

Pearl in the Mist Study Guide

Pearl in the Mist by Virginia C. Andrews

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Plot Summary

A year before the novel begins, Ruby Landry Dumas discovers her father lives in New Orleans and so she leaves her home in an impoverished Cajun bayou community to be reunited with him. Although Pierre Dumas is thrilled to have his daughter in his life, his wife Daphne is not so enthusiastic. After a dramatic year full of scandal, Mr. Dumas decides to send Ruby and her twin sister, Giseselle, to a private girls' school near Baton Rouge called Greenwood.

Sad to leave her boyfriend Beau, Ruby acquiesces quietly to her father's decision, while Gisselle complains the whole way to Greenwood. Life at Greenwood isn't perfect for Ruby: Gisselle tortures her with problems while trying to force Ruby to demand their father bring them back to New Orleans. The school principal, Mrs. Ironwood, discriminates against Ruby because of her "low class" Cajun roots and because Ruby inadvertently befriends Mrs. Ironwood's blind cousin Louis, heir to their family fortune. But Ruby finds comfort in a new friend Abby, who also has a mysterious past (Abby is one quarter black) and her art teacher mentor, Miss Stevens, who encourages Ruby's passion for painting. But life continues to throw trials at Ruby: Gisselle discovers Abby's secret and announces her mixed blood status to the school, resulting in Abby's expulsion. Louis reveals dark, incestuous secrets to Ruby, who pities him and fears he is falling in love with her. Mrs. Ironwood finds tiny ways to punish Ruby for crimes she did not commit. And then Mr. Dumas abruptly dies.

Life gets harder with Daphne in charge of Ruby and Gisselle's destinies, and she promises harsh punishment if either of them stray from her extreme control. Daphne does her best to keep Ruby from Beau, enraged by their sensual relationship. Upon returning to Greenwood after their father's funeral, Ruby unexpectedly faces expulsion when a teacher accuses her of an affair with the school's groundskeeper. Ruby narrowly escapes her fate when Louis rushes in as her alibi. Ruby is shocked to discover the crime was actually committed by Gisselle who has secretly regained the use of her legs, although she continues to feign helplessness in order to get her way.

Home for Christmas, Ruby and Gisselle are surprised by Daphne's sudden generosity. They learn Daphne is basically bribing them into a truce: she intends to marry their father's former business partner and wants the family to present a united front to New Orleans' upper crust. Disgusted by the lies and manipulations of her supposed family, Ruby finds solace in Beau, making love to him several times. The twins' truce with Daphne lasts only until Gisselle's New Year's Eve party gets out of hand and destroys the house. Despite Gisselle's "miraculous" recovery and pleas to stay in New Orleans, Daphne spitefully sends them back to Greenwood.

Ruby is resigned to being at Greenwood until she learns Miss Stevens has resigned amid rumors of a lesbian affair with a student. These rumors turn out to be allegations Ruby believes that Gisselle started. But Ruby doesn't have too long to worry about Miss Stevens before she discovers she is pregnant. Mrs. Ironwood gleefully sends her back to New Orleans for good. Daphne, enraged that Ruby got pregnant when she herself is



infertile, and concerned only for the purity of the family name, sends Ruby out of town for a shady, illegal abortion. But Ruby cannot go through with it and runs away, back to her childhood home in the bayou.

Ruby is welcomed back into her home community of Houma with open arms. In particular, her half brother Paul is elated to see her: the two were almost romantically entangled before they discovered the true nature of their relationship. Paul still loves her and would gladly marry her, but Ruby is determined to take care of herself. After her daughter Pearl is born during a wild hurricane, Ruby decides to trust herself to make the right choices for her new little family.



Prologue & Chapter 1: First Day

Prologue & Chapter 1: First Day Summary

Pearl in the Mist begins with a letter from teenage protagonist Ruby (Landry) Dumas to her half brother, Paul. Ruby was raised in the bayou with Paul, and almost had a romantic relationship with him until they discovered they were related. Now, Ruby lives with her father's family in New Orleans, including her twin sister, Gisselle, and her stepmother, Daphne. In the letter, Ruby describes her apprehension at starting a new private school in Greenwood, but her determination to please her father and create peace in the family; Daphne dislikes Ruby so much she tried to have her committed to a mental institution the previous year. Going away to school will placate Daphne and reduce Ruby's father's constant worrying. Ruby worries that she will be judged for her Cajun, lower class upbringing, at a private school where most of the pupils come from wealthy Creole families. Ruby closes the letter by admitting that misses the bayou where her grandmother, Catherine, raised her.

In Chapter 1, readers meet Ruby's twin sister Gisselle. She blames Ruby for their impending trip to Greenwood, claiming that their father would not make them go if Ruby resisted the plan. Neither sister wants to attend the private school in Baton Rouge. Gisselle lost the use of her legs in a car accident after smoking pot on a date, and now uses a wheelchair. She continually tries to persuade Ruby to unite with her in scheming to get out of going to Greenwood, but Ruby is too obedient and respectful of her father to consider it. On the day of the twins' departure, Daphne only emerges from her bedroom long enough to warn them to stay on their best behavior at Greenwood and always bear in mind how their actions reflect on the family reputation. The family cook, a Cajun woman named Nina, gives Ruby a voodoo-inspired ankle bracelet to ward off evil spirits. Ruby's boyfriend, Beau, arrives to say goodbye. Beau dated Gisselle before Ruby arrived in New Orleans, but now is completely loyal to Ruby. Their relationship is under siege from their parents after Ruby was caught painting a nude Beau, but they continue to see each other surreptitiously. During their emotional goodbye, Beau promises to visit Ruby at school, and gives her a locket with their pictures in it - a gift which arouses Gisselle's jealousy. Gisselle fights her father and complains until the last minute, but eventually they are on their way to Greenwood.

Prologue & Chapter 1: First Day Analysis

The letter to Paul in the prologue acts as a device for delivering exposition: Pearl in the Mist is the second novel in a series about Ruby and her family, so in the letter, readers get caught up on what they missed in the first novel. Despite all the drama Ruby describes in her young life, she presents herself as rather naïve, wondering, "Maybe we've already had our share of hardships and misfortune and maybe the rest of our lives will be full of good and happy things" (p. 5). Readers can assume this is not the case or it would make for a boring novel. Though naïve, readers also note that Ruby is



good-natured about her trials and maintains an attitude of "forgive and forget" rather than wallowing in bitterness. Ruby puts stock in the concept of destiny, believing she is on a course laid out by fate, which she cannot control. Given her introduction into the world, in which her twin sister was sold to her father's family and raised in wealthy New Orleans while she grew up poor in a shack in the bayou - positions which could very easily have been reversed - it is not surprising Ruby feels like the events of her life are arbitrary and out of her hands.

In Chapter 1, Ruby describes a recurring nightmare in which she drifts through the bayou toward the cry of a baby, a tiny girl whose face is "the color of a pearl" (p. 8). With the description's prominent position in the first chapter, and given its allusion to the title, readers should note the details of this dream and its foreshadowing quality. Readers can reasonably expect a baby to arrive in Ruby's world before the end of the novel. Gisselle's introduction is unambiguous: she is whiny and irresponsible, without any love for her sister. Whatever Gisselle can blame on Ruby, justified or not, she does. Gisselle complains about her wheelchair but manipulates her situation to her advantage, seeking pity to get her way. Her attitude is epitomized by her statement, "Everyone should be thinking of me first and my suffering" (p. 9). Meanwhile, Daphne's admonition for the twins to monitor their behavior to preserve the family honor reveals her priorities: she only cares about the twins inasmuch as they can damage her good name. Though ostensibly a patriarchal household, Daphne and Gisselle clearly browbeat Mr. Dumas into doing their will. Only Ruby shows any filial respect for her father, which mirrors her greater passivity toward the forces of Destiny that she thinks shape her life.



Chapters 2 & 3: Further from the Bayou & Getting Along

Chapters 2 & 3: Further from the Bayou & Getting Along Summary

As the twins set out with their father for Greenwood School in Baton Rouge. Ruby feels a bit nostalgic for the people she has grown to love in New Orleans, whom she is now leaving behind. Gisselle continues to stew about their new life, while also fretting that Ruby's lower class background and how it might embarrass both of them at this elite new school. She continues complaining as they reach the Greenwood campus about how insurmountable it will be in her wheelchair. Ruby and Gisselle meet their dorm "house mother," Mrs. Penny, and their quad-mates: Jacqueline, Samantha, Kate, Victoria, and Abby. Abby is a new student, like the twins. She and Ruby become fast friends, although Ruby immediately senses that Abby has a secret, a mysterious past like her own. When Ruby and Gisselle learn they will share a room, Gisselle immediately starts manipulating everyone around her.

Having overpacked just to be difficult, Gisselle requires extra space for her belongings and stores stuff in Abby's room since she does not have a roommate - although as usual, Gisselle accepts Abby's offer of help without graciousness. Gisselle forces her father to get her a concession so she does not have to wear the school's uniform, and she plots how she can use her wheelchair to keep her out of trouble. Despite her unpleasant demeanor, she quickly charms and dominates her roommates, particularly Samantha, who immediately volunteers to help Gisselle with whatever she might need. The twins say goodbye to their father, and Ruby promises to watch over Gisselle and try to make her see the bright side of being at Greenwood.

The veteran Greenwood students warn Ruby and Gisselle about the severe strictness of Mrs. Ironwood, the school's administrator/principal, whom they will meet at the orientation assembly. Their assessment is correct, as Mrs. Ironwood proves a stern disciplinarian, clearly unimpressed when Gisselle comments at will throughout her lecture. The list of Greenwood rules is long: no alcohol, drugs, makeup, smoking, or loud music. Breaking the rules results in demerits that lead to harsh punishments. The new girls also learn they will be invited to tea at Mrs. Clairborne's mansion. Mrs. Clairborne endows the school, and Mrs. Ironwood is her niece. The school's patron likes to get to know all the students in her care, and repeat invitations are issued to girls who distinguish themselves. Gisselle is appalled to learn the students have little access to Baton Rouge itself, that social events with boys are only scheduled once a month, and that the students are expected to assist with serving and cleaning up meals. She takes pride in shocking her roommates, smoking cigarettes in their room and talking about sex and masturbation.



Ruby and Abby take a walk to the school's lake. Having trusted Abby with the secret of her Cajun upbringing in the bayou, Abby returns the favor to Ruby: she reveals she is a "quadroon," which means she is one quarter black, having a Haitian grandmother. Abby admits her parents didn't even want children because of the stigma, and when her boyfriend, a descendant of a Confederate hero, found out about her ancestry, he broke up with her. Abby's parents sent her to Greenwood to try to let her pass as white and become a true member of society's upper crust. While at the lake, the girls meet Buck Dardar, the school's attractive Indian groundskeeper, who admonishes them for walking the grounds after dark. Bonded by their shared secrets, the girls return to their dorm.

Chapters 2 & 3: Further from the Bayou & Getting Along Analysis

Ruby continues to show her innocence, fantasizing that perhaps she, Gisselle, Daphne, and her father can be a real family one day. She has forgiven Daphne for trying to institutionalize her, and wants to move forward with their relationship. But Daphne has not forgiven Mr. Dumas for cheating on her with Ruby and Gisselle's Cajun mother seventeen years ago. Their worldviews are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Andrews creates vivid descriptions of the Dumas twins' quad mates as their physicality reflects their personalities. For example, Jacqueline (Jacki) has "a small mouth with thin lips that became pale rubber bands, especially when she smirked" (p. 40). The readers' mental image of the abrupt snap of a rubber band resonated with the quick and painfully sharp sarcasm that characterizes Jacqui. Samantha is described as "an adorable doll-like strawberry blonde" (p. 41). Her small stature and youthful appearance evoke this image of a doll, a toy, that Gisselle plays with at will. Samantha is the first to fall under Gisselle's spell and complies easily with her every wish. Victoria, the studious roommate reflects the stereotypes of a straight-A student: "thick-lensed black frame glasses" (p. 41) and an unattractive face. In this world of appearances, it doesn't matter if she's smart if she isn't also pretty.

Abby's late arrival gives the girls time to speculate about her. Kate wonders, "You don't think she's..." (p. 44), leaving the thought unfinished for decorum's sake, but clearly wondering if Abby is from a lower class of breeding or race. Jacqueline immediately rejects the notion, claiming, "They don't let them into Greenwood, no matter who protests" (p. 44). The hint of prejudice illuminates a key theme in the book: discrimination based on race and social status. This discrimination foreshadows events that will unfold as the novel progresses. Once Abby reveals to Ruby she is racially mixed, readers can presume it is only a matter of time before other students find out as well.



Chapter 4: My Sister's Keeper

Chapter 4: My Sister's Keeper Summary

While settling into the new, structured routine of Greenwood, Ruby is summoned to Mrs. Ironwood's office. She is surprised to learn that Mrs. Ironwood and Daphne spoke about her, and Mrs. Ironwood is dubious about Ruby's background and ability to adjust from a "backward life to a more civilized one" (p. 72). Though Mrs. Ironwood is glad to see Ruby has a good academic history and talent for painting, she is grim as to whether Ruby's manners and breeding are up to snuff. Mrs. Ironwood reiterates Daphne's warning that Ruby needs to watch her step in order to uphold the Dumas name, and vows to keep an extra close watch on Ruby to ensure she behaves appropriately. Ruby sees the injustice of this "guilty until proven innocent" attitude and is not afraid to speak up for herself, which does not win her favor with Mrs. Ironwood. Mrs. Ironwood further blindsides Ruby with the responsibility for Gisselle's behavior. If Gisselle falls behind in class or acts up, Ruby will be blamed. Ruby points out the hypocrisy of Mrs. Ironwood's requests: Ruby, who is supposedly wild and low class, is given much more responsibility than her "well-bred" twin. Mrs. Ironwood doesn't care about Ruby's protests, and dismisses her.

Ruby falls into a despairing mood until her art class with a new, young teacher named Miss Stevens. As with Abby, Ruby and Miss Stevens immediately connect, and Miss Stevens is impressed that Ruby has already had work sold in a gallery in New Orleans. Miss Stevens suggests an off-campus outing to do to paint the natural world, and Ruby readily agrees: she is passionate about her painting and wants to devote more time to it.

Gisselle blames Ruby for everything that is horrible about Greenwood, and Ruby wonders how she will possibly keep Gisselle in line and keep both of them away from the notice of Mrs. Ironwood. Fortunately for Ruby, Gisselle begins relying on Samantha and their other roommates to assist her getting around school. When the scholastically-minded Victoria prioritizes her school work over Gisselle's petty needs, Gisselle punishes her by hiding a term paper Victoria has to turn in. A phone call from Beau cheers Ruby up, and he promises to visit the following weekend. Her prospects further brighten when Gisselle suggests a roommate swap: Ruby will move in with Abby, and Samantha will room with Gisselle. The shift makes Ruby optimistic about life at Greenwood.

Chapter 4: My Sister's Keeper Analysis

In this chapter, readers begin to see the obstacles in Ruby's life because of her Cajun heritage. Mrs. Ironwood, egged on by Daphne's pejorative descriptions of Ruby, is prejudiced against her from the start. Despite Ruby's excellent academic record, Mrs. Ironwood characterizes her as having a "strain of independence, that Cajun stubbornness, a wildness that must be kept in tow" (p. 74). The irony is that Gisselle,



who is also half Cajun by birth, displays these negative characteristics far more than Ruby does, even though Gisselle was raised among the upper crust of a sophisticated urban society. Nobody considers Gisselle Cajun, nor does anyone degrade or mock her for her ancestry. There is a hierarchy of acceptable class and breeding in this society. Gisselle's "Cajunness" is erased because she was properly raised by a family with a good name, and her continual bad behavior does not diminish her social standing. Ruby, raised as a Cajun, is socially lower than Gisselle, but higher on the social ladder than Abby, who is biracial. Had her ancestry been known when she applied to Greenwood she would have been accepted. The strata and depth of prejudice in this aristocratic Southern community run deep.

Ruby's martyr-like attitude toward Gisselle's behavior and her unwillingness to fight back might irk readers looking for direct confrontation and resolution, or who find themselves exhausted by the constant torment Ruby receives at Gisselle's hands, but Ruby proves her passivity is actually a smart strategy, saying, "Being angry at Gisselle did little good. If anything, she enjoyed seeing me upset. It was better to simply ignore her" (p. 81). Gisselle assumes everyone around her is as devious as she is. When she ruins Victoria's term paper, she refuses to admit she is involved, and accuses Victoria of sabotaging herself, "Just to get someone in trouble" (p. 83). Gisselle's mind is so twisted with self-absorption she can only imagine everyone thinks exactly as she does, and that the world is peopled by individuals out to "get" each other.



Chapters 5 & 6: Sad Songs & A Surprising Invitation

Chapters 5 & 6: Sad Songs & A Surprising Invitation Summary

Ruby and Gisselle speak to their father on the phone. Ruby worries that he sounds sick and stressed, despite the fact that their absence from New Orleans was supposed to ease tension. Mrs. Penny escorts them, along with Abby, to their introductory tea with Mrs. Clairborne. They are driven by Buck, whom Gisselle takes an intent interest in, wondering how Ruby and Abby already know him. Mrs. Penny gives the girls a history of the Clairborne family and mansion, a former sugar plantation. As they get their bearings in the great house, Ruby notices that all the clocks are stopped at 2:05. Like her niece Mrs. Ironwood, the elderly Mrs. Clairborne has a stern presence. After the girls introduce themselves, Mrs. Clairborne makes a speech about the important values and traditions of Greenwood. Even Gisselle is cowed by her intensity.

Ruby excuses herself to go to the bathroom and stumbles into the presence of a gifted blind piano player, whom she learns is Louis, Mrs. Claiborne's nephew. Louis initially disdains Ruby as just another stuck up Greenwood student, but they bond over their mutual passion for their art (Louis can only express his emotions through his playing). Louis has not always been blind, but he doesn't share with Ruby how he lost his sight. Because his hearing has sharpened due to his diminished sight, Louis recognizes Ruby's accent as from the Cajun bayou. He respects her even more for having enrolled at Greenwood despite the school's "pure blood" demands. He recognizes she is not like the other Greenwood girls in temperament either.

After the tea, Gisselle uses her "helpless" status to make a small sexual advance on Buck. As the only young man on campus, she sets her sights on him as a conquest. Mrs. Penny is shocked that Ruby wandered into the Clairborne's private quarters and met Louis, but she shares a few more details about him: he went blind after the tragic death of his parents when he was 14. Mrs. Penny refuses to share the details of their death. She tells the girls Louis suffers from "melancholia," an old-fashioned diagnosis for depression, and that he rarely leaves the Clairborne mansion. Back at the dorm, Gisselle overhears Ruby and Abby discussing Abby's "secret," and demands to know what it is. She is placated when Ruby makes up a story about a sexual indiscretion that got Abby suspended at a former school.

Miss Stevens invites Ruby off campus for a painting excursion, and they bond over their unusual pasts: Miss Stevens was raised by nuns in an orphanage, which has made her extra shy around men. Miss Stevens also reveals the story behind Louis's blindness: his mother cheated on his father with a much younger man, and he committed a murder-suicide. Louis's blindness is not physical but psychological due to the trauma, and the



stopped clocks at the Clairborne mansion are set to the time Louis's mother, Mrs. Clairborne's daughter, died.

When Ruby returns to her dorm, she finds Mrs. Penny fretting: she should not have left campus without a signed permission slip from her parents. Ruby asks Mrs. Penny not to get her or Miss Stevens in trouble, as it was an honest mistake. Mrs. Penny shares more shocking news: Ruby has been invited to the Clairborne mansion for dinner at Louis's request, an honor never bestowed on a Greenwood student. Gisselle jealously assumes Ruby must have given in to Louis's sexual needs to receive such an invitation. Upon arriving at the Clairborne mansion, Ruby quickly learns that Mrs. Clairborne is unhappy with Ruby's presence and acquaintance with her grandson. Louis keeps his grandmother from overt rudeness toward Ruby and takes an active interest in learning as much as possible about Ruby. Alone, Louis plays the piano for Ruby, and admits he has never been so physically close to a woman. She allows him to touch her and even kiss her, but when she pulls back, he gets embarrassed and asks her to leave. He is distraught and fearful, but he will not tell Ruby why.

Chapters 5 & 6: Sad Songs & A Surprising Invitation Analysis

Mrs. Clairborne believes that Greenwood is "one of the last bastions of moral fiber that once made the South the true capital of gentility and grace. Here you girls will get a sense of your traditions, your heritage. In other places, especially in the Northeast and the West, radicals are invading every aspect of our culture, thinning it out, diluting what was once pure cream and turning it into skim milk" (p. 98). Besides noting how old-fashioned and conservatives Mrs. Clairborne's (and by extension, Greenwood's) values are, readers should stay mindful that Mrs. Clairborne makes this speech to Ruby and Abby, two girls whom she would consider to have "diluted" the pure blood and gentility that is the benchmark of the South. There is also a noticeable gender gap in these attitudes: Louis does not share his grandmother's feelings about racially mixed people like Ruby, nor does Gisselle think Buck, a Native American, is unworthy of pursuit due to his racial background. (Though, of course, given Gisselle's salacious and perverse attitudes, Buck's appeal to her might simply be that a relationship with him is taboo.)

When Gisselle overhears Abby and Ruby discussing Abby's secret, she expresses some jealousy that Ruby confides in Abby like they are sisters, rather than in Gisselle, her actual sister. It is hard to tell what motivates this jealousy: does Gisselle, deep down, crave a sisterly connection of love and trust? Or is her selfishness and self-absorption so all-encompassing that she cannot stand anyone having anything that she can't have, even if she doesn't truly want it? Readers may follow Gisselle's actions to see if she ever does anything truly genuine and selfless on her sister's behalf. Ruby claims her grandmother told her "your first impressions about people usually prove to be the truest because your heart is first to react" (p. 110). If readers follow this advice, Gisselle may prove irredeemable. Since Gisselle almost catches Abby and Ruby discussing Abby's racial heritage, readers only need to sit back and wait for her to find out Abby's secret. Because Abby and Ruby didn't take Gisselle into their confidence in a



forthright manner, readers can assume Gisselle will find a way to get revenge when she does find out.

Ruby and Abby learn they each have a voodoo-invested item to ward off evil. Readers should be encouraged to track whether these charms actually brings the girls any luck. Louis says to Ruby, "As you see, my grandmother has definite feelings about everything. It makes things easier. I don't have to think for myself" (p. 121). Mrs. Clairborne also treats the Greenwood girls with this unrelenting authority, as was evident in her lecture on Greenwood's values. She expects her students to acquiesce to sharing all the values and attitudes she expresses. Though Ruby does not set out to break any Greenwood rules or be overtly rebellious, the fact that she refuses to be brainwashed into like-minded conservative thinking will prove her downfall at Greenwood. Though her actions are often passive, her thinking is less so.



Chapter 7: So Many Rules

Chapter 7: So Many Rules Summary

Ruby returns to the dorm, confused about Louis and his tortured past. She and Abby agree everyone deserves a fresh start. As the week progresses, Ruby is relieved to note Gisselle is on her best behavior and seemingly on top of her schoolwork, though she wonders what machinations Gisselle has brewing below the surface. Ruby's paranoia proves justified when she once again finds herself in Mrs. Ironwood's office, where she gets in trouble for leaving campus with Miss Stevens. After Mrs. Ironwood insults Ruby's background, Ruby realizes the true reason she is being punished: Mrs. Ironwood believes she used her feminine wiles to wheedle an invitation from Louis for dinner, in an attempt to dupe him into falling in love with her. Ruby only makes the situation worse when she admits she feels sorry for Louis and the way the Clairbornes have caged him in the mansion. As punishment, her social privileges are revoked for a week, meaning Beau can't come visit her as planned. Ruby discovers Gisselle ratted her out to Mrs. Ironwood in an attempt to make Ruby hate Greenwood and demand of their father that they return to New Orleans.

Unable to use the phone as part of her punishment, Ruby misses a call from Louis, which sends him into a rage. He forces his cousin, Mrs. Ironwood, to give Ruby permission to visit him, which shocks everyone. Though Ruby is irritated that she couldn't see Beau but the rules can be bent so she can see Louis, she nevertheless goes to the Clairborne mansion, where Louis apologizes for his behavior on her previous visit. He admits Ruby has made him less fearful of being mocked for his blindness, less afraid of the outside world in general. He gives her a song he has written on her behalf.

Louis takes her to his room, where he slowly reveals the secrets of his past. His mother molested him as a child, and he has very conflicted feelings about their unnatural relationship, which he both enjoyed and is ashamed of. When his father discovered the incest, he beat Louis and broke the bond between Louis and his mother. When she turned to another young boy to molest, his father murdered her and killed himself. Louis regresses into his childhood as he tells the story, turning Ruby into his mother, asking her to act out her part. He admits he's never told the truth to anyone before. Finally seemingly at peace, he falls asleep and Ruby returns to the dorm.

Chapter 7: So Many Rules Analysis

In her analysis of Ruby's evening at the Clairborne mansion, Mrs. Penny claims Ruby should be proud of herself for garnering the honor of an invitation. Ruby thinks to herself, "[Proud] for being invited to a dinner? Why wasn't it more of an honor to paint a beautiful picture or get high marks on a school test?" (p. 130). In the old-fashioned world of the novel, Ruby displays an interesting tension: she desires to be a good and



obedient daughter and student, in keeping with the times, but occasionally, as in this thought, she displays a nascent feminism. The fact that she keeps the thought to herself proves she still generally subscribes to the idea that women should be seen and not heard, but readers should note this small breach in her thought pattern, and track whether or not it evolves as the novel progresses.

Mrs. Ironwood continues to display prejudicial tendencies when she chastises Ruby for leaving campus with Miss Stevens, explaining explicitly why Ruby's actions made the school liable and claiming, "Normally, I don't find it necessary to explain our reasoning, but in this case, with your particularly history, I have done so just so that you understand I am not, as some of your type are bound to claim, picking on you" (p. 133). She further calls Ruby's background "depraved" (p. 134) and calls her behavior "insidious, subtle" (p. 135). For a school that prides itself on bestowing gentility and good breeding on its students, Mrs. Ironwood displays a narrow-mindedness and lack of tact that directly contradicts the school's mission. Her hypocrisy belies an injustice that will doggedly hound Ruby, no matter what she does.

Louis's revelation about his relationship with his mother harkens back to ancient Greek drama: the incestuous encounter between Oedipus and his mother. Even Louis's blindness mirrors that of Oedipus: upon discovering he has slept with his mother, Oedipus stabs out his own eyes. Similarly, Louis's blindness is self-inflicted. It is psychosomatic rather than physical. Louis's scene of reenactment with Ruby is disturbingly erotic. His feelings toward his mother are so conflicted; though he loved her and enjoyed their closeness, he knows she took advantage of him and that what they did was wrong. The scene is dark, and Ruby passively listens and allows Louis to expel his demons. She is a sieve through which he can funnel his emotions.



Chapters 8 & 9: Suspicions & A Friend in Need

Chapters 8 & 9: Suspicions & A Friend in Need Summary

Though deeply disturbed by her visit with Louis, Ruby is surprised when he writes her a note of gratitude and admits he suddenly can distinguish between light and shadow, the first time he's seen anything but darkness in almost twenty years. Ruby turns her attention to the upcoming Halloween dance, when Greenwood will be visited by boys from another school. Despite the many rules that accompany the dance, the girls are all excited to mingle with the young men. Uncharacteristically, Gisselle acts kindly toward Abby: she tells Abby that as the prettiest girl everyone will vote for Abby for the queen of the dance, and gives Abby a ribbon to wear in her hair. Gisselle decides the quad-mates should attend the dance as a united group. As soon as the dance begins, Gisselle's oddly generous behavior turns sour. No boys ask Abby to dance, not even when Ruby prompts them to. The longer Ruby stands loyally by her friend, the less attention she receives from the gentlemen of Rosewood school as well. Ruby realizes Gisselle may have spread some indiscrete rumors about her too, when the arrogant brother of one of Ruby's classmates makes some innuendo-laden statements to her. Ruby confronts Gisselle with her suspicions that Gisselle has somehow turned the Rosewood boys against Abby, but Gisselle feigns indifference. The evening reaches a climax when Gisselle is asked to announce the queen of the dance. Abby wins, and Gisselle announces why it is a historic event: Abby is the first quadroon to be awarded the honor in the school's history. Shocked after her secret is revealed so publicly, Abby acts with dignity. She has already decided to encourage her parents to stop denying their heritage.

In Chapter 9, Abby leaves the dance but Ruby cannot chase her without incurring the wrath of Mrs. Ironwood. Ruby worries frantically about her friend walking alone in a storm. Miss Stevens takes her car to search for Abby, to no avail. Though Gisselle claims to have no involvement in the night's events, Samantha privately admits to Ruby that Gisselle discovered Abby's heritage when she entered their room and read some of Abby's private letters. Samantha is the only student who shows any remorse for what happens to Abby, but begs Ruby not to tell Gisselle what she has revealed. Ruby warns Samantha that Gisselle will most likely turn on her too one day. Abby returns to the school with her parents to pick up her things. She admits she is relieved to be attending a public school and forgoing the secrecy surrounding her racial background.

Ruby is devastated to lose her one true friend at Greenwood, and anticipates life at the private school becoming even more difficult. She pours out her sorrows in a letter to Paul, wondering if she should ask her father to allow her and Gisselle to return to school in New Orleans. After a pep talk from Miss Stevens and a cheerful letter from Paul,



Ruby tries to be more optimistic, looking forward to the upcoming visits from her father and Beau. But fate throws her world into turmoil yet again when she learns that her father has suddenly died.

Chapters 8 & 9: Suspicions & A Friend in Need Analysis

Ruby speaks to her father, who sounds sicker than in their previous conversation. Astute readers will note that his chest cold is getting worse and not better. There are shades of foreshadowing in this phone call. Though Mr. Dumas promises to visit his daughters the following week, readers likely that assume this visit will never take place.

After Abby's public shaming, Ruby is the only Greenwood student who stands up for her. The Rosewood boys and Greenwood girls all subscribe to the prevailing notion that races and classes shouldn't mix. Though powerless to actually help Abby, Ruby's aggressive verbal defense of her friend proves the independent streak Mrs. Ironwood keeps accusing her of. Though Ruby follows the school's rules, Greenwood cannot subdue her thinking. Gisselle makes some innuendo about the nature of Ruby's relationship with Abby, implying that there may be lesbian undertones in their closeness. Though in most ways Ruby is much more open-minded than her peers, her enraged and disgusted reaction to Gisselle's subtle teasing indicates homosexuality is the outer limit of her tolerance. Her attitudes not only reflect the mid twentieth century values of the novel, but the pervasive conservatism on the issue of sexual orientation that still existed when the book was written in 1994.



Chapters 10 & 11: Orphaned Again & The Gloves Are Off

Chapters 10 & 11: Orphaned Again & The Gloves Are Off Summary

Ruby and Gisselle travel back to New Orleans for their father's funeral. Ruby is utterly devastated to lose her father so soon after forging their relationship, while Gisselle is more concerned with how Daphne will tighten the reins on their lives. She blames their father for not taking better care of himself. Ruby naively thinks Mr. Dumas's death will change Daphne's perspective and make her appreciate the twins more. But their reunion with Daphne is none too familial, nor do they share the bond of mutual grief. Daphne wastes no time laying down the new rules: she will not spoil or indulge the twins as Mr. Dumas did. She threatens to disinherit them if they do not behave properly, presenting a "good face" to the greater community, during the wake and funeral. Appearances are at the forefront of her priorities. Ruby frets about her father's brother Jean, her uncle, who is in a mental asylum and depends on her father's visits to sustain him. Daphne refuses to tell Jean of Mr. Dumas's death. Meanwhile Gisselle merely complains that Daphne intends to send them back to Greenwood. Like Mrs. Ironwood, Daphne unfairly makes Ruby responsible for Gisselle's behavior throughout the public mourning process. Ruby finds some solace in Beau's condolences and his promises to take her to see her Uncle Jean.

The next day Ruby and Beau go to the mental institution to see Jean. Ruby is appalled to learn Daphne has already cut the funds that support Jean and he has been removed from his private room and put in a communal ward. The move has already sent Jean deeper into his mental incapacity, and when Ruby reveals the news of her father, Jean withdraws even more. Ruby worries that he has now irrevocably gone over the edge and blames herself. Daphne is displeased to learn of Ruby's trip to Jean, but Ruby fires back with her displeasure about Uncle Jean's living conditions. Daphne proclaims it a waste of money as Jean will never fully recover anyway. Daphne punishes Ruby by confining her to her room during the pending wake. Gisselle's skewed priorities make her jealous that Ruby can skip the wake, while Ruby herself despairs that she cannot show honor and respect to her deceased father.

In a moment of what seems to be genuine empathy, Gisselle sneaks Beau up to Ruby's room during the wake. But when Gisselle leaves her sentry post, Daphne immediately discovers them. Though they are merely talking, Daphne accuses them of inappropriate behavior and promises to tell Beau's parents and further estrange their relationship. The funeral is sad but uneventful, and Ruby is greatly consoled when her half-brother Paul arrives. Disgusted by his Cajun background, Daphne only allows them a brief time together. It is clear Paul still has romantic feelings for Ruby, no matter how inappropriate. Ruby encourages him to seek love elsewhere. After Paul leaves, Daphne



announces some new rules. Besides returning to Greenwood immediately, she is cutting their allowance and warns them she'll send them to reform school if they misbehave at school. Gisselle tries to fight with Daphne, but Ruby is resigned to their unjust fate.

Chapters 10 & 11: Orphaned Again & The Gloves Are Off Analysis

The twins' differing reactions to the death of their father succinctly describes their polar personalities. Ruby wants to see her father's body immediately in order to say goodbye, while Gisselle thinks it is creepy to go near the coffin. Gisselle is happier to be back in New Orleans to see her old friends than she is upset that her father is dead. Gisselle worries how Daphne will further deprive and shackle them, while Ruby hopes their mutual grief will act as a balm to heal the old resentments and sins. Daphne's reaction to her husband's death is as unfeeling as Gisselle's. She claims, "I'm still a very young woman. I don't intend to let these events age and sicken me" (p. 195). The pervasive presence of business partner Bruce foreshadows a deepening relationship between him and Daphne. Also like Gisselle, Daphne can't understand true goodness in other people. She thinks Ruby came to New Orleans in order to manipulate her way into her father's will, rather than out of a genuine desire to forge a filial connection. She claims Mr. Dumas had no sense for business and she has been running things for years. There is an interesting statement being made about women and power. If Daphne's claims are true and she has been controlling the family business, she has done so by being uncompassionate and ruthless - that is, she has behaved like a man. In the world of the novel, the only way women can exercise power actively is to reduce their "feminine" qualities, and thus Daphne displays no maternal instinct. She is a hard and cunning woman, and readers can see her influence reflected in Gisselle, even though there is no love between the two women.

With her last real feeling of family gone, Ruby despairs, but Beau promises she'll always have him to rely on. Ruby responds, "It's better not to make a promise than to make one you can't keep" (p. 203). Readers should note some foreshadowing here. Beau may ultimately not be able to keep his promise. Readers may also note the fairy tale like quality of Ruby's story, particularly in reference to Cinderella. Her father is married to a rich but evil woman, and Gisselle stands in perfectly for the evil stepsisters. Ruby is treated as an outcast within her own family. Like Cinderella, she is docile and good. She may occasionally speak her mind but she does not try to fight "Fate" in the form of Daphne and Gisselle, and she allows herself to be carried along by the choices others make for her.



Chapter 12: Dark Clouds

Chapter 12: Dark Clouds Summary

As usual, Gisselle blames Ruby for their return to Greenwood. Gisselle immediately flies into a rage when they arrive at the dorm, accusing Samantha of using her things while they were gone, and further blames Ruby for forcing her to switch roommates. With Abby gone, Gisselle demands that Samantha move in with Ruby, leaving Gisselle her own room. She vows to take care of herself despite the wheelchair. Gisselle further forces the entire group to ostracize Samantha, until she allows Samantha to reinstate herself: Samantha is forced to act out her sexual fantasies in order to rejoin the group. Despite the humiliation, Samantha does what Gisselle tells her. Ruby receives a condolence call from Louis, who invites her to dinner to see his progress, for which he gives her all the credit. Ruby worries that Louis has become too attached to her, and wonders how he will react when she tells him about Beau. Despite the restrictions on their relationship, Beau calls Ruby and promises to find a way to see her when she returns to New Orleans for the holidays in a few weeks. He also reveals Daphne and Mr. Dumas' business partner, Bruce, are ruthlessly managing her father's business, cruelly seizing property from tenants Mr. Dumas had been compassionate to.

Ruby notices that Gisselle seems exhausted from taking care of herself, and Gisselle's schoolwork is slipping. When Ruby confronts her about this, Gisselle is determined to stay independent. Ruby tries to check up on her sister, only to find her door locked and no response from inside. Gisselle also locks herself in her room during a dorm-wide party. Though she finds it odd, Ruby assumes Gisselle is just stretched too thin from her attempt at "freedom." Ruby goes to visit Louis and is amazed that his vision has improved so much, though he still can't quite see. He has decided to continue his recovery at a clinic in Switzerland where he will also study piano. He credits Ruby with his progress and believes he will continue to improve as long as she is close. Though she flinches at the weight of that responsibility, Louis has demanded his grandmother allow Ruby to visit whenever she wants. Ruby reluctantly agrees. Louis plays the completed symphony he has written for her.

Chapter 12: Dark Clouds Analysis

Gisselle's punishment of Samantha is strange and cruel: she forces her to take off her clothes and make out with a pillow as if it were a boy. This demonstrates Gisselle's unique perspective on sex as a weapon, a tool for gaining power. She tells her classmates about her sexual escapades as a way to inspire awe and respect. When Gisselle dated Beau before Ruby arrived in New Orleans, she would torment him by flirting with other boys. Gisselle views men as "playthings, not to be trusted and not worthy of loyalty." Given that Gisselle was raised by a loving father, readers may wonder if she learned this attitude toward men and having power over them from Daphne.



Ruby's relationship with Louis is conflicted: she seems to have no active interest in their friendship, but she does not actively try to break ties with him either. When he asks if she wants to see him on a regular basis, her response is lukewarm at best: "Louis, I don't mind coming up here whenever I can, but..." (p. 244). He interrupts her before she can continue, only hearing what he wants to, and she doesn't push to tell him the truth. While Ruby often stands up for herself with other women, her relationship with men is much more passive: she submits to the will of her father, Beau, and Louis without fighting for what she really wants. Though she does not want to attend Greenwood, she does it for her father's sake. Louis gives her all the credit for his recovery, but there is nothing active about her role in it: her mere presence as a talisman, a good luck charm, is leading to his recovery. She is not pushing him to get better, to snap out of his self-induced state of inertia.



Chapter 13: False Accusations

Chapter 13: False Accusations Summary

Once again Ruby is summoned to Mrs. Ironwood's office where she is shocked to learn she will be subjected to an expulsion hearing. A respected teacher alleges to have witnessed her after curfew having an illicit rendezvous at the boathouse with Buck. The accuser is Mrs. Gray, a teacher Ruby has always gotten along with, and Buck himself has signed a testimony naming Ruby before he was fired and forced off the grounds. Ruby cannot begin to fathom the allegations, as she was with Louis at the time, but Mrs. Ironwood refuses to allow Ruby to involve the Clairbornes in the hearing. Ruby has no way of defending herself and is bound for expulsion but she is determined to go through with the hearing to face down her accuser. Gisselle is thrilled when she learns of Ruby's hearing, believing they have just earned their ticket back to New Orleans. Miss Stevens is more sympathetic, wondering why Mrs. Gray would lie.

Ruby begins to pack, accepting the inevitability of her fate. Before a panel of student and faculty judges, Mrs. Gray describes in great detail what she saw at the boathouse. However at the last minute, Miss Stevens brings Louis in and he provides Ruby with an alibi. He is even able to use his improved vision to prove he is a reliable witness. He threatens to also involve Mrs. Clairborne, who can corroborate his story, and Mrs. Ironwood finally relents. Ruby is not completely exonerated, but she is given a temporary reprieve from expulsion. But Mrs. Gray refuses to disbelieve her own eyes and remains disappointed in Ruby.

Ruby contemplates Mrs. Gray's testimony and her description of what Ruby was allegedly wearing - which was not the school uniform. The pieces of the puzzle begin to fall into place for Ruby, and she confronts Gisselle. Ruby is shocked to realize Gisselle can walk again, though Gisselle keeps up her crippled façade in order to receive special treatment. Gisselle barely even blinks at the collateral damage of her choices, with Buck getting fired and Ruby taking the blame for her actions. Ruby demands Gisselle tell everyone the truth, but Gisselle threatens to spread rumors about Miss Stevens' sexuality if Ruby reveals her secret.

Chapter 13: False Accusations Analysis

Mrs. Ironwood is always willing to believe the worst about Ruby, and is ecstatic at the prospect of sending Ruby back to her "own kind." But Ruby's response to the prejudice sets up a major theme in the book: "My kind doesn't look down on people just because they don't happen to be rich or descendants of some noble family. My kind doesn't plot and connive" (p. 250). The novel subverts the premise that many of the aristocracy in the book believe is a truism: the well bred, pureblooded, and wealthy are more moral because of their social standing. The "lower class" or socially ostracized characters that Ruby encounters in the novel, such as Nina, Abby, Miss Stevens, and Paul, are all



morally more upstanding than any of the wealthy Creole families Ruby mingles with. At the same time, Ruby again proves passive in the face of her "fate:" left to herself, she would surely be expelled, and only finds herself given a reprieve because Miss Stevens intervenes and brings Louis to testify on her behalf. Her inaction in the face of such a consequence, when she has proof that she is innocent, is baffling.

Buck's signed testimony about his alleged encounters with Ruby offers an interesting view on female sexuality. The statement reads, "Miss Dumas came to my quarters on at least a half dozen previous occasions to flirt and offer herself to me. I confess to accepting her advances" (p. 258). Besides placing most of the blame squarely on "Ruby," or the woman's shoulders as the lustful temptress, the precise wording of the statement demonstrates an attitude toward woman solely as objects. The woman "offers" her body almost like a commodity. Her sexual agency is tied up with concepts of a) evil and b) soulless objectification.



Chapter 14: Unexpected Gifts

Chapter 14: Unexpected Gifts Summary

As the Christmas holidays approach, Ruby goes to visit Louis one more time. She is shocked when he gives her a one carat ruby ring and a recorded copy of her symphony as presents. Ruby takes the presents without hesitation but realizes she must finally tell Louis about Beau. However Louis guesses her feelings lay with someone else, and he is not upset about it, merely grateful to her for being his muse. They vow to remain good friends even as he disembarks for Switzerland.

Ruby receives more surprises when she and Gisselle arrive home in New Orleans: Daphne has completely changed her attitude and doles out permissions to the twins: they can have friends over for New Year's Eve and Ruby can see Beau. There is a heaping stack of gifts for the girls under the Christmas tree. Ruby is uncomfortable with the jovial nature of the house so soon after her father's death, but tries to go with the flow. Daphne tells Ruby she is impressed with the adjustments she is making and promises to give her and Gisselle extra freedom over the holidays, as long as Ruby takes responsibility for her sister's behavior. Daphne claims she wants to start the year fresh as a real family. Ruby is suspicious about Daphne's motives but has no choice but to go along.

Ruby turns her attention to Beau, who is allowed to see her again. She tells him about Louis and his gifts in order to ward off Gisselle from trying to create a scandalous wedge between them. On Christmas Eve, Gisselle and Ruby are permitted to have a few friends over: Beau and Gisselle's latest boyfriend, John. Beau gives Ruby his class ring as a Christmas gift, a precursor to an engagement ring. In an attempt to relax and throw off her reputation as a "Miss Goody Two Shoes," Ruby makes love with Beau. When Gisselle sees the ring she gets envious, and as Ruby predicted, tries to make Beau jealous by telling him about Louis - but to no avail.

Chapter 14: Unexpected Gifts Analysis

In this chapter readers can starkly see the opposing views Ruby and Gisselle have toward sex. Ruby views sex as the ultimate physical manifestation of a pure and true love: "Let's not make each other feel guilty or dirty. I love you and you love me. Nothing else matters, and that makes whatever we do good and pure, because it's good and pure to us" (p. 284). She justifies her actions with concepts of love though her instinct appears to be to feel shame about giving in to her carnal desires. She also treats sex like a submission rather than an active choice, "permitt[ing] her body to slide under him" (p. 283). As previously discussed, Gisselle uses her sexuality to toy with and manipulate men. She uses it to put herself in a position of power. She cleverly and disturbingly uses her handicap to play into the "damsel in distress" stereotype that she recognizes appeals to men. She claims, "My pretending to be so helpless turns him on. It turns



them all on, you know. Men like feeling in charge, even though they're not" (p. 287). She uses her position of seeming powerlessness to control the men in her life. Similarly, the twins view love itself from opposite perspectives. Ruby believes in love first, and then sex, while Gisselle proclaims to be uninterested in anything but having fun and marrying rich. Ruby believes Gisselle is lying and says, "You won't admit it, not even to yourself, but you want someone to love you, only...no one's going to love someone so selfish" (p. 287). It is difficult to discern if Ruby is projecting her own goodness and optimism on Gisselle, or if Gisselle is truly jealous of the richer emotional life Ruby enjoys. Gisselle herself never speaks or acts in a way to truly support Ruby's claim.

Ruby sums up the opposing sides she and Gisselle represent by using a comparison to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: "I saw her as the embodiment of all the evil inclinations in my own heart and imagined I was looking at the darker part of myself, almost like Dr. Jekyll peering into a mirror and seeing Mr. Hyde. And like Dr. Jekyll, I couldn't hate this side of myself as much as I wanted because it was still part of me, part of who I was" (p. 281-2). No matter what, Ruby's sunny disposition cannot be corrupted. Within another oft-used symbolic dichotomy, Ruby, despite her sexual experiences, is the "Madonna" to Gisselle's "whore."



Chapter 15: Bought and Paid For

Chapter 15: Bought and Paid For Summary

Without her father or her grandmother, Christmas is not as happy or exciting for Ruby as it once was. She fantasizes about her future, a marriage with Beau, who "would take me from this fractured family and place me on the threshold of a new life, one filled with hope and love" (p. 290). Mr. Dumas' ex-business partner, Bruce, is at the mansion early dressed as Santa, ready for the festivities to begin. Gisselle suffers a massive hangover from her exploits the evening before, and Ruby takes pity on her and visits the voodoo servant, Nina, for a tonic to make her better. She also asks Nina to do a charm to bless the love between her and Beau. The twins open presents with Daphne and Bruce, and Ruby is baffled by Daphne's unprecedented generosity. Daphne even tells her she has bought a gift for Uncle Jean, and she will allow Ruby to take it to him at the asylum, and allow Beau to accompany her.

The other shoe finally drops when Daphne announces she and Bruce are engaged to be married after an appropriate period of mourning. Ruby realizes Daphne's kindness is merely a bribe to ensure the girls' best behavior at the wedding and public face in general about the relationship. Gisselle hopes she can leverage the bribe to include a permanent return from Greenwood, but Daphne doesn't want them underfoot. Ruby, recognizing the disrespect to her father inherent in the situation, can only muster a vague blessing for Daphne and Bruce's union. Gisselle tries another tactic: she surprises Daphne and Bruce by wobbling to her feet, begging to stay in New Orleans to go to rehab to get stronger to walk again. Daphne agrees to consider it.

Beau arrives and Ruby takes him to Nina's room so that Nina can burn brimstone and ward off evil spirits from destroying their love. Beau is skeptical but he placates Ruby by participating. The brimstone won't light immediately, and the couple almost drops the jar, but eventually Nina gets it to smoke and hopes it is enough to ward off a love consecrated in the deceitful Dumas household. Ruby tells him about Daphne and Bruce, and Beau admits he had suspicions about their relationship even before her father died. Ruby and Beau visit Jean and discover that he is completely unresponsive, not recognizing Ruby at all. Ruby gets more depressed about this lackluster Christmas, but Beau tries to cheer her up with talk of their future attending university together, and how Ruby will become a well-known artist while he will become a doctor to honor her healer grandmother.

Back at the mansion, Ruby asks Daphne to return Jean to his own room to see if he can improve again. Daphne bargains with her: if Ruby convinces Gisselle to go back to Greenwood, she will fund Jean's move. Sensing it may be futile, Ruby consoles herself by painting, but is interrupted by Bruce. Bruce offers a cheerful bribe to get Ruby to accept him willingly into the family. Gisselle has requested that he talk Daphne into letting her stay in New Orleans, but Ruby asks that he intervene on her Uncle Jean's behalf. Bruce is impressed by the selflessness of her request. Ruby attempts to



convince Gisselle to return to Greenwood quietly, but Gisselle is adamant about staying home.

Chapter 15: Bought and Paid For Analysis

Ruby once again proves how alienated she is from her "family" when, after opening the mountain of presents from Daphne and Bruce, she feels empty, wishing for "a real Christmas morning again, when the truly important gift was the gift of love" (p. 297). Members of the "upper class" like to equate good breeding and social standing with good morals, but the misplaced value Daphne and Gisselle place on possessions and "name" prove this equation is out of balance. Ruby, raised with nothing in the bayou but a loving grandmother and a generous community, knows what really matters in life. Thematically, the novel proves time and again that money can't buy happiness.

Like the relationships with all of the men in her life, Ruby exhibits a disturbing docility around her soon-to-be stepfather Bruce. Though he leers inappropriately and makes Ruby uncomfortable, she does not stand up for herself the way she does when Mrs. Ironwood or Daphne disparages her Cajun heritage. Ruby passively "lets" Bruce embrace her even though she does not trust or like him. He says to her, "Will you let me ... be your guardian, your protector, and champion? I can make you into the princess you deserve to be" (p. 304). The fact that his interest in Ruby is creepy and somewhat incestuous is one issue, but the fact that she does not attempt to tell him to back off is a bigger problem. Most of the time, Ruby is willing to let fate drive her life, but displays an ability to speak her mind when she believes something is wrong. But not, however, when it comes to her interactions with men. It as if she believes she owes men a respect that does not apply to women.

When the ritual Nina performs to bless and fortify the love between Ruby and Beau does not go entirely smoothly (the brimstone won't light, they almost drop the jar), it foreshadows the couple's imminent relationship problems.



Chapters 16 & 17: A Brave Front & A Walking Nightmare

Chapters 16 & 17: A Brave Front & A Walking Nightmare Summary

Gisselle organizes a big New Year's Eve party for all her old friends while Ruby only invites Beau. Daphne warns the twins not to destroy the house before she and Bruce go to a party of their own. As Ruby expects, the party gets a bit out of hand, and she and Beau retreat to her bedroom to ring in the new year by making love and toasting to their future life together. Back downstairs, the house is completely trashed, with food on the walls and vomit on the floor. Ruby finds Gisselle drunkenly painting a nude John and ruining Ruby's art studio. Ruby knows Daphne will blame her for the mess, but cannot put it right alone. Daphne, as expected, is livid and promises to retaliate by sending the girls back to Greenwood. Gisselle blames Ruby for not taking the blame for the party, and for their imminent return to Baton Rouge.

The truce between Daphne and the twins is over, and Daphne won't let Gisselle take her wheelchair back to Greenwood, recognizing her stepdaughter's manipulative ways. Gisselle is only pacified by the hero's welcome she receives from her quad-mates, who are all impressed with her remarkable recovery. Disgusted with Gisselle's inexplicable, charisma, Ruby vows to herself to throw herself into her art - until she discovers Miss Stevens has resigned over the holiday. A student alleged Miss Stevens made sexual advances toward her, and Miss Stevens resigned before she could be fired. Ruby suspects Gisselle has followed through on her earlier threat to start rumors about the art teacher. Powerless, Ruby despairs that her last bastion of friendship at Greenwood has disappeared.

Beau visits Ruby in an attempt to cheer her up. They sneak into a secluded wooded area and make love again. Back at the dorm after Beau leaves, Ruby is right back to trouble when an impromptu dorm inspection leads Mrs. Ironwood to discover a bottle of rum in Ruby's dresser. Of course it is not hers, but Mrs. Ironwood won't believe her and punishes her with bathroom scrubbing duty for a month. Even Mrs. Penny is disappointed in Ruby.

Ruby finds herself ill and vomiting. A visit to the school nurse and a discussion of her symptoms quickly leads to the conclusion that Ruby is pregnant. Though the school nurse is sympathetic she is required to tell Mrs. Ironwood and Daphne. Gisselle is jealous when Ruby is expelled and forced to return home to New Orleans, where an enraged Daphne has already arranged an illegal abortion for her. Daphne is only surprised to have to do it for Ruby rather than Gisselle, but wastes no time taking Ruby down a peg for Ruby's smug moral superiority in the past. Daphne is further embittered because she herself was unable to conceive a child but Ruby did it without



even trying. She informs Ruby that Beau's parents have sent him to France to finish his schooling and Ruby will never see him or hear from him again, or he will be disinherited.

When Ruby arrives at the doctor's office, she is uneasy about its shabby appearance and the brusque, unfeeling attitude of the staff. Fearful and confused, she abruptly leaves, telling the driver to return to the mansion. But when they reach the fork in the road, Ruby shouts for the driver stop. She climbs out and begins the long journey on foot back home to the bayou.

Chapters 16 & 17: A Brave Front & A Walking Nightmare Analysis

As Ruby and Beau make love in the woods of Greenwood, she hears a woodpecker: "His tap, tap, tap grew faster and louder, until it sounded as if he was tearing down the whole forest" (p. 335). Besides underscoring the sexual tension and rhythm of the scene, readers may recall the first line of Chapter 1 - a woodpecker woke her from her nightmare about the drowning baby in the bayou. Connecting the significance of that dream with the intensity of Ruby and Beau's sexual experience foreshadows the conception of a child through their love. This foreshadowing is further emphasized when Ruby claims, "Maybe we love each other too much for our bodies to bear" (p. 336). Her body is truly going to bear the brunt of their love.

As Ruby leaves Greenwood for good, she admonishes Mrs. Penny for staying at the school and implicitly upholding their "values" of hypocrisy and prejudice. She implores her to find work somewhere where people are kind to each other, and value kindness in others. For the first time, Mrs. Penny drops her pleasant façade and proves she is cynically aware of the reality of their world. She counters Ruby's pleas to find paradise by saying, "There isn't any such place, but if you find it, send me a postcard and tell me how to get there" (p. 342). Mrs. Penny represents a third class of women. If Gisselle uses her sexuality to win power, and Daphne must shun her femininity in order to gain power in the man's world of business, Mrs. Penny is another kind of woman, denied sexual prowess or an appealing femininity. She has no power and is, more than Ruby, in the hands of fate. Fighting the prevailing value structure at Greenwood would only mean she would lose her job. She cannot afford to make enemies, and therefore only sees what she wants to see, maintaining a smile that hides her true feelings.

When Ruby states the obvious, that she did not mean to get pregnant, Daphne snaps back, "How many times since Eve conceived Cain and Abel have women uttered that stupid sentence" (p. 344). By evoking the Biblical character, Daphne alludes to a longstanding symbolism: Eve, the first woman, is the temptress who leads to the downfall of man. Womankind bears responsibility for Original Sin. Daphne implies that like Eve, Ruby tempted Beau, led to his near ruin, and alone is accountable for the consequences of her lustful actions. Daphne upholds the stereotype of weak and evil women. Even in the twentieth century, women are the reason humankind no longer lives in the Garden of Eden.



Chapter 18: Why Me? & Epilogue

Chapter 18: Why Me? & Epilogue Summary

Ruby is picked up by a kind truck driver who takes her most of the distance of her journey. She immediately calls Paul from a payphone, and he picks her up to deliver her to her old house. Ruby is shocked by the disrepair of her grandmother's home, which her alcoholic grandfather Jack has all but destroyed. Jack is so addled from his addiction that he barely recognizes Ruby. Running out into the swamp, Jack accidentally drowns - not the homecoming Ruby was expecting. Ruby throws herself into restoring the shack, and all of her grandmother's old friends, whom Ruby grew up with, step in to help immediately. Ruby's pregnancy quickly becomes evident as well, and the community assumes Paul is the baby's father, as it is clear he still has feelings for Ruby. Paul would more than willingly marry Ruby and take care of her, and the ladies who help Ruby encourage her to hold Paul accountable for "his" responsibilities. While Ruby is touched by everyone's kindness, especially Paul's, she is determined to live on her own in her grandmother's old house.

Ruby gets a teasing, cruel letter from Gisselle, who is back in New Orleans. Daphne finally relented and let her come home when rumors of Ruby's pregnancy spread at Greenwood. Gisselle claims Beau is still in France and happily dating a member of the French aristocracy. Though Beau wrote Gisselle for any news of Ruby, Gisselle tells him she doesn't know where Ruby is. Ruby can't help but be hurt by the letter even though she doesn't trust anything Gisselle says. As the birth of the baby approaches, Paul helps Ruby more and more, pleading for her to come stay with him until after the delivery. But Ruby feels the need to keep Paul at arm's length, even as news of a bad hurricane approaches. As the storm hits and the little shack is torn apart, Ruby goes into labor. Paul helps her deliver a healthy baby girl, whom she names Pearl - like the pearl-colored baby of her dream.

Paul and the neighboring ladies continue to help Ruby after Pearl's birth. Ruby gets another letter from Gisselle, who received a letter from Paul about the baby. Gisselle gleefully hopes Ruby shows up with the baby to ruin Daphne and Bruce's wedding, and can't wait to point out to Daphne that she is a grandmother. She continues to jab at Ruby about Beau, who will remain in Europe for college. Gisselle claims he is still dating French royalty. Paul continues to press Ruby to marry him, despite their relationship, and for the first time Ruby considers it. She asks her dead grandmother for a sign to help her make the right choices. An owl seems to respond to her plea, and Ruby feels comforted that she will make the right decisions for herself and her baby.

Chapter 18: Why Me? & Epilogue Analysis

Chapter 18's title says a great deal about Ruby's attitude. She continues to believe she is being swept along by the unstoppable hands of fate. Although she blames herself



more than Beau for her situation, she can't take full responsibility for her actions. She can't believe something as beautiful as love would put her in such a predicament. Though her attitude may not have caught up with her actions, by running away Ruby has finally stopped passively reacting fate's control. She does not want to have an abortion, she does not care about the Dumas family reputation, and she recognizes that blood does not mean Daphne and Gisselle are her family. She does not have to be a victim to Daphne's rules and cruelty. Running away is the first truly active decision Ruby makes in the entire novel. She has at least evolved that far, and with the last line of the novel, "I would make the right decisions" (p. 374), Ruby acknowledges her responsibility to propel herself into her future rather than waiting for fate to pull her there.

Having retreated from New Orleans, Ruby is forced to rely on the unreliable: Gisselle's letters are made up of entirely questionable "facts." Ruby, and the reader, cannot be sure whether Gisselle's claims about Beau's new life in Europe are true. Deductive reasoning and historical precedent would indicate that jealous and manipulative Gisselle is just trying to hurt Ruby. On the other hand, Beau has free will and could have come searching for Ruby at any time, but she has not heard anything from him directly since the last time she actually saw him. His fear of being disinherited may be greater than his love for Ruby. There is no way to truly know, but given that there are three more books in this series, readers may predict Beau will pop up again in Ruby's life.



Characters

Ruby (Landy) Dumas

Ruby (Landry) Dumas is the seventeen-year-old protagonist of the novel. She was raised by her Cajun grandmother on the bayou until she discovers the identity of her wealthy father in New Orleans, and goes to live with him, her stepmother Daphne, and her twin sister Gisselle. Ruby is kind and optimistic, always looking for the best in people around her. Gisselle characterizes her as a "goody two shoes," and in general, she is, getting good grades and obeying the rules as best she can. Because she was raised in a Cajun community, the authorities at Greenwood look down on her as racially inferior. They blame her upbringing for her occasionally fierce independence and willingness to speak her mind. Mrs. Ironwood views Ruby as a rebel, but in reality, Ruby believes that fate guides her life, and this belief means she reacts passively to most situations she finds herself in: she allows herself to be swept along as if she has no free will and is merely a victim to destiny's plan. For example, she goes to Greenwood at her father's request, she allows Gisselle to treat her badly without seeking revenge or fighting back, and even when she can prove she has done nothing wrong, she demurs (for example, when she is accused of an illicit rendezvous with Buck in the boat house, all she needs to do is contact Louis to prove she was with him at the time). She is fortunate Miss Stevens steps in as a *deus ex machina* with Louis in tow to rescue her from expulsion. She haplessly seems to be on the wrong end of a misunderstanding, usually orchestrated by Gisselle, or due to the unwarranted prejudice of Mrs. Ironwood. Because of this, her life is a series of small tragedies. She is even resigned to getting an abortion at Daphne's command. Her decision to run away back to Houma in the bayou is the first time she actually makes a choice for herself, though again she martyrs herself in the situation, believing she alone bears the blame for her unexpected pregnancy and her boyfriend Beau should not be held responsible. Back in the bayou and determined to raise her daughter on her own, she takes control of her life for the first time, confident she will "make the right decisions" (p. 374).

Gisselle Dumas

Gisselle Dumas is Ruby's seventeen-year-old twin sister. Though she was raised with every advantage among the cream of New Orleans society, Gisselle is selfish, malicious, lazy, and jealous. She is more of a "rebel" than Ruby, drinking, smoking pot, and being sexually promiscuous. Even when she has everything, she wants more. Gisselle is an irredeemable villain, never sincerely trying to relate to or help her sister. Rather, she often goes out of her way to make Ruby's life miserable or blame her sister for her own sins. Andrews does not make clear whether these personality defects are the result of her upbringing with her unpleasant stepmother or if she was just born that way. Gisselle spends much of the novel in a wheelchair due to a previous accident, and she uses her handicap to evoke pity and get whatever she wants, to the extent that even after she has regained the use of her legs she continues to pretend she is crippled



to continue her manipulations. She generally succeeds in this goal: people around her do as she commands, but Gisselle's so-called friends seem to act more out of fear of Gisselle than out of affection or loyalty. Though she is often envious of Ruby, she cannot grasp that Ruby receives the love and respect of people like Beau, Louis, and their father because Ruby is good rather than by somehow strategically controlling them as Gisselle herself would. As there is no goodness in her own heart, she cannot understand what goodness is, nor how it can be rewarded.

Pierre Dumas

Pierre Dumas is Ruby and Gisselle's father. Though he did not even know Ruby existed until she arrived in New Orleans the previous year, he welcomes her into the family with open arms. He spoils his daughters and tries to protect them from his wife Daphne, who hates her stepdaughters and their constant reminder of the woman Mr. Dumas used to love. Rather than orchestrate reconciliation, Dumas capitulates to Daphne's demands and sends his daughters to private school to keep the peace. When he abruptly dies half way through the novel, Ruby's last line of defense against those forces against her (Daphne, Mrs. Ironwood) disappears.

Daphne Dumas

Daphne Dumas is Ruby and Gisselle's stepmother. Daphne rejects Ruby because of her Cajun background, which diminishes Ruby's societal value in Daphne's eyes. She frequently advocates to make life more difficult for the twins, especially Ruby, until she wants something from them: quiet consent to her speedy remarriage to a business associate of Mr. Dumas after his untimely death. But when Ruby potentially brings scandal to the Dumas family, Daphne reverts to hateful form, sending Ruby away for a shady, unsafe abortion.

Mrs. Ironwood

Mrs. Ironwood is the principal of Greenwood School. She is the niece of Mrs. Clairborne, the school's financial patron. Mrs. Ironwood is intent on making the Greenwood students genteel young ladies by using an iron fist. She is a stern, uncompassionate woman more interested in discipline than kindness. She is prejudiced against anyone not of pure blood, including Ruby. She discriminates against Ruby before she meets her and is eager to believe the worst about her because of her Cajun background. She is a major antagonistic force against Ruby and often has absolute control over Ruby's fate.

Mrs. Clairborne

Mrs. Clairborne is the financial patron of Greenwood school.. Her worldview is old-fashioned and based on traditional aristocratic values - she wishes the world could



return to a pre Civil War mindset. She is overprotective of her blind grandson Louis and resents Ruby's interference in their personal affairs, despite the fact that Ruby inspires Louis back to sight.

Louis

Louis is Mrs. Clairborne's grandson who lives with her in the family mansion. Louis's mother molested him as a child and his father eventually murdered her and killed himself, a trauma so great Louis went blind. He has disturbingly conflicted Oedipal feelings toward his mother, and his blindness is psychosomatic rather than physical. When Ruby accidentally stumbles upon Louis at the mansion, she inadvertently becomes his muse, inspiring his music (Louis is a gifted pianist). Although Louis is on the brink of falling in love with Ruby, he accepts that she is in a relationship with someone else.

Mrs. Penny

Mrs. Penny is the house mother of the Dumas twins' dorm. She is in charge of ensuring they follow the rules and behave like young ladies. Though Mrs. Penny rarely reacts to the unpleasant aspects of reality, she makes a cynical comment to Ruby that reveals she may be willfully blocking out the world's ugliness because she is all too familiar with reality.

Buck Dardar

Buck Dardar is a Native American who acts as handyman around Greenwood. He is easily ensnared in Gisselle's web when she decides to seduce him while pretending to be Ruby. He is so easily duped because no one yet knows Gisselle can walk again. Buck is fired from Greenwood for his indiscretion and abruptly disappears from the novel.

Beau Andreas

Beau Andreas is Ruby's boyfriend in New Orleans. Like the Dumas twins, he comes from an aristocratic family. Before Ruby arrived he dated Gisselle, who toyed with him while flirting with other boys. His feelings for Ruby seem intense and true; he gives her his class ring, a symbol of pre-engagement in their society. But when he accidentally impregnates her he submits willingly to his parents' punishment, shipping off to school in France rather than attempting to find Ruby and make an honest woman of her.

Abby Tyler

Abby Tyler is Ruby's closest friend at Greenwood. They bond over their mutual unusual heritages: Abby is one quarter Haitian, and thus a "quadroon." Her parents are



determined that she should pass as white, but the secret weighs heavily on Abby. When Gisselle makes sure everyone discovers the true ancestry, Abby is relieved, glad to finally just be herself. With her departure from Greenwood, Ruby's life at the school becomes darker.

Rachel Stevens

Rachel Stevens is Greenwood's art teacher, who instantly befriends and mentors Ruby, a fellow painter. Miss Stevens supports Ruby through the many trials that test her at Greenwood, coming to her rescue when she is nearly expelled. In order to make Ruby miserable, Gisselle spreads rumors that Miss Stevens is a lesbian and she is forced to resign from Greenwood before the scandal erupts. She too abruptly leaves the world of the novel, and Ruby does not ever hear from her again.

Nina

Nina is a servant in the Dumas household. Ruby befriends her and goes to her for spiritual guidance, relying on Nina's voodoo powers to help bring her good fortune.

Paul

Paul is Ruby and Gisselle's half brother, born of a secret indiscretion of their mother. Paul and Ruby don't learn of their relationship until they are nearly involved romantically, but Ruby pulls back once she learns the true nature of their connection. Despite their close blood, Paul still loves Ruby and is willing to marry her and act as father to her child, but Ruby cannot commit such a taboo.

Samantha

Samantha is one of the twins' quad-mates. The most immature, she easily falls under Gisselle's spell and does her bidding, but also finds herself ostracized by the whole class when Gisselle grows tired of her.

Victoria

Victoria is another quad-mate. The most scholastically apt, she cares little for social status and interaction, and thus incurs the wrath of Gisselle who cannot control her.

Jacqueline

Jacqueline is another quad-mate. Sarcastic and bitter, she is drawn to Gisselle and becomes a member of her entourage.

Kate

Kate is the final quad-mate. On the heavy side, she laughs at herself and her weight rather than allowing herself to be shunned because of it. She too follows Gisselle like a sheep.



Objects/Places

The Garden District

The Garden District is the area of New Orleans where the Dumas mansion is. It is a well-to-do neighborhood for the most prestigious families in the city.

Greenwood

Greenwood is the private all girls' school on the outskirts of Baton Rouge attended by the Dumas twins. The school is for well-to-do girls of good breeding and families, and claims to instill proper Southern values in its students.

Houma

Houma is the town where Ruby was raised. On the bayou, it is a poor Cajun town. The upper crust of New Orleans society do not consider the bayou a respectable place to grow up.

Voodoo

Voodoo is the spiritual beliefs and practices performed by the Cajun people. This brand of mysticism uses charms and spells to promote good fortune and deter evil spirits. Ruby grew up around the voodoo of her grandmother, a Cajun healer, and continues to seek the spiritual assistance of the Dumas's Cajun servant, Nina.

The Wheelchair

The Wheelchair confines Gisselle after her car accident the previous year that leaves her without the use of her legs. She uses her handicap as an excuse to manipulate those around her, even after she can walk and no longer needs the wheelchair.

The Class Ring

The Class Ring is a gift Beau gives to Ruby, which symbolizes his devotion to her. In their mid twentieth century society, it is a precursor to an official engagement.



Painting

Painting is Ruby's passion, an activity she devotes herself to in hopes of being a professional artist one day. She has had some success already, having sold some paintings through a gallery in New Orleans.

Piano

Piano is the only solace for Louis after he goes mysteriously blind following the murder/suicide of his parents. He releases all his emotions through his playing. Ruby's kindness inspires him to write a symphony for her.

The Boathouse

The Boathouse on the grounds of Greenwood is the site of Ruby's first meeting with the groundskeeper, Buck, a kind Native American. Later, Gisselle visits Buck there for illicit rendezvous, and gets Ruby in trouble when a teacher believes she sees Ruby meeting with Buck there.

Quadroon

A Quadroon is a person who has one quarter minority racial heritage. Abby's father, with one black parent and one white, is considered a mulatto, while Abby herself, only one quarter black, is a quadroon.

Creoles

Creoles are the prevailing social class in Louisiana society. Their heritage, stemming from colonial times, is synonymous with good breeding and aristocracy. Most of the Greenwood students' families are from a longstanding Creole tradition, and are considered "pure" or "bluebloods."



Themes

Nature Versus Nurture

Since Ruby and Gisselle are twins they present an interesting case for the debate over what shapes the character of children: inherent genetics or how they are raised. Ruby often wonders if she, rather than Gisselle, had been raised in the New Orleans mansion, if her personality would have manifested Gisselle's toxic blend of deception and self-absorption: "Would I have turned out this way had I been the first baby born and the one given to the Dumas family? Did the evil of that act settle in her tiny heart like a lump of coal and infect her every thought and feeling? Would that have happened to me" (p. 192). Though this line of thinking is mystical, there are other factors that could have contributed to Gisselle's wicked personality, including the bitter and vengeful attitude of their stepmother Daphne and the over-indulgence of their father. Having grown up demanding and receiving whatever she wants, Gisselle has no comprehension of what it means to want, and this lack of perspective results in her ungrateful, entitled behavior. On the other hand, Ruby was raised poor, but with a loving, nurturing grandmother, and her worldview reflects the generosity of the Cajun community where she grew up. When she returns to Houma at the end of the novel, pregnant and alone, all the women step in to help her set up a home for her baby, unlike Daphne who demanded she get rid of the child. Ruby can better appreciate what her status and wealth in New Orleans means because she can compare it with the poverty of the bayou, but it was in the bayou that she learned the values of community, kindness, and open-mindedness.

Mrs. Ironwood insists Ruby's upbringing and social background indicate certain facts about her: "I know your kind, your type. Your bad behavior is more insidious, subtle. You learn quickly who are the most vulnerable, who have certain weaknesses, and you play to those weaknesses, like some sort of swamp parasite" (p. 135). Ironically she is accurately describing the behavior of Gisselle, who grew up far from the bayou but still has "Cajun blood" from her mother - are these sweeping characterizations about an ethnic group part of Gisselle's, if not Ruby's basic nature? Mrs. Ironwood further accuses Ruby of having "a strain of independence, that Cajun stubbornness, a wildness that must be kept in tow" (p. 74). Yet despite these negative aspects of Ruby's "nature," Mrs. Ironwood cannot deny her good grades and behavior in class, and still charges her with the responsibility of managing her sister. Mrs. Ironwood's view of Ruby's inherent traits couples with the demands she makes of the teenager are contradictory and hypocritical.

Despite Daphne's presence in her childhood, Gisselle was also raised with the unconditional (though over-indulgent) love of her father, and Ruby experienced the cruelty of her grandfather. Both girls see both sides of the good/evil coin. This makes a strong case that character has more basis in an individual's inherent nature and personal choices than the environment they are raised.



Female Sexuality

Set in the 1950's, *Pearl in the Mist* presents an old-fashioned notion of female sexuality. While Gisselle, the evil twin, revels in her sexual promiscuity and the shock it elicits in the sheltered private school girls of Greenwood, Ruby's relationship with sex is more complicated. Though ultimately Ruby enjoys her sexual relationship with Beau, Andrews uses language that presents Ruby's interest in sex as passive. When Louis kisses her and touches her breasts, Ruby does not react or push him away, despite her boyfriend at home: "I was confused but afraid to deny him" (p. 124). Her attitude is that she owes Louis this intimacy, though she has no interest in it herself. Similarly, with her soon to be stepfather Bruce who makes her uncomfortable, Ruby "let him embrace me" (p. 304). She behaves as if, as a woman, her body is at the disposal of the men around her, whether she likes it or not.

In her sexual encounters with Beau, Ruby "permitted my body to slide under him on the sofa" (p. 283) and "let myself fall against him" (p. 313) and "didn't resist" (p. 314). Even though she enjoys her physical relationship with Beau, she approaches it passively, rather than trying to control her feelings and desires. Ruby appears only able to justify their sexual relationship because it is based in love, not lust: "Let's not make each other feel guilty or dirty. I love you and you love me. Nothing else matters, and that makes whatever we do good and pure, because it's good and pure to us" (p. 284). The novel creates a strange tension between Ruby's desire for physical pleasure and the need to validate it by basing it in "honorable" emotions. Though readers don't see any of Gisselle's sexual exploits firsthand, she seems to take an opposite view, treating men as toys and sex as a game to be enjoyed at her will. The irony comes when Ruby finds herself pregnant despite her pure, loving intentions with Beau. "Fate" punishes her for giving in to her sexual desires. Sex is not actually "good and pure" as she wants to believe, but a shameful act with severe consequences - for a woman. Beau's parents send him away to Europe - and he goes. He makes no efforts to find Ruby or take his share of the responsibility for their child. The burden falls to her alone, and she believes that is exactly how it should be: "of course, I had no one to blame but myself. I didn't even blame Beau, knowing somehow that I had had the power to say no, to turn him away, but had chosen not to do so" (p. 340).

Finally, Miss Stevens is fired over rumors and accusations that she is a lesbian. A woman in this society and era is not free to pursue a "deviant" sexual lifestyle or her own sexual happiness. What's more, it's clear Gisselle started these rumors about Miss Stevens and there is no basis for truth in them, because even the tolerant Ruby finds the idea of lesbianism "disgusting," so Miss Stevens cannot possibly be one.

Though written in 1994, the novel thus appears to reinforce 1950's attitudes towards female sexuality: women have no right to initiate or enjoy sex. Rather they need to remain chaste (especially if they are attracted to women) and rebuff the advances of men, or else they will be rightfully punished for giving in to their lust - and these women only have themselves to blame.



There's More To Life Than Money

Status and wealth are intertwined in the world of Pearl in the Mist. One can't have one without the other. To Daphne, Giselle, Mrs. Ironwood, and the girls of Greenwood, they are of utmost importance. Andrews uses her characters to disprove the notion of the preeminence of these superficial values: the only true kind individuals Ruby encounters lack status, money, or both. Her best friend at Greenwood, Abby, is one quarter black and it is her biggest secret. She goes through life denying her heritage and passing as white in order to maintain her social standing: such mixed bloods, particularly in a society still deeply racist a century after the Civil War, have no social standing. Yet Abby is a good and loyal friend to Ruby, a person indifferent to the shallow interests of her peers. Similarly, Miss Stevens is an orphan. She literally has no family, let alone a family with a "good" name and lineage. But again, she is generous to Ruby, mentoring her and supporting her through the trials of Mrs. Ironwood.

Ruby grew up without luxuries in the bayou, but with the tremendous love of her grandmother. She has many fond memories of her childhood surrounded by people who care about each other. Ruby goes to New Orleans to seek the familial connection of her father and sister after her grandmother dies. What keeps Ruby in New Orleans is love: the love of her father, and her boyfriend Beau. When both abandon her, there is nothing to entice her to stay. Money, clothes, and status mean little to her: "Except I know that many of the things you all think are so important, things like family lineage and great wealth, don't guarantee happiness...Liking yourself...for who you really are and not what others want you to be [does]" (p. 185).

Daphne and Gisselle have the world at their feet, but they are never happy. Daphne constantly worries about preserving the image of the Dumas family, fearing ruin if any scandals leak to the greater community. Gisselle always wants more of what she has, and can't stand to see anyone be happy or have anything she doesn't. Despite their wealth and status, they do not lead fulfilling lives.



Style

Point of View

Pearl in the Mist is recounted through the first-person narration of the protagonist Ruby. Readers are privy to all her inner thoughts and feelings on the action of the novel. She is a reliable narrator: having a reputation as a "goody two shoes" means she is genuine and transparent in her motives. Ruby acts mainly as a witness and reactor to the world in flux around her. She does not drive the action of the novel, frequently finding herself a victim to the hands of Fate, or, more likely, the manipulations of her twin Gisselle or stepmother Daphne. Ruby often finds herself in situations where she has to work backwards to piece together how she got there. She is fairly good at reconstructing the action to determine how Gisselle got her entangled in a mess. Although Ruby can accurately predict Gisselle's evil behavior, readers never get to see the inner workings of Gisselle's mind or have a chance to truly understand what motivates her actions beyond basic selfishness.

As the second novel in a series about Ruby, a great deal of novel is told through exposition, filling in readers on important information and action from the first novel. Again, despite this exposition, Ruby never points to a defining moment that might have shaped Gisselle's character and made her such an irredeemable person. The novel is written in the past tense, and despite the many crises Ruby finds herself in, the novel lacks a sense of urgency or suspense that would drive the reader from one chapter to the next.

Setting

Pearl in the Mist is set in 1950's Louisiana, traveling between New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and the Cajun town of Houma in the bayou. The Dumas twins live in a world of privilege and status, residing in the well-to-do neighborhood of the Garden District in New Orleans and attending a private all-girls school called Greenwood for the "best families" just outside the capital city of Baton Rouge. Limousines transport them and they have multiple servants at their mansion. This world of luxury is new to Ruby, who only arrived to New Orleans last year, having grown up in a shack in the swamps of Houma, raised in poverty by her Cajun healer grandmother.

Institutionalized racism is prevalent in this world. Prominent families like the Clairbornes, who endow Greenwood and keep it running, are still bitter about the outcome of the Civil War. Ruby's friend Abby has to keep her one quarter Haitian ancestry secret - and when the authorities at Greenwood find out about her heritage, she is expelled. Ruby's pedigree is also questionable given that she was raised in a Cajun community. The Dumas are a prominent Creole family: Creoles are well-bred with proud colonial heritage, whereas Cajuns are considered inferior, backward, and low class. Because of her own mixed cultural background, Ruby is tolerant of various races and beliefs,



including Abby and the Dumas servant Nina, who uses voodoo to help increase Ruby's good fortune.

This is an old-fashioned society where family honor is preeminent, Ruby's illegitimate pregnancy could ruin the Dumas name. Daphne does not even consider trying to force Ruby and Beau to marry, instead sending Ruby off by herself to a shadowy, grimy location outside the city to have an illegal abortion in order to cover her secret and keep the family from shame.

Language and Meaning

Since there is no explicit reference in *Pearl in the Mist* as to what year it takes place, the language helps date it in the 1950's. References to girls' "bosom" (Page 23), calling a young man a "dreamboat" (Page 50) or "as handsome as a soap opera star" (Page 13), and Gisselle's sarcastic use of "Peachy" (Page 31) to describe activities she is unenthusiastic about, all set the action in an old-fashioned world.

Andrews relies heavily on figurative language to create vivid imagery in the readers' minds. She compares the natural world to manmade objects: "The water of the lake shone like a polished coin" (Page 37); to evoke strong physical pictures of people, describing Mrs. Ironwood's mouth as being "set in a jaw that seemed made of granite" (Page 43); and to eloquently and succinctly describe a situation: "But I won't be paddled out of here in a canoe built out of fabrications and hateful deceit" (Page 251).

Andrews also tries to create a realistic world by using a different grammatical style for the servants in the Dumas mansion to indicate their different social status and educational background. Nina, Ruby's friend and voodoo advisor, refers to herself in the third person ("Nina don't get angry at you") and uses incorrect grammar ("I be giving you this...") (Page 18).

The language of the book is straightforward; there is no subtext or double meaning to search for in the dialogue between characters. Everything is stated explicitly, to the point that when Ruby refers to a menacing comment from Gisselle, she oxymorornically claims the "veiled threat clear" (Page 278).

Structure

Pearl in the Mist is divided into chapters that are almost uniformly 20 pages each, give or take a page, as well as a brief prologue and epilogue. The novel does not build toward a single climax and denouement, rather each chapter acts as an episode or vignette peppered with mini crises and resolutions. The structure feels like a television soap opera, where drama arises and recedes and is forgotten. Characters disappear - after Abby leaves Greenwood, Ruby never hears from her again. Similarly Miss Stevens gets fired and vanishes without even a goodbye letter to Ruby. Ruby inexplicably (through sheer kindness) sets Louis on a path to regained sight, and he leaves the action to go recover in Switzerland, barely distraught that Ruby has a boyfriend and



does not love him. Readers meet Beau early in the novel but he only becomes prominent in the action and Ruby's life in the second half of the novel when the author requires him to impregnate Ruby and set her on her final journey.

The action is linear and relatively forward thrusting, though not because of a cause and effect plot: since Ruby considers herself a victim of Destiny the events of the novel seem random and out of anyone's control beyond Gisselle's machinations. There is no flashback, but the Prologue, which is a letter from Ruby to her half brother Paul acts as a device to catch readers up on the action of the first novel in the series. The first seventeen chapters of the book take place over four-five months, the first half of the school year at Greenwood. The pace is leisurely, encompassing Ruby's weekly or daily life. In the last chapter however, once Ruby runs away from her abortion, nine months, until the baby is born, are compressed into twenty pages.



Quotes

"If I'm the one who came from a backward world, why am I the one held responsible" (p. 74).

"When people go where they don't belong, they only make problems for themselves" (p. 170).

"Whatever doesn't destroy you, makes you stronger. Hardships have a way of toughening us, if they don't kill us" (p. 183).

"Except I know that many of the things you all think are so important, things like family lineage and great wealth, don't guarantee happiness...Liking yourself...for who you really are and not what others want you to be [does]" (p. 185).

"Would I have turned out this way had I been the first baby born and the one given to the Dumas family? Did the evil of that act settle in her tiny heart like a lump of coal and infect her every thought and feeling? Would that have happened to me" (p. 192).

"It's all right to do something sneaky if it's going to result in something good" (p. 203).

"You're always imagining the worst. You're always looking at the dark side, almost hoping things will be terrible, just so you can be miserable. You like suffering. You think it's noble" (p. 278).

"I saw her as the embodiment of all the evil inclinations in my own heart and imagined I was looking at the darker part of myself, almost like Dr. Jekyll peering into a mirror and seeing Mr. Hyde. And like Dr. Jekyll, I couldn't hate this side of myself as much as I wanted because it was still part of me, part of who I was" (p. 281-2).

"Let's not make each other feel guilty or dirty. I love you and you love me. Nothing else matters, and that makes whatever we do good and pure, because it's good and pure to us" (p. 284).

"My grandmere taught me never to laugh at anyone's beliefs, Beau. No one has a monopoly on the truth when it comes to spiritual things" (p. 299).

"You're like a wildflower. The rest of us have been cared for, nourished, given the best of everything, while you've had to struggle. But...the struggle has given you more strength and more beauty. Just like that wildflower, you've blossomed high and above the ordinary, the weeds" (p. 313).

"Why was it that no one but me could see through Gisselle's façade? Why were they all so eager to be taken in by her, fooled and made fools of by her? They deserved her mistreatment; they deserved to be taken advantage of and used and manipulated" (p. 325).



"I remember that as I lay there burying myself in a mountain of self-pity, hating Fate, cursing Destiny, I wondered why love was made to be so wonderful if it could put me in such a state of affairs. It seemed like a cruel joke had been played on me, but of course, I had no one to blame but myself. I didn't even blame Beau, knowing somehow that I had had the power to say no, to turn him away, but had chosen not to do so" (p. 340).

"Events seemed to be carrying me along on their own. I was like someone who had lost all choice" (p. 345).



Topics for Discussion

Discuss two differing values Ruby and Gisselle were raised with. Do you think Ruby and Gisselle's personalities would have been more similar had they been raised with the same parents? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Do you think Ruby is a victim of fate? Why or why not? What does this word mean to her? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Compare and contrast Ruby and Gisselle's attitudes toward sex. Does Andrews present female sexuality positively or negatively in the novel? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Discuss three examples of how a young lady is expected to behave in the novel. How do these expectations compare and contrast to the expectations in the modern world? How might Ruby's life be different if she lived in modern times? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Why do Daphne and Mrs. Ironwood make Ruby Gisselle's "keeper"? What contradiction can be found in their motivation? Is this responsibility fair? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What insecurities might Gisselle be hiding underneath her caustic and selfish behavior? What do you think are Gisselle's true hopes for the future? What type of relationship might Gisselle truly want with Ruby? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does Ruby's return to the bayou reflect Mrs. Ironwood's statement that, "when people go where they don't belong, they only make problems for themselves?" How does the novel reinforce or subvert societal prejudice? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.