

# **Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit Study Guide**

**Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Genesis.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Exodus.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Leviticus.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Numbers.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Deuteronomy.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Joshua.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Judges.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Ruth.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>



# Plot Summary

Jean lives "for a long time" with her mother and father. That seems a sarcastic statement until she reveals that she is adopted, meaning that she didn't always live with her parents. She immediately begins a description of her mother. She says that her mother lives for conflict. For example, her mother wants the Mormons to come to her door and deliberately chooses the windiest days to hang out sheets so that she'll have to do battle to keep them off the ground and on the line. Her mother has a list of friends and enemies. Slugs and the people next door are among the enemies. Slug pellets, God, and Jean are among the friends. Jean's mother is a devout woman. Jean says that she "was very bitter" about the fact that the Virgin Mary "got there first", so that Jean's mother did the next best thing—arranged for the adoption of a foundling. That "foundling" is Jean.

Jean is taught at home for a time, largely through the use of the Bible and scriptures. Authorities then insist that she attend school. She doesn't fit in and is scolded for frightening the other children with her stories of hell and damnation. Her mother tells her that they are to be set apart and Jean notes that her mother has few friends, and none outside the church.

Jean becomes close to a woman named Elsie. Their friendship seems to develop when Jean is in the hospital after having surgery to restore her hearing. Jean's mother believes she's caught up in the rapture of the Lord and it's a neighbor who discovers that Jean actually can't hear. Jean's mother is busy with church activities and Elsie is the one who stays with her in the hospital and who cares for her when she returns home until her mother returns from a church trip. Jean becomes caught up in the activities of the church and is soon presenting sermons of her own. When her sexual orientation comes into question, the council that oversees the church notes that women have overstepped their bounds with regard to church services. Jean says that she'd always been surrounded by strong women and sees nothing wrong with the role they play, but her mother disagrees.

When she is a teenager, she admits that she is gay and enters into a sexual relationship with another young woman. Perhaps because she feels guilty about the relationship, she attempts to tell her mother what she feels. Her mother discerns the true nature of the relationship and takes the matter to the pastor, who calls Jean and her friend, Melanie, to the front of the church demanding that they repent. Melanie does immediately and is later married, though Jean notes that she's soon a "bovine" and then a vegetable. Jean does repent and seems to be forgiven but then enters into a similar relationship with Katy, another young woman—a new convert to the church. They are likewise discovered and confronted, but Jean refuses to repent and leaves home at her mother's demand, which seems to be prompted by the pastor. She lives with a teacher, works part time on an ice cream truck and part time in a funeral parlor while finishing school, then takes a job in a mental hospital because the job includes a room. She returns home for a Christmas holiday and notes that her mother acts as if she'd never



been away. There have been some changes, including the disbanding of the Society for the Lost because of corruption among its leaders.

Jean is raised to believe in the power and importance of the church, but near the end of the story admits that she's not certain God is real. She seems to come to no conclusions but seems somewhat more at peace with her life and her choices.



# Genesis

## Genesis Summary

Jean lives "for a long time" with her mother and father. That seems a sarcastic statement until she reveals that she is adopted, meaning that she didn't always live with her parents. She immediately begins a description of her mother. She says that her mother lives for conflict. For example, her mother wants the Mormons to come to her door and deliberately chooses the windiest days to hang out sheets so that she'll have to do battle to keep them off the ground and on the line. Her mother has a list of friends and enemies. Slugs and the people next door are among the enemies. Slug pellets, God, and Jean are among the friends. Jean's mother is a devout woman. Jean says that she "was very bitter" about the fact that the Virgin Mary "got there first", so that Jean's mother did the next best thing—arranged for the adoption of a foundling. That "foundling" is Jean.

On Sundays, Jean's mother prays uninterrupted while Jean makes tea. When the prayers are over, Jean's mother quizzes Jean about the Bible, preparing Jean for Bible quizzes at church. If the World Service radio program is filled with good news, Jean's mother cooks lunch. If not, they have "boiled eggs and toast soldiers." Jean admits that her mother sometimes invents the theology she preaches.

Jean's mother allows her to go to carnivals as long as she promises to bring black peas home. Once, an old gypsy grabs her hand and reads Jean's palm, saying Jean will never marry and will "never be still." She then refuses payment for the peas and Jean runs home.

Jean purchases comics weekly from Grimsby's, run by two unmarried women who sometimes give Jean a banana bar. They once invite Jean to go with them to the seaside and Jean doesn't even consider that her mother might not let her go. Her mother mentions "unnatural passions" and Jean believes that it means the women put chemicals in their sweets.

Jean's mother tells stories of those who accepted and rejected salvation including herself. She'd wandered into Pastor Spratt's Glory Crusade one evening by mistake. She talks of Pastor Spratt's good looks and that many young girls were saved that day. Those saved during Spratt's sermons were offered a plant—the lily of the valley or the non-flowering Christmas Cactus. Her mother accepts the lily of the valley and the following night instructs Jean's father to follow her lead, but to take the Christmas Cactus. By the time he reaches the front of the line, the lily of the valley are the only plants remaining. Jean's mother then says that her husband isn't pushy or he would not have been at the end of the line.

There follows a fairy tale in which a "brilliant and beautiful princess" was so sensitive that she would cry over the death of a moth. She once visits an old hermit woman who



wants to die but can't because there's no one to carry on her work—milking the goats, educating the people, and composing songs for festivals. The princess agrees to take on the duties, the old woman dies, and the princess forgets all about the palace.

Next, there's an account of Jean's mother's dream of having a child. She followed a star to an orphanage where Jean was in a crib. She was taken home where she cried for days but the mother was patient, providing comfort until the child felt at home.

As Jean and her mother return from a walk on a Sunday, Jean's father is watching television—a pastime not allowed on Sundays. The family owns a "Deeds of the Old Testament" tablecloth that is used to cover the television on Sundays. The cloth is kept in a drawer with only a piece of Tiffany glass and an old piece of parchment that the family had once believed was a piece of the old testament but turned out to be a "lease to a sheep farm" in Lebanon, which the family held as a prized possession anyway.

There's a section of town called Factory Bottoms and Jean, her mother, her "Auntie Alice and Auntie May" are walking through the district when they meet Mrs. Arkwright, owner of a store that sells supplies to kill vermin. Arkwright laments the fact that business is slow, says she hopes for a hot summer so that the vermin will come out in force, and presents Jean with some tins originally containing poison that Mrs. Arkwright says can be used for storing "marbles and stuff".

## Genesis Analysis

It's noteworthy that Jean so thoroughly describes her mother in the opening of the story. She says that everything in her mother's life is clearly divided into two categories—enemies and friends. She is listed among the friends but notes that it's only when she's young that she's on that list. She describes her father, saying that he would have gladly cooked dinner when her mother wasn't up to the task, but that her mother couldn't believe anyone else capable and wouldn't allow it.

Jean herself talks about the difference in classes. She says that among children there are the "posh", who are members of Brownies and never "stay for school dinners". She says that the two classes—the posh and the "ones like me"—have frequently fought, though she seems to have no friends during her early life.

It's interesting that her mother allowed her to visit the caravans where the gypsies sold food, but it's also noteworthy that her mother wanted something from these visits—the food. Jean will reconsider the words of the old gypsy many times over her life. Immediately following the gypsy's words, Jean begins to tell of her encounter with the two women who sell comics. It's the reader's first clue of Jean's own sexual orientation.

Jean's mother often tells her stories of people converted to Christianity or those who refused salvation. Jean loves the stories as most children would love fairy tales, and this knowledge is later to become a problem for her at school. Jean's mother tells of her own salvation and then of Jean's father's. It's interesting that Jean's mother accepted during a tent revival then instructed her husband to attend and apparently to accept the call.



He seems much less interested in church than his wife and it could be asked whether he was even called on the day he reportedly converted or whether he pretended in order to get the plant for Jean's mother.

It's interesting that Jean tells the fairy tale of the sensitive princess immediately followed by the story of her own selection for adoption. That selection includes facts like those of the birth of Jesus. It's also interesting that the story includes the fact that the child selected has "too much hair". It seems that Jean's mother is already searching for fault in her daughter. The story includes the fact that the child came from the mother's vision rather than childbirth. The story ends with a statement that is never explained: "She had a way out now, for years and years to come".

Jean is taught at home by her mother until authorities tell her that Jean must go to school. Among the things Jean learns from her mother is that clouds are punctured when they impact a high building. In the "old days", only holy buildings were tall enough to puncture the clouds, hence the expression "cleanliness is next to godliness". It's also the reason so many of the heathen places are so dry. Jean had asked her mother why she didn't attend school and her mother had informed her that school is a "breeding ground" but offered no other explanation. When she's ordered to attend school, Jean is elated and notes that she's going to "the breeding ground at last".

Jean's mother tells of a love affair of her youth. There was a young man named Pierre and he's the reason Jean's mother refuses to teach her to speak French. Jean frequently asks for more details but is not often granted them. Much later, her mother will tell her that Pierre had threatened suicide over the breakup.



# Exodus

## Exodus Summary

Jean recounts the time when she went deaf. She said she was in bed one night, contemplating the "glory of the Lord", when she realized that there was no longer any noise in the world. She says it had been going on for some time and her mother had explained to others that Jean was in a "state of rapture." Jean's Aunt May points out that Jean is seven and that "strange things happen in sevens." The following Sunday, the pastor talks of Jean's condition. Jean can't hear and simply continues to read her Bible which convinces everyone of her modesty. When Jean realizes that she can't hear, she writes her mother a note that says, "Mother, the world is very quiet." Her mother takes this as another sign of Jean's preoccupation with the Lord.

The following morning Jean leaves the house and encounters a woman named Mrs. Jewsbury. Jean writes a note that says, "Dear Mrs. Jewsbury, I can't hear a thing." Mrs. Jewsbury takes Jean to the hospital where a doctor arranges for Jean to be admitted immediately. Jean's mother writes Jean a note that says, "Dear Jean, There's nothing wrong, you're just a bit deaf. Why didn't you tell me? I'm going home to get your pyjamas." Her mother returns later with her Bible, a "Scripture Union colouring book", oranges and modeling clay. The nurse refuses to allow Jean to keep the clay, saying she might eat it. As Jean peels oranges, she creates igloos with the peels. Jean's mother leaves her a letter, encouraging her not to worry, promising lots of visits and imparting the news that her operation would be the following day. Jean is afraid and considers writing down her instructions for her burial, in case she dies during surgery.

Jean awakens to the words, "Jelly, Jeannette." She believes it must be an angel, asks and is assured the person she sees is a doctor, is again offered a biscuit with jelly and that she can now hear. Jean's mother is busy with church activities during her hospital stay and it's Elsie who most often stays with Jean. Elsie often reads to Jean from the Bible, poetry, or Elsie's personal favorite, W.B. Yeats. The two often share an orange and Elsie encourages Jean to continue building her igloos and to ignore the nurses. Jean says it would have been easier with her modeling clay and Elsie says it wouldn't have been nearly as interesting. Jean stays with Elsie for a couple of days after leaving the hospital because her mother is out of town on church business. When they arrive from the hospital, Elsie presents Jean with a gift—three mice named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, with a house that looked that the fiery furnace of the Bible story and two wooden figures representing the angel of the Lord and Nebuchadnezzar.

Jean endures school with the assurance that she'll soon be allowed to go to their summer church camp, a family event held in Devon. Jean's mother is working to recruit converts during this event. She relates work on establishing a previous church and says that Jean's father was a gambler in those days. She tells of her youth when she had several boyfriends. She married Jean's father, provoking the wrath of her own father,





who then denied her any of his wealth. Jean's mother eventually forgets that she had money at all. Jean says that the church is her mother's family, and is her own as well.

Jean doesn't do well at school. She says that she is often stuck with lunch monitor duty, is cut off when reading her own essay about summer vacation because of the content, and arrives home to tell her mother that she doesn't want to go back. Her mother says she has to and gives Jean an orange. Jean says she tries to make herself "as ordinary as possible." During sewing class, Jean decides to embroider the words, "The summer is ended and we are not yet saved" using black thread, which some consider inappropriate. Later, two mothers visit the school, complaining that Jean has told their children about hell and prompting nightmares. Mrs. Vole, the principal, writes Jean's mother and asks that she "moderate" Jean. Jean gives her sewing class project to Elsie, then takes it back to enter into a contest. When it doesn't win she says that her teacher "lacks vision" and believes that Elsie won't want it back. Elsie says that some people simply can't understand and hangs it back on her wall. Jean continues to be inspired by Biblical passages and never wins a contest at school. She says it's not fair and Elsie says she should get used to it.

## Exodus Analysis

Jean asks her mother why she must attend school and her mother says that she must send Jean or go to prison. Jean immediately points out that the apostle Paul was often in prison but was always released. As Jean is listening to the radio later, there's "a programme about the family life of snails". Jean's wit shows through when she imagines the snail family sitting around their house and the mother snail saying she's worried about the child snail because he "won't come out of his shell".

Jean likes Elsie Norris, mainly because of the things in her home, including a collage of Noah's Ark. A brillo pad meant to be a monkey is part of that collage and Jean says that she plays out various scenarios with the monkey, usually ending with the drowning of the monkey. She seems to greatly enjoy creating and playing out scenarios, often alternatives to Biblical stories. While in the hospital, Jean attempts to create an igloo from the orange peels. She has no Eskimo to put into the scene so she creates a story about the Eskimo being eaten. She then says that she is sad and that it's because it's so easy to become involved when creating this type of diversion.

It's Elsie who tells Jean there are two worlds. One is the physical and she knocks on a wall as an example. To exemplify the other—which she doesn't name—she pats her own chest. She doesn't explain further though Jean says she's confused, so Jean hopes she'll find the answers at school. Instead, she learns country dance steps until the teacher spends all the class time with another teacher, practicing for a dance competition. It seems that Jean is pointing out that she found little of value or interest at school. Jean says that she'd expected the entire world to be something like church but that life in general is much more complicated.

Jean says the children leaving Egypt were led by a pillar of clouds and then of fire, but that the pillar leading her is "perplexing and impossible".



# Leviticus

## Leviticus Summary

One Sunday afternoon, there are noises of "fornication" coming from "Next Door." Jean's mother sends her out for ice cream, then they sing hymns until the neighbors complain, which prompts them to sing louder.

Jean's mother serves as treasurer of the Society of the Lost. She'd been invited to the position when the former treasurer left the position to open a guest house in Morecambe. The guest house would be frequently used by church members over the coming years. Under her leadership, membership of the Society doubles. They meet a woman who makes wreaths and Jean later works for the woman on Saturdays, preparing wreaths and the dead for burial.

## Leviticus Analysis

It's during a church service when the pastor preaches about perfection that Jean develops her first "theological disagreement. There follows a fairy tale in which a young prince searches for the perfect woman and takes years to discover that it doesn't exist. He does locate a woman and wants to marry her, but she declines which angers him.

The story of the young prince ends when he orders his advisors to chop off the head of the young woman he'd wanted to marry. Her blood becomes a lake and his advisors are all drowned. The prince escapes by climbing a tree and is there when a vendor passes by, selling oranges and leaflets on how to build the perfect person.



# Numbers

## Numbers Summary

Jean begins to have dreams about marrying. She wakes to find that her husband is either blind, a pig, her mother, the man from the post office, or other alternatives—none of them good. A woman on Jean's street says that she married a pig, and that one can never tell until it's too late. Jean reads the story of Beauty and the Beast and wonders if the women who married "pigs" or were otherwise disappointed were expecting their own husbands to change to a handsome prince after marriage.

Jean's mother insists that they go to town. Jean complains that she needs a new mac but her mother says no. Then Jean hangs her sleeve on a meat hook, tearing her mac. Her mother tapes it together, but then they encounter Mrs. Clifton, who says that Jean needs a new mac. Her mother immediately pushes her into a shop that sells seconds, buying Jean a pink mac with a matching hat, both much too large.

Jean becomes enamored with Melanie, a girl she encounters at a fish stall. She goes there on Saturdays just to watch Melanie. Then Melanie gets a job at a library and Jean doesn't see her for some time. When she next sees Melanie, Jean invites her for a baked potato. They share one outside Woolworth's, then Melanie invites Jean to church. Pastor Finch is visiting on a regional tour. He has a new van, large enough to transport the choir, musical instruments, and a first-aid kit used in case the "demon combusts somebody". The church members get caught up in a song Pastor Finch wrote himself, though Melanie doesn't join in. When Pastor Finch calls for sinners to raise their hands, Melanie is the only one and attracts lots of attention following the service. Jean begins to spend Mondays with Melanie, studying the Bible.

At home, Jean talks constantly of Melanie, and one day her mother says that there's a "newish" convert at church named Graham and that she's come to realize that Jean is interested in that boy. She then tells the story of her affair with Pierre. She says that she'd felt "fizzy" when she was around him and equated it with love. She spends all night with him once then goes for a doctor's visit and discovers that what she was feeling wasn't love at all, but an ulcer. Jean briefly wonders if she might be the child of that encounter, but her mother assures her there was "no issue" from her affair with Pierre. Her mother then warns her to never confuse her emotions and never allow a boy to touch her "down there" before Jean flees for Melanie's house. Jean spends the night with Melanie when her mother is away from home.

## Numbers Analysis

Jean says that her mother read "Jane Eyre" to her years ago. It was in a nostalgic moment that Jean picks up the book and reads it for herself, discovering that her mother had rewritten the ending. Jean asks her mother what prompted her own marriage. Her



mother says "We had to have something for you", but doesn't explain what that meant. Jean later hears a conversation between two women who are doing the wash, Doreen and Nellie, with Nellie saying that she believes her husband is having an affair. Jean says that she soon put aside the thoughts of love, though years later she would fall in love.

At the fish stall, Jean encounters a girl named Melanie who is slicing kipper. Jean says she wants a fish and her mother says no because there are too many mouths to feed already, including the dog. There's no indication of Melanie's identity but the two girls apparently know each other. Melanie says that she's not allowed to talk to friends while working and Jean says it's okay because they aren't friends. Melanie says it will appear as if they are and Jean says that in that case, they may as well be friends. The encounter ends abruptly. Jean says that her desire for a fish is her mother's fault. She says that if she had been taught like other children, she'd be happy with a pet rabbit. Later that morning, Jean is offered a job washing glasses at a diner. Her mother accepts for her and Jean says she doesn't mind because the work isn't difficult and she has time to think about Melanie.

Jean says that she had spent some time with Graham, teaching him to play guitar. It seems that she's spending more time with Melanie. Her mother had previously talked of two women who spent excessive time together and that it was "unnatural". Jean's mother then warns her against allowing men to touch her but it almost seems as if she's hoping that Jean has feelings for Graham. Jean once asks Melanie if what they feel for each other is "unnatural passion", but Melanie says it can't be because that feeling is awful. Jean's mother is relieved that Jean is spending less time with Graham and both Jean and Melanie say they feel at home with their church members.

The final section of the chapter details a brief story of people having a dinner while there are "tremours" that drop plaster onto the table. It's cold, the women are bare-shouldered and suffer the most from the cold while there are "a rush of torches" outside. "It has always been this way", with "getting old, dying, starting again", and not noticing while "rebels storm the winter palace". It's not explained whether the tale is a dream or a story told by Jean or her mother. The significance is left to the reader.

# Deuteronomy

## Deuteronomy Summary

The chapter is filled with brief observations, such as the fact that time "is a great deadener." She says that the English were once very preoccupied with building "wooden boats" and invasions. Following that, the peasants "limped back to the land" and the noblemen engaged in battles. While Jean says that there is naturally more to the history of England than this, it's natural for a person to "make of it what we will." She says that life is like "a string full of knots" and the best a single person can do is to try not to make a bigger mess of it.

Jean talks of the fact that people try to separate stories that are not fact from history, but that it's difficult to decide what is true. Even then, people tend to change history to suit themselves. People burn photos, documents, and details of the past when it becomes horrible, altering what they don't destroy. She says that those who are curious are always in more danger.

The past cannot be changed but the memories of the past are "malleable". She says that she is "astonished" when she sees that someone has taken so much of the "oozing world between two boards and typeset". She says that the person who eats out too often has no control over "what's going in, and received information is nobody's exercise". Finally, she offers a piece of advice, "If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches".

## Deuteronomy Analysis

This section is very brief—only three pages in length. In the Bible, the book of Deuteronomy is written about the law governing people in the days before Jesus. Jean's book of Deuteronomy focuses on her thoughts on history and the fact that no two people see a single event in exactly the same way. The chapter is filled with imagery and it's left to the reader to determine what much of it means and its significance. For example, Jean says that time "is a great deadener". It could be that she's speaking of the fact that the hurts she's endured such as never winning a prize for her endeavors at school lessen with time.



# Joshua

## Joshua Summary

Jean says she had been uncertain two times in her life. Once is when her biological mother came to reclaim her. The second time of uncertainty is Jean's relationship with Melanie. Jean says that she's tried to talk of her need for Melanie's companionship with her mother, that she wanted to be with Melanie, needed her friendship, could talk to her, "and . . .", but that she can never quite explain the "and". Jean often spends the night with church members without her mother knowing where she is and she hides behind this now as she spends many nights with Melanie. During a church service, the pastor announces that Jean and Melanie have succumbed to lust. Melanie agrees to go to the vestry with some church members who will pray for her. Jean is sent home. Jean has brandy and sleeps for some time, then Mrs. Jewsbury comes into her room and the two make love though Jean says she hated it.

Jean is locked in her room for the next thirty-six hours and then promises to repent, seeing it as the only way to be fed and to have the church members leave her alone. Jean asks Mrs. Jewsbury to drive her to Halifax where Melanie is staying and she does, promising to pick her up at seven the next morning. Melanie first tries to close the door on Jean but then allows her to slip upstairs. They spend the night together, crying and kissing until Mrs. Jewsbury arrives to take Jean home. She immediately comes down with glandular fever, which is proclaimed as God's way of cleansing her. While she's ill, her mother burns everything that would be a reminder of Melanie, an act that Jean refers to as betrayal.

By summer, Melanie is gone, no one mentions "the Incident" or that Mrs. Jewsbury has packed up and left, and Jean is preparing sermons for a tent revival. It's noted that Jean has "lost none of her gifts" in preaching and her mother takes credit, saying that it's because she reached Jean "in time". The prayer meeting is interrupted at eleven o'clock by men who are angry about the noise. They close down the meeting, leaving Jean and a new convert—Katy—to blow out the lanterns. The following day, Jean goes for a walk and encounters Katy, who lives near Jean's home church.

Katy invites Jean to spend the night with her in the caravan and Jean does. Jean says that they were to spend many nights together over the years and that Katy would be her least complicated love affair. Jean says she wasn't naturally a discreet person but has learned that nothing good will come of telling about her love for Katy, so she keeps it a secret. At Easter, Melanie returns with the news that she's to be married. Jean says she doesn't hate men but hates him, that he tells her that he knows about her affair with Melanie, and that she spits on him.



## Joshua Analysis

Jean's adoptive mother says that Jean was always meant to be her child. She calls Jean's biological mother "a carrying case", and says that she is of no consequence. Jean says that her own emotions of that time are "uncertain". She says that she recognizes it as someone else might recognize an aardvark - it's a "curious thing" that she had no first-hand knowledge of, but that she knows through second-hand illustration. Jean is just hinting at the depth of her relationship with Melanie. She says that on one particular evening, she is tracing the "triangle of muscle of her stomach", and wonders what it is that makes intimacy so disturbing.

When Jean is confronted by the church, she's locked in her room where she literally encounters her demon. It seems this is a manifestation of her lifestyle, which she is being taught is wrong in the eyes of God. The demon is orange and explains that she has two choices, renounce her demon or retain it. If she retains it, her life will be "different and difficult". She hopes that by retaining her demon she will have a relationship with Melanie and falsely promises to give up her lifestyle. At Melanie's, Jean dreams of a city of Lost Hope and a Room of Final Disappointment, where she's doomed to remain because she made the "Fundamental Mistake". At home, Jean's mother burns everything that would remind Jean of Melanie. Jean notes that in her mother's mind, she is still queen but that she is no longer Jean's queen. Jean then says that walls are meant to protect and limit and that when they fall it's because someone has blown their "own trumpet". She seems to be referring to the Biblical story of the battle of Jericho and indicating that her mother has been blowing the trumpet that ultimately caused the collapse of the walls.

Jean continues to dream about the Forbidden City and rambles on about walls, Humpty Dumpty, and the need to distinguish physics from metaphysics though some of the principles are the same. She's awakened this time by her mother who gives her an orange which Jean has trouble peeling. She says that she would rather have a grape or banana so that she doesn't have to deal with the peel. When she opens the orange, her demon is waiting inside. It's interesting that Jean's demon is orange. The demon says that's because her aura is also orange. The demon says that her mother's aura is brown and that all people have some demon, meaning her mother's demon is also brown. When her mother reminds Jean that she's made a decision and that there's no turning back, Jean's demon tosses her a brown pebble. When Jean doesn't see the demon for some time, she assumes that her life has returned to normal.

Jean's mother collects tins of food for the church, hiding the food under the vestry in case of a holocaust. One drive is so successful that food is handed out to the needy as well, but it's tinned food rather than fresh. One woman complains, saying that they'd always been given fruit, vegetables, and bread rather than "water chestnuts in brine". Jean's mother is angry at the criticism and takes the woman off her prayer list. Jean notes that her father adds the woman to his own prayer list so that she "doesn't miss out". It's also noted that her father delivers food bags and builds the nativity set for the





Christmas play. Other than Jean's earlier statement that she almost had no father at all, there's very little information about her father.

After Melanie leaves Jean's house, Jean prays that the Lord will set her free. She notes that she felt nothing when Melanie kissed her goodbye. It's not clear whether Jean is really fighting her lifestyle or if she's simply gotten over the first crush of love. When she encounters Melanie again, she's equally anxious to leave her. Later, she wonders if she's coming down ill again. Jean then tells of a garden—likely a dream—located on the banks of the Euphrates with an orange tree at its center. The fruit "pours forth blood", and those who eat must leave because the fruit "speaks of other longings". It's only reached by chance and one never knows if he is one day to open another gate and find himself in the garden.



# Judges

## Judges Summary

Jean says that her mother begins to insist that she move from her home. She recalls when she'd told her mother she had no intention of becoming a missionary—the field she'd trained for most of her life and that her mother had pledged her for from the time of her adoption. Her mother says that if Jean remains at home to preach, she'll fall in love with a man and end her career in the ministry. Jean says that when her mother realizes that Jean will never marry, she should have been happy but is now angry that Jean is not living as her mother wants.

Katy and Jean arrange a week together at a cabin for the bereaved sponsored by their church. Then the woman who runs the place questions Jean, who is determined that Katy not be subjected to the "darker side" of the church. She says that Katy helped arrange a meeting between Jean and Melanie. Jean's mother is notified but Jean says that Katy is spared and that's all that's important. Jean's mother begins to pray for a sign and the pastor arrives. Jean notes that she believes her mother would have preferred a more spectacular sign—such as having Jean and her room consumed in flames.

The pastor and Jean's mother get into an argument over whether Jean is a victim as the pastor says or a product of her own wickedness as her mother says. Her pastor says she's deceived the congregation and that Jean's mother should keep an eye on her but allow her to go to church. The pastor says that he's going to have to take the situation up with the council because he's not prepared to deal with it. Jean says it is "near-hysterical" because no one knows what to do with her.

It's then decided that the reason for Jean's sexual orientation is her success in the pulpit. Because she's taken on the role of a man as a leader in the church, she's seeking the role of men in other areas of her life. The pastor then tells Jean that if she'll repent he'll arrange a more powerful exorcism. The following day, Jean announces that she intends to leave the church. They beg, promising that she can again teach a Bible class under supervision, but she refuses. Her mother, apparently at the advice of the pastor, orders her to leave. Jean points out that she has nowhere to go but her mother refuses to relent, saying that the "Devil takes care of his own".

Jean arranges to live with a teacher who seems to care about her life, and tells her mother that she's moving out. Her mother asks how she'll live and she says that she'll work nights and weekends but refuses to say where she'll be living until she sees "how it works out." It's noteworthy that Jean says her situation is bleak, but not so bleak as it would be to remain at home. She says that her biggest worry is that she might have to work in a fruit stall, but promises herself that she'll work at a tripe stall before she allows that to happen.



## Judges Analysis

Jean tells a story of King Arthur who hears reports of Lancelot who was driven mad by "heavy things". Then Arthur sits in a garden with a sundial at the center—a description of the garden Jean had previously described. This time there is a thorny crown, dusty because all things turn to dust. She later continues the story, telling of Sir Perceval's travels, his dreams of King Arthur, and his tears.

As Jean's pastor and her mother are arguing over the situation, "seven ripe oranges" fall "on the windowsill". Jean offers them an orange and they immediately decide she's "mad". Jean says the oranges are pretty but not much help and that she's going to need more than icons to get through this. It's interesting that Elsie says she could have protected Jean if she'd not been in the hospital. She doesn't offer further explanation.

When Jean's mother is spending time with the pastor talking of Jean's situation, Jean notes that her mother has "painted the white roses red and now claims they grow that way". She seems to be referring to the queen in *Alice in Wonderland* who ordered all the white roses painted red. It's likely that Jean is referring to her mother as the queen who is able—and willing—to issue orders impacting lives without a second thought.



# Ruth

## Ruth Summary

Jean tells the story of Winnet, a woman who is alone in a forest and meets a sorcerer who promises to help her. He is cooking and her hunger drives her to accept his invitation to eat with him. He draws her a chalk circle for protection from magic, leaving an opening so that she can enter it and giving her a brown pebble so that she can draw the circle closed behind her. She does and they dine in silence until she chokes on a piece of bread, whereupon she allows the sorcerer to enter her circle and "bang on her back". He tells her that he wants her for his apprentice. He tells her that unless she agrees, he'll never release her from the chalk circle and points out the fact that she doesn't have the power to release herself. She says that she'll agree if he guesses her name. He guesses that it's Winnet Stonejar. She admits that she was tricked but consoles herself with the notion that he can at least cook.

They go to the sorcerer's castle where Winnet comes to believe that she's his daughter and forgets any life she had other than her life at the castle. He tells her that she had been entrusted to his care by a "powerful spirit" and she acknowledges that she would never want to live anywhere other than the castle. She meets a stranger, a boy, and conjures his presence into the castle where she soothes his fears and kisses him. That night there's a great feast and the sorcerer tells the people of the village that there's to be a blight, that it's caused by the boy and that they must cast him out. They throw him into a dark room but Winnet releases him and tells him to say whatever he must against her to gain his freedom. The next morning, the sorcerer orders Winnet to leave. There are three ravens—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—and her favorite, Abednego, tells her that if she remains she'll be consumed by grief but if she leaves she'll still have her power but will use it differently. The raven coughs up a brown pebble that he says is his heart. Her father appears in the form of a mouse, ties a string around her button, and she leaves.

The story of Winnet is interrupted as Jean tells of her current situation. She continues to work for the woman who makes wreaths and the woman's friend, Joe, at the funeral parlor. She also drives the ice cream truck and sometimes parks the truck around back while she works inside. Her competition on the ice cream truck was Birtwhistles. Jean says she bought ice cream for him as a child because there was a "bonus". When they heard the music from this horse-drawn ice cream shop, Jean would purchase wafers for herself and her mother and would take time to scoop up whatever horse shit was on the cobblestones for her mother's lettuce beds.

One day, Jean drives the ice cream truck past Elsie's house and discovers many people gathered there. She learns that Elsie has died but her mother and the pastor tell her to leave. When she goes outside, there are people gathered to buy ice cream and she serves them, getting more information there than she had from her mother and the pastor. Elsie, unable to properly care for herself anymore, had slipped away during the



night. Mrs. White comes out of Elsie's apartment and equates Jean's selling of ice cream with making money off the dead, predicting that Jean will pay for the crime. She then tells Jean that she's not to come to the funeral because it's for the holy.

The story of Winnet continues as Winnet wanders for several days, finally falling down from exhaustion. She is picked up by a village woman who revives her with herbs. She knows of a city in the sky and feels she's be safe if she ever gets there, though people encourage her to forget the plan.

Jean goes to the funeral parlor the following day. She knows that the church people must have forgotten that she works there. She doesn't see Elsie until that evening, when she knows there's a church service and she's not likely to encounter anyone from church.

While Jean is washing up, Mrs. Jewsbury appears saying that she'd wanted to say her goodbyes. Mrs. Jewsbury invites Jean to visit her but Jean says she can't. She finishes school and takes a job at a mental hospital. She says it's not a job she would ordinarily have wanted but the biggest advantage is that it includes a room. Joe and the woman who makes wreaths predict she won't like it, but she goes anyway.

The story returns to Winnet, who finds a map rolled up around a broom handle. There are those who tell her that she won't be happy even if she finds the city in the sky but she goes on with her plans. A blind man teaches her the ways of boat builders and sailing, and that the rope is like a dog, "rough and dependable". On her last night on earth, she dreams that her two eyebrows become bridges leading into a bore hold in the middle of her forehead, and that she must navigate the blood and bones into the gut before she can squat on the step. Next she's riding a horse around and around, growing dizzy. The blind man wakes her and she rows out to sea. With water all around her, she feels the pull of the city and knows there's no going back.

In the city, someone asks Jean when she last saw her mother and why she never returns home. She says that she'd thought the past was past in the city and doesn't know how to answer. The person asking wonders what would have happened if Jean had stayed and she says that she would have been a priest rather than a prophet. She points out that a priest has a book while a prophet simply cries out in the wilderness and often doesn't make sense at all.

Jean goes back for a visit with her mother. Jean's mother says that the Society has disbanded after corruption was discovered, that the Reverend Bone was using money to pay maintenance for his estranged wife and the woman he was living with was actually a girlfriend, and that the guest house they frequented at Morecambe was discovered to have been the site of séances and the services of a medium.

The next morning, Jean's mother wakes her with hot chocolate and a request that she go shopping. Jean stops at Mrs. Arkwright's shop—the lady who sells poisons for vermin. The woman invites Jean for a drink at a local pub, the Cock and Whistle, and Jean accepts, saying that she'd only returned home for Christmas. Mrs. Arkwright says



business is bad, attributes it to the increase of bathrooms and central heating, says that she plans to emigrate to Torremolinos, that she hasn't quite enough money and that she plans to burn down her shop to get the rest.

Jean doesn't go directly home after her trip to town, but climbs the hill she so often climbed as a child, sometimes with her mother. She makes a series of observations. She says that it wasn't God who betrayed her, but the servants of God and that servants, because of their nature, can't help but betray. She says that she wants someone who will be irrevocably on her side and that a betrayer is one who promises to do that but changes sides. She says that she'd met Melanie pushing a pram during her years away from home and that she seemed vegetative.

Jean's mother has a new hobby. She's traveling with Pastor Finch, using her own experience to help parents of demon-possessed children. Jean says that she's glad her mother has a hobby but wishes her sins weren't listed in the self-help tract written by her mother. She says her consolation is that there's not a photo of Jean included with the warning for parents to lock up their daughters. Jean and her mother play Beetle until five before midnight Christmas eve when Jean's mother leaps onto her pile of gifts under the Christmas tree, unable to wait longer. The gift from Jean's father to her mother is a catapult, which her mother requested as a way to get rid of the cats from next door because the animals pee on her roses. The first post following Christmas brings a letter and news of the woman who'd run the Morecambe guest house. The woman had taken up with a charismatic man who'd been an exorcist and had convinced the woman to allow him to practice voodoo on patients in the nursing home where she worked. They were caught. Jean's mother rushes out, saying it's a mess for Pastor Finch to help clear up and Jean notes that it's likely the final blow for her mother. The story ends with Jean's mother on the CB, calling out, "This is Kindly Light calling Manchester".

## Ruth Analysis

Jean says that magic was once important and that people stood in a chalk circle to protect themselves from evils. She says that the reason it worked is that people needed it to work. Wizards stood within their chalk circles until they were capable of controlling their space. The training of wizards is a long-term process and difficult. Jean says that "they push out their power" until they can control their space, then she switches to the personal perspective, saying that it is "not possible to control the outside of yourself until you have mastered your own breathing space". She then says that true evil is "to change something you don't understand".

There are several interesting points of the story of the sorcerer. The brown pebble has come to represent Jean's mother's demon. It's noteworthy that the names of the three ravens are Biblical characters and that it's not the first time these three characters are named in this book. It seems that the story of Winnet is a parallel to Jean's life, including the fact that the sorcerer passes her off as his own daughter, saying that she was



brought to him by a particular power. When Winnet is taken to the village, she learns the language of the people but never fully understands or speaks so that she is understood.

In the city, someone asks Jean about her mother and why she doesn't ever "go back", apparently referring to a trip home. Jean notes that there are threads that "help you find your way back" and threads "intended to bring you back". It's left to the reader to determine the difference but it seems possible that Jean is talking about the difference between choosing for oneself and being pushed into a decision. She points out that Lot's wife turned back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Jean says that pillars are meant to hold things up and salt is a cleanser, both positives, but that trading herself for those things was a poor trade.

Jean reverts back to the story of Sir Perceval. He regrets leaving the Round Table and King Arthur. He'd had the opportunity to turn back for the first three days, but then was lost. Sir Perceval, as it turns out, was a "warrior who longed to grow herbs". It seems a parallel to Jean's life, that she'd had the opportunity to return for some time and that despite her apparent role in life, she was actually longing for a different kind of life—as different as a warrior and a herb gardener.

When Jean met Melanie, Melanie said that the two women had likely seen their relationship very differently. Jean notes that the important thing about memories is that they can be altered, but that it only serves to "knot it up", like a string used to create a cat's cradle. She says Melanie mentioned that she hoped Jean had destroyed the letters that passed between them, as if those letters after all these years might come to light.

Jean has a moment of sadness over the death of the dog she'd left behind when she left home. She seems to draw a parallel between the dog and her own troubles, but says the dog is buried in clean dirt while her issues are being exhumed. She notes that she's managed to avoid many things but that there's bound to be a day of reckoning.

The story of Perceval resumes at this point. The knight compares his hands—one strong and firm and the other appearing underfed. He continues to worry over the Round Table, dreams that he is a spider hanging by a thread, that a raven flies through, breaking the thread, and that he scuttles away. It's left to the reader to determine the symbolism but it seems possible that Sir Perceval's hands represent two different possible lifestyles open to Jean. If this is the case, it's up to the reader to decide which of the lifestyles is strong and bold and which is underfed.



# Characters

## Jean

Jean's story begins when she is seven, though she tells the story of her mother's search for a child that she knows is to be her own. She finds Jean in an orphanage and adopts her. Jean is raised in the church and later says that she's surrounded with strong women, meaning that she had no inkling that women were not meant to be strong. At seven, Jean is singled out by a pastor who says that parents should keep an eye on their children because even children can be possessed by demons.

Jean is educated at home and her mother uses the Bible as almost her sole teaching tool. Jean is constantly quizzed on Biblical stories so that she can do well on the church quizzes. She notes that her mother likes it when Jean wins. Then Jean is forced to attend public school. Initially, she's excited but soon learns that she doesn't fit in. When she tells the other children about hell and death, the children have nightmares and tell their mothers, who confront school officials. Jean's mother says that they are to be apart from others and takes the school's reprimand as a sign that Jean was in accord with God and with her Christian duties. During her childhood, Jean becomes deaf and undergoes surgery. While she's unable to hear, her mother assumes that she's living in the rapture of the Lord and is pleased. Jean's mother is not often at her bedside during her hospital stay because she has church business to attend. She sends oranges and letters and Jean is often kept company by a woman named Elsie Norris who becomes Jean's close friend. It's Elsie who tells Jean that she would have protected her from the church's exhortations after Jean's sexuality is made public, but Elsie herself was in the hospital at the time.

Through a series of stories about princesses, a sorcerer's apprentice named Winnot, and the knight named Sir Perceval, Jean draws parallels to her own life. When her second female lover is discovered, Jean refuses to recant her lifestyle and is ordered from her mother's home. She moves in with a teacher, works her way through school, and eventually takes a job in a mental hospital.

## Jean's Mother

The description of Jean's mother begins on the first page of the book and seems to override everything else. She's never named but is referred to only as Jean's mother. She has apparently told Jean the story of her decision to adopt. Jean's mother says that she was led to the orphanage where Jean lived as a baby, and that a star led the way. Jean's mother was intended to raise Jean as her own and she immediately dedicated the child to mission work. Much later, Jean declines to go on the foreign mission field, saying that she prefers to remain at home and that she can do equally good works for the Lord without going to a foreign country. Jean's mother is saddened by this news and it seems that she's had her heart set on having a daughter on the mission field.





Jean's mother works hard at her various causes and it seems that she must have something to keep her busy in order to be happy. The relationship between Jean's mother and father is only hinted at, though he apparently shares her interest in church and Christianity, though it seems to a lesser degree.

When Jean's mother discovers her daughter's sexual preference, she immediately turns the issue over to the church—an action that will be repeated later when it's discovered that a former member of the Society for the Lost is drinking heavily and has been accused of allowing a man to perform voodoo on nursing home patients she was responsible for. Jean's mother seems almost to love the problems, though she calls on the church for help.

When Jean is in trouble at school for telling the other children about hell, Jean's mother is delighted. She says that Christians are to be set apart and Jean admits that her mother seems to have no friends.

## Melanie

Jean's friend who becomes her lover. Jean notices Melanie working in a market and continues to go there on Saturdays just to watch her. When Melanie quits and begins work at a library, Jean searches for her. When they meet, Jean invites her for a baked potato and Melanie agrees. They soon begin spending nights together. The relationship apparently disturbs Jean, who tries to tell her mother of the situation but can't bring herself to give up all the details. Her mother discerns the nature of the relationship and turns it over to the church. The girls are confronted and Melanie succumbs to pressure, repenting of the lifestyle. She later marries a young man who tells Jean that he knows about their relationship. Jean answers by spitting in the man's face. Jean notes that soon after the marriage Melanie takes on the docile look of a bovine and later appears completely vegetative. Jean sees Melanie after the birth of her first child and she says that she's pregnant with her second.

## Katy

Jean's second lover. When the relationship is discovered, Jean is intent only on protecting Katy. With that in mind, she separates herself from Katy as much as possible so that the church will not attack Katy as they had Melanie. When Jean is kicked out of her home, she notes that she might go to Katy except for the repercussions.

## Elsie Norris

Known as "testifying Elsie" because she's always willing to give her testimony, Elsie is the person who spends time with Jean when she's in the hospital recovering from surgery to restore her hearing. Elsie and Jean become fast friends. Elsie helps Jean with school projects and Jean creates a sampler for Elsie in sewing class. Elsie is in the hospital when Jean is confronted about her sexuality and later says that she would have



protected Jean had she been there. When Elsie dies, Jean spends the night at her side in the mortuary.

## **Mrs. Jewsbury**

The woman who teaches oboe and who takes Jean to visit her lover when the two of them are separated by the church. Jean and Mrs. Jewsbury also make love. Jean says she hates every moment of it but doesn't stop. Mrs. Jewsbury immediately moves away and Jean later learns that she's not living alone. Mrs. Jewsbury invites Jean to her apartment but Jean declines.

## **Pastor Spratt**

The handsome young preacher who is leading a tent revival called a "crusade" when Jean's mother wanders into the event by mistake. She, along with many other young girls, accept the calling to Christianity that night. Pastor Spratt gives all new converts a potted plant. He justifies it by saying that Christians are to be "fishers of men", and that it's okay to use "bait". Jean's mother chooses a lily of the valley plant from Pastor Spratt, instructs her husband to follow her lead the following night but to choose the Christmas Cactus plant. Pastor Spratt is out of plants by the time Jean's father makes his way to the front of the line to choose a plant.

## **Pastor Finch**

A guest speaker at Jean's church, Pastor Finch is a missionary and is idolized by Jean's mother. It's Pastor Finch who leads various church services and serves as a guide to Jean's mother whenever there's a problem. He becomes the best known missionary supported by this particular group of churches.

## **Jean's Father**

Little description of Jean's father is offered up in the story. Jean's mother says that he was a gambler when they met and he's described as a person who is never pushy. When Jean's mother is angry at a person who criticizes food given to the poor, she promptly removes the woman from her prayer list, but Jean's father adds her to his own. From this and the fact that he built the nativity scene used in the Christmas play, it seems that he is at least somewhat religious though little else is known about him.

## **The Woman Who Makes Wreaths**

She is never referred to by name but is a friend of Jean's mother. This woman later puts Jean to work, helping in a funeral parlor and providing a job that Jean needs desperately.

## **Mrs. Arkwright**

The woman who sells products to control vermin. She notes at one point that business is bad and that she hopes it will be a warm season so that people have trouble with vermin. She later tells Jean that indoor plumbing and central heat have hurt her business and that she plans to emigrate. She says that she needs additional money in order to set herself up in a new business and that she plans to burn down the building of her vermin control business to raise the money, but swears Jean to secrecy.



## Objects/Places

### Next Door

The house next to Jean's childhood home. Her mother refers to "Next Door" scornfully, pointing out all their flaws. When there are sounds of a couple having sex coming from Next Door on a Sunday afternoon, she, Jean, and a friend sing Christian music loudly.

### The Victoria Hospital

Where Jean undergoes surgery after it's discovered that she's "a bit deaf".

### Devon

The city where Jean and her mother attend a summer camp with their church.

### Halifax

Where Melanie is sent to stay with relatives after the church members discover that she and Jean are involved in a relationship.

### The City of Lost Chances

The place Jean dreams about on the day after she promises to repent of her lifestyle and her relationship with Melanie.

### The Cock and Whistle

A pub near Mrs. Arkwright's shop. Jean says that her mother had talked of the iniquity of the place and Jean is disappointed when she first steps into the place to discover that it's quite ordinary.

### Morecambe

The location of a guest house used by the members of the Society for the Lost. It's run by a former treasurer of the group who is later found guilty of allowing an exorcist perform voodoo on nursing home patients.

## **Fern Gore**

The location of the ice cream company Jean works for during high school.

## **Maxi Ball's Catalogue Seconds**

The place that sells cheap clothing that doesn't last. It's said that Jean's mother would rather not eat than to shop there. Once she was forced by circumstances to buy a corset there and it broke almost at once, stabbing Jean's mother with a whalebone which she endured for a long time until the end of the service she was attending. Jean says that she remembers that event whenever she's tempted to cut corners.

## **Fuzzy Felt**

Felt pieces in the shape of Biblical characters and scenes used in Sunday school to illustrate stories. Jean is playing with Fuzzy Felt, creating a scene in which Daniel is eaten by a lion, when she's confronted by Pastor Finch.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

Jean ages physically, mentally and emotionally during the course of the novel. She's only seven at the beginning and is a young woman who has completed school as the story comes to an end. She has also taken a long look at herself and made some decisions about her life during that time. One of the biggest decisions is that she refuses to renounce her lifestyle and submit to an exorcism, accepting her mother's decree that she must move out if she doesn't submit.

Jean matures with regard to her relationship as well. When she and her first lover are discovered and confronted, they stand together in front of the church. Jean's lover, Melanie, accepts the church's demands that she repent. When Jean is discovered to be involved in a second relationship, she separates herself from her lover, Katy. She does this in order to protect Katy from the abuse she knows will be forthcoming.

Jean also matures in her role in the church over the course of the story. It's Jean's mother who has decided that Jean is to be a missionary and Jean is a teenager when she decides that isn't what she wants for herself. Instead, she points out that she is in a position to do good works for the church at home. She begins offering up sermons of her own, leads Bible studies, and is an important figure in the church, even at a young age. This role is taken away when her second sexual relationship is discovered though she's bribed to repent by offering to allow her to resume her teaching of Sunday school—under direct supervision.

Jean's mother seems to age somewhat, though it's not really accurate to say that she is an example of coming of age. When Jean returns home for Christmas, her mother acts as though nothing had happened between them. Jean even wonders if her absence might not have even been noticed. Her mother doesn't immediately embark on a tirade about Jean's lifestyle, nor does she make any demands. This shouldn't be taken as acceptance by Jean's mother of her daughter's lifestyle, but is an example of her apparent attempt to hold her family together—a great change over her attitude of previous years.

## The Need to Belong

Jean is raised in the church and she often points out that she is comfortable there and that the church members are her family. This "family" becomes vital to Jean when she fails to fit in at school. It's mentioned that there are other children involved in the church, and it seems likely. In any case, Jean seems not to associate with those other children. In school, Jean is teased and doesn't fit in. She says on several occasions that she's not one of the "posh" students who is a member of a Brownie troop. While that seems that it should have put Jean into a group of poorer children by default, it seems that she



doesn't fit in there either and that she has few—if any—children who want to be around her.

Early on in her school years, Jean is confronted by school officials who say that she has prompted nightmares in other children by telling them stories of hell. Jean says that she herself has nightmares and doesn't seem to understand why she shouldn't tell these stories. After all, these are the facts of life as she has been raised to know them. When her mother receives an admonition to have Jean tone down her stories, her mother is delighted that Jean seems to be set apart from other children. It's then that Jean notes that her mother has few friends herself.

There is little talk of the impact when Jean is forced from the church, though it seems likely that it would have taken a huge toll on her. It could be that she became so busy in surviving—working two jobs while she finished school—that she had little time to grieve over the loss of her church family.

## The Need for Approval

In school, Jean is always outside the circle of friendship and companionship. When she's to make a sampler in sewing class, she pulls from her Biblical background for inspiration—an act that wins the favor of her good friend Elsie Norris but not the approval of her teachers. She gives the sampler to Elsie who hangs it in her living room. When it fails to earn a prize in the sewing contest, Jean returns it to Elsie with the comment that she might no longer want it. In Jean's mind, the fact that it fails to win a prize in the contest lessens its value. Elsie says that it's perfect and that she wants it, then adds that some people simply don't understand. Jean talks of wanting so badly to win a competition in school. She spends a great deal of time on projects but never wins and finally credits it to a lack of imagination and understanding on the part of the teachers.

Jean's relationship with her mother seems to be many things, but love and approval don't seem to figure into the equation. When Melanie tells Jean that she has no father, Jean says that she also doesn't have one though her adoptive father is alive and well. She seems to be referring to the lack of interaction between the two of them. When Jean's biological mother comes to reclaim Jean, her adoptive mother refuses to allow the two even to meet. Though Jean doesn't interrupt the meeting, she listens in and tells her adoptive mother that she wanted to meet her biological mother. It seems that if Jean had actually wanted that meeting, she would have stepped into the room and done so. Instead, it's possible that she was attempting to provoke a loving response from her adoptive mother. That wasn't the response she received.

Jean's interaction in the church seems to be a need for companionship, but it is also a safe place where she is accepted and needed. When it's noted that women have overstepped their bounds in the church, Jean says she doesn't understand. It seems she's taken her cue from the strong women in the church and that she feels there's nothing wrong with women delivering sermons and taking over the organization of the

church. Her mother, seeming to give in to her own need for approval from a man she admires—Pastor Spratt—agrees with the church that women have overstepped their bounds.





# Style

## Point of View

The majority of the story is written in first person from Jean's limited point of view. There are, however, some sections that are less limited. For example, Jean goes deaf for a short period and cannot hear anything. During this time, people believe that she's having a religious experience and stop talking to her. She tells of her mother's comments to others during this time and of the attitudes of those in the church regarding her experience—facts that she wouldn't have known because she could not hear any of those conversations.

Jean also tells stories that are not part of her own personal experience. For example, she writes of a fairy tale about a sensitive princess. It's not clear whether her mother told her the story or if she made it up on her own. Either way, it's simply inserted into the book without explanation.

Some sections reveal details not of a specific event but of the normal happenings of her life. On Sundays Jean's mother prays alone though Jean can hear her prayers. When Jean hears a specific part of the prayer, she knows that it's time to put the kettle on for tea. When her mother returns to the kitchen, she looks outdoors and says that God is good. She then asks Jean what kind of tea she's served. Next, she asks a Bible question. Jean speaks of this using a specific Bible question but says the questions vary from one session to the next.

## Setting

The story is set in England and it appears that it could be in the 1950s. There is a reference to the Second World War and Jean's mother spends a great deal of time preparing for a holocaust, indicating that these topics were on the minds of the people of the day. It's also noted that many of the households are just getting indoor plumbing and central heat, another indication of the time frame. Many of the places mentioned are real, which lends a sense of reality to the story itself. There is little description given to individual buildings or places. For example, Jean's house is described only through events. She says that her mother always prayed in the parlour, and that her mother was building a bathroom and erecting a partition that would serve as a wall for Jean's room. There is little other than these types of details. As a general rule, the settings are described only through events. The church Jean and her mother attends is another example. The church is an important part of Jean's life but there is nothing to indicate the appearance of the church. It's noted that lanterns were used during one of the revival services, but there are few other details about the specific settings for the story.



## Language and Meaning

There are many references to oranges, and both Jean and her mother use the fruit as comfort food. When Jean is in the hospital her mother brings her a bag of oranges, obviously meant to be a kindness when she herself can't often visit. Jean herself uses the orange peel to build igloos while in the hospital.

There are a great many passages that seem to be references to a particular incident. While some are quite clear, most are left for the reader to determine the significance of these passages. Jean talks often of a garden with plants growing in concentric circles. What's at the center varies from one scenario to the next. The significance is left to the reader. In some cases, the significance is evident. For example, she talks of the importance of magic in days past. She says that people of those days drew chalk circles around themselves in order to protect themselves from various evils. Jean says these chalk circles worked because people needed them. In this case, it seems evident that the significance is that Jean herself is searching for protection from her mother and the church who are persecuting her for her lifestyle choices.

## Structure

The book is divided into eight chapters of varying lengths, generally more than twenty pages but with one—Deuteronomy—only three pages in length. The chapters are named for the first eight books of the Old Testament of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. As is the case with the Biblical books, the chapters offer clues regarding the contents of that particular section. For example, Genesis describes Jean's early life while Exodus describes her leaving the home for life at school. The book is written in chronological order with occasional flashbacks to explain various events. These flashbacks of explanation are typically done by tying them to current events. For example, Jean talks of Sunday dinners at home and ties that to the fact that she's adopted.

## Quotes

"And so it was that on a particular day, some time later, she followed a star until it came to settle above an orphanage, and in that place was a crib, and in that crib, a child. A child with too much hair. She said, 'This child is mine from the Lord.'" Genesis, p. 11

"Seven seals? I had not yet reached Revelation in my directed reading, and I thought he meant some Old Testament amphibians I had overlooked. I spent weeks trying to find them, in case they came up as a quiz question." Genesis, p. 12

"As long as I have known them, my mother has gone to bed at four, and my father has got up at five. That was nice in a way because it meant that I could come down in the middle of the night and not be lonely. Quite often, we'd have bacon and eggs and she'd read me a bit of the Bible." Genesis, p. 15

"So an hour early, we trooped back on to our coach, and joggled home. Three plastic bags full of sick and hundreds of sweet wrappers were our memento to the drive. It was all we could part with." Exodus, p. 34

"'They were all wayward men,' she sighed. 'I had a bad time enough finding one that was only a gambler.'" Exodus, p. 36

"If you were in a particular place, you expected to see particular things. Sheep and hills, sea and fish; if there was an elephant in the supermarket, she'd either not see it at all, or call it Mrs. Jones and talk about fishcakes. But most likely, she'd do what most people do when confronted with something they don't understand: Panic." Exodus, p. 45

"I didn't know quite what fornicating was, but I had read about it in Deuteronomy, and I knew it was a sin. But why was it so noisy? Most sins you did quietly so as not to get caught." Leviticus, p. 54

"He was very proud of that bus, and told of the may miracles worked inside and out. Inside had six seats, so that the choir could travel with him, leaving enough room for musical instruments and a large first-aid kit in case the demon combusted somebody." Leviticus, p. 84

"As far as I was concerned men were something you had around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless. I had never shown the slightest feeling for



them, and apart from my never wearing a skirt, saw nothing else in common between us." Judges, p. 127

"I now knew where the blame lay. If there was such a thing as spiritually adultery, my mother was a whore." Judges, p. 135

"It works because the principle of personal space is always the same, whether you're fending off an elemental or someone's bad mood. It's a force field around yourself, and as long as our imagining powers are weak, it's useful to have something physical to remind us." Ruth, p. 141

"Everyone thinks their own situation most tragic. I was no exception." Ruth, p. 161

"I still don't think of God as my betrayer. The servants of God, yes, but servants by their very nature betray." Ruth, p. 170

## Topics for Discussion

Describe Jean's childhood. How does she come to live with her adoptive mother? What happens when there's an encounter with her biological mother? What does Jean's adoptive mother say about her biological mother?

What's the significance of the extensive descriptions of Jean's mother? What's the significance of the lack of description of Jean's father? Describe the role her father plays in her life.

What is Jean's role in the church? What is her mother's goal for her future? What does Jean change about that goal? Why?

Describe how Jean comes to have a relationship with Melanie. With Katy. With Mrs. Jewsbury. How do each of these end? How are they similar? Dissimilar?

What is Jean's relationship with other children? Who is it that stays with her most often in the hospital? How does that relationship develop? What does Elsie mean when she says that she would have protected Jean from the church members had she not been in the hospital? Could she have intervened? Would it have mattered?

Jean is given the choice to renounce her sins or leave home. What arguments does she give? What does she ultimately decide? What are the consequences?

Who is Winnot? Sir Perceval? What are their roles in Jean's story? What are the parallels between Winnot and Jean? Between Perceval and Jean? What is the significance of including the two characters in the book?

What is the significance of the orange? What is its role in the story? Who says, "oranges aren't the only fruit?" What does she mean?