it, Bourke is openly against the government's bride program. Linked by their mutual education and love for words, Bourke and May spend quality time together, denying their physical passion. May now thinks she is in love, which is not surprising, given her long bout of isolation.

Bigotry and racism seems to permeate the group in several configurations, such as Bourke's attitude toward the savages, Daisy's attitude toward "niggahs" and Yankees, and Narcissa's self-righteous religious opinions. Observant May, however, takes a liking even to the most ordinary of them, such as Jimmy.



24 April, 25 April, 5 May and 6 May 1875

24 April, 25 April, 5 May and 6 May 1875 Summary

In dangerous country, Bourke is concerned for the group's safety. Murders at Camp Robinson were recently committed by Cheyennes and, ironically, the brides are assigned to the Cheyenne tribe of Chief Little Wolf. They will join the nomadic Cheyennes' winter encampment, but will be on the move constantly. May doubts the sanity of this ordeal and is glad to have friends who are familiar with nature, including Jimmy, who she learns is actually Dirty Gertie, a wild and eccentric woman.

The Cheyenne men visit to inspect their female "trade goods." The Indians are lean, lithe and physically small, some painted and adorned, and their horses elaborately decorated, as well. May experiences an "eerie, terrifying sense of exhilaration" at their appearance. The women are learning sign language, but the Cheyennes' spoken language seems far too complicated. To Helen, the colorful Indians are an artist's dream, but Daisy is appalled at their dark skin. The red-headed Kelly twins fascinate the Indians. Phemie is paired with a black Cheyenne. Gretchen announces she is not pretty, but will make a good wife and big strong babies. The Indians argue among themselves as they choose their white wives. May is pleased to be claimed by the stately and majestic Chief Little Wolf, but Bourke watches with sadness.

24 April, 25 April, 5 May and 6 May 1875 Analysis

The reality of the Indians' brutality has subdued the group, but May realizes the group has been only half-willing to think about the truth. There is a surreal quality to May's writing while the women wait for their fate. May cannot imagine a nomadic life and realizes now why Benton asked if she enjoyed camping, which, as Bourke said, is really the least of their worries. Captain Bourke, who obviously knows much more than most about the Indians, knows there is danger ahead for the women. The truth of being a commodity occurs to the women as the Indians inspect and discuss them.

May's increased fondness for Gertie is partially due to Gertie having developed her own unique safety mechanism against men. May's observation of the Chief is amazingly detailed. She notices everything about him, from his fine features to the decorations on his horse. She has already imbued him with a fierce set to his jaw, confidence, maturity, strength, imperiousness. May's ability to fantasize about love is a real gift at this potentially terrifying moment. Feeling civilization crumbling away beneath them like a sinkhole lends a dizzying feeling to this scene. The true extent of the upcoming change begins to hit home as a reality with this meeting.



7 May and 8 May, 1875

7 May and 8 May, 1875 Summary

Anticipating their transfer to the tribe, Bourke tells May this is not a game, and she is no longer an actor in a farce. Indians have no recognizable culture, but only centuries of savagery and degeneracy. John wants to get May excused from the mission, but she will not risk a return to the asylum. Telling him about her past, May says she is not promiscuous, but has "been with" only one man. John will do anything to save her. As expected, they make love. May finds it a strange propensity to become involved with unsuitable men.

Phemie's "Black Man" was captured from a wagon train of escaped slaves and raised as a Cheyenne. Helen is paired with a Mr. Hog. Sara will marry Yellow Eagle. Since madness is a gift from the gods, there is some competition for Ada Ware, whom the Indians think is holy. The Indians laugh at the women's luggage. Daisy's man holds up her poodle by its neck as the others laugh, but the little dog bites his leg and hangs on, which his peers find hilarious.

Rev. Hare, who will escort them into the wilderness, hopes to convert the Indians before the Catholics get to them. He will serve as translator and spiritual adviser. Feeling like lambs going to slaughter, May reminds the women that they all may return to freedom in a couple of years. May rides at the head of the procession with her Chief, and is personally resolved never to display fear or uncertainty. The Cheyenne children greet them, some riding large decorated dogs. Throngs of Indians gather to look at them, their tipis a colorful spectacle, and the women are claimed by their new families. May feels she is in an insane dream, surrounded by sullen squatting savages, like trolls from a fairy tale. She mentally tells Harry goodbye.

7 May and 8 May, 1875 Analysis

May's need for love makes her irrational about Bourke. Whether it is true that she has only ever "been with" one man, as she has told him, is questionable, since she has already revealed the incidents in the hospital, her powerful passion and her early flowering.

May's dramatic question, "Who falls swifter or harder from grace and with such splendid soul-rending agony than an Irish Catholic boy raised by Jesuits?What sweeter love is there than that which cannot be?" reflects that May sees herself as acting in a very dramatic play. In a long entry, being her last letter to Harry, May is struggling to let go of her past. Her life has changed, and it is clear Harry will never be a part of it again. One wonders why May would write to Harry about her intimate night with John Bourke, but writing makes her feel safer.

The terror and dread of these women who are entering a hellish life is unnerving, and foreshadows troubled times. Unlike the romantic love and marriage model that women in American culture often expect, this is like a bad dream sequence with an unknown ending.



NOTEBOOK III - MY LIFE AS AN INDIAN SQUAW 12 May, 14 May and 15 May 1875

NOTEBOOK III - MY LIFE AS AN INDIAN SQUAW 12 May, 14 May and 15 May 1875 Summary

The Chief's two other wives, an old woman, a young girl, a young boy and an infant all live in May's tent. Teaching them to be civilized would be daunting and, as Helen points out, there is no use of table manners when there isn't a table. The Indian women use the white women as slaves to do demeaning, hard labor. While the women work, the Indian men appear to spend most of their time smoking and gossiping.

The group wedding will include Christian and Cheyenne ceremonies. May learns her new name is Mesoke, meaning Swallow, and Gretchen's new name means Big Voice. May decides she will be a good wife, if only to keep her sanity. When May bathes along with the men, they disapprove and laugh at her bathing suit. In response, May makes a graceful dive in front of them. The men do not want to swim with her. The Chief may have actually smiled, but has still not spoken a word to her.

Not an effective leader, Rev. Hare takes advantage of his position as a holy man. At a meeting, Phemie announces to the group she has chosen to be a hunter. The twins, betrothed to twin Indians, are not bound by Hare's rules, and tell him everyone knows Protestants go to hell. Narcissa feels she is in charge of moral decisions, but Susie observes there is no authority out here. Hare mentions plans for a reservation school for their half-Caucasian children. Narcissa, however, will not consummate her marriage, but will instead show her husband the path of Christian Salvation, to which Meggie comically responds with sympathy for him. Phemie laughs that it will be difficult for her to have the superior half-Caucasian baby to which the Reverend refers. The Kellys will not be having any Protestant babies, either.

NOTEBOOK III - MY LIFE AS AN INDIAN SQUAW 12 May, 14 May and 15 May 1875 Analysis

There is certainly no romance yet for the women in this hard-working situation, and it is hard to see them as "brides."

Describing her "intended" in detail, using dramatic words like burnished copper for his smooth skin, hair glossy as a raven's feathers, with the utmost dignity and bearing, May keeps her own silly sense of romance intact, in spite of being pushed beyond her normal limits. Always pushing the envelope of appropriateness, May has the audacity to swim, uninvited, with the men. The comparison to her father's stuffy Chicago Men's Club, may be one reason she feels the need to defy their custom.

The group's religions and viewpoints are varied and contentious. Since marriage is usually governed by religion, and the heathens have no recognizable religion, the women want to assert their own beliefs into the mix. Symbolically, they are all now physically separated from one another into different family groups. It is important to note that the two religious leaders in the group, Hare and Narcissa, are the weakest links.



18 May and 19 May, 21 May and 22 May 1875

18 May and 19 May, 21 May and 22 May 1875 Summary

The Indians are respectful of the white women's humorous ways. Formerly mute, Sara now actually speaks with her fiancée in Cheyenne. Martha, or Falls Down Woman, wears high-heeled city shoes. Leaping over smoldering fires hoping to get her name changed, Martha falls into a fire pit, earning her two new names of "Falls Down in Fire Woman" and "Ash Faced Woman." May notes that Indian children are well-behaved, and Indian babies instinctively protect themselves with silence. The Indians' spoken language is a complex mixture of sounds, but some speak limited English with a bit of French. May realizes there is no vocabulary to describe her life, such as the mingled odors in the tent.

May notes she has now outdone herself in her ability to shock her family. To prepare for the group wedding, her fellow wives have sewn a decorated wedding dress from antelope hide. May is both terrified and exhilarated.

In a very short journal entry, May is just awakening from her wedding experience. She is still not herself and will never be the same. She has been drugged, her senses assaulted and her barriers broken.

After a long sleep, May writes about her wedding day. While the brides spend the day at their lodges being decorated, they are being fed small bites of food. A small puppy is cooked, a delicacy for the savages. All of them in a trance, gathered in a circle, the brides see the others' decorated faces. Flutes, drums, gourds play eerie music. Little Wolf is dressed in splendor and, in her altered state, May is proud to be with him. For a moment, May hopes to be rescued, but the wedding ceremony is completed. Dressed in white lace, Daisy shares that she had formerly been left standing at the altar. Feeling compassion for her, the brides laugh at the name of Mr. Bloody Foot, who was bitten by Daisy's dog. One at a time, the women step beyond their personal boundaries and join in the wild and frenzied dancing. Animals and gods appear to watch and sing along. May's wedding is dreamlike, and she and her husband mate like primitive animals. The dream ends when May awakens at dawn still in her wedding dress. May's family's cruelty has led her to this world of lunacy, but May sends regards to them and her babies, saying that one day they will all be together.

18 May and 19 May, 21 May and 22 May 1875 Analysis

Although still in a strange state of mind from such unfamiliar customs, the women are adapting to their surroundings. May is very kind, in spite of her egocentric personality. Although she is competitive, she also wants the best for the women. She seems to pride



herself on being a trouble maker, and relishes the thought of her parents witnessing her wedding to a savage. She recognizes the hypocrisy in her own family and has made a concerted effort to be different from them, which has caused her considerable trouble.

The transition from being a bride of a savage, to being a savage herself, is intriguing. The women fear total assimilation into the tribe, clinging to their own identities as long as possible. Symbolically, their Indian families strip them of their civilized clothing to dress them as savages for their weddings. Although May is again quite dramatic, it seems she truly has had a life-changing experience. Her wedding night is like a psychedelic journey - lovely and horrifying at varying levels of consciousness. Clearly, May's story of the dancing, the magical appearance of animals and the earth's heartbeat, reflects her uncertainty of how much of the experience was real. Her graphic description of the sexual encounter is dramatic and shocking.

May seems to have become more loving from this experience. She feels affection for Daisy, and sends regards to her parents, signing her letter "your loving sister." She has experienced an extraordinary connection with living things and the earth.



NOTEBOOK IV THE DEVIL WHISKEY 23 May, 26 May and 28 May 1875

NOTEBOOK IV THE DEVIL WHISKEY 23 May, 26 May and 28 May 1875 Summary

May and Martha concur they must have been drugged on their wedding night, and Martha confesses to losing her virginity. They agree it was like a dream that really happened. Now on a trip with her new husband, May looks back at the village and feels a sense of home, peace and gratitude, marveling at how the Indians have made themselves part of the natural setting.

At their campsite, May and the Chief eat roasted grouse, stuffed with wild onions and herbs May has gathered. May talks to Little Wolf in English, and he nods and occasionally replies in his own language. She explains her life story, certain he has also told her important things, but cannot understand one another yet. May is willingly learning the finer points of dealing with fresh meat. Her working honeymoon has been instructive and useful, but she appreciates the hot spring bath at the end of her day.

The Chief leaves their camp to hunt. May floats happily on her back in the hot spring pool, and spies a barely human looking man watching her. The man threatens her in French, and approaches her with the clear intention of rape. She is terrified, but the Chief appears and speaks calmly, without rancor, to the man, who backs out of the pool. In English, the awful man says he is Jules Seminole, and threatens her again. Little Wolf tells her Jules is half Cheyenne and half Seminole. May now feels dependent on Little Wolf for safety, and sees him as a gentle, solicitous and patient man.

May tries to get Little Wolf to "play" but he is a serious man, and patiently helps her learn Cheyenne words. May teaches Little Wolf some swim strokes and, though she intimidates him a bit, she shows him how to make love other than like an animal. Gushing about his attributes, May draws a romantic parallel between Bourke and Little Wolf, seeing them tied together by her love.

When the two return, the southern Cheyenne have erected a hundred new lodges. Whites and Indians have exchanged clothing and are blending. Rev. Hare tells May to visit Helen, who is now Satan's disciple and is practicing thaumaturgy [performing miracles]. Learning the men are puffed up because the southerners are about to make war on the Crow, May finds Helen painting birds on the warriors' bodies and horses. The medicine man determines each warrior's medicine animal, and imbues Helen's painted symbols with magical properties. Helen is now rich with gifts paid for her services, but hopefully will not be blamed if her art fails to protect the warriors. Helen feels that art never fails.



NOTEBOOK IV THE DEVIL WHISKEY 23 May, 26 May and 28 May 1875 Analysis

Like the night and day wedding painting on May's face, her life is a roller coaster fraught with terror and bliss. She is finally comfortable, safe, enjoying her idyllic honeymoon. The hellish creature, Jules, violently disrupts her peace. Unable to communicate his threats to Little Wolf, she knows this man plans to harm her later. Little Wolf cannot hurt Jules Seminole as Jules is half Cheyenne.

May is enjoying learning her new tasks. Little Wolf seems to tolerate her deliberate violations of his customs. May tries to relate the present to her past, wanting to see this trip as her honeymoon. Claiming Little Wolf is only her third lover, she questions again if this makes her a sinner or harlot, or insane. She is fulfilling her mission, which is to teach the savages about white people and, although Little Wolf's initial reaction to her sexual aggression is withdrawal, he decides to trust her. What the savages know about intercourse is only what they have seen animals do.

The May 28th entry has a sense of foreboding, as the visitors are preparing for war, and Helen is putting herself in a precarious position by images on them that they think will protect them from harm. In a sense, Helen is using the superstitions of the Indians for her own gain, and almost jokes about it, seeing no real harm in it since her first love is her art. We learn that Jules Seminole's presence is connected with the visiting Southerners, which also indicates trouble.



3 June, 1 June and 4 June 1875

3 June, 1 June and 4 June 1875 Summary

The camp is festive, like a country fair. The Kelly girls are acting as bookmakers for the hard-gambling Indians, who bet on the organized games. The southern Cheyennes have brought many items of civilization with them, and betting is intense. The festivities are being held to celebrate the arrival of the southerners and the beginning of the summer hunts. The June 1st entry is out of chronological order, and it is not clear whether it is intentional. It may be a way to reveal the raucous, busy tenor of the events that are keeping May busy.

A small child leads her blind old grandfather to compete in a shooting contest. Black Coyote goes first, and hits a bullseye with his new rifle. Old "Stares at Sun" puts a sewing needle in his mouth, blows a breath of air, and they find the needle in the exact center of the bullseye. Certain they have been tricked, the Kelly girls challenge him again. The old man weakly blows on a porcupine quill, which also lands in the precise center of the bullseye. This man has "big magic", and May wonders if the little girl's faith in her grandfather is what makes his magic work.

Gretchen is going to arm wrestle Julian Seminole, who again makes filthy threats to May. He informs May he is married to Little Wolf's niece, so no matter what he does to May, the Chief will not kill him. Julian bets a barrel of whiskey on his contest with Gretchen, and makes an agreement with No Brains that if he wins, he will take Gretchen back to his lodge with him. Gretchen twists her husband's nose until he sheds tears. May warns Gretchen not to arm wrestle with this evil man, but Gretchen is confident she can beat him since she never loses. Gretchen says Jules stinks like a "gottdamnt hog," and his breath makes the contest unfair. The women, terrified of the Seminole, cheer for Gretchen, who wins the contest. Gretchen's feelings are hurt by her husband's willingness to bet her away.

3 June, 1 June and 4 June 1875 Analysis

The camp is at a high level of excitement, and May uses words like "abuzz" and "festive." May notes the temporary break in jealousy and tension among both races of women, as they all cheer for Phemie. Since we know the celebration is a precursor to the war party's activities, the ebullient joviality seems wild and careless.

May thinks the old man's magic might be a result of the his little girl's belief in him, which may explain May's excessive faith in Captain Bourke. The swindling Kelly girls have clearly been working together as a team for a long time, evidenced by their savvy knowledge of the odds in gambling and the way their conversations flow together. Jules Seminole is not going to go away. He is a despicable, vile person determined to violate women and threatens to be a force throughout the story.



Proud of her Swiss heritage, Gretchen does not take well to being called German. She had begun to lose the contest, but the Seminole's bigotry renews her strength and, in turn, calling him a French pig, she puts his arm down. This is another example of the many strains of racial hatred addressed in the story. Gretchen's husband No Brains may not be a highly principled person, either. Gretchen, as an unattractive woman, has probably spent a lifetime being insulted and ridiculed, but she is strong enough to demand that No Brains not return to "her" home.



5 June and 7 June 1875

5 June and 7 June 1875 Summary

On the day before the raid, May and Martha try to persuade their husbands, through Rev. Hare, to stop the attack. Since the raid is arranged by the Kit Fox Society, tribal law won't allow the Chief to interfere. The Chief wonders how this is any different from what white people do to their enemies. Hare says the government does not want the Indians attacking whites, but discord among tribes encourages the friendly ones to be scouts. Hare only translates selectively, and threatens May with the wrath of God.

A passage through Hell takes place, and many women want to return to civilization. At the celebration feast, Seminole frightens May again, but she cannot leave while the men are smoking. Jules gives each man a drink of whiskey, and May watches them rapidly transform from its effects. Despite her husband's insistence, May leaves to find her friends and assure herself of their safety. The camp is in a general state of drunken chaos, with gunfire, fighting, horrible music and dancing, and men trading their women for more whiskey.

Hare is paralyzed with fear, saying whiskey will make the savages commit atrocities. The only defense is to hide. Narcissa has been raped and blames May for all of this, saying they will all burn in hell, but Ada points out, they are already there. May takes Martha to her tent, where the crone is on guard with her club. Leaving to find Sara, May steps out and Jules Seminole drags her and licks her. May's tipi crone hits Jules hard with her club. May, now armed with her own club, leaves again to find Sara amid the hellish chaos. Daisy is face down on the ground, the men raping her one after another. May hits one man with her club, but another attacks her. The savages knock May down and tear her clothes, but Gertie appears with her bull whip. With help from Phemie and Gretchen, whose husband is one of the offenders, the women all escape the violent scene. The village eventually quiets down. Daisy wakes up confused, but Bloody Foot is sober and has been looking for her all night. The women do not tell him what happened to her. May finds Sara safe at her lodge with her good husband.

Gertie's secret is exposed, and she has dropped the name, Jimmy. Bourke has sent Gertie to warn May that gold was found in the Black Hills and, although a treaty grants the area to the Indians, the gold seekers will demand protection from Indians. President Grant is dissolving the brides program. Bourke wants May to return to the fort immediately, promising the government will get all of them out in time. May wonders what the government's official position is on the brides, but Gertie tells her the government is sitting tight and having no shame.

Gertie knows May will not go back with her. Gertie feels happiness is a condition invented by white people, like whiskey. To her, life with the Cheyenne is a fairy tale until they bump up against the white man's world.



5 June and 7 June 1875 Analysis

The hopelessness of the mission is becoming apparent to May and to the reader. Among the government, the church and the patriarchal structure of the entire world, May's attempts to make things better fall on deaf ears. The presence of the women is not going to change the customs and attitudes so deeply ingrained in the tribe, especially when the status quo is reinforced by the government through its so-called holy men. Reverend Hare's slimy attitude is exposed in this chapter. He does not want peace for the Indian. His threat of the wrath of God was only a reference to his own wrath. His religious facade is, perhaps, only just that. Unfortunately, he is the only anchor for the group of white women.

The nightmare of a drunken brawl and the savages' reaction to the alcohol is extreme and volatile, perhaps bringing out the worst in their individual and collective personalities. It is no coincidence that May is saved by Gertie who happens to carry a message from Bourke. Gertie is a true friend, and understands May cannot abandon her commitment. It seems odd that Gertie happens to show up in the middle of this chaos. Again, once the drama of the horrendous night is past, May experiences a blissful moment of being "home," the roller-coaster quality of her life consistent and reliable.



15 June 1875

15 June 1875 Summary

The camp recovers and repairs itself. Gertie leaves with a letter for May's children and a letter from May to Bourke, telling him she is most satisfied with her marriage. May has decided not to alarm the women with Bourke's warning. A group of women, led by Narcissa White, tries to escape the mission but are tracked and returned to their lodges within a few hours by their husbands.

Little Wolf stays out on the prairie for three days, doing penance or seeking divine guidance. He returns quiet and ill, followed by a sickly coyote, who is his medicine animal. The coyote eventually disappears, and Little Wolf's health improves.

Ada Ware's husband, Whistling Elk., murdered a Cheyenne during the fracas. He is banished from the village and is renamed Stinking Flesh. When Ada was in Chicago, she was ill with a black dog on her chest [depression] because she could not accept her husband's adultery. While she was confined in the asylum, he divorced her and married his lover. She is now married to someone who is rotting from the inside out and in exile for murder. Ada wonders if there is no end to a woman's suffering on this earth. Susie Kelly mentions that Chicago winters also gave her melancholia, but the prairie has more sunshine and may be too hot for the black dog.

A number of women were raped on the bad night. Daisy has grown withdrawn, but her husband is caring for her. Jules Seminole continues to surface and say vulgar things to May, who tries not to go anywhere alone for fear of him. Little Wolf is aware of Seminole's unwholesome interest in May, but does not lose his temper, and is only able to speak out against Jules at council for bringing whiskey into the village. May sees Little Wolf as "monk-like...nearly Christ-like" in his selflessness.

15 June 1875 Analysis

We do not know what moral crimes Little Wolf may have committed while he was drunk, but he has been suffering with guilt, if not physical illness from the ordeal. May has put him on quite a pedestal, and interprets his actions as almost holy, excusing and overlooking any flaws he may have. Whether Little Wolf truly has this much integrity or May is exaggerating, as she is prone to do, we as readers do not know, given our source of information.

Ada Ware, who is already quite aware of how unfair life can be, has been dealt another hard blow with her husband's exile. Her life pattern seems to be repeating itself. Daisy is paying a huge price for her drinking. The fact that the women are not allowed to escape exposes their true status, which is that of prisoners. May, however, having been offered the perfect opportunity by Bourke to escape, chooses to stay. Perhaps this is the best her life has ever been, or possibly her pride over Bourke's upcoming marriage prevents

her from leaving. A positive result of this adventure is that the women are becoming closer, encouraging one another and concerned about one another's welfare.



17 June 1875, NOTEBOOK V - A GYPSY'S LIFE 7 July and 14 July 1875

17 June 1875, NOTEBOOK V - A GYPSY'S LIFE 7 July and 14 July 1875 Summary

Helen Flight will be guest of honor at a dance, being credited for the raid in which no Cheyenne lives were lost. The Kit Fox warriors, successfully stole many Crow horses. Helen shares how effective her snipe painting was in protecting one of the warriors, and the Indians have begun to believe that Helen's magic is more powerful than Rev. Hare's. All are revolted by Hare's display of cowardice on the night of drunkenness and his loss of faith.

The camp is planning its summer hunts deep in the wilderness, further from civilization. The savages have no Shakespeare, because they are too busy living life to ponder it. Time does not exist for the savages, but May keeps a calendar and is filled with joy and trepidation over being pregnant. The huge combined tribe moves together, an awesome sight to May. May observes they are all natives now and barely distinguishable from the Cheyenne women. Phemie is bare-breasted in breech clouts, Helen now has a buckskin suit, Martha, Feather and May all wear antelope hide dresses. She idyllically ends this entry, with the "horses slipping down off the knoll, following the People, who follow the buffalo, who follow the grass, which springs from the Earth" (175). May acknowledges the order in the flowing movement of the tribe, calling it "communal life in the purest form," and comparing it to nature.

The men focus on the hunt, guarding the camp and protecting the group as they travel. Now in Crow country, the warriors are even more vigilant. May acknowledges that the danger of the hunt balances out the labor of the women's work. She credits the tribe for recognizing Phemie's hunting talent, noting that Little Wolf is respectful of women's opinions, including hers. The tribe has amassed an abundance of food and hides for trading.

Narcissa now insists she is there against her will and refuses to work. She cannot convert the savages, so she tries to teach them how to be good slaves to the white man so they will turn to God for salvation. Narcissa teaches two young Indian women to wait on her and the rules of pretentious etiquette that seem ridiculous in the wilderness. She feels they will later be able to find work if they know their manners. Still angry about being raped, Narcissa will not say whether she is pregnant.

They tribe reaches their afternoon destination, and the camp is set up exactly the way it was before, in the same order and in the same directions. All circles and individual lodges face east for religious reasons, as well as practical ones. May thinks the symmetry and order are a lovely art form.



17 June 1875, NOTEBOOK V - A GYPSY'S LIFE 7 July and 14 July 1875 Analysis

Helen is playing with fire but seems to be enjoying the attention. She almost believes that her paintings are magical. She calls the Indian's imitation of a snipe "haunting," implying that he so resembled a snipe that she wonders if he had become one.

May is not sure if the army will be able to monitor their summer travels, and knows she is headed deeper into the wilderness of the unknown, further from civilization than she has ever been. She appears to have fully adapted to her of nomadic travels. She is happy to be near the Indian children and, because she will be a mother, is filled with hope for the future. She is in a slightly blissful, very positive frame of mind, even though the mission is scrapped. Her poetic writing reflects May's daydream-like mental state.

No longer complaining of the harshness of her situation, it seems that May sees the goodness and balance in every aspect of Cheyenne life. There is a contentment and joy in her writing as she observes the pattern and flow of the travel, the hunt, the daily work and the customs. She now notes that opening the tipi to the sunshine in the morning "lights, warms and freshens" it, a far more affectionate description of the tipi than earlier in her journal.

She sees foolishness in Narcissa's behavior, and not particularly critical, is more philosophical. May appreciates the abundance of the hunt and humorously notes the changes in the savages' names as different events mark their personae. Interestingly, May refers to the rape of Narcissa as the consummation of her marriage, almost sympathetic with Narcissa's husband.



1 August and 7 August 1875

1 August and 7 August 1875 Summary

Camping along the Tongue River is blissful and beautiful. The valley is lush, river lined with cottonwoods, and multitudes of birds are singing. The place is teeming with peaceful and abundant nature, and May feels she is a part of this world.

Some of the women join May in her early mornings by the river. May considers herself the president of the little group. Daisy is now recovered, and has softened, Daisy proudly announces that her now dear friend Phemie has been asked to join the Crazy Dogs as a full fledged warrior, inadvertently calling Phemie a white woman. Gretchen, called "Big Foot" since kicking her husband through the camp, has reunited with him but is angry at him for his laziness and for not providing for the family. No Brains is not a strong man, but Gretchen wants him to make something of himself.

May wonders what will become of her children, praying that her letter reaches them. She hopes they will learn of her life among the savages and know that, whatever her flaws were, she was not insane. She is having a premonition in the background of her good spirits, which eventually comes to fruition.

Their worst catastrophe on the darkest day yet, the women are attacked and abducted by Indians wearing combined altered army clothing and white man's clothes. Hands and feet bound, the women are thrown over the backs of horses, some that belong to their own tribe. They travel several hours, with Gretchen unconscious. Sara tells them that Pretty is saying these men are Crow - this is the first and last time they would ever hear Sara speak English.

One of the men grabs Sara by the hair. Gretchen is too injured to help, and Martha is paralyzed with fear. May realizes that this is what must have happened to little Sara in the asylum, the thing that made her stop talking. As they watch Sara's assault, Sara plunges a blade into the man's neck, but before he dies, he pulls the knife free and slits Sara's throat.

The women are raped, May twice, sparing Pretty Walker from this fate. The women are broken, and Martha wishes to be dead like Sara. Meggie and Susie plan to be alive for the birth of their babies, and they assure one another that their husbands will be coming for them. Gretchen, too, feels No Brains will come for her. They have no fire, and huddle together for warmth.

1 August and 7 August 1875 Analysis

This entry was written after a relatively long gap in time. May is living the daily life of a Cheyenne and making the best of it. Perhaps May has not written in her journal for some time as she is content and caught up in daily living instead of observing. She and



her fellow white brides seem to have bonded tightly, despite their differences. Gretchen provides them with comic relief, although they do not laugh at her out of disrespect. May is pleased that Sara, who never spoke at all, is now happy and speaking fluent Cheyenne. May is in the flow of nature and feels part of it, as she gets her morning water and observes her surroundings.

The foreboding sense May is feeling foreshadows events to come. This peaceful, almost blissful existence will not last, and her ruminating about her babies back home and the possibility that she will not see them again, may imply that she intuitively knows this, and is trying to enjoy every moment while she can.

August 7th is a horrifying entry that May writes, hoping her writing will help keep them alive, since her pen is her medicine. The women have gone from almost completely adjusting to the rawness of life on the prairie to a painful, violent situation in which they are helpless, and expect to be killed. The night of the drunken brawl was certainly a nightmare, but this experience is even more gruesome and life-threatening. May's bravery in exchanging her own body for Pretty Walker's is moving. The fact that most of these women are pregnant makes the situation even more abominable. We are warned of this disaster through May's earlier premonition.



8 August, 9 August and 11 August 1875

8 August, 9 August and 11 August 1875 Summary

The Cheyenne warriors arrive and kill all the abductors, and the women are safe again with their own people. May feels a bit sorry because some of the abductors were little more than boys, but sees it as the darkest twenty-four hours of their lives. Little Wolf led the charge against the Crows and seemed to May like a God of vengeance, a fearless animal without mercy, her knight in shining armor.

Phemie was one of the rescuers, and must have horrified the Crows. Even No Brains had come along dressed for battle, although May thinks he hung back until it was time to count the dead. Gretchen finds her husband leading his horse, holding up a bloody scalp. The women watched the killing and scalping in a dreamlike state. All are savages now, taking pleasure in the deaths and mutilation of their abductors, and experiencing savagery in their own hearts.

Little Wolf asks May if Pretty Walker was raped. May answers no, but tells him she could not stop her own rape. Little Wolf tells them both it is all right now. Yellow Wolf's grief over the loss of Sara makes them all cry. The women of the camp run out to meet the returning white women, but they all hear Yellow Horse's family crying out as they see the body of Sara.

The burial of Sara and her unborn child is conducted by Yellow Wolf and by Reverend Hare. Yellow Hare kills Sara's horse next to her grave so she can ride the Hanging Road to Seano, or the Cheyenne's heaven, which is reached from the hanging road, or the Milky Way. Cheyennes believe that anyone who has ever died goes to the Creator, and in Seano they live in villages the same as on earth. Regardless of the lives they have led, and all are reunited with the souls of their loved ones in Seano. Reverend Hare argues that anyone can go to Seano, but only baptized Christians can go to heaven. Sara will have her choice.

Yellow Wolf cries by Sara's grave for two days and nights. Hare offers no consolation to the women, who are still suffering from their abduction. The women agree never to speak of the ordeal, and to move forward. The families are kind to the women, but some of the white women insinuate that their sins got them into trouble. May stays close to Little Wolf, taking comfort in his protection. She is very attached to him now, and Quiet One no longer begrudges their relationship. Quiet One knows and is grateful that May protected her daughter. May feels that she and Pretty Walker have "seen the boogeyman in the flesh and are more than ever afraid of him."



8 August, 9 August and 11 August 1875 Analysis

Traumatized, debased and thoroughly violated, the women are returned to their tribal home. It is clear now that they will never be truly safe, but they take comfort in their husbands' bravery.

The extreme horror of watching Sara's death, of being raped and watching each other be raped explains their new fascinated pleasure in watching their enemies be mutilated and killed, as they are desensitized by their own suffering. As with each experience they have had on this mission, the women will never be the same.

Hare's insistence on a Christian burial for Sara is starkly absurd. Young Sara never even spoke until she became comfortable with Yellow Wolf; her life had only just really begun with the Cheyennes. Yet Hare does not have much to hang on to, and his credibility in other areas is certainly lacking by this time, so he needs to assert his religion on the proceeding.

May, who has always needed a loving father figure, has become childlike in her need for Little Wolf and his protection, by her own confession. She is grateful for the generous and caring Cheyenne families and their non-judgmental attitudes. As usual, it is a white person who projects a judgmental attitude. Narcissa, bitter and self-righteous, was not abducted. With so many near-death experiences for this group in such a short period of time, the reader wonders if things can get any worse.



20 August, 23 August and 28 August and 6 September 1875

20 August, 23 August and 28 August and 6 September 1875 Summary

May, the Kelly girls and Gretchen are in the midst of healthy pregnancies, uninjured by their ordeal. Helen Flight is not pregnant, but has already confided her inability to have children. Helen tells May that Mr. Hog has the idea that unless he impregnates her he is less than a man, and every day when he asks her if she's pregnant, and she tells him no, he wants to try again - a dreadfully tiresome business. Since the abduction, Mr. Hog has made no further overtures to Helen so she is able to concentrate on improving her medicine, or her art. Phemie has had men pushing themselves on her since childhood, so she will decide if and when she wants to be a mother. The other women's babies will be born next February. They worry about the cold weather, but hope to be living at an agency with a doctor and hospital nearby, as discussed by some of the men in council.

Reverend Hare has been attacked by Bad Horse, who is driving him with his quirt from the Reverend's tent that he shares with Dog Woman. The Reverend is naked and blubbering in Cheyenne and English. Bad Horse's young son, also naked, is being carried away from the tent by his mother. Susie Kelly tells May this is a family matter, that the "old hypocrite got caught boogerin' the boy," and this happens all the time amongst the Catholics. Susie tells her at the orphanage the old priests did this all the time. Meggie does not think the Cheyenne have ever seen something like this. May calls Hare a lost soul.

The badly beaten, naked Hare's wounds are tended to by Dog Woman. May speculates that Hare's disgrace is final and their mission, although some of the women are pregnant, is not successful in terms of teaching the savages the ways of civilized people. The large group is now dispersing into smaller groups, and each is heading off in a different direction.

May and Martha have one conversation about the night of the abduction, Martha apologizing for being paralyzed and extolling May's bravery. May got through it by imagining the calm beating of her babies' hearts. She submitted to the brutality of that night to save her baby. May reiterates the idea that if you believe strongly enough in your own power, perhaps it protects you. She reminds Martha that she, too, endured that night and saved her baby, and that her power is her medicine, from which she should take courage.



20 August, 23 August and 28 August and 6 September 1875 Analysis

Pregnancy bonds the women with a common goal and purpose, and they hope for a more secure situation by the time the babies come. The two who are not pregnant both have other occupations. Phemie feels a hunter-warrior may not be the best profession for a mother.

Reverend Hare's impure motivations make his Christian dedication questionable. He has not been a source of safety or comfort to the women. He has also not helped to civilize the savages and, in fact, is more of a savage himself. He uses his religion as an excuse, even claiming to have been teaching this little boy his catechism. May ironically notes that the repercussions from this will be felt for a long time to come. The fact that the Kelly girls take this sad event of Hare's so matter-of-factly reveals some of the harshness of the lives they have led. It is interesting to note Susie Kelly's comment that this is a "family matter."

May is a very strong, courageous and wise woman, and a blessing to her friends. She admits her own fears, but love for her babies, born and unborn, sustains her through the worst of times. May helps Martha see that she really does own her own strength. Whether May's strength in this entry is just her way of helping Martha is not known, but there is evidence throughout her journal that her focus on her children is a psychological tool she uses to get herself through challenging times. May is not superstitious, but relies on her self for comfort and strength. Although she does not believe Helen's "poppycock" about personal power, she still reveals a certain degree of faith, if only in herself.



10 September and 14 September, NOTEBOOK VI The Bony Bosom of Civilization and (14 September 1875 Cont'd)

10 September and 14 September, NOTEBOOK VI The Bony Bosom of Civilization and (14 September 1875 Cont'd) Summary

May's band is heading south toward Fort Laramie. Their horses loaded down with hides and supplies, the young men are discussing stealing horses from Crows or white settlements, but Little Wolf advises against this, feeling they are currently at peace with whites.

May is ebullient about her physical condition. She would rather walk than ride, and notes the excellent condition of the other women. Helen Flight, the Kelly girls and Phemie are part of May's band, but Gretchen, Martha and Daisy have left with their families in different directions. Ada Ware stays with her murderer husband on the periphery of their band, while Rev. Hare follows the group in shame. May feels he and Narcissa White will probably leave when they get to the fort. Some of the southerners have stayed with them, including Jules Seminole. May is finally able to say in Cheyenne words to her husband that Seminole talks dirty to her, and she sees rage on Little Wolf's face.

May keeps track of their travel on her army map, as they travel with the autumn chill coming on. She notes the terrain and water systems, and the rocky dry desert areas, where they rush through quickly, the water being undrinkable. They head south alongside the Black hills on the edge of the prairie. May has not told Little Wolf about Gertie's message, that the government has no intention of sending any more white brides.

A bright, raucous war party of Oglala Sioux, allies of the Cheyenne, intercept them, putting on a show with their war paint, looking and sounding ferocious. Little Wolf, who is a "tribalist," does not care for the Sioux. He has kept himself and his family separated from the Sioux in the same way he avoids contact with whites. The Sioux are invited to smoke and eat and discuss their intent to wage war against the white settlers invading the Black Hills. The land was given to the Cheyenne and Sioux "forever" in the last great treaty agreements. They ask Little Wolf to join them in this war, and although Little Wolf knows the terms of the treaties, his small band intends to head to the trading post, not to make war against white settlers. The Sioux chief insinuates that the Cheyenne have grown soft and afraid since they got the white women. This angers Little Wolf, who



reiterates that this is not a war party but a trading party. He leaves the medicine lodge, and the next day, the Sioux are gone.

Reaching Fort Laramie, Little Wolf leads a trading group to the fort. Looking back on their appearance as they entered the fort, May realizes that she and the women appear completely wild now. She overhears fort women and children talking viciously about the brides. Helen encourages May, telling her these are "tiny, tiny little minds", and she should pay no attention, taking off her hat off and waving cheerfully to the onlookers. However, the onlookers began calling the women dirty whores. In response, Phemie, who knows bigotry and hatred, begins to sing freedom songs. Some of the black soldiers join in the singing. As May turns to look at this mean-spirited group, her eyes meet with John Bourke's.

10 September and 14 September, NOTEBOOK VI The Bony Bosom of Civilization and (14 September 1875 Cont'd) Analysis

May has truly become an Indian woman, walking on foot, tracking their progress and seeming quite matter-of-fact about the long journey. She knows she may not see Martha again, has reassured her, in spite of her own misgivings.

It is a relief that May has finally been able to communicate with Little Wolf about Jules Seminole's nastiness toward her, and comforting that Little Wolf is finally angry about it. His lack of response to Jules' earlier attempt to rape May seemed odd. The conspicuous lack of success of Narcissa White's mission, and the dislike of Reverend Hare reinforces the fact that the religious leaders are ineffective.

May has some trepidation about returning to the fort and wonders if Bourke and his bride will be there. The news that the Sioux plan to invade the white gold seekers is exactly the potential problem that Captain Bourke tried to communicate to May through Gertie. The Sioux are obviously very riled up, and their insults to Little Wolf did not set well. Little Wolf's anger as he ended the discussion and left the medicine tent leaves tension between the two tribes. One wonders at this point whether May is making things worse by keeping Gertie's secret about Bourke's message. Only the reader is privy to this foreboding information.

The fact that they were called "savages" makes one think that the Indians were all dirty and ungroomed, but we learn that the opposite is true of the Cheyennes. Those who truly are savages, such as Jules Seminole and the fort Indians, are notably smelly, dirty and unkempt.

Phemie is afraid of no one and has taken too much abuse to let the judgmental, ill-mannered people at the fort hurt her. Singing her songs aloud is her way of proclaiming her freedom and maintaining her confidence. She decided when she joined the Cheyennes that she will live her life under her own power. Helen, who is probably a



lesbian in a world unfriendly to such things, has learned to ignore people who judge, her self-esteem coming from being a gifted artist and a good person, not from what others think. May seems to have lost her earlier propensity for playing shallow, social games, as she did with Bourke. Having no one at her educational level for months, and having experienced so much hardship, she is no longer at home in the white man's environment, and questions where she really belongs.

In a long chapter that brings May back into civilization and the relative safety of the fort, she and Bourke realize they love one another. However, May has become a staunch advocate of the savages', and is appalled by the government's swindling of the Indians' land. Their manipulation of the Indians in order to meet the needs of the white people is despicable to her and to the reader. John assures May that if the tribes come to the reservation that the bride program may still be used as a carrot, but that General Crook, a "man of honor who has always dealt fairly with the savages," will not promise them more brides.

Discussing Hare's actions, May tells John that the Cheyenne culture is totally unfamiliar with the concept of child molestation, and she feels John should be interested in this. She has clearly crossed over in her heart, seeing the injustice of the government, and observing the more logical lifestyle of her new family. The discussion between May and John gets a bit thorny but, as serious as the issues are, their mutual affection remains. John likes how irreverent she is, and she likes that he recognizes it.



18 September, 19 September and 20 September 1875

18 September, 19 September and 20 September 1875 Summary

Since the press is present, no white women are allowed to attend Little Wolf's meeting with Gen. Crook. As Bourke said, no promises are made about delivery of more brides. Little Wolf is angry, because the deal was already made. Little Wolf has seen the conditions at the Red Cloud agency, where the Sioux have been forced to eat their own horses. He does not see why they should go to the agency rather than live free and abundantly on their own land. Little Wolf obtains rifles, ammunition and gunpowder from illicit, outside dealers. He understands the government will not sell them arms and ammunition as a means to make them defenseless, and proceeds to purchase a full case of new carbines.

Still camped outside the fort, May hears that a cruel game has been set up by Captain Bourke and his friends. A little boy tells the Chief he must come and save face for the Cheyennes, since none of their "medicine" so far has been able to defeat the white man's medicine box. May accompanies Little Wolf and sees a pail of water with a coin on the bottom, connected to a battery. The white men are amusing themselves, challenging the Indians to hold the battery pole in one hand and try to take the coin from the bucket with the other. The medicine men, chanting their songs, try to retrieve the silver dollar and are, of course, shocked each time. May warns Little Wolf this is a white man's trick, but the Chief feels obligated to prove the power of the Sweet Medicine. Disappointed to hear malice in Bourke's voice, May suggests they find some puppies to torture. The white men say it is only a game, and Bourke tells her they are trying to prove to the savages that their superstitions are inferior to the white man's power. As May stares at Bourke, challenging him to ruin the credibility of this esteemed Chief, Little Wolf tries the test, touching his medicine pouch first. At the same time, the Captain stops turning the crank, and Little Wolf removes the coin from the water unharmed. The women cheer at Little Wolf's success.

Narcissa has her baby aborted at the fort hospital. No one knew she was pregnant, but Narcissa begged the doctor, saying she was raped and could not stand birthing a heathen's baby. She will stay at the fort to prepare the way for the heathens' settlement on the reservation. Narcissa is telling anyone who will listen at the fort that the white women have gone wild and may have taken some Crow scalps. May gives a brief description of the abduction, and Gertie understands.

The army is moving out to reposition because of the trouble in the Black Hills, and Gertie will go as a muleskinner. She suggests May and her band stay away from that area, since the Army cannot tell one Indian from another. Gertie says, "The Army can't tell the difference between buffalo shit and sirloin steak." Gertie also tells May that



Captain Bourke lost face in front of his men for May's sake by refusing to shock Little Wolf. Gertie equates the battery incident with men's egos, such as "I have a bigger battery than you." Although May admits it was decent of Bourke not to shock Little Wolf, she tells Gertie to tell Bourke his battery is every bit the equal of the Chief's.

18 September, 19 September and 20 September 1875 Analysis

Little Wolf wants no part of being ordered to the reservation and cannot get the General to give him a reason why it makes sense for them to do so. Having seen the horrendous conditions at Red Cloud, where the people are forced to eat their horses, it is clear to him that the government will not come through as they promise, just as they are reneging on their other agreements.

The meeting ends with no resolution. May implies that the fort's agent had a deal with the government to keep the Indians as destitute as possible, but the agent gives in, because he badly wants to buy their animal hides. The band's purchase of a case of new carbines is not a good sign, and we get the idea that this band, too, will probably end up having to defend itself against the white people, regardless of the fact that some of them are white and have been sent there by the government.

John Bourke is not necessarily a moral man, but he does care for May. Also, she provides a conscience for him in his dealing with the Indians. The white men singing an Irish song while they watch the Indians shock themselves is pathetic, and as heathen than anything these savages have done so far. Again and again, the white men prove to be less civilized savages when held up against the Cheyenne, and their racial bigotry continues to appear in many forms. May is getting a better picture of Bourke now that she is able to compare the Indians with white men.

Narcissa seems to hold no compassion for the Cheyennes, even after spending time in their care, and is focused only on foisting her religion on them. It is also worth noting that May does not deny having taken scalps in their rescue from the abduction, but only briefly explains the incident to Gertie. Gertie thinks they must be taking every mule and every wagon in the country if they are hiring "known gals" for muleskinners, which effectively explains the size of the army's forces and the magnitude of their mission.



22 September, 28 September and 3 October 1875

22 September, 28 September and 3 October 1875 Summary

Unable to locate a priest to replace Rev. Hare, a Benedictine monk was assigned the job of accompanying the white women. St. Anthony of the Desert has determined that he will found his own monastery. May describes him as a gaunt anchorite [religious recluse] as compared to the Episcopalian pederast [pedophile] on a mule. May plans to work with the women so they can convince the men to move to the fort, as they have been instructed. It will be hard, since there is no benefit to them, and they will not want to relinquish land they consider theirs forever.

Quiet One says it is snowing. May lets the little children cuddle with her in her bed when it is cold, as well as her co-wife, Feather on Head. Quiet One has taken to sleeping again with Little Wolf, May feeling sufficiently recovered from her night terrors. When the baby cries, Feather on Head pinches his nose returning him to animal silence. May calls the child Willie after her own baby. She imagines he sees her as auntie. She has stopped letting horse boy join their snuggling, as she realizes he is too old.

They are all preparing to leave for their home in the north. May reluctantly gets out of her warm bed to take her freezing cold bath. She rushes from the water back into the tent, laughing and making noises from the cold. The baby and the other women laugh and smile. May is a squaw.

The cold weather and wind make it hard traveling, but the group has more horses available than when they left. Helen managed to get art supplies and also furnished May with two new notebooks, which she is filling quickly. Her notebooks are becoming cumbersome to transport.

Anthony trails behind on his small burro, and May rides with Helen, who keeps a pipe between her teeth, struggling to keep it lit. Heavily bundled in furs, hats and scarves, the women still had trouble talking with the cold wind in their faces.

May sees herself as a squaw and knows her unborn child sealed her commitment to this life. She has willed John Bourke from her soul with a new finality. She has invited Helen and Mr. Hog, and the new monk Anthony to eat with them, since Little Wolf killed an antelope.

The band moves north into the Black Hills so that Little Wolf can see the influx of whites, and to make a ceremony at Medicine Lodge, in the sacred area of Bear Butte, before winter. Sweet Medicine, the Cheyenne's god, appeared long ago and told the people that the white man would take and destroy everything. Since Sweet Medicine's



predictions are seeming to come true, their faith in that deity is strengthened. May contemplates the logic of worshipping a god who resides among them, and one who came from Nazareth. Brother Anthony is popular as a holy man, his simplicity and self-denial admired by the Indians. They join him in chanting his liturgies. May is strengthened by Anthony's presence, feeling that perhaps there is a reason he was sent to them.

As the party makes its way back to Powder River country, they see Camp Robinson and a few white settlements that look like shanty towns, not an improvement to the countryside. Some of the young men of the tribe killed two of the white men's cattle and, when May explains that this will bring trouble for them, Little Wolf reasons that the settlers have driven off the buffalo and killed the game. The People must eat as they travel. The beef were found where they had once found buffalo. The People, including May, prefer the taste of buffalo to beef.

They stop at Red Cloud Agency, where the government's provisions have left the people destitute. As Bourke predicted, the council at Red Cloud Agency is unable to agree on the sale of the Black Hills. Chief Red Cloud feels there is already such an influx of white miners, that they inevitably will take the land, so it would be good to get something for it. Little Wolf does not feel they should be forced to sell it.

Brother Anthony shares that nature is his life, and he is blessed by all of God's creations. He does not hunt, but is a baker. Helen seems enthused and wants them to come to her home for wild game bird. May enjoys the peace and quiet among the people who sit calmly before the fire. She realizes she loves this hardy race of people. May goes outside to say good night to her guests, and squats by a sagebrush. She looks at the billions of stars and planets and realizes her own insignificance no longer terrifies, but comforts her. She feels a part of everything, experiencing the temporary nature of life on earth.

May reminds Little Wolf that when he approached the government, he requested the white brides so the tribe could begin to assimilate. Yet the Cheyennes are very prosperous at this time, and Little Wolf has the last word. Being such a logical character, this would not make sense. May speaks of the reservation as "what we have to look forward to," implying that she will stay with the Indians even when they move onto the reservation.

An agent named Carter visited May's lodge with the intent to enroll the band on the agency rolls. He first assumed May was being held captive, then that she must be a whore to the savages. May explained the white women were not prostitutes, but married wives. May threatens to have Little Wolf skin and roast Carter for supper, and he quickly leaves.



22 September, 28 September and 3 October 1875 Analysis

Once again, May makes the best of her life, appreciating the warmth of the tipi and animal skins, enjoying the children and making the women smile. She has found a sister-figure in Feather on Head, and there is no longer any tension among the wives in her tent, with the exception of the crone who uses any excuse to snap at them with her willow switch.

May's love for babies, a mainstay for her, is transferred now to the Cheyenne children. She is likely in over her head with the idea that she might be able to effect a change of heart on the part of the Cheyenne about going to the reservation. She still has enough faith to believe that the Army will give them the time they have promised. For some reason, their spiritual guides have all proven to be somewhat uninspiring, but it is too soon to know what influence Anthony of the Prairie will bring.

September 28th is a particularly blissful entry. Although the wind is biting and cold, the warmth of the company, the fire and the shelter are idyllic and harmonious. In fact, May is finding harmony in every aspect of her life. She does not mention missing her babies, and does not seem sad about John Bourke in this entry, but feels as though she belongs to the earth, and finds peace at a deep place in her soul. May has an insight that white men try to fill the vastness and emptiness of an earth they do not know how to worship. She has gained true spiritual insight living this simple life and is no longer a "white" person.

The inevitability of the tribe's demise, one way or another, is almost palpable. Even Little Wolf knows that they will lose the life they have now, and wants to hang on just a while longer. Their own religion tells them that the white man will take everything they need to live, including the earth. A very sad passage in this entry is one of Little Wolf softly saying that they will look back on this life some day. He knows what is ahead and is all too aware of how severely things will change.

May has learned to defer to Little Wolf's logic in most matters. At this point, May has had several opportunities to make her break from her situation, but chooses to stay with Little Wolf, preferring this life to the alternatives. Captain Bourke's prediction that the tribes would not present a united front was accurate. Some chiefs use logic and have faced the inevitable, while some are still partial to justice and reason. To the Indians, who call the government the "Great White Father," a deal means a deal, and they have experienced the government's tendency to renege or want to renegotiate after the deal has been made, perhaps too many times.

May is incensed over Carter's insinuation that she and the other women are prisoners or whores. She makes it very clear that they are with the Cheyenne of their own accord. Once again, it is difficult for a white person living outside the tribe to understand why the women would subject themselves to savagery, because they do not understand the lifestyle.



5 October, 8 October, 10 October and 14 October 1875

5 October, 8 October, 10 October and 14 October 1875 Summary

The Cheyenne slip softly past the white settlements in the Black Hills. They have learned there is also an Army presence here. Little Wolf has ordered his people not to harass anyone, but Phemie tells May that her husband slipped away with a band of Oglala Sioux who are making raids on the immigrants.

The band has arrived at Novavose, where religious observances and celebrations are taking place, some too complicated for May to describe. Fasting, sacrifices, self-mutilation and torture are done in sacrifice to the gods. Helen is busy painting shields for dancing. Anthony, the monk, is very interested in the rituals and is taking notes, while gently spreading his own gospel among the people. May describes Anthony's "spirit of honesty, humility and generosity," and feels he is their best hope yet for salvation of the savages' souls, if they need it.

Woman Who Moves Against the Wind, Little Wolf's spiritual adviser and a tribal holy woman, looks like she has a reflection of flames in her eyes. Considered a seer with one foot in the real world behind this one, she tells Little Wolf about her vision of the Peoples' lodges on fire, their possessions stacked in huge piles and on fire, everything they own consumed in fire, and the people driven to the hills crouching like animals. She sees people freezing, and babies freezing blue as "chunks of river ice in their mothers' arms..." At this revelation, May cries out in English, that this talk is nonsense, and she does not believe it. May asks that someone get Anthony to tell them the truth. Little Wolf, after hearing the seer's vision, leaves the lodge for three days and nights to seek his own spiritual vision and to contemplate the seer's vision. When he returns, he states that he has made offerings to Great Medicine hoping to protect the People from harm, but has had no sign.

After the religious observance at Medicine Lodge, the subdued People move north and west across the plains. Having seen the invasion of whites on their sacred lands and having heard about the seer's vision and Little Wolf's failed quest, they are anxious about their future. Their traveling is more meandering now, as the weather is nice. Helen happily shoots game and teaches some of the Indians to shoot. There is an abundance of wildlife and natural beauty, moving Anthony to say, "We are blessed by God." These are peaceful days of harvesting and perfect weather. May sees them as the calm before the storm that some whisper is coming.



5 October, 8 October, 10 October and 14 October 1875 Analysis

May knows that things are getting very dangerous. This short entry reveals May's quiet sense of secrecy, as they silently pass the white settlers without being seen. May finds the self-mutilation and infliction of pain in the Indian rituals repugnant. The activities have produced a vision for the seer, and Little Wolf accepts her word as truth, but May, who does not want to believe it, rejects it as nonsense. She is alright until the vision includes frozen babies, at which point she loses her composure. It is worth noting that this outburst of skepticism on May's part is entirely in English, as is her request to see Anthony. She remains, at her core, a white woman, regardless of how assimilated she has become. The superstitious aspects of tribal life do not appeal to the part of her personality that is strictly a white woman.

Hoping to reverse the seer's grim vision with his own power of prayer and sacrifice, the lack of response to Little Wolf from Great Medicine is foreboding. This six-sentence entry is kept short to provide impact and prepare us for the inevitable future of these people. Little Wolf is an honest and humble man, and his ego is not involved in these matters. This group is purposefully living each day to the fullest, knowing there is trouble ahead.

In current times, it would be shocking to see a woman killing birds for the sake of art, but as readers, we find Helen's behavior not nearly as shocking as other events in the story.



18 October, NOTEBOOK VII - Winter 1 November and 5 November 1875

18 October, NOTEBOOK VII - Winter 1 November and 5 November 1875 Summary

The bands are arriving at winter camp from all directions. Some going to the Agency for the winter. General Crook, or "Three Stars" promises that those who comply early with his orders to give themselves up to an agency will be given the best land and more provisions. Some of the white women and their husbands, anxious about giving birth in the winter with no doctors, have gone on to the agency, an inevitability being faced by everyone. May is certain they will all be able to convince their husbands by the end of winter to surrender to "the inexorable march of civilization."

As their band approaches winter camp, they all sing a Little Wolf song of friendship. The camp is protected from wind by mountains and bluffs. May is glad to settle here after several months of constant travel. Martha, large with her pregnancy, is overjoyed to see them, clapping her hands. She has become healthy and strong and is now a wild Indian.

The preface of each new notebook has been, up until now, an entry from May's journal. However, this particular notebook's face page contains a passage from Captain John Bourke's memoir, "On the Border with Crook."

The camp's larder is full with game and there has been heavy snow for two days. Tired of being confined, May takes a very cold bath. Although half of the white women have gone with their husbands and families to the agency, Gretchen and No Brains remain at the camp, as well as Daisy and Phemie and their husbands. Daisy has uncharacteristically fallen in love with her "niggah Injun boy" husband and is carrying his child.

Phemie views going to the agency as enslavement to the white man. May disagrees, but Phemie says the law is made by the superior race of white men to keep the lesser race under control, which equals slavery. Phemie feels in a sense that by living with these people she has mended things for her mother, who was removed from her native land as a child. May idealistically imagines the two races living together peacefully, melding together with the new babies beginning the process.

A short entry, mostly about the weather, is somewhat inert, as is the prairie when it is covered with snow. May describes the snows marching across the plain like an approaching army. She is not depressed, but her mood is not quite as lively as usual, even though she does note the exceptional supply of food and the good hunting weather prior to the storm.



This entry appears to be metaphorical - the calm before the storm, the snow spreading like an army. Although May describes the tipi as snug and warm, she also sees it as confining, but the inactivity and lack of social contact seems to be making her anxious.

18 October, NOTEBOOK VII - Winter 1 November and 5 November 1875 Analysis

May describes the arrival of bands at winter camp like the spokes of a wheel running to the hub, obviously enjoying feeling so much a part of something bigger and organized like the greater tribe. One gets the sense that she has never felt this sense of belonging in her former life. She accepts Little Wolf's authority over her band, although she still hopes to convince him to take them to the agency. May's notation that, "The valley appears to have everything we need for the moment," sums up the nature of the lifestyle to which May has become accustomed. If their basic needs for survival are met, even temporarily, they are happy.

Whether it is May's fundamental whiteness, her fear or her sense of practicality that makes want reservation life is not exactly clear. She does sense that there is no other safe choice, but her arguments are so idealistic that they make little sense. Her point that mulatto slave children sired by white masters were children of the exploited, as compared to these women who voluntarily chose this mission with the Indians, is valid, but does not mean that these new, mixed children will blend in. The melding and happy mingling of races is an idea that has no basis in reality. Phemie's viewpoint is borne of real experience and first-hand knowledge of human nature. May is a romantic who tries to see the bright side of everything. Phemie is much more credible in her analysis and is willing to risk her life to maintain the freedom she has acquired.

When May speaks of the advantages, inventions and conveniences so dear to a woman's heart, she again sounds like the typical American white woman, not like an Indian woman, whose life is centered on the daily chores that make the tipi hum. It is starting to appear that May is missing her life as a white woman, and feels the reservation, at least, represents safety.



10 November, 10 December and 18 December 1875

10 November, 10 December and 18 December 1875 Summary

The Cheyennes' sweat lodge, which is used for religious reasons, does not allow women. In the old country, Gretchen's people used a sweat lodge throughout the winter, and her family had brought the custom to Illinois. May and Gretchen, pregnant and wrapped in towels, burst into the men's sweat lodge. The men are not amused, and the medicine man shakes his rattle telling them to go away, but May and Gretchen sit down for a sweat. Gretchen's tells her husband if he doesn't like it he can go home himself. The other men laugh that No Brains is henpecked.

May and Gretchen decide to build a sweat lodge just for women. This project will help them pass the time in the winter, in addition to "all of the other dreary projects of wifedom." The white women value their closeness and are happy to have one another for friendship, moral support, arguing, laughing, weeping and pondering. Anthony plans to build a hermitage, or abbey, in the spring. The women visualize his abbey and imagine coming there with their children. Anthony is teaching the women to bake bread. May notes that when the sun is up and shining on the white prairie, all is beautiful.

May recognizes the wisdom in hibernation, and has waited a month before writing, storing up things to write about during a period of relative inertia. Other than telling stories and a few simple games, the Indians wait out the winter calmly and patiently. The white women have read Shakespeare to one another, read all the books they have with them and make daily visits to Anthony's lodge.

The women's sweat lodge is in operation, and Feather on Head and Pretty Walker begin joining the white women. They sweat together, then dash for the river, but Helen's pipe-smoking is scandalous and sacrilegious to the Indian women. May is hugely pregnant. Pregnant women are doted on by the Indians, given herbs and teas brewed from roots, flowers, leaves and grasses. May has learned to embroider hides with beads, and finds that Indian women are much the same as white women. With the language barrier dissolving, they all have more mutual respect and appreciation of one another. The Indian women are delighted by the white women's irreverence toward men, and acknowledge women's superiority.

The Indians cannot understand that they must give up allegiance to the tribe and learn to function as an individualized society. May reflects that Little Wolf's dedication to his people's welfare does not seem like something he should give up. Bourke's example of the Indians who are scouts for the Army and are paid, fed and clothed, does not seem noble, since their job is to betray their own people.



Quiet One mistakes arsenic powder for baking soda and bakes it into her bread. No one dies, but some are very sick. Little Wolf is desperately ill from the arsenic, and Quiet One is distraught over her mistake. The Indians have been told by white agents that if they poison wolves with arsenic, there will be more game, but the Indians realize that any animal that eats a poisoned animal will be sick, as well. A large gathering of prominent chiefs, dignitaries and medicine men, including Anthony and some of the women gather in Little Wolf's lodge. The men smoke the pipe, then Antelope Bowles Moving states that if the arsenic is properly used, it is good as it kills wolves leaving more game for the People. May, in her usual boldness, asks if it is true there will be more game, why it is that there is so little game around the agencies using arsenic. Little Chief and Black Coyote agree, but say that the arsenic should be used instead to poison white people, since they have much more to fear from them than they do the wolves. The People have always lived with wolves and coyotes, but only when the white man arrived did the buffalo begin to disappear. Thus, the white man, not the wolf, is the enemy. Little Wolf discusses the good things that the wolves do, like eating the bones and offal when the people leave camp. He says that this way everything returns to earth and nothing is wasted. Although it is true that wolves kill game, they also take the older and weaker ones. Yet the poison kills many other animals and he, himself, has almost died from it. The way of his People is to share and, until the white man came, there has always been enough for all. He will no longer permit arsenic in his camp.

10 November, 10 December and 18 December 1875

Analysis

May, as usual, is full of mischief and refuses to respect the men's silly rules about the sweat lodge. The women are no longer shy about nakedness and this entry provides a comical image of the two very pregnant women surprising the men, and hopping in and out of the frozen water.

May's spiritual faith seems to be blossoming in its own way. She values her time with Anthony, and even imagines her children in his church. His brand of spiritualism is genuine and pure in comparison with Reverend Hare's, and she is attracted to it, reciting the liturgy with him. It seems the group of women is growing spiritually, as well, almost resembling a meditation group in their gatherings. The sisterhood among the women is highly valued.

May is bored with the winter inactivity, but the women find ways to amuse themselves. May is impressed that the Indians do not appear to suffer from boredom, feeling they are lucky to have unlimited patience and animal-like stillness, qualities she has not developed. Again, she does not seem depressed, but her prose is not as light, lively and flourishing as in other seasons.

Little Wolf has an endearing way of thinking through his argument and then logically and calmly presenting it. Banning the arsenic makes sense and perhaps his first hand experience with it has influenced him. However, as usual, Little Wolf's first consideration is the tribe and harmony with the earth, so his decision is predictable.



25 December, 23 January, 26 January and 28 January 1876

25 December, 23 January, 26 January and 28 January 1876 Summary

Christmas makes May think of her children and her own childhood, and she vows again to be reunited with them and tell her the stories of her adventures. Although it is snowing and blowing, May takes her notebooks and goes for a morning visit to Martha's. Martha makes coffee, and May gives her a present. Martha cries over learning that it is Christmas day, but May tells her that she only has a home right here. Joking about Santa coming down the tipi's smoke hole, May and Martha sing a Christmas carol together, and doze in front of Martha's fire.

By January 23, it has been almost a month since May's accident wherein she risked her own life and that of her child. She is now strong enough to sit up and write, but regrets being so careless. After her nap on Christmas day at Martha's, May decided to make her way home in the blizzard. She became disoriented and lost. Knowing she was going to die, May apologized to her baby and went to sleep in the snow. Dreaming that she was in a beautiful river bottom in the spring, she sees Sara, and weeps with joy. Sara tells May that later Sara will meet her and show her the way along the Hanging Road. When May awakens, she is in her own bed with little Horse Boy, who found her half-covered in snow and dragged her home. Gertie is also there, and tells her the baby is fine. May asks Gertie if she ever had children, and Gertie replies she never cared much for the little bastards, but May knows she doesn't mean it.

May has contracted pneumonia. She recalls medicine men chanting and burning sage under her nose, and rattles and totems around her head. Horse Boy stays next to her, and she is aware of a stream of visitors. The women sing to her until the crone chases them away with her stick. Little Wolf is there when others had gone, warming her in his arms. She is now able to sit up and feels the baby move, telling herself that all is well.

After her last entry, May enters early labor and chooses the mighty wren for her child's medicine bird. Being ill, her labor is difficult, and she goes in and out of consciousness, visiting Sara when it is time to push. However, Sara tells her it is not time yet, and the baby needs her. The medicine woman says May is dying in childbirth. Martha shouts at her to wake up and help give birth. May wakes with a choke and feels her baby be born. She hears the women talking, and learns that the baby is Caucasian. May realizes she has given birth to John Bourke's daughter.

Little Wolf is sure the white baby is his own daughter. He is proud of her beauty and feels that she is white to teach the new way to the people. The seer has explained it to him, and it is just as Anthony told him, that a white baby Jesus will lead his people to the promised land. May is touched by his naiveté and smiles at his Biblical interpretation of



the birth. He thinks it is good that this time the savior is a girl. May is not the virgin Mary, but lets him see it his way. May's daughter is considered a sacred child, and Brother Anthony agrees that telling the truth would serve no good purpose. He thinks perhaps the little girl will continue God's work on earth. Daisy finds the irony humorous, and mentions that Wesley Chestnut was responsible for her own pregnancy long ago. She admits that she had the baby and gave her up for adoption, which she has regretted every day since. Daisy will be keeping this little "niggah" baby, come Hell or high water.

25 December, 23 January, 26 January and 28 January 1876 Analysis

Christmas brings nostalgia and melancholy. May thinks of home and her children every day of her life. Martha is happy with Tangle Hair, but sad to be so homesick. They sing together "with full hearts, with hope and courage for the future."

May's daring spirit takes her into a dangerous situation when she mistakenly thinks she can walk in a blizzard. Her writing is now somewhat detached, as sick people tend to be. In and out of consciousness, she has realistic dreams of Sara. Little Wolf's presence gives her sense of total safety and peace. It is interesting that Sara says May must stay "a little longer," implying that May will soon be in Seano.

Although May is somewhat ashamed and dreads Little Wolf's reaction to the child being Bourke's, she does not seem afraid or too stressed. Little Wolf's innocence regarding the skin color of his new daughter is surprising, since he is normally so insightful and logical, but he makes the meaning what he needs it to be, explaining the phenomenon in spiritual terms, as is his tribal custom.

The baby's elevated status is almost comical, since she is so unlike her Cheyenne father. Anthony helps May feel comforted about her decision not to tell Little Wolf the truth. The surprising baby makes Daisy comfortable enough to talk about her own past, as she reveals the source of her pain and anger toward Wesley Chestnut.



29 January, 30 January, 17 February and 22 February 1876

29 January, 30 January, 17 February and 22 February 1876 Summary

The Cheyenne have reached the deadline for moving to the agency, and Crook's army is just a few weeks away. Crook's Cheyenne scouts include Jules Seminole and Ada Ware's husband, who had gone to the agency in the fall. Crook's orders are to "clean out any hostiles" they find here, meaning, any Indian not enrolled with the agency. A military campaign with a life of its own, is already headed toward them. In John Bourke's letter, he tells May her people must quickly go south toward Fort Fetterman, flying a white flag at all times so they can be identified as peaceful. He assures her they will be safely escorted to the fort, and warns that all Indians will be considered hostile unless they are traveling south, flying the white flag.

They are all deeply shaken by Gertie's news and Bourke's letter. Complying with these demands is inconceivable with bad weather, pregnancies and newborn babies. May sends Gertie to intercept Bourke with a letter. Little Wolf posts a white flag in the middle of camp.

Two weeks pass with no response since Gertie left with May's letter. The weather is still extreme. The babies are being born in rapid succession. Martha and Daisy gave birth to their brown little sons on the same day. The Kelly girls had their labors and births in perfect synchronization, both having red-haired twin daughters. Gretchen's baby girl is born oddly small and delicate. Feather on Head loves baby Wren, Quiet One is fascinated by her, and Little Wolf still acts like a proud father.

Little Wolf holds a council, and all chiefs of the remaining warrior bands agree to begin the move south toward Fetterman, as instructed. Anthony has helped with this decision, and May feels relieved, although they have still not heard from the army. Anthony baptizes the babies and counsels the people toward peace and harmony. He plans to stay and build his hermitage in the hills above the river rather than go on with the tribe. May intends to visit him regularly after they are settled on the reservation.

29 January, 30 January, 17 February and 22 February 1876 Analysis

The Cheyennes are in a precarious position, reaching the Army's deadline and unable to travel easily. The Army's Indian scouts know exactly where their camp is, since some of them have been a part of it. May is in the position of communicating the danger to the tribe, which is entirely vulnerable, their only hope being the white flag.



Another short, urgent entry in May's journal tells us that she is nervous and worried about Bourke's warning. Marrying Little Wolf and having an affair with Captain Bourke places her in the middle of the government and the tribe. Gertie has assured her the army has wiped out other innocent tribes and will not hesitate to do so again. As a white American, May cannot imagine that an army of her own people would do such a thing and as always, continues to be naive as to the government's inhumane nature.

With the exception of the tension over not hearing any confirmation from the army, all seems well. It is clear to the reader that practical traveling conditions for the well-provisioned Army are vastly different from those of the Cheyenne. The tribe's decision raises the peoples' confidence, and a resigned peacefulness is apparent, especially with the Indians' increasing openness to Anthony's teachings. Anthony does not preach any particular dogma to the people with the exception of peace and harmony. The earlier tension in May's writing seems to have dissolved somewhat.



24 February, 28 February

24 February, 28 February Summary

Indian scouts determine the army is a week away. The white flag is still flying over the village, and May is sure Gertie has delivered her message. May discusses the upcoming year with Little Wolf, explaining he will need to give up two of his wives to comply with white man's customs. The Chief proudly imagines May taking their daughter into the white world as a member of the tribe, still hoping for oneness among whites and Indians. May knows the government will not send more brides, but tells her husband Crook promised to address this again after all the Indians have turned themselves in. Little Wolf is familiar with the promises of white men.

May suggests Little Wolf send a courier to the army to reiterate the tribe's peaceful intentions, but he insists that first they honor the Kit Fox raid by attending the first victory dance in honor of the new babies. The Kelly twins' husbands, who have stolen Shoshone horses, announce they have also stolen the Shoshones' power as a gift to the new Cheyenne babies. The bag of power contains the severed right hands of twelve Shoshone babies. Little Wolf watches impassively, but the women scream and cry. Telling them they will burn in hell, May returns to her tent. Quiet One explains that this abominable act was to keep the Shoshone from using their medicine against her baby. May cannot explain the concept of "wrong" to them, but shows them Wren's hand, telling them there is no power in a baby's hand.

The women are devastated, and the Kelly twins are inconsolable since their husbands performed the horrific deed. They want to find the army, give themselves up and go home. Anthony tells them God demands faith. The drums, music and dancing continue into the night, while May writes in her journal and looks forward to the arrival of the troops.

24 February, 28 February Analysis

As May prepares psychologically for her new life on a reservation, she is detaching from this one. It is interesting that she seems to be treating Little Wolf more as a child in terms of letting him believe what he wants rather than telling him the truth about the brides program, as well as the baby. Perhaps she is unconsciously slipping back into her role as a white woman, already deceiving the savages. She is still, or maybe again, idealistic about teaching the People the ways of the white world, and still thinks that the government will keep its word about the reservation.

The savagery has finally hit home with the white women. They have been exposed to a lot of horrendous things, but this is the final insult to their moral sensibilities. The superstitions of the tribe are no longer harmless fantasies and rituals, but now exact a



price the women cannot bear. The relationship among the Cheyenne and the white women is suddenly and irreparably broken forever.

Babies have been a constant source of interest throughout the story. The women focus on conceiving them, thinking about them, waiting for them, giving birth to them and caring for them. This abominable act against babies is beyond their ability to comprehend and the reality of the vast, unbridgeable differences between white and savage becomes starkly clear.



1 March 1876 and Codicil by Abbott Anthony of the Prairie, St. Anthony of the Desert Abbey, Powder River, Montana 11/15/1926

1 March 1876 and Codicil by Abbott Anthony of the Prairie, St. Anthony of the Desert Abbey, Powder River, Montana 11/15/1926 Summary

May is shot and fears she is dying. Jules Seminole has told the army this camp belongs to the Sioux. Even though the white flag is posted and the tribe is prepared to surrender, the army proceeds to raid their village. Little Wolf tries to protect the women and children. Quiet One, May, the baby, Pretty Walker and Feather slip through a slit in the tent, but Crooked Nose stays as she is old, and it is a good day to die. Phemie is in the fray. May is knocked down but gets up and continues to run. People are running to the bluffs and rocks, looking for caves to hide from the danger and cold.

Pretty Walker, Feather, May and Quiet One find Martha rocking her freezing baby, and May helps to warm them. Hiding in a shallow cave, they kill a mare to provide warmth. May has been shot in the back, her notebook cushioning the bullet, which is now lodged between her shoulder blades. They have no fire and are all freezing to death, watching smoldering piles of belongings and bodies being burned in the destroyed village.

Martha leaves to find Bourke and bring him back. May finishes writing in her notebook, and talks of Sara in Seano. She wants Martha to tell Bourke this was the village of the great Cheyenne Chief Little Wolf, and to deliver Wren to him, saying "It is a wise father that knows his own child..."

Codicil: May Dodd's journals are delivered to Anthony by Wren's son, May's grandson. Fifty years ago Anthony built his Abbey as he planned. The journals were kept as part of a sacred tribal treasure by Old Little Wolf until he died in 1904, never having told Wren of their existence. Little Wolf was exiled from the tribe for killing Jules Seminole. The journals became part of the Sweet Medicine bundle.

Anthony writes in the blank pages around the journal's bullet hole. He recalls the army's raid, seeing the soldiers burn Helen Flight's paintings, Euphemia's death, Gretchen's tears. Anthony blessed the bag of baby hands and prayed for the children's souls. Martha led him to May, who was dead, her notebooks gone. Daisy and her baby died of cold. Losing both sets of twins, the Kellys joined bands of marauders. Martha took her baby to Chicago where she remarried. Martha once mentioned to Anthony that she had delivered May's message to Bourke, but was perhaps threatened or bribed to remain



quiet about it. May's journals were kept secret so the Cheyenne could believe that Wren was a holy child sent to them to teach them white man's ways. John Bourke watched over Wren from a distance, through Anthony.

1 March 1876 and Codicil by Abbott Anthony of the Prairie, St. Anthony of the Desert Abbey, Powder River, Montana 11/15/1926 Analysis

In the worst ending possible, the army wipes out the entire village. The women, whose survival instincts have been honed, kill a horse to warm their babies, but finally, nothing lasts in the bitter cold. May is quickly losing touch with her life. We do not know, with the exception of May and Martha, who has survived in this small group. When Martha suggests going down to give themselves up, she does not make reference to Feather on Head or Quiet One. The author leaves the reader with a devastating sense of waste and destruction, after providing a glimpse into a life of balance and abundance.

Codicil: This completion by Anthony is much more satisfying than the end of May's journals. This story is a poignant picture of how bizarre legends and traditions are sometimes passed along through generations, and how hideous incidents of extreme brutality and inhumanity fade and are buried in distant history over time.



Characters

May Dodd

May is a young woman whose insatiable sexual appetite and unwillingness to follow the rules of social propriety have resulted in her father committing her to a mental institution with the diagnosis of "promiscuity." May is highly intelligent and witty, and is clear about her own beliefs, however unconventional. She has been well educated, but not felt loved enough by her ultra-wealthy family, and so decides on her own course in life, having two babies by a man who is not worthy of her, socially or morally. May is the writer of the personal journals that make up this story. As the story progresses, May changes in several ways, as she experiences life in the raw, living as a wild savage with her adopted Cheyenne family. Married to the tribal chief, Little Wolf, May's Cheyenne name is "Mesoke," meaning swallow.

Captain John Bourke

John Bourke is an honorable military man, dedicated to his job and to the safety of the women he is escorting to the Cheyennes. He is bewitched by May Dodd's clever charm and lovely looks, and even leaves his fiancée over her. His first commitment, however, is to the army. John is a torn man, who wants to be patriotic and dutiful, yet strongly disagrees with his government's decisions regarding Native Americans. Nevertheless, he takes an active part in eliminating them and their culture.

Martha Atwood

Martha is an employee at Lunatic Asylum in Chicago where she meets May Dodd. Believing May has been unjustly incarcerated, Martha helps her to escape by forging government documents for the Brides for Indians program. Knowing she will lose her job and face prosecution when the authorities discover the forgery, and being "homely as a stick," Martha also joins the program and becomes a very close friend to May throughout their entire time with the Cheyenne. Martha's Indian husband is Mr. Tangle Hair. Her Cheyenne name is "Falls Down Woman."

Euphemia (Phemie) Washington

Phemie is a tall, black woman from Canada, whose mother was captured and sold into slavery, eventually landing in Florida. Phemie, a child of the plantation owner and her mother, served the white man the rest of her childhood until she was able to escape on foot to Canada. As a "white" bride in the government's Brides for Indians Program, Phemie sees an opportunity for true freedom. She inspires and soothes others by singing old slavery songs. Phemie's Cheyenne husband is also black, but raised as Cheyenne. Phemie never does choose to have a child, but prefers her occupation as a



brave Cheyenne hunter and warrior. Phemie's Cheyenne name is "Black White Woman."

Helen Flight

Helen Flight is an eccentric English woman whose passion is killing and painting wild birds, her work having been compared with Audubon's. Helen often speaks fondly of her dearest companion, Mrs. Anne Hall, and has joined the brides program as a way to research and capture birds in the wild. She becomes an honored member of the Cheyennes when she skillfully paints the warriors' medicine birds on their bodies for them. Believing they get power from the paintings, they hold Helen in great esteem. Helen is quite masculine and is married to Mr. Hog.

Gretchen Fathauer

Gretchen is a very large woman with a loud voice and a heavy Swiss accent. A farmer's daughter from Illinois, Gretchen worked as a domestic for Cyrus McCormick's family in Chicago. Not a handsome woman, Gretchen's face is described as having a certain unfortunate tuberous quality. Gretchen joins the government's Brides for Indians program after a mail order match fails. Gretchen is a hard-working, strong and honorable woman, well-loved by the other brides. Her loutish Indian husband is known as No Brains. Gretchen's Cheyenne name starts out as "Big Voice" but changes to "Big Foot" after she kicks her husband.

Susie and Meggie Kelly

Susie and Meggie Kelly are identical twins with a heavy Irish brogue and a penchant for crime. Abandoned as babies, the girls were left in an Irish Catholic convent, running away to the streets at ten-years-old. They have joined the brides program to escape a prison sentence for prostitution and grand theft. A natural team, the sisters are witty, street-wise and clever. Their Cheyenne husbands, also twins, commit the final act of savagery that turns the white brides against the tribe.

Daisy Lovelace

Daisy is a pretentious spinster who sees herself as a southern belle, complete with bigotry and a small white poodle. Daisy takes her "medicine" at every opportunity from a flask she carries, and she does not hesitate to voice her distaste for black people, especially around Phemie Washington. Daisy lives through a harrowing event that changes her considerably, and she becomes more honest and likable as the story progresses. Daisy's Cheyenne husband, Mr. Bloody Foot, earns his name when Daisy's dog latches onto his foot and won't let go.



Sara Johnstone

Sara is a very young girl who was in the same asylum in which May Dodd was incarcerated. Pretty and delicate, Sara is unable to speak. Sara has lived at the asylum all her life and has no family, possibly having been the illegitimate child of the asylum's unscrupulous doctor. Sara's marriage to the Indian, Yellow Wolf, is very happy and loving. Sara is the first to learn the Cheyenne language, and finally is able to speak. Sara is killed during an abduction by the Crow Indians.

Narcissa White

Narcissa is a sanctimonious and self-righteous missionary who joins the brides program so that she can convert savages into Christians. Narcissa's religion is rigid and judgmental, and she is not liked by the other women. In the program on false pretenses, Narcissa is raped by her Indian husband, and later aborts her child. Narcissa is one of the less likable characters in the story.

Reverend Hare

Hare is an Episcopalian priest, assigned to accompany the white brides into the wilderness. Corpulent and lazy, Hare abuses his position as a perceived holy man. He is in service to both his church and the government. Hare cowers in fear rather than protect the white women. When a Cheyenne father catches Hare fornicating with his young son, Hare is whipped mercilessly. Hare is more pitiful than anything else, faithlessness and cowardice discredits his preaching role.

Ada Ware

Ada Ware joins the bride's group wearing black, as if in mourning. Ada is very depressed, perhaps seeing the brides program as a way out of her internal prison. Ada's husband, during a drunken brawl, kills another Cheyenne. Since it is a sin to kill within the tribe, her husband is banished and his name is changed to "Stinking Flesh." Ada stays with him on the periphery of the group throughout the story.

Jules Seminole

Jules Seminole is half Cheyenne and half Seminole, living and traveling with the southern contingent of the Cheyennes. He is a filthy, evil, despicable man, focused on the sexual abuse of women. He belongs to the southern contingent of the Cheyenne tribe and eventually misleads the army about Little Wolf's tribe, resulting in their annihilation.



Chief Little Wolf

Chief Little Wolf is the highest ranking Cheyenne chief who has met with President Grant and received the government's peace medal. He is May Dodd's Indian husband, and is a fair-minded, kind, respectful leader whose sole focus is on the welfare of his people.

Feather on Head and Quiet One

Feather on Head is the young second wife of Little Wolf, and sister of his first wife, Quiet One. Feather becomes friends with May Dodd and the white women, learning some English from them and helping them learn her language.

Quiet One is Chief Little Wolf's older first wife. As her name implies, Quiet One does not say much and initially resents May, but eventually warms up to her as part of the family.

Horse Boy

Horse Boy is a sweet young Cheyenne orphan whose job it is to tend the family's horses. Horse Boy and May become very close, and he is protective of her. May calls him her little man. He is killed in cold blood by Capt. Bourke at the beginning of the army's raid on his village.

Crooked Nose

Crooked Nose is the elderly crone who guards and coordinates the activities in Little Wolf's family tipi. She uses a club for protection, and a willow switch to inspire people to do their tasks. On the day of the army's invasion, Crooked Nose chooses to stay at the tipi, feeling it will be a good day to die.

Harry Ames

Harry is the man May was in love with in Chicago, and the reason she was sent to the insane asylum. Harry may have betrayed May, or may have been killed by May's father's black guards, but the reader never finds out. Harry was May's father's foreman. He cheated on May with other women, and was probably an alcoholic. He was also father of her two children.

Hortense

Hortense is May Dodd's sister to whom she occasionally writes letters. Hortense is married to a banker, living a conventional aristocratic life, but May has fond memories of being close to her sister when they were children.



Dog Woman

Dog Woman is a holy man who resides with Reverend Hare. He is probably a hermaphrodite who supposedly can change himself into a dog. His apprentice, Bridge girl, is also half-man and half-woman. Since they know all about both sexes, they are popular among the tribe for their matchmaking abilities.

Abbot Anthony, or St. Anthony of the Prairie

Anthony is a young anchorite who joins the Cheyennes as spiritual adviser when Reverend Hare is terminated in disgrace. Anthony is truly a peaceful spirit and is the first religious leader who actually provides guidance and sustenance for the women. As he planned, Anthony built an Abbey in the hills above the Powder River. As an old man, he adds his own notations to May Dodd's diaries.



Objects/Places

BFI

BFI is the Brides for Indians program developed by the U.S. Government as an effort to teach the Indian savages the ways of the white man, and to inter-breed and ultimately, assimilate the two cultures.

Red Cloud Agency

Red Cloud Agency is an Indian reservation that has been sorely neglected by the U.S. government, its residents living in poverty and hopelessness. Little Wolf takes his group to Red Cloud where they witness what life in a reservation is like.

Camp Robinson, Fort Laramie, Fort Fetterman

US Army forts where the white brides stayed as they traveled toward Indian country wilderness.

lodge

A lodge is a tipi, or Cheyenne tent, which often houses several people or accommodates group meetings.

houe

Houe is the Cheyenne word for assent, or "yes"

parfleche

A parfleche is a folding case made of buffalo rawhide carried by the horses or mules, which contains household goods and implements.

breechclout

A flap of animal hide worn by Indian men to cover their private parts.



medicine animal

Each member of the Cheyenne tribe has an medicine animal that gives him special power against his enemies and helps protect and keep him safe. By wearing the images of their specific animal on their chest, the warriors believe that they assume the animal's characteristics.

Great White Father

The Cheyenne's refer to the U.S. Government as the Great White Father.

he'emnane'e

The he'emnane'e is the Cheyenne tribal member who is responsible for organizing the ritual celebration dances.

band

A band of Indians is a smaller group that separates from the larger tribe. The Indians split into bands during the winter, because it is easier to feed and provide for a smaller group of people. The bands join together in the summer for the hunting season.

Seano

Seano is the Cheyenne's spiritual heaven where they all go when they die, regardless of their deeds on earth. They believe Seano has villages and horses and everything that they have on earth, and that one's spirit gets there by traveling along the "hanging road," or the Milky Way.



Themes

Bigotry

The prevailing theme of this novel is that of prejudice and bigotry. The treatment of the "savage" Native Americans by the white army is unconscionable. Broken treaties, trickery, disrespect and violation of the Indians in this country were the norm. As there was no real understanding of the ways of the Indians, white people assumed that they were animals and considered them disposable.

The hatred shown African Americans is portrayed through Phemie's character. Daisy, who is from the south, blatantly insults Phemie and uses the term "niggah" freely. Daisy even calls the Indians "niggah" as their skin is darker.

Moral judgment of women who do not fit into accepted social standards is explored, with the assumption on the part of many that the Indian brides are whores. The self-righteous prejudice and bigotry shown by Reverend Hare and Narcissa White toward everyone who does not practice their religion strikes a note of truth, even today. Likewise, the Catholic Kelly girls hate the Episcopalian Reverend Hare, and John Bourke hates Protestants. Different religions squabble over who will save the souls of the savages.

The issue of respect for women is mixed, since Little Wolf is very respectful to his wives. However, the incidents of rape and violation are prolific in the story. Daisy, who joins the Indians in drinking whiskey, is violently raped. The white women are abducted and raped, and one is killed. Jules Seminole's sole purpose in life is to rape. Narcissa White is raped by her Indian husband. Although women are relatively highly regarded among the Cheyenne, they are not allowed to sit in the inner ring of men, not allowed to smoke the pipe and are generally expected to know their lesser place.

Nature

Throughout this story, the beauty and majesty of nature is described by May, as the tribe travels seasonally from one area to the next. May's appreciation of nature grows deeper as the story progresses and she realizes that nature provides everything the Indians need. She enjoys the cold baths in the river, the beautiful birds that Helen Flight paints, the lushness of spring time and the beauty of the meadows and mountains. During the year, as the tribe lives peacefully and in tune with their normal routine, nature is their friend, and the seasons determine their movements. However, nature becomes the tribe's worst enemy when the army arrives, driving them from their tipis into the freezing cold, with no way to warm themselves or their babies. Killing a horse to keep the babies from freezing is another example of nature providing, and May thanks the horse for her sacrifice.



It is clear that these people learned how to live in peace with nature and her changes, and it is only the white man's nature that disrupts the natural flow of their lives.

Bonds among women

In the beginning of this story, the white brides are as different as they can possibly be in terms of their upbringing, their personalities and motives. After being exposed to the same living conditions, the same hard labor and challenging circumstances, the women begin to bond with one another to the point of feeling like sisters. Daisy, who hates blacks, eventually becomes close to Phemie, whose color she eventually fails to notice. The women join in with Phemie's slavery songs in times of stress. The women all grow to love young Sara, even though she has not been able to speak to them. Most interesting is the bond that forms between the white women and the Cheyenne women. The Indian women at first see the white women as too bold and disrespectful, but once the white women have a decent grasp of their language, all of the women share common problems, complaints and joys. Quiet One, who initially resents May's presence, grows warmer and friendlier, especially in sharing May's sense of humor. The younger Indian women spend time with the white women sitting at the river during their meetings and using the women's sweat lodge. The most bonding factor for the women is babies. Even Helen Flight, who cannot have babies, enjoys decorating the labor tent, and Gertie's transparent wish for babies surfaces later in the story. The Kelly twins, whose "cheeky" attitude gives them a hard edge, become close with the other women as they go through their pregnancies and births together.

Hope

May's constant hope to see her babies again is threaded throughout her story of life with the Cheyenne. Being imprisoned in the insane asylum, her hope is apparent when she sees the opportunity to become an Indian bride and gain her freedom.

May also maintains hope throughout the year that the tribe will see the logic in turning themselves in to the agency to avoid any further battles with the white man. May is a positive thinker who tries to see the bright side of things.

Phemie's sadly oppressed life takes on a new shine when she declares her independence as a hunter and warrior. The silent Sara learns to talk to her husband in Cheyenne. Daisy's angry, harsh edge softens, and she becomes more affectionate and kind, especially to Phemie. Even the black-clad Ada Ware decides to stay with her exiled husband.

The entire Brides for Indians program is based on a hope that the new mixed-breed children will bring forth an understanding among white people and the Cheyenne, making peace between them.



Style

Point of View

This novel is a culmination of journal entries written by May Dodd. She often writes in present tense, observing what is going on around her, and also writes in past tense as she recounts the events that take place during her year as an Indian bride. The Codicil written by Abbott Anthony looks back on his relationship and experiences with the white brides and Little Wolf's band.

The white women's characters in the novel come from different backgrounds. Gretchen speaks in a heavy Swiss accent, the Kelly twins speak in a strong Irish brogue, Daisy speaks with a distinct southern drawl, and Gertie speaks like an American cowboy. Fergus is adept at having May spell the women's words the way they would sound with these accents.

Setting

One Thousand White Women begins with Chief Little Wolf's acceptance of President Grant's peace medal in Washington, D.C. May Dodd's journal entries begin on her train ride from Chicago to the wild west where she will take part in the government's Brides for Indians program. As the train makes its way across the country, May sees every kind of terrain, including mountains, flat land prairie and hot desert. However, the bulk of the story takes place among the tribe's seasonal camping spots, primarily in Montana, including the Powder River, the Black Hills and Bighorn Mountains, The Tongue River and the grass prairie lands of America.

May writes in her journal inside the warm tipi, outside near the river where she bathes and contemplates nature, and even against the back of Horse Boy as they made their seasonal trek on horseback. She likes being outside and wears her journal hanging around her neck to keep it handy. As she is dying, May writes in her journal from a shallow cave where she hides from the soldiers.

Language and Meaning

Fergus has May's writing tinged with some old-fashioned words, but reflecting a woman author who was ahead of her time. Extremely well educated, May was fluent in French and English, and eventually in Cheyenne. Fergus makes her writing style descriptive and flowing and at times, abrupt, depending upon what is taking place around her. May is a romantic, tending to add drama to the events in the earlier sections of her journal. Over time, experiencing many hardships and unfortunate events, her writing becomes less dramatic, more realistic and mature. She remains somewhat idealistic, but her rich life with the Indians is reflected in the grounded and more mature tone of her writing as the journal progresses.



Structure

Although the novel primarily consists of May Dodd's journal entries, it is prefaced by Will Dodd, the great grandson of May Dodd, who is presenting the journals to us, as well as a report by an unknown author regarding the Washington, D.C. meeting between President Grant and Chief Little Wolf. Brother Anthony adds his own reflections at the end of the journals, and we return to May's great grandson, who adds a little more current information, as well as the letter that May wrote to her two babies and sent to them through Gertie and the U.S. Army.

May, at times, writes in her journal every day. Certain events, such as her illness and childbirth, create gaps between the entries, at times being almost a month in between. In a couple of instances, the dates of the entries are reversed chronologically for unknown reasons. The journal entries were kept in a series of five notebooks, each section being introduced with a quote from the journal. However, one quote comes from a later book supposedly written by Captain Bourke regarding his military activities.

Although May's great grandson's narrative is in the present tense, her journals cover only the period of March 23, 1875 through March 1, 1876, not quite one year.



Quotes

Frankly, from the way I have been treated by the so-called 'civilized' people in my life, I rather look forward to residency among the savages. (42)

Mah daddy felt that his fust duty was to stay home and protect his family and his property from the vicious rape and pillage for which the Yankee army was so infamous. And so Daddy sent two of his best buck niggahs to fight in his stead. Course, straightaway they run off to join the Union, like all niggah's'll do given the very fust opportunity. (66)

When he [Little Wolf] came back in at last he was trailed by a sickly coyote; everyone in camp saw it and everyone remarked upon it — although only we white women seemed to consider this to be a particularly bizarre sight. We are beginning to realize that the savages' world has even a different corporeality than ours, and one quite inaccessible to us. (165)

The sun had risen, and the camp was going about its business, but it was muffled quiet and safe inside the tipi, the gentle morning sunlight filtering softly through the buffalo skins; the fire was warm and took the early-morning chill off the air, the tent pungent with the mingled scents of human beings and smoke and coffee and meat cooking, the smell of animal hides and earth. All these no longer seemed to me to make for an offensive odor, but rather an oddly comforting one — the smells of home.

The Reverend looked at me, the blood beginning to rise in his round pink hairless face, darkening his complexion. He spoke in a low voice. "Madam," he said, "may I remind you that it is hardly within the realm of your responsibilities to determine what God does and does not wish for these people." "Ah, yes, of course," I said, nodding. "That's up to the church and the United States military, isn't it?" "I warn you, young lady," said the Reverend pointing at me with a fat trembling finger, "I warn you once and for all not to incur the wrath of God, for the wrath of God is a terrible thing to behold." (147)

We will look back on this life that we have now," Little Wolf said softly, "and we will think that no people on earth were ever happier, were ever richer; we have good lodges and plenty of game; we have many horses and beautiful possessions and I am not yet prepared to give this up to live in the white man way. Not yet. Another fall, another winter, perhaps one more summer...then we shall see." (237)

"I admit dat he is not da brightest fellow, in da whole world, dat is true," Gretchen says in his defense. "But before da children come, I vill teach da big ninnyhammer how to be a goot husband and provider. I know I yam not a pretty girl myself, but I always vork hart and I make a nice home for my family vedder dey be Indian people or white people — it don't matter to me. I am a hartvorking, tidy person and I vill be a goot mudder to my children — a d goot vife to my husband. Dat is how I was taught by my own mudder. and you know girls, dat fellow of mine he may be da biggest pumpkinhead in da whole tribe, but he is still my man....you know, and he likes me...yah!" she covers her mouth



and giggles "He likes me lots," she adds, striking her robust breasts with a flat hand. "He loves my bick titties! All he wants to do is to roll in da buffalo robes with me!" And we all laugh. Bless her heart.

"She has just been asked to join the Crazy Dogs warrior society — an event without precedent among the savages. And Ah do not mean as a ceremonial hostess at social events. Ah mean as a full-fledged warrior woman. The very fuust taame in the history of the tribe that a woman has been so honored — and a whaate woman to boot. Aren't y'all so proud?" (180)

"Exoxohenetamo'ane," I finally said to my husband the last time the man came skulking around our lodge. "He talks dirty to me." Little Wolf's face darkened in rage. And there the matter rests. (197)

Before I went myself through the opening I turned to old Crooked Nose. "Come, Vohkeesa'e, hurry!" I said to her. But she bared he gums in a smile and shook her club and said in a clam voice, "You run, Mesoke, save your baby. I am an old woman and today is a good day to die." (282)

I caught one glimpse of Phemie, mounted on a white soldier's horse, completely naked, black as death against the whiteness of snow, galloping down upon a soldier who was afoot and trying to extract his bayonet, which was lodged in the breastbone of one of our women. Phemie carried a lance and gave a bloodcurdling shriek that seemed not human and when the soldier looked up at her his eyes widened in terror as she bore down upon him. (282)

"Tis a family matter, May," Susie said. "The old hypocrite got caught booggerin' the boy. Happens all the time, you know, amongst the Catholics." (193)

...the President's Indian Peace Plan has all the various denominations squabbling over the souls of the savages like dogs over a steak bone.(81)



Topics for Discussion

Does May's basic personality change over the year-long period of her life with the Cheyenne? If so, in what ways does she change, and what is the evidence? Why does she change?

Do you feel this story is written with a bias that favors Native Americans? If so, why might the author take that stance?

Discuss how some of the characters' names are related to their personalities or roles in the story.

Discuss May Dodd's transformation into a wild Indian. Was the transformation complete? Was it permanent?

Fergus uses humor to make the story more enjoyable. Identify the funny passages and characters who provide the most comic relief.

Why is Sara an integral part of this story?

Was May Dodd mentally stable?

May's relationship with her husband Little Wolf has several facets. Discuss how the relationship varies from the beginning, through the year, and at the end of the year of her journal.

Discuss Susie Kelly's comment on page 193, with regard to Reverend Hare's molestation of a young boy: "Tis a family matter, May."