

# **A Respectable Trade Study Guide**

**A Respectable Trade by Philippa Gregory**

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## Plot Summary

Frances Scott is an orphan who is living as a governess and on the kindness of her aunt and uncle, Lord and Lady Scott, when she sees an advertisement posted by Josiah Cole, a merchant involved in the slave trade. Josiah is advertising for a governess, though he has no children of his own. The interview is interrupted early by Josiah, who then writes Frances a letter, proposing that she marry him. Frances still doesn't know the reason Josiah had sought a governess and it's much later that she learns that she is to be responsible for teaching slaves, newly captured and arrived from Africa, so that they can be sold at a premium rate as English house servants. The first batch of slaves arrives, two men, two very young boys, and a total of thirteen people. One of the men, Mehuru, is trained as a priest in Africa and lived himself as a member of the royal court. He is highly intelligent and soon becomes the acknowledged leader, learning the language quickly to become something of an interpreter between those less adept at the language and their new owners, including Frances.

Frances and Mehuru spend a great deal of time together and their attraction is almost immediate and is mutual. It takes very little time for Frances to realize that she has come to love this man who remains strong and proud despite his current situation. For her part, Frances comes to realize some important things about herself - including the fact that she is too weak to set out for a life with the man she has come to love because it would mean bucking social standards that she holds dear. Frances also fears the uncertainty of a life without her family name behind her and knows that if she leaves her husband, she will be cutting all ties with her family.

Mehuru sees nothing except his desire for freedom and his need to spend that freedom with the woman he has come to love. As he seeks a way to make her willing to take a chance with him, Mehuru faces the grim reality that he cannot force her to take this chance. When it's evident that Frances is going to die, Mehuru makes the decision to remain behind while the other slaves in the home flee. Mehuru is on hand for the birth of Frances' child, a son who greatly resembles Mehuru. With her dying breath, Frances instructs Mehuru to look for her last will and he discovers that in death she has done what she could not possibly bring herself to do in life - grant Mehuru and the other slaves their freedom.



# Chapters One through Four

## Chapters One through Four Summary

A priest named Obalawa Mehuru, who is trained in the interpretation of dreams, wakes from a dream about a ship heavy with the stink of rotten meat. He has trouble shaking off the feeling of dread left from the dream but finally does. Later, there's a meeting of his council at Old Oyo in the African kingdom of Dahomey where the alafin - or king - bans the trade of slaves with white men. At Mehuru's suggestion, the alafin orders that the priests travel the region, explaining the decision to the people. Meanwhile, at Redcliff Dock in Bristol, Josiah Cole writes a letter to Frances Scott, a young woman who has applied for a position of governess. Josiah writes that he cannot consider her as his employee but would like to make her his wife. At the home of her uncle, Lord Scott, she acknowledges that there are few options to her and that she should accept the offer. Lord Scott agrees to arrange the contract after reminding her that he will have no way to help if she finds herself in an unhappy situation.

In chapter two, Frances writes a letter of acceptance to Josiah. Josiah tells his sister, Sarah, the news, and she is immediately defensive, saying that to keep a woman of Frances' social status will be expensive. Josiah goes to the quayside to seek out new partners for the next sailing venture, men who will put up a portion of the money. His engagement to Frances immediately garners new interest. Frances receives a letter from Lord Scott, saying that he believes Josiah to be an acceptable husband who will be able to care for her adequately though he notes that he's concerned that Sarah will not accept Frances readily. He notes that Frances has had experience dealing with people who don't want her around.

Meanwhile, Mehuru and his servant, a young boy named Siko, are traveling to share the council decision to ban the slave trade. Mehuru dreams several times of the ship that he's never seen, seeming to know that it's a slave ship. One day, Mehuru and Siko run toward a river for a swim when they are captured. Mehuru continues to believe that he will be set free as soon as he can explain who he is.

In chapter three, Frances has married Josiah, though he has not yet been able to buy the house he'd promised. The quayside house is small, smelly and the indisputable domain of Josiah's sister. Frances and Josiah are uneasy with each other. On the morning after the wedding, Frances wakes to find Sarah already downstairs. Frances basks in the knowledge that she is not a servant in this house. Sarah, acting on Josiah's instructions, offers Frances the household account books, but Frances admits that she doesn't know how to keep the accounts. Sarah tells her briefly about the business, which includes three ships - the Daisy, the Rose and the Lily. The main cargo, according to Sarah, is sugar. She says nothing of slave trade. She agrees to retain responsibility for the household books with Frances planning to learn from Sarah.



Meanwhile, Mehuru and the others share a horrible trip with many dying from lack of food and water, the inadequate conditions of the ship's hold, or simply choosing to starve themselves to death or commit suicide in some other way. Mehuru initially fights back but comes to hate the lack of control so much that he also begins to refuse food.

In chapter four, Frances tells Josiah that she wants to go outside and that she understands that she isn't allowed to walk the docks alone, having been told so by Sarah. Josiah initially says he's busy but then agrees that he hasn't provided for Frances as he should have and arranges for a carriage. They drive through slums to reach the outskirts of the dock area and Josiah shows her the house in Queens Square that he wants to buy. They travel on to a small spa and Frances sees an area she says would be more appealing for a home, but Josiah says it's too far from town. Josiah tells her that his job is to provide for her and that her job is to teach Josiah and Sarah how to enjoy themselves.

## Chapters One through Four Analysis

Mehuru's dream is about a slave ship, though he doesn't identify it as such. The interesting part of the African's decision to ban the slave trade is that the people believe it to be a profitable business, though they are literally selling their neighbors into a life of unthinkable slavery or condemning them to horrible deaths on the trip to their new lives. Mehuru hears one argument for the continuing trade expressed as the only way to gain weapons for protecting their country. The man with this information says that the whites will no longer trade for anything other than men. The argument is that men should be free of this fear unless they are convicts.

Frances Scott's situation is typical of young women of wealthy families who find themselves in serious financial trouble. Her father has apparently died and she is living with her uncle, though his wife is apparently not happy with the presence of a poor relative. Frances has been working as a governess but is in an uncomfortable household where she's being snubbed by the lady of the house. Frances is already in her thirties, the bloom of youthful attractiveness past, and says that she isn't looking for a fairy tale situation, just a place where she can live in peace. She notes that her aunt and cousins will soon have her waiting on them for no pay and no thanks.

Frances watches Josiah from the window of the tiny quayside house and sees him conducting business on the docks. Frances notes that he looks like "a little man struggling to cope." The impression is an important part of Frances' impression of her husband and will color their relationship.



# Chapters Five through Nine

## Chapters Five through Nine Summary

Josiah makes a verbal offer to purchase the house at 29 Queens Square but is initially rebuffed by the owner, Stephen Waring, who says that he doesn't believe Josiah can afford to purchase the house. Josiah learns from others that Waring has paid dearly for the new house he is having built and realizes the house at Queens Square is going to cost more than he'd initially imagined. Frances is learning about the shipping business from Sarah, including the fact that they trade in slaves. Sarah paints a dim picture of the financial state and laughs at Frances' assumption that Josiah is financially sound. Frances then learns that the job she had initially applied for - as governess - was to complete a plan to teach the newly arrived slaves so that they could be sold as trained house servants for a higher sum. Frances pledges to Sarah that she will try her best to succeed.

In chapter six, Josiah is seeking new investors, but there are some who have seen him taking time off in the middle of the day to go for a buggy ride with his new wife and those people no longer trust that Josiah has his full attention on the financial side of his business and of aiming too high in his aspirations to buy the house on Queens Square. Josiah takes a risk, sending Captain Smedley and the *Rose* on a voyage without insurance on the human cargo and with instructions that he is to smuggle a load of slaves directly to the Spanish colonies, promising a large reward in return for the risk.

Mr. Waring, owner of the house in Queens Square, tells his wife that he cannot believe that Frances married Josiah, and she replies that Josiah will certainly pay whatever price is named in order to secure the house for Frances. Mr. Waring realizes that she is right, names a too-high price that he knows Josiah will pay if he's serious, and sends word to another resident of Queens Square who is preparing to put his own house on the market requesting that he hold off a week until the deal with Josiah is sealed.

In chapter seven, Josiah and Sarah are at odds over borrowing enough money to purchase the house at Queens Square, though Josiah has already placed a down payment on the deal. Waring has been unable to move out because the weather has delayed completion of their new house. Sarah is defensive about the tiny quayside house, saying it was like a palace to her mother. Mehuru and twelve other slaves, including children as young as two years of age, arrive at the quayside and are housed in the cellar. Frances learns that the slaves were purchased with her dowry and that she is to be responsible for training them so that they can be sold as house servants. Frances is told that John Bates will oversee the slaves, including beating them when necessary. She tells Sarah that they must have been afraid during their trip and Sarah says that they are not human and do not feel as humans do.

In chapter eight, Sarah takes Frances to the cellar where the slaves are being held. Sarah is excited, saying that she should give Captain Lisle a bonus because she is



pleased with the selection of slaves. Mehuru and the others are taken outside and forced to stand naked as they wash with soap and cold well water, though it is winter. They are all then dressed and at Frances' instructions, six are taken to the parlor, including Mehuru, where Sarah instructs Frances to begin their lessons. In chapter nine, Mehuru quickly catches on that he is to repeat what Frances says and uses his hand to tap out the instructions to the others, just as would have been done in Africa when there was a need to communicate. Mehuru realizes from Frances' speech and body language that she has little power in the situation, though she is not completely at the mercy of Sarah. Frances then tries to tell them her name is Frances and Mehuru is the first to realize that she wants to know his name in return. Mehuru tells her his "public name," that name that anyone can use "without summoning his soul or harming him."

Frances stops the lessons before Sarah is prepared to, saying that her students will grow tired. She then insists that they have a clean place to sleep and light, so that they begin learning how to keep themselves clean and presentable.

## Chapters Five through Nine Analysis

Sarah seems pleased with the opportunity to shock Frances with information about the slave trade. She laughs when Frances doesn't understand that "loss of cargo" means the slaves died. At one point, Josiah talks about the situation with a ship in which the slave trader had thrown his sickly human cargo overboard and then claimed that he had done so because there wasn't enough water to supply them all. Josiah says the attempt to defraud the insurance company - which would have to pay for cargo lost at sea but not for those who simply died on the way - had resulted in new stipulations by the insurance companies. The result is that Josiah is having trouble insuring his next shipment and he's faced with a desperate situation. Josiah tells Sarah not to worry, that he'll find additional investors to help pay the cost of outfitting the ship for the voyage and that he'll find an insurance company willing to cover them. This is a battle between brother and sister, each who depends on the business and each with their ideas about what the business should accomplish. Sarah wants merely to have a stable financial situation and dreads the thought of going into debt to change their circumstances. Josiah longs for more and this ambition is something new to Frances as well.

Frances knows that she cannot begin to enter society in her new role as wife until they are away from the quayside because gentle women she would want to visit could never pay a return visit to the cramped, smelly and dangerous location. Josiah, meanwhile, is anxious to make the move because he realizes that the only way to attract the men with larger chunks of investment capital is to move in their circles.

When Mehuru and the others have returned to the cellar, Sarah tells Frances to begin work on the household ledger. Frances agrees, but stops to think as soon as Sarah is out of the room. There's some immediate connection between Frances and Mehuru. She notes that she'd wanted to touch him. Though none of them were interested in her during her first inspection of the group, Mehuru had raised his head and stared at her, meeting her eyes. The depth of this interest is not immediately detailed but it is evident



that Frances feels a control over another person - a man, in the case of Mehuru - and is excited at this prospect. She notes that she, as a woman, always defers to the men in her life and that, in this one case, she is in control. Another aspect of this is that Frances has been told that most slaves are bound for the fields where many die. Frances knows that these slaves are destined to learn to behave as house servants, a much gentler occupation with a higher survival rate. In this she has not only control over someone who must obey her, she also has the power of life and death in her hands. By teaching these people, she is - at least in her own mind - saving their lives. An interesting aspect is that Frances continues to refer to them as "niggers" and to agree in theory to Sarah's statement that they aren't human like white people, but already has a difference of opinion, though she is not yet able to voice that opinion in words.





# Chapters Ten through Thirteen

## Chapters Ten through Thirteen Summary

Frances and Sarah receive word that Josiah is bringing home company and he returns with Sir Charles Fairley and his daughter, Honoria. Sir Charles says that he is in the country from Jamaica to conduct some business and to introduce his daughter to society, obviously with an eye toward marriage. Sir Charles buys many slaves from Josiah and freely shares his ideas about the best way to handle slaves. For example, he says that slaves understand nothing except regular beatings, that they can remember nothing without having it beaten into them, and says that he spends a great deal of time trying to think up new forms of punishment that will work. Honoria interrupts and Sir Charles notes that his daughter has a sensitivity to the subject but goes on later in the meal to say that breaking the spirits of each of the slaves is the only way to control them.

Frances is fully aware that the evening is a "parody" of what a dinner party should be in polite society but has no options available because of the small apartment in which they are living. Later, Josiah and Sir Charles retire to the study, and when Honoria wants to go home, Sir Charles sends her with a servant escort. Sir Charles then tells Josiah that he wants one of the slave women for sex and Josiah tells him that in England, this behavior isn't accepted though it might be in Jamaica. Sir Charles makes a barely-veiled threat to withdraw support for a coming shipping venture and Josiah relents but has to ask Frances for the key. Frances immediately realizes what's happening and tries to make Josiah promise no harm will come to the woman. When she goes back to her bedroom, she can hear Sir Charles raping the girl. Frances reminds herself that she made a trade for her current life and that she must find a way to live with it.

In chapter eleven, Josiah tries to talk to Frances the following morning to apologize, but she has a severe headache and puts him off, though he demands that she not skip the day's lesson. With the slaves later, Frances manages to get the point across that she wants to know their names. In his own language, Mehuru relays the question and the names given to Frances are "Despair," "Homeless" and "Grief." The woman who had been raped calls herself "Died of Shame."

In chapter twelve, Frances tells Sarah that she doesn't believe she can teach the slaves as she'd promised and Sarah accuses Frances of being lazy. The woman who calls herself Died of Shame picks up a handful of earth while she is outside and later consumes it as her first step in an attempt to die. Cook calls on John Bates to quiet the slaves when they begin moaning together with the woman. Frances fears the woman is sick and takes Sarah's advice to call on Sir Charles for advice. He tells Frances that she must have a muzzle made to cover the woman's face so that she can't eat any more dirt.



In chapter thirteen, Sir Charles comes back to the Cole house for lunch after having given his opinion on the woman eating dirt. He tells Frances that the new house on Queens Square will be a move in the right direction, but suggests that many of the up-coming families are choosing Park Street instead. Frances had suggested that to Josiah but didn't press the issue. Sir Charles then says that he's looking for someone to help manage his money through good investments and Sarah volunteers with Sir Charles agreeing only after Frances says that her uncle, Lord Scott, will help. Both John Bates and a young man who helps with the slaves rape the woman called Died of Shame while returning her to the cellar where the slaves are quartered. The woman is then muzzled with an iron contraption that covers her face and makes her nose bleed.

## Chapters Ten through Thirteen Analysis

Honoraria says that the slaves who work in the house on their plantation home are "half-castes," or "mulattos." She explains that these are half African, half white, but doesn't delve into their parentage or seem to acknowledge that many of these servants are likely her half-siblings.

Frances is slowly but surely changing her opinion of slavery so that she no longer believes that the institution is right. The final change on this point will come quickly and Frances will soon realize that she hates all forms of slavery and hates being associated with it. As she is beginning this transition, she tells Mehuru that he must learn to smile. What's interesting is that she doesn't tell him that he must be happy, but only that he should smile.

Frances notes that she doesn't want to call on Sir Charles for advice when the woman is apparently growing sick from eating the dirt, but that she is being "swept along" in the situation and has no way to escape herself, let alone save any of the slaves from their fates. She also knows what's wrong with the woman they call Died of Shame and says that she's calling on the man who raped her to help decide what to do with her now, but doesn't articulate her anger to Sir Charles. An interesting point is that Sir Charles obviously knows that Frances is aware of his role in the situation and is not overly upset at having been caught. Instead, he's acting like a little boy who's done something just a little naughty that will get him a brief, good-natured scolding.

Frances admits that it was largely a desire to insert herself into the conversation that prompted her to tell Sir Charles that her uncle would help with the investments. At the time, Sarah had been seeking to manipulate the conversation but was having limited success in convincing Sir Charles that he should leave them with his investments. The moment Frances mentions her uncle's name, he is willing and says so. While Frances has no doubt that her uncle will help, she didn't really want to be involved.

When John Bates and the boy rape the woman who had already been raped by Sir Charles, the woman simply lies still, unmoving, while the rape takes place. The boy suggests the rape and John Bates agrees, saying that Sir Charles had raped the woman and that the two of them should follow suit. After the rape, the woman is so still



that John and the boy fear she's dead. She doesn't move even when she's kicked until Mehuru tells her that she's now in the "keeping of your fathers." Mehuru and the others know what has happened to the woman and it impacts them all, especially the men who are powerless to protect the woman.



# Chapters Fourteen through Seventeen

## Chapters Fourteen through Seventeen Summary

That night, Died of Shame asks Mehuru if she can pray for death. Mehuru tells her that their lives might improve but then looks at the woman with the gifts of his sight and "sees" the baby of Sir Charles along with the disease Sir Charles has passed on to her. Sir Charles had told Josiah that he no longer cared about the diseases and that he'd become increasingly reckless. Mehuru tells Died of Shame that there's something wrong with the baby and she tells him that Sir Charles had smelled of death. With this, Mehuru knows that the baby will never grow to full term and that the death of the mother before the baby's birth will make no difference on that score, so tells her that it is alright for her to choose to die. The following morning, the woman is dead. Mehuru asks for Frances and she seems perplexed by the woman's death, though she knows the cause.

In chapter fifteen, Mehuru tells the others that his powers as a priest are weakening. He points out that Frances had tears in her eyes over the death of Died of Shame, but that it was obviously an untrue emotion. In chapter sixteen, Josiah wakes Frances early so that they can go see the house on Queens Square. Sarah declines to accompany them. The house is furnished largely in Chinese fashion and Frances quickly insists that they'll use some of the Scott "heirlooms" to complete the furnishings. Outside the house, Mrs. Waring arrives and Frances tells her that they will be receiving visitors on Thursdays, prompting Mrs. Waring to promise a formal visit on a future Thursday. As they leave, Josiah takes Frances for a tour of the "Hot Wells," a nearby commercial district that features natural hot springs. He says that Merchant Ventures own the district and are looking to sell the lease. Frances and Josiah know that having Mrs. Waring as a friend will open the social doors necessary for their success.

Christmas passes before the move takes place and Frances is bitterly disappointed with the holiday in their little apartment on the quay. The move finally occurs with Frances' family furniture arriving from storage and a note from Lady Scott. Frances places the note in a conspicuous location so that visitors will notice the connection. Frances insists that the slaves be better clothed. Sarah objects but Frances overrides her, saying that they must be warm to be healthy and that they must be well clothed in order to make a good impression. As Frances is caught up on the business of the move, she loses sight of the woman she knows as Died of Shame, preferring to forget the guilt of that incident.

In chapter seventeen, the Coles finish the move at the end of January and Frances hosts a "visiting day" on a Thursday. Josiah is not at home as the first guests arrive and Frances jokes that she has trouble tempting him to attend anything to do with tea. Josiah arrives, pretending to be rushed and apologizing for being late, earning the understanding respect of the men who are visiting. He takes the men to the library for punch and leaves Frances with Sarah and the women. When the guests leave, Josiah opens champagne to celebrate the success, announcing that he's been invited to share in the insurance policies written by the Merchant Venturers and is on the verge of being



invited to become a member of that group. He tells Frances that it's because of her, earning Sarah's jealous anger. Sarah insists that they are trying to outgrow their means and that they are making financial mistakes. After she leaves, Josiah tells Frances that they have moved too fast for her. Frances notes that their marriage is like their house - fluctuating from room to room but better than either of them had imagined.

Mehuru continues to realize that his powers of vision are growing less as the Daisy, finally insured, leaves port. Mehuru and the others have fewer formal lessons and all are doing domestic work under Frances' direction. Then Frances gives all of them English names, calling Mehuru Cicero. He objects, saying that there are few things that he as a slave has control over but that he won't give up his name. Frances insists and there is a tense moment when Mehuru pleads with her to leave him with his African name. Frances tells him that he is her slave, apparently to remind both of them of this fact, and that she will call him Cicero.

## Chapters Fourteen through Seventeen Analysis

The women do what they can in preparation of burial for Died of Shame, though one says that "it's not right" and fears for the woman in the afterlife. Mehuru says that the woman had known that it wouldn't be as it would have been in Africa, and that she accepted that as a possible consequence of her death. A young man named Kbara tells the others that the ways of these people are not the same as their own, but that they could have rituals and that those rituals could be right in a different way. This is an unusual level of tolerance on the part of the slaves and one that isn't often duplicated.

Frances has been told that the house on Queens Square is decorated in the latest style, filled with Chinese images and décor. When she gets her first glimpse, she's a bit overwhelmed and it's obvious that she doesn't really like the theme. Josiah, on the other hand, is thrilled and imagines taking this theme through with the decorations and furniture he plans to buy. Frances is able to tone it down some and Josiah agrees to her suggestions, which are slightly less than demands but remain insistent. When Josiah tells her that he plans to buy red dragons, she agrees, laughingly saying that she couldn't imagine doing without them. He laughs with her and admits that she knows more about what they should do than he. When he tells her that he desperately needs the approval of the men involved in the Merchant Ventures, Frances realizes this is something she can help him achieve because the social requirements of becoming part of this group are what she understands. There is bound to be some conflict between Frances and Sarah as this scheme progresses because Sarah hates the changes, hates spending the money and hates Frances.

Slavery is taking a toll on those in Frances' care, but on Mehuru more than some of the others. He becomes less like his proud self and more like the slave that he has become. It's noted that he has a great deal of trouble standing up straight and that it's blamed on the weight of the collar he'd worn while being chained in the cellar at the quayside, but that it's an attitude as well. His demeanor continues to change, becoming more like someone without a will of his own. This is undoubtedly what his future masters would

require of him, and it seems that this lack of self-esteem will be a desirable quality when it comes time to sell Mehuru. However, Mehuru will not be sold and he will eventually regain his pride.



# Chapters Eighteen through Twenty-one

## Chapters Eighteen through Twenty-one Summary

After the departure of the Daisy, Josiah arrives at the coffeehouse where many of the traders meet, where he's welcomed to the tables reserved by the Venturers. Josiah, having been coached by Frances, tells the men that his wife is teaching slaves in their home and that they are using only those slaves for house servants. He tells them that one of the slaves is in training for Lady Scott, which prompts an series of orders for the slaves, despite the outrageous price Josiah names. Asked how he arrived at that price, he admits that it's the price Frances has named based on what Lady Scott was willing to pay for those being trained for her needs. Stephen Waring turns the conversation to a business venture, naming a potential investment amount. At home, Josiah tells Frances about his conversations and Frances advises that he consider the idea but that he not commit.

Sarah tells Frances that they are in financial distress because of the money they've spent on the move and the increased expense of maintaining this larger house. Josiah arrives after an evening with the members of the Venturers and tells Frances that he's been invited to become a member, which entitles him to less expense on dock fees, use of the crane for unloading without paying a fee, and a percentage of the fees paid by others. Meanwhile Frances has received a letter from Lord Scott telling her that she's done a good thing by taking control of Sir Charles' investments and that he hopes she is well. He also warns that there is legislation afoot that would ban the slave trade.

In chapter nineteen, Sarah wants to continue to invest in ventures with small returns and Frances comes to realize that the potential of earning large amounts of money frightens Sarah almost as much as the idea of spending money. Frances says she has plans to keep the slave she's named Elizabeth as their servant along with one of the young boys and another woman. One day during lessons, Frances tries to convey the idea of God and Mehuru doesn't understand, saying that the importance of a man who died long ago cannot compete with the importance of home. Lord Scott sends Frances a box of daffodils and Mehuru notices that she is moved sensuously by their fragrance. Frances is disappointed by the lack of an Easter celebration and Sarah says that the day should be observed piously, though Frances wishes for a celebration with friends as her father, a rector, had always planned. One evening, Frances sees Mehuru and the other slaves dancing in the kitchen with the other servants. Frances is greatly moved by the sight, especially because Mehuru is "transformed" from the slave he is quickly becoming to the man he was in Africa. Frances senses their joy and it makes her suddenly fiercely aware that she is very lonely so that she goes to her bedroom and cries. She also realizes that she has fallen completely in love with Mehuru.

In chapter twenty, Frances asks Mehuru, who she now calls Cicero, about his life before he was a slave. Mehuru tells her that "Cicero was born here, in this room," referring to the fact that Frances had insisted on the use of the English name rather than his African





name. He initially plans to refuse her request but gives in, saying that his mother was a companion of the king, his father had played a role in the military, and describes briefly the government of his country. Frances says that the people of Mehuru's country keep slaves but he says there are differences in that slaves generally sell themselves into slavery to escape poverty or a slave is a criminal sentenced to a term of slavery. Frances questions him about other beliefs she holds about his country, including that there is human sacrifice, and Mehuru explains the truth.

In the quayside coffee shop that morning, Josiah tells Stephen Waring that he doesn't want to participate in his venture but that he is interested in the lease on the Hot Wells. Stephen expands on Josiah's information, saying that all the work has been done and all that's necessary is someone who can make the correct connections to draw the crowds ready to vacation there and to spend money. Meanwhile, Frances continues to fight her increasing awareness of her feelings for Mehuru.

In chapter twenty-one, Frances tries to write to Lord Scott about her unhappiness and her growing love for Mehuru, but knows she cannot tell the truth to anyone. Josiah tells Frances that he's booked a horse for her to ride that day and she, knowing the Mehuru knows how to ride, takes him with her though not before checking with the other adult male slave, named Julius, and learning that he does not know how to ride. When the conversation grows serious, Frances says she wants to be Mehuru's friend and he says the only way to do that is for her to set him free. Later, Josiah is considering the lease of the Hot Wells and weighing the likely income from his ships. He calls for Mehuru to deliver a letter to Stephen Waring formally requesting the lease and Mehuru asks for money to buy flowers for Frances while he is out, telling Josiah that Frances enjoys the smell of flowers and that there aren't any fresh ones in the house. Josiah seems surprised by the suggestion but agrees. Mehuru buys a large batch of flowers from a street vendor and spreads them all over Frances' room, including on her bed. When Frances sees them, she knows immediately that it was Mehuru's work and luxuriates in the scent, stripping off her clothes and rolling in the bed which is covered with the flowers.

## Chapters Eighteen through Twenty-one Analysis

Sarah remains anxious almost all the time over the changes in the company, the new responsibilities and even the potential for making more money. It's noted that she goes into a fit of anxiety when faced with the potential for large returns on investments, even when those are relatively sound. Josiah is very similarly worried and Frances has to insist on some investments with Sir Charles' money because Josiah is so concerned over the possibility of losing some. When Frances insists on investing with a shipping company headed to America, Josiah is even more worried, partly because they are making a hefty investment but also because he sees it as helping a competitor.

Frances' budding relationship with Mehuru catches her by surprise, at least partly because she was never involved in the silly, puppy love episodes typical of teens. She says that she found them incomprehensible and that they found her cold. Frances now





finds herself irresistibly drawn to Mehuru, and it's probably partly because she is so lonely now that she hasn't her parents and is completely alone. She has not bonded with her husband or her sister-in-law and so feels more lonely than ever in her life. It seems possible that, had her parents lived, she might never have fallen in love.

While they are riding, Mehuru tells Frances that there are some words in English that do not exist in his language, such as beauty. Frances, openly flirting, asks what he would say if he wanted to tell a woman she is beautiful and he says that there is no need for that flattery, that saying he wants her as his wife would be the correct statement. Frances is angry, more so at herself than at Mehuru, but later apologizes for her anger. Mehuru says there's no need to apologize because one would not apologize to an animal, and that slaves are no more than animals owned by another. The emerging feelings of the two are confusing them both and Frances is openly torn by her emotions, which she is experiencing for the first time in her life.



# Chapters Twenty-Two through Twenty-Four

## Chapters Twenty-Two through Twenty-Four Summary

Frances thanks Josiah for the flowers and then tells him that the little boy they call James is ill. She says that they must call for a doctor and convinces Josiah of the need to spend the money by saying that having the child die will be an expensive loss. Josiah urges her to wait but Frances sends Mehuru for the doctor that evening. Dr. Stuart Hadley compliments Mehuru on his speech and tells him about a coffee house where freed slaves sometimes meet with those opposed to slavery as a trade. Dr. Hadley chastises Frances for the keeping of slaves in general and specifically for having James who is barely more than a toddler. Dr. Hadley asks to see the other little boy in the house who is also coughing, but Frances says the child is out on an errand. Dr. Hadley points out that it's horrible weather outside for a sick little boy, again chastising Frances, before leaving with a promise to call back later.

Later, Stephen Waring is meeting with a man named Mr. Green and the two talk about the Hot Wells and Mr. Green expresses his idea to Stephen that the business will never thrive. Stephen says that the potential buyer is a trader and must know the risks. Dr. Hadley returns later that night and says that James is going to die. Sarah says that the loss of another slave is a waste of money. When Frances says that she plans to give the child a proper burial, Sarah grows angry, saying that it is another waste of money and urges Frances to hurry with the training so that the slaves can be sold.

In chapter twenty-three, Frances tells the woman they call Elizabeth that she is to oversee the burial of James, and that she is to do whatever is necessary to bury him in the ways of her people. She then tells Mehuru to help and says that she is trying to "make it right." Mehuru says this can't make it right, but that he will help with the burial.

A few days later, Mehuru asks Cook to allow him to leave the house after the chores are completed, saying he is going to the coffee house and will return before midnight. Cook agrees and give him some money to buy himself a drink while he's out. There, Mehuru finds Dr. Hadley with several black men who have, in one way or another, become free. Mehuru learns many things about slavery, including a press to have the trade of slaves abolished. He is given abolitionist handbills and is told that many of the freed black men marry white women. Dr. Hadley predicts that this will be the revenge of the blacks - the elimination of a pure white race. Mehuru says that he doesn't want revenge, but wants only to return to his home in Africa.

When Mehuru arrives home, the young boy named Kbara is waiting up for him. Kbara tells Mehuru that the other little boy, John, is sick just like James had been. Mehuru goes to check on the child but stops at Frances' door on the way, letting himself in to watch her while she slept for a moment. He then checks in and finds the child sick and



so goes to Frances' room and wakes her to ask permission to go for the doctor. Frances wakes to find Mehuru in her room and, still almost asleep, has an expression of desire that prompts Mehuru to rush to her. They embrace and kiss passionately but Mehuru breaks it off, telling her about John. Frances gathers herself and becomes very cold to counteract her initial response, sending Mehuru for the doctor. Stuart is appalled at the overcrowding of the slave quarters and says that he can't be certain the disease isn't typhoid. He says he'll call the following morning to check on the boy again, but Mehuru warns that Frances may not want him back because of the expense. Stuart says he'll return because it's necessary. When Mehuru returns upstairs, he stops at Frances' door and considers going in but decides against it. Just as he's leaving, she opens the door and he knows immediately that she's decided to lay with him, throwing away her inhibitions and meeting him as an equal.

In chapter twenty-four, Stuart arrives and catches a look between Frances and Mehuru that makes him aware of the relationship. He warns Mehuru that the situation is dangerous for both Mehuru and Frances. Later, Mehuru tells Frances that the slaves should all be paid a wage so that they could buy their freedom. He seems to want only to be able to provide a place that he might take Frances as an equal but she says it is not possible. He leaves in anger and Frances has to restrain her impulse to chase after him.

## Chapters Twenty-Two through Twenty-Four Analysis

The trip to the coffee house and the time spent with the men who are opposed to slavery is good for Mehuru's ego. He is suddenly filled with more self-confidence and is excited that there are others in similar circumstances. Mehuru is interested to learn that many of the men who are freed slaves marry white women. He says that he would choose a woman of his own race and his own culture, but cannot help thinking about Frances at this point. Mehuru is actually very drawn to Frances and his denial that he would choose a white woman over one of the other slave women in the household is a brief look at Mehuru's innermost feelings. He seems to hold a grudge because of his status as a slave but can't resist his attraction to Frances anyway. The feelings, emotions and situation are complex.

Stuart Hadley's reaction to Mehuru's statement that he would want to return to Africa is interesting. Stuart here reveals his own lack of knowledge about those who are in England as slaves. He admits to Mehuru that he'd had an impression of all the people of Africa living in mud huts and eking out an agricultural existence.

Frances writes a letter to her uncle, advising him of various aspects of her life. She then tells him that she knows of a woman in Bristol who married a merchant and who now finds herself in love with someone else. The scenario is obviously a description of herself and Mehuru. She says that the man is a nobleman in his own country and is very handsome. Frances seems to be reaching out for someone to advise her that there is a way out of her marriage with Josiah though she goes on her letter to say that she has already told the woman that there is no option to escape the marriage.



# Chapters Twenty-Five through Twenty-Eight

## Chapters Twenty-Five through Twenty-Eight Summary

Josiah tells Frances to sell the little boy remaining in the house but Frances stalls, saying that it would be bad for business to sell a slave who was not healthy and who died. She also tells Josiah that Mehuru will not be sold so that he can help teach future shipments. Josiah and Sarah argue heatedly over the Hot Wells, with Josiah saying that this is the way to make money and Sarah insisting that to go into debt is a serious mistake. Sarah says that Josiah had promised their father that she would share in running the business and Josiah counters that he'd never promised she could "rule the roost." He then breaks the news that he has an office at the quayside and that he's taken on the services of a clerk to deal with the books, a job Sarah had always done.

In chapter twenty-six, Josiah and Frances visit the Hot Wells and Frances suggests that they build a large bathhouse, breaking up the appearance so that the building looks less like a warehouse. They are caught in a rainstorm going home and are soaked and chilled. Mehuru asks one of the maids about Frances and is told that she seems on the verge of illness. Sarah tells Josiah that she wants to see the books and confesses that it's because she is interested in the company accounts but also because she has nothing to do in this new life. She says that she would prefer to return to the house at the quayside. Josiah tells her he will bring her the books but knows that he cannot because she would be very upset to see the level of their debt.

In chapter twenty-seven, Frances receives a reply from Lord Scott with information about investments and Sir Charles' money, and the news that Lady Scott is expecting a baby. Lord Scott says that Lady Scott will remain in seclusion until after the birth. Josiah meets later with Stephen Waring, who promises to help him secure the lease for the Hot Wells. That night, Mehuru slips out of the house again to meet with Stuart and some others as they wait for the outcome of a proposed law to ban slavery. When the word finally comes, the messenger says that the vote has stalled and is due to be renewed in ten days' time. Mehuru is disappointed but Stuart tells him that they must work harder than ever in the meantime. Frances remains in bed, sick from the chill she'd taken at the Hot Wells. Frances revels in the intimacy of the little time she has with Mehuru, ostensibly continuing his lessons in reading with the slave named Elizabeth as chaperone. During this time, they talk about many things, including slavery.

In chapter twenty-eight, Josiah receives a letter from Lord Scott telling him that the slavery ban has been delayed, as had been predicted, and that the situation is in the control of those supporting the slave trade. At a meeting of the Venturers, Josiah is awarded the lease of the Hot Well and he signs without reading it. Later, Stephen Waring tells another member that he has plans for an area known as the Downs, Clifton and for the harbor. At the same time, Mehuru is attending a meeting of the Bristol



Society for Constitutional Information and he feels he is "at the forefront" of the movement. Mehuru learns that there's a plan to colonize an area of Africa so that slaves can be returned to the country. Mehuru says that the colony, named Sierra Leone, will not be safe because of the strife created by the slavers and that he doesn't believe those who return there will be safe.

Stuart continues to check in on Frances, and by July she is beginning to feel somewhat better. He warns Josiah in Mehuru's hearing that the Bristol weather does not agree with Frances, that her lungs and heart are weak, and that she should winter abroad. Josiah says he's never traveled and wouldn't know how to arrange it for Frances. Stuart talks some to Mehuru then, telling him that the situation in France could lead to the release of slaves but that he does not believe Frances will leave to see the end of slavery in England. As Stuart leaves, Sir Charles arrives and Frances gives him an accounting of his investments and the money he'd left with her. He is pleased but the slaves are angry at his presence. Frances wants to tell him that she knows he is a rapist but cannot bring herself to say anything. Sir Charles' slave boy, Sammy, is wearing a silver collar, engraved with Sammy's name, that Charles says is "all the rage." He insists on a list of names from Frances so that he can have collars made up for her slaves as well. Frances reluctantly hands him the list. Sarah says that Sir Charles is "quite charming" as he leaves, but Frances is relieved that the meeting is over.

## Chapters Twenty-Five through Twenty-Eight Analysis

Lord Scott's letter to Frances includes a paragraph about the "friend" Frances had described as having fallen in love with a man other than her husband. Lord Scott indicates that the woman should remain faithful and do her duty to her husband. Frances admits that she knew this would be his advice. Lord Scott then includes a line that says, "I am very, very sorry my dear," indicating that he knows this "friend" is actually Frances herself.

Frances is torn on the issue of slavery, having profited and known nothing other than a life with this institution intact. However, having come to know Mehuru and some of the others, she hates that these particular people are involved, though she can't bring herself to say that she opposes slavery outright. Elizabeth realizes the depth of Mehuru's feelings for Frances and Mehuru confirms that he believes Frances also loves him. Elizabeth calls him a "poor, foolish man," obviously realizing that the relationship is doomed. She tells him that he has made his situation much worse because of this relationship. Elizabeth doesn't explain, but it seems that she knows that Mehuru is going to be torn by his loyalty to Frances when the time comes - as it must - for them to try to escape.



# Chapters Twenty-Nine through Thirty-Seven

## Chapters Twenty-Nine through Thirty-Seven Summary

Sarah goes to the warehouse and discovers the true state of their financial affairs, including the lack of insurance on one of the ships, the fact that they are indebted for much more than the cargo of any one of the ships, and that Josiah had ordered one of the captains to smuggle slaves to Spain for a higher profit. Josiah goes later to his Hot Wells, where an outside spigot used by the poor of the community is being closed off so that these undesirable, poor people will not be on hand to discourage the wealthy visitors to the spa. He also visits briefly with the "master of ceremonies" at the spa, who says that business will likely pick up in coming months and asks for permission to make some changes, including keeping the band on year around. Josiah agrees. In chapter thirty, Mehuru and Frances are out for a walk and Mehuru tells Frances that he believes they can live happily together if they leave Bristol for Italy or France. Frances is mortified that people might already know about their relationship and tells Mehuru that she fears for her reputation. Mehuru asks what she believes they should do and she says she doesn't know.

At the quayside, Josiah is being dunned by creditors on a regular basis, a situation that has never before occurred. He is then told by Stephen Waring that the Venturers will not allow him to close off the public access to the water, adding that the stipulation was part of the lease. One night, Mehuru arrives in the kitchen to hear from the other slaves that they believe the time has come to run away.

In chapter thirty-one, Josiah has a letter from Captain Stephen Smedley, who says he is between Africa and the West Indies, that he has had heavy losses but expects to arrive in port with more than the normal load of slaves ready for sale, and that he expects to arrive in port some two months after his letter. Josiah then receives a letter summoning him to court over a suit by the Venturers, who are suing him to reopen the public access to the spring. He goes immediately to talk it over with Frances, who advises that he hire an attorney. Josiah reopens the spigot and is painted in a poor light by the media who point out that Josiah, a "young upstart," tried to eliminate public access to the healing waters and that the Venturers were the champions of the poor who depend on that access.

In chapter thirty-two, Josiah looks out over the quay and wonders if he wouldn't have been happier if he had just stuck to one ship in a partnership with Sarah. Josiah again visits the Hot Well and discovers only a few very poor, very sick visitors. He argues with the director and fires him. At home that night, Lord Scott is visiting and Josiah, ignoring social etiquette, tells Frances, Sarah and Lord Scott that he is in financial trouble. Lord Scott, breaking a tense silence, tells Frances that the collars promised by Sir Charles have arrived and when Mehuru refuses to allow one put around his own neck, Josiah





erupts in anger and beats him. Mehuru is subdued by Lord Scott's servant and the collar is put on each of the servants. Lord Scott says that abolition will be adopted eventually and urges Josiah to consider some different ventures. Josiah says that he has invested in land and in the well, and that he believes those are on the verge of costing him everything.

In chapter thirty-three, the slaves discuss what they can possibly do if they leave the Cole household. They don't immediately agree on a plan other than their insistence that they all remain together. Mehuru promises to ask Stuart for help and advice. When Josiah and Frances later encounter each other, Frances shrinks back in fear, but Josiah doesn't notice because he is so overwrought with the fear of the debt that is about to crush him. He tells Frances that she and the slaves have cost him dearly.

Mehuru tells Frances that he and the others will soon leave and asks again that she accompany him. She tells him that she has no courage, and that she's ashamed that she allowed Josiah to strike him and was not even willing to come to his aid. Frances says that she's become the epitome of "an English lady," and is unable to take any action other than to "wring my hands and pour tea."

In chapter thirty-four, Frances hires a carriage - though Sarah forbids it - so that she and Mehuru will have a chance to say good-bye. Mehuru asks why Frances married Josiah and she tries to explain but cannot make him understand her situation, at least partly because of their cultural differences. During their ride, Frances discovers that the Venturers are building a new spa that will take the water from the well Josiah uses for his spa. Frances orders Mehuru to take her home, saying that she must see Josiah and that she believes they are ruined. When she tells Josiah, he initially doesn't believe her. Frances collapses and Mehuru rushes her upstairs. Sarah confront Mehuru but leaves when Mehuru says that Josiah is also ill. Mehuru sends for the doctor. In chapter thirty-five, Stuart soon realizes that Frances is expecting and notes that most ladies of good breeding do not know the signs and may be well advanced before realizing the situation. Frances tells Stuart that the child is not likely Josiah's and Stuart warns that if Mehuru is the father, the child will not be white. Mehuru continues to care for Frances though she doesn't tell him that she's expecting his child.

In chapter thirty-six, Josiah continues to wait and to hope that the Rose will arrive, though she is now late. Sarah blames Frances and Mehuru continues to remain with Frances, telling the others that they must leave as planned and that he will join them. Elizabeth says that she will also remain until Frances dies, as they know she must. Frances tells Sarah that the others have run away and that there's no need whipping Mehuru and Elizabeth as they would not reveal the destination even if they were killed.

In chapter thirty-seven, the bailiffs arrive to repossess furniture and items to repay some of Josiah's debt. Frances goes into labor and Stuart arrives in time to deliver the baby, though it's certain that Frances will not survive. The child, a boy, is obviously Mehuru's son. Elizabeth says that Frances had known that Elizabeth would be caring for the child and that she is able to nurse him. Frances directs Mehuru to her will and he discovers that she has granted freedom to all the slaves, and that she has left the money earned



from her investments for Sir Charles to Josiah and Sarah with instructions that they establish a bank with the proceeds.

## Chapters Twenty-Nine through Thirty-Seven Analysis

When Sarah is going over the books, she tells Josiah that their current financial situation is all Frances' fault, accusing Josiah of trying to live beyond his means because of Frances' expensive tastes. Josiah tells her that he was not content even before Frances arrived on the scene and that he'd wanted this for himself and for Sarah. It's noted that Sarah had lived through much more severe poverty than had Josiah, and that their parents had been on the way out of their deep poverty by the time Josiah was born. This explains a great deal about Sarah's attitudes. She recalls the fear of the desperate times she'd experienced prior to Josiah's birth and is desperately afraid of returning to this condition.

Frances tells Mehuru that she doesn't want him to have anything to do with the radical anti-slavery groups, making him angrily walk away, but he returns when she calls out to him, growing immediately breathless. Frances tells him that she is trying to protect him, but Mehuru says that he doesn't need the protection of a woman who "locks up a grown man and forbids him to choose his friends." Frances' greatest fear is for her reputation, but she is also very fearful of what she might have to do to make ends meet if she were to agree to live with Mehuru. She tells him that being a governess was a horrible life. It's interesting that she is so strong in some ways but so pampered in others that she is unwilling to work or to stand up for herself. This seems to be a fatal flaw in Frances' character and may be at least part of the reason for her physical weaknesses, which will soon cost her her life. Frances at one point admits that she feels sorry for the slaves she has come to know, but admits that she cannot speak against slavery as a whole because to do so would be to "endanger her prosperity." She says that she also cannot bring herself to say this to Mehuru but does admit it to herself. Put this bluntly, it becomes an interesting question as to why Mehuru fell in love with her at all and one the reader is left to answer for himself.

The incident over the well is interesting on several levels. First, Josiah wants to question the reason behind the situation but isn't comfortable confronting those involved. Frances is the only one who continues to wonder about the reasons the Venturers go to such great lengths to put themselves in the forefront of the community as heroes and protectors of the poor. Another interesting point is that Sarah has questioned the reason Josiah so totally believes in the loyalty of these newfound friends but Josiah won't hear anything against them. Even now, Josiah is given a further reduction in the costs associated with his shipping enterprise and takes that as the way the Venturers make up for his role in the embarrassing situation over the well. In actuality, Frances will soon discover that the Venturers plan to open a second spa using the water from the wells leased by Josiah, and that this means they can close all public access to their establishment on the grounds that Josiah's spa already has that available.





# Characters

## Mehuru

A man trained as a priest who has a vision of the coming of the slave ship, Mehuru is an important man in his native home. He lives in Africa and is among those distressed by the continuing slave trade that is tearing villages apart and robbing their nation of an entire generation. Mehuru is assigned the task of taking a ban on slavery to the various villages of his region in an effort to eliminate the African participation in the trade. While on this mission, he is captured and transported as a slave to the home of Josiah and Frances Cole. Mehuru is very intelligent and quickly learns to speak the language of his captors so that he is able to communicate and to help teach the other slaves. Mehuru soon learns to read and is a voracious reader, taking interest in the new world in which he finds himself. When Mehuru makes a chance acquaintance with Dr. Stuart Hadley, his world is changed as he discovers that he is not alone, that there are other slaves seeking freedom, and that there are opportunities for those who manage to escape. When the opportunity to run away presents itself, Mehuru decides to remain behind with Frances, gravely ill and carrying Mehuru's son. Their love is not to be, but Mehuru remains with Frances until she dies in childbirth, giving him his freedom and leaving behind their son.

## Frances Scott Cole

Frances is well past the prime of life when she is orphaned and forced to work as a governess. Her aunt and uncle provide, in theory, a home for her, but she finds herself there as the unwelcome poor relative. When she learns of a position as governess in Bristol for a trader named Josiah Cole, she applies and is surprised when Josiah proposes that she not come into his household as governess, but as his wife. Frances, with few options available and none as attractive as becoming Josiah's wife, agrees, but soon finds herself as the outsider of a family business and jealously regarded by her new sister-in-law, Sarah. Then Frances learns that her job as governess would have been to teach a group of slaves, newly arrived from Africa, so that they may be sold at a premium as English domestic servants. Frances, face-to-face with slaves for the first time in her life, is torn by the conveniences slavery provides and horror slaves must face. She watches helplessly as a young woman who was raped commits suicide, and then she herself falls in love with Mehuru. Faced with the option to run away with the only man she has ever loved, Frances finds herself short on courage. She remains stoic with the knowledge that she will not likely survive the birth of her son, Mehuru's child, and leaves behind a will that grants her lover the freedom that she had not been able to grant in life.



## **Josiah Cole**

A merchant, Josiah is moderately successful but yearns for more and sees Frances with her family connections as his way of moving up in the social world, which he believes will boost him in the business world as well. Josiah is overly trusting of those he should be wary of and buys into a scheme that is doomed to failure. Faced with the lack of success, Josiah agrees to return to his previous way of life with his sister, leaving Frances behind in the hour of her death.

## **Lord Scott**

Frances' uncle who owns the house where Frances is staying prior to the marriage proposal by Josiah Cole. Lord Scott warns Frances that he cannot protect her if Josiah turns out to be an abusive or cruel husband, but agrees that the marriage is likely the best offer Frances will have. Lord Scott comes to realize that Frances is not happy in her marriage but advises that she cannot leave Josiah. He continues to offer guidance for investments and would likely have steered Josiah into profitable ventures had Josiah not been too headstrong to listen.

## **Sarah Cole**

Josiah's sister, she cares for his books and is angry at his decision to marry Frances. Sarah is jealous of Josiah's time with Frances and blames Frances for their eventual financial failures. As Frances lies dying in childbirth, Sarah convinces Josiah to leave this life behind in order to return to their old way of life.

## **Stephen Waring**

The man who owns 29 Queens Square, the house Josiah wants to buy when Waring and his family make plans to move farther from the cramped heart of the city. Waring is conniving and is ultimately hanging Josiah over as a sacrifice in order to further his own interests and those of his fellow businessmen.

## **Captain Smedley**

The captain of the Rose who is ordered by Josiah to smuggle slaves from Africa directly to the Spanish colonies.

## **Sir Charles**

The owner of a plantation, Sir Charles is a cruel slave owner who notes that there is a high mortality rate among his slaves and that he spends a great deal of time working out new means of punishing those who would defy him. Sir Charles rapes a woman who



calls herself Died of Shame, causing the woman's suicide. He comes to trust Frances with money for investments and she does very well for him and for herself, retaining a large amount of money as her share for overseeing the investments and leaving that money to Josiah and Sarah upon her death.

## **Died of Shame**

The name chosen by the woman who is raped, first by Sir Charles and then by John Bates and a young man. The woman is brought to the Cole household at the same time as Mehuru. After the rapes, the young woman asks Mehuru if he will pray for her death. She is buried in a pauper's grave without the ceremony Mehuru and the others believe appropriate.

## **Dr. Stuart Hadley**

The physician who is called on to see James, the young boy in the Cole household, who dies after having given in to cough and fever. Dr. Hadley is staunchly opposed to slavery and berates Frances for having a child so young in her care, and for allowing him to grow so sick that he died. He comes to befriend Frances and Mehuru, delivers Frances' son, and witnesses her will.



## **Objects/Places**

### **The Daisy**

The slave ship captained by Captained by Captain Lisle and owned by Josiah Cole.

### **The Lily**

The second of Josiah Cole's three ships, the Lily is returning from the West Indies with a load of sugar and rum as the story opens.

### **The Rose**

The third ship owned by Josiah Cole and captained by Captain Smedley, the Rose is off the shore of Africa as the story opens.

### **Redclift Dock , Bristol**

The site of the warehouses of Josiah Cole.

### **Queens Square**

Where Josiah Cole tells Frances Scott he is planning to buy a house.

### **The Alafin**

The name for the king in Old Oyo, he is an elected monarch who rules.

### **Old Oyo**

Where Mehuru lives as the story opens.

### **Merchant Venturers Company**

A closed group of gentleman merchants who are wealthier than those in Josiah Cole's circle, and where Josiah wants to belong.

## **The Bristol Society for Constitutional Information**

The group including Dr. Hadley who are opposed to slavery and the slave trade.

### **Bristol**

Where Josiah Cole lives and works. It's noted that the air is foul and there is a significant problem with pollution.



# Themes

## The Evils of Slavery

The institution of slavery is at the heart of this story and drives the interactions of almost all the characters in one way or another. Frances has always known about slavery but in a distant way. When she comes face-to-face with the real people impacted by slavery - those brought to her house as slaves captured and bought with her own money - she suddenly sees slavery for what it can be. However, Frances' life and the lives of all those she knows, is also positively impacted by the slave trade. When Dr. Stuart Hadley confronts her about her ill treatment of the little boy who dies, Frances doesn't have to defend herself because Stuart admits that he has also benefited by the trade, just not as directly as Frances. An interesting aspect of this story is that even when Frances falls in love with a man she owns, she cannot bring herself to say that she supports abolition. Frances admits this to herself but not aloud to Mehuru, fearing his reaction. This seems to suggest that she knows in her heart that slavery is wrong but that she is unwilling to support an end to slavery simply because she does benefit from it.

## The Need for Security

Frances and Sarah are similar in their need for security, though the two women are not the only examples of this theme. When Mehuru and the other slaves are discussing their plans to run away, the other man - Kbara - says that he wants to return to Africa. Mehuru argues that the country is no longer safe and that the odds are that the children would simply be taken again. Kbara is seeking security in his way through his desire to return to the country where he feels safe while Mehuru is seeking the security in a different way, by removing himself and those he has come to love from the possibility of being returned to slavery after making their escape. The security sought by Frances and Sarah are somewhat different. For Frances, the security is found in social status and in money, though the money seems to be almost secondary to the social status. She loves Mehuru as she has never loved before, but when Josiah strikes him, Frances does nothing but cry out. She tells Mehuru that she has become "the essence of an English lady," and that when her lover was being beaten she could do nothing other than "wring her hands and pour tea." Frances fears being ostracized and this fear is so strong that she can deny the only love of her life. Sarah, meanwhile, seeks security in a known situation with known financial obligations. Her greatest fears are of having no money and of having too much, both which would put her into an unfamiliar situation and both which are equally terrifying.

## Cultural Differences

Frances and Mehuru are vastly different in many ways and it's noted that their cultural differences would have been sufficient to keep the two apart even without any of the



other differences. At one point Frances tells him that she would not be able to leave Josiah because her family would immediately disown her. Mehuru says that he does understand that some people wouldn't approve, but cannot believe that Frances' own family would be among those. Frances also tries to explain her situation prior to marrying Josiah and Mehuru also cannot comprehend a society in which an orphaned child would not be completely welcomed as part of the extended family. In another instance, Mehuru tells Frances that his native language and English are vastly different. As an example, he says there is no word for "beauty." Frances teasingly asks him what he would say if he wanted to tell a woman she is beautiful. Mehuru responds that there is no need for this kind of flattery in his culture and that he would tell her simply that he wants her for his wife, and that the woman would know she was desirable. When Mehuru says this, Frances is upset at his candor which is not accepted in her culture though it is normal in his.

# Style

## Point of View

The story is written in third person from the point of view of several of the characters, giving the story an omniscient perspective though this is limited at any given point in time to the perspective of a single character. For example, the reader may see the story through the eyes of Frances for a period of time before the author switches to Mehuru's perspective. Other characters, including Josiah, Sarah and Stephen Waring sometimes hold the spotlight. This is an effective means of presentation for several reasons, chiefly that the story spans two continents and the author would not otherwise have been able to present specific details fully. For example, Mehuru's life prior to his capture and his complete belief that he would be released when his identity was discovered is vital to the understanding of the character. Limiting the perspective would have precluded this information and made Mehuru a less vibrant character from the beginning of the story. In other cases, the perspective is used to build suspense. For example, Stephen Waring cheats Josiah both on the purchase of his house on Queens Square and on the lease for the Hot Wells. Waring briefly takes the perspective as he describes both of these situations to fellow businessmen which makes the reader realize that a financial crisis will occur during the climax of the story.

## Setting

The story is set largely in Bristol, England, though scenes occur in Africa and aboard a slave ship bound for America. The story begins in September of 1787. The slave trade is at the heart of the story and the descriptions of this business seem true to historical accounts. The places are real, though there are extensive details that cannot be fully verified. These details - the existence of the fashionable residents of Queens Square being sold in favor of a new area, the smells of the quayside, the conditions aboard the slave ships, and the financial maneuverings of the merchants involved in the story - all make the story more believable. These descriptions, people and places seem reasonable, also lending an air of credibility to the story.

## Language and Meaning

The story is written in a straight-forward style that most readers will have no trouble understanding. There are some words and references that seem dated - the phaeton, the visiting days, and the slave trade, for example - that may be somewhat dated, but these are typically explained so that readers can fully understand meanings. There are some details of the slave trade in general that may be disturbing to some readers. For example, Josiah receives a letter from the captain of a slave ship in which he describes his plans to use bootblack to cover sores of the slaves he is about to trade so that potential buyers will not realize that the slaves are damaged. This same letter makes





reference to the fact that the anuses of those with the flux will be "plugged" so that potential buyers will not know that the slaves are ill. The treatment of Mehuru and the others is presented in fairly straight-forward detail. These details serve the purpose of making the reader identify with the plight of the slaves involved and evoke sympathy for their situation.

## Structure

The story is divided into thirty-seven chapters. The majority of these are about eight to ten pages in length, though some are slightly longer. The chapters are identified by number only which lends no clue as to the contents of that chapter. There are several letters included in the story, including letters from Josiah, Lord Scott, Frances and a ship's captain. These are set apart from the text of the story through the use of italics. Letters are dated which provides a clue as to the setting of the story. The letters take on a slightly more personal tone than the rest of the book, apparently in an effort to mimic the personality of the character writing the letter. This seems an effective means of expanding on the characters and these letters add some additional depth to the relationships between various characters, including that of Frances and her uncle, Lord Scott, who seems honestly fond of the girl. The letters include an interesting variation in the use of capital letters. For example, a letter from Stephen Waring to Josiah in reference to the house on Queens Square reads, in part, "I can Offer you this house at This price for a Week Only, Mr. Cole. I have had a Pressing enquiry from Another man to Whom I must reply within Eight days." There seems to be no reason for the capitalization and it's left to the reader to determine the significance. This is also true of Frances' will, which reads in part, "I send them my Dearest Blessing and the hope that they may make a Home in England and Find it in their hearts to Forgive me - and all English people - for the Very great wrong that we have done to Them and to their Country. It has taken me a Long, Long time to realize what we did to you. I am sorry, I am Sorry." The book is copyrighted in 1995 with a Touchtone edition in 2007, which includes a list of study questions.



## Quotes

"I was Delighted to meet you at my Warehouse when you applied for the Post of governess, but your Family Connexion and own Demeanor convinced me that I could Never think of You as an Employee of mine. It was that Realization which prompted me to draw the interview to a Close. I had an idea Then which I now Communicate with you: Namely that I wish I might think of you as a Wife." Josiah's letter to Frances, Chap. 1, p. 3

"Mehuru set himself the task of fighting for his share and then giving half of it to the neighbor on his right. He did it as an exercise, a discipline, not an act of love. He thought he would never love anyone, ever again." Chap. 3, p. 50

"You have been hidden from the real things, the dirty thing, sister. But now you are the wife of a man who makes his living by the sweat of his brow, whose hands are dirty at the end of the day. And I am proud of it. I don't want to be a lady who knows nothing of the real world." Chap. 8, p. 99

"But I'm grown very reckless, you know. There is something about being master, complete master of so many. There is something which stirs you, to know that every woman has to do your bidding and that the others can do nothing but watch." Chap. 10, p. 132

"She knew why the woman who had named herself Died of Shame was eating earth and pouring earth on her head and streaking her face with it. Frances knew that she was inviting a rapist to order how his victim should be managed. She knew that she was being slowly and effectively corrupted by a system over which she had no control." Chap. 12, p. 153

"In his shoes and stockings, in his warm breeches and grubby shirt, Mehuru crept from the dockside to the new house, carrying goods and pushing a cart, and knew himself to be walking head bowed, neck bent, like a man without pride, like a man without hope, like the slave he was." Chap. 16, p. 206

"Each is, in every respect, an English servant; but one which never asks for wages, or time off, or can move to another employer. Think what you pay in wages to your servants - and how they behave! Then think what value a slave is!" Chap. 18, p. 225

"I benefit from the trade as much as you do, but I manage to keep my hands clean; I take my profits from the trade at a distance. How can I measure what good it does me?" Chap. 22, p. 287

"They became a new kind of family, an invention all of their own: an African family that mostly spoke English, a black family clothed in cotton and heavy serge, a community with two men but headed unquestionably by the women. And - less comfortably - a



family that snatched at a little space and a little time and could be torn apart and sold away from each other at any moment." Chap. 27, p. 330

"But her social self, which always had the upper hand, stirred the tea, passed cakes, and laughed at his jokes, as she had been trained to do. Just like a little pet dog, she though miserably, which sits to order, and begs when told, and barks a little, and perhaps has forgotten altogether that it was ever a real dog." Chap. 28, p. 361

"He had forgotten the ease and sense of plenty in the luxurious house and the slowly blooming beauty of hi expensively bought wife. All he could see now was the mounting weight of his debts; all he could hear was the steady tick-tick of accruing interest. All he saw when he looked at Frances, pale and defensive in her bed, was another expense." Chap. 33, p. 420

"I lack courage, Mehuru. When I was a girl, I was full of spirit, but I have been made into the very essence of an English lady - all I can do is watch and wring my hands and pour tea." Chap. 33, p. 423



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Frances Scott? How does she come to marry Josiah Cole? What is Frances' reasoning behind agreeing to the proposal?

Who is Josiah Cole? What is his life like prior to meeting Frances? What is it that drives him to marry her? What is his life like after their marriage? What role does Frances play in his ambitions?

Who is Sarah Cole? Compare the similarities and differences between Sarah and Frances, including their fear of poverty and their roles in the life of Josiah Cole.

What is Mehuru's life like prior to being captured? What does he believe will happen when his identity is made known? What is his role in the Cole household? What is it about his former life in Africa that makes him suited to some aspects of his new life and completely unsuited to others?

Who is Sir Charles? Lord Scott? Lady Scott? Stephen Waring? Mrs. Waring? Stuart Hadley? What are the roles of each in the lives of Frances and Josiah Cole?

What happens to prompt the slaves' decision to escape? What is it that makes Mehuru decide to remain behind? Why does Elizabeth choose to remain behind? What is it that frees those two from their duties?

Josiah tells Sarah that he was never happy with his life and that he'd always had ambitions. What is it about his personality that prompts these ambitions? How might Josiah's life have been different if he hadn't met Frances? How might the story have turned out if he hadn't asked Frances to marry him, but had merely accepted her as governess? Support your answers, including the personalities of the various characters as reasons for your answers.

What is the summation of Frances' final will? What does she do in this will that she could not do in real life? What is Frances' stand on slavery? What is Lord Scott's belief on slavery? How are their ideas the same? How do they differ?