

Ruth Hall and Other Writings Study Guide

Ruth Hall and Other Writings by Fanny Fern

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Plot Summary

Ruth Hall by Fanny Fern is a fiction novel that closely resembles the real life of the author. It is divided into ninety short chapters and, as the author states in the preface, this work does not follow the conventional rules of novel writing in 1855. The story follows the life of Ruth Hall, a woman who becomes a widow at a very young age and is forced to create a life for herself and her children that defies the conventional rules of society.

The story begins on the eve of Ruth's wedding day. She is excited and apprehensive about what the future holds. Ruth and Harry marry and move in with Harry's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Hall, until they can afford a home of their own. Harry's parents immediately dislike Ruth—particularly Harry's mother, who is jealous of anyone who competes for Harry's attention.

The young couple's first daughter, Daisy, is born, and soon they have enough money to move into their own home. They live an idyllic life in the country, until Daisy tragically dies of the croup. The couple moves away from the memories of their little girl, and they have two more daughters, Katy and Nettie. Then, Harry unexpectedly dies of typhoid. Ruth is left alone with two little girls and very little money.

Immediately, Ruth's father, Mr. Ellet, and her in-laws, Dr. and Mrs. Hall, fight over who should take care of Ruth and the girls. Neither family wants to take responsibility. They agree to each pay a small amount of money for a short time so that they will look good in the eyes of their respective churches.

As the days and months go by and the money continues to dwindle, Ruth's situation becomes dire. She tries desperately to find employment, but no one will hire her for lower-class jobs, because she comes from an upper-class family with a particular reputation. Then, Ruth is tricked into letting Dr. and Mrs. Hall take her older daughter Katy to live with them. Ruth and Nettie end up nearly starving in a miserable room in a boardinghouse in the lower part of the city, but then Ruth gets an idea: she could write for the papers.

Ruth goes to almost every paper in town with samples of her writing, and finally two papers take her on at very low salaries. She works day and night to meet her deadlines, and the popularity of her stories grows. Ruth becomes a bit of a celebrity, but she goes by the penname "Floy" so no one except for the editors know that she is the author of the columns.

Even though Ruth is gaining notoriety, she is still on the brink of economic disaster and barely has enough to feed herself and her youngest daughter Nettie. Then, she receives a letter from Mr. Walter, the editor of a prominent paper. He offers her a year contract with a much higher salary if she agrees to work exclusively for his paper. Ruth takes his offer and finds out as she gets to know Mr. Walter that the other editors were quite unscrupulous.



Ruth's financial situation is getting better every day, and then three different publishers offer her book contracts. Ruth goes with a publisher that allows her to keep the copyright to her book, and she becomes a very wealthy woman when the book is a best-seller. Ruth rescues Katy from her horrible grandparents and takes her daughters to live in another part of the country in comfort and happiness.

Ruth Hall shines a glaring light on hypocrisies in nineteenth-century society and particularly the double standards that career-minded, single women faced. Ruth is assaulted by hypocrites and by fate itself, but she saves the day by using her own intelligence—getting a job as a writer so that she can become financially independent. There is no knight in shining armor that swoops in to marry Ruth and take care of her for the rest of her life. Ruth saves herself. This was a borderline radical feminist concept in the 1850s.

Ruth Hall is a sentimental and satirical story; it is both modern and dated; and it is a frank portrayal of the challenges women faced when they did not fit squarely into 19th century society.



Chapters I - X

Chapters I - X Summary

Chapter I finds Ruth sitting by her windowsill, unable to sleep. It is the night before her wedding. She is not sad to be leaving her home, because her childhood was not particularly happy. She is instead anxious about what the future holds for her and her new husband.

Chapter II gives a glimpse of Ruth's wedding day. It is a pity that no one but her own family sees her, because she is radiant in her white satin dress and orange wreath. Her husband, Harry, is also a very good-looking gentleman. As the carriage takes the newly-married couple away, Hyacinth admits that they make a handsome pair, and he is relieved that his new brother-in-law is a man of means, so that Ruth will no longer be a burden to the family.

Chapter III is a snapshot of old Dr. and Mrs. Hall, Ruth's in-laws. Mrs. Hall is already jealous of her new daughter-in-law. She belittles Ruth's beauty and intelligence—calling her a frivolous doll—and also disapproves of her family as being overly proud.

In Chapter IV, old Mrs. Hall takes a jab at Ruth. She drills Ruth with questions, leaving her feeling inadequate as a wife and mistress of her household. Old Mrs. Hall also takes this moment to try to plant some of her own values in Ruth.

As soon as the mother-in-law leaves, Ruth bursts into tears in Chapter V, but she does not cry long. Ruth is a rational woman. She decides not to discuss her conversation with Mrs. Hall with Harry, because it would force him to take sides. She loves him too much to put him in that position. By the time Harry comes home from work, Ruth has composed herself, and he has no idea that anything is wrong.

Chapter VI is a small vignette about Harry's parents. Dr. Hall grew up in Vermont and eventually established himself as a country doctor. He is very proud and stubborn and believes his views are the only legitimate ones. Both Dr. and Mrs. Hall are dedicated to their Calvinistic church obligations, and while they bicker often, they are united in the idea that their son, Harry, is perfect.

Harry's parents are not nice to Ruth, and they snoop around trying to find fault with the way she keeps their apartments. However, Ruth wisely keeps her mouth shut and never says an unkind word to her in-laws. The intrusion of old Dr. and Mrs. Hall into their lives inspires Harry to work doubly hard to afford a home of their own.

Chapter VII ushers in a joyous day. Ruth becomes a mother for the first time to a little girl named Daisy. Harry is moved to tears when he sees his daughter. Ruth is worn out from labor. The old doctor thinks of Daisy as an opportunity for future medical experiments; Mrs. Hall considers Daisy another barrier between her and her son; the maid, Betty, looks at the child and sees nothing but extra work. Daisy nestles at her



mother's bosom, too new to earth to worry about the thoughts of the people who surround her.

Chapter VIII describes Mrs. Jiff, an obese woman who is hired to be Ruth's nurse after the birth of Daisy. Mrs. Jiff drinks a lot and takes food from the kitchen every chance she gets. Mrs. Jiff is loud, rude, and ineffective as a nurse. She even occasionally puts the small baby in danger when she is in her care. Ruth suffers from exhaustion, and Mrs. Jiff brings her no relief, spending most of her time instead in the kitchen.

In Chapter IX, old Mrs. Hall pays Ruth a visit. She ruthlessly tells Ruth how terrible she looks and how many women she knows who died after childbirth. Harry arrives just as his mother is leaving and sees the tears in Ruth's eyes. Both Harry and Ruth are too in love to let old Mrs. Hall ruin their bond.

Harry and Ruth finally move into their own home in Chapter X. Ruth dances around like a child from room to room. The house is older and in need of some repair, but it is five miles from the city and perfect to the young couple. Ruth is tearfully grateful for the wonderful life God has given her. She first learns to pray by her child's cradle, bonding with her beautiful little baby girl.

Chapters I - X Analysis

The first chapter provides background information on Ruth in a short series of flashbacks or memories as she sits by the windowsill on the eve of her wedding. She remembers how she used to wish she was beautiful, just so that someone would love her. Her brother, Hyacinth, was more often the center of attention and told her she was plain when she was young. Ruth recalls that she was a shy child who often spent time alone. Her brother, Hyacinth, goes on to achieve fame and love. Ruth's mother dies at a young age, and her father is not a loving man. She is sent off to boarding school, where she blossoms and emerges a well-educated beauty. Now on the eve of her wedding, she is filled with questions about what the future holds for her.

Chapter II is a very brief snapshot of Ruth's wedding day. The author gives clues about the love Ruth and Harry have for each other simply by describing the way they look as they stand together at the altar. Harry's lip quivers with emotion and he stares earnestly at his bride. Ruth never looked more radiant before this day. A bit more of Hyacinth's self-centered personality comes out in this short chapter also. He briefly mentions that Ruth looks quite beautiful—as if he is surprised—and then comments that he cannot imagine staying married to one person his entire life.

Chapter III introduces old Mrs. Hall, Ruth's mother-in-law. She is one of the obvious villains in this story. The author sets her in a negative light immediately, as she makes jealous comments about why she does not believe Harry needed to get married. Mrs. Hall assumes Ruth must be a simpleton, because most beautiful girls are frivolous and not too bright. The end of the chapter foreshadows danger on the horizon for Ruth. She is blissfully unaware of her mother-in-law's animosity.



In Chapter IV describes a troubling exchange between Mrs. Hall and Ruth, where Mrs. Hall immediately attempts to insert her influence by cutting Ruth down and making her feel completely inadequate as a new wife.

Chapter V is a brief emotional snapshot of Ruth. The author lets us in on this personal moment that none of the other characters witness. Ruth bursts into tears as soon as old Mrs. Hall leaves. However, the stronger side of Ruth's character is revealed when she takes great pains to recover before her husband returns and tells him nothing about the incident. Her love for Harry overrides her urge to complain about his mother.

In Chapter VI the author introduces Dr. Hall, Harry's father. He is another villain in the story. Background information on Dr. Hall throws some light on the fact that, despite his arrogance, he is actually a country doctor and probably received no formal training in medicine. Dr. Hall is also very pious. He and Mrs. Hall use their religion to feel superior to everyone else—especially Ruth. The young couple is living with Dr. and Mrs. Hall until they can afford their own home, and the old couple spies on them constantly, looking to find fault with Ruth. Their perfect son is never to blame. The author uses simile in this chapter to describe the old couple as being like two scathed trees.

Chapter VII jumps to the next highlight in Ruth and Harry's marriage, the birth of their first daughter, Daisy. It is a sharp contrast to the previous chapter, because this moment is filled with joy and hope for the future. However, the villains in the story cast a dark shadow over the happy event, when the author reveals their own personal feelings on the birth of the child. The last line foreshadows that poor little Daisy does not know what danger is lurking around her.

Mrs. Jiff makes an entrance in Chapter VIII. The entire short chapter is a vivid description of this very unlikeable woman. She is fat and noisy and often sneaks too much to drink and puts the child in danger. She does very little to help Ruth. In fact, Mrs. Jiff seems to make Ruth's recovery even more difficult. The chapter also reveals that Harry and Ruth find it difficult now to steal a private moment together. First of all, they are living with Harry's snooping parents; and secondly, Mrs. Jiff has a knack for being absent when she is needed and present when Harry and Ruth would prefer a little privacy.

Mrs. Hall tries once again to cause Ruth pain in Chapter IX. The author is very clear that Mrs. Hall has no redeeming qualities. She is very much the villain. Mrs. Hall sweeps in to pay Ruth a visit, and in a few short sentences, she reduces Ruth to tears once again. Her evil ways are starting to wear on Ruth, and Harry begins to notice. The author comments at the end of this chapter that love is a wise teacher. Ruth holds her tongue once again about Harry's mother, because she knows it would hurt him to find out about the mean things she has been saying.

Chapter X is a relief. Harry and Ruth finally move into their own home and away from the evil Dr. and Mrs. Hall. The house is in some need of repair, but it is quite clear that the happy couple will make it into a lovely home. This chapter gives a little more depth to Ruth's personality. She is a strong woman and also very connected to nature. Ruth



notices all of God's creations in the countryside around their home, and she quietly gives thanks to God for them. Ruth's religion is much more organic than that of Dr. and Mrs. Hall. The author takes the point further when Ruth prays by her daughter's cradle. She is not an outwardly religious person, but her faith is more authentic than the very showy piousness that Dr. and Mrs. Hall display.



Chapters XI - XX

Chapters XI - XX Summary

Chapter XI paints a beautiful pastoral picture. Harry, Ruth, and Daisy live an idyllic life in their new home. Ruth and her young daughter share a love of nature, and they spend much of the summer months wandering through the woods and fields. Ruth gazes adoringly on her daughter, but the unseen author warns that her happy moments with her daughter may be fleeting.

Chapter XII provides a snippet of conversation between Dr. Hall and Mrs. Hall. It reveals that they have moved closer to Harry and Ruth's home. Mrs. Hall rants about how much nicer her home will be than Ruth's. Dr. Hall takes that opportunity to tell her that Ruth could care less about what Mrs. Hall has in her parlor, and Harry would give Ruth anything she wants. Mrs. Hall complains about being under-appreciated in their forty-year marriage and storms out.

In Chapter XIII, Mrs. Hall goes over to Ruth's house to snoop around. Her goal is to find evidence of poor housekeeping. Mrs. Hall meets Dinah, a freed black woman who is Ruth and Harry's maid. Dinah has nothing but praise for the couple and their young daughter, which bothers Mrs. Hall.

Mrs. Hall goes through every room in Harry and Ruth's home in Chapter XIV looking to find fault somewhere. Unfortunately for her, the home is beautiful, and everything is in its place. Mrs. Hall finally spies a reproduction of Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty. The old lady is upset that Ruth would bring a naked statue into her son's home—as if it negates all of her religious teachings over the years. She marches home to tell her husband.

In Chapter XV it is the old doctor's turn to meddle. He goes over to Harry and Ruth's home and tells all of the laborers that he is Harry's father and they should stop doing what Harry told them to do and start following his orders. After all, he knows much better than his son how to farm. He even pulls up newly planted hedges by the roots, because he does not think they are the right choice.

Chapter XVI is another beautiful mother-daughter scene. Daisy is waiting on the doorstep for her father to come home from work. She entertains herself by playing with a bushy, yellow caterpillar. Ruth teases her daughter that she has picked an ugly playmate, but Daisy reminds her mother that God made the caterpillar.

Harry returns home on his horse, Romeo, in Chapter XVII, and finds his workers ready to quit. John and Pat explain that they are not willing to work for two masters—Harry and his father, the old doctor. Harry is a very good son and does not want to disrespect his father, but he must be the master of his own home. He tells Pat and John that from now on they only need to follow his orders.



Chapter XVIII opens with old Mrs. Hall spying on her son's home and complaining about Ruth again. Dr. Hall barely listens to her, but he does chime in to relay his own story of Ruth acting in what he believes is an unladylike fashion in front of their minister. Mrs. Hall says that Ruth should do her hair in a more dignified style, like her own. The doctor responds that Mrs. Hall's hair is false. Mrs. Hall tells the old doctor he should not make fun of her wig—he wears a wig of his own.

Chapter XIX is a winter scene. Pat is putting Romeo in a harness, and Daisy hears the bells of the harness tinkling from the barn. Daisy warms her father's coat by the fire while Harry says goodbye to Ruth, and soon Harry dashes out to the sleigh for the five-mile trek to the city. He tells Daisy not to come to the door, because she needs to take care of a cough she has developed.

Chapter XX immediately has a darker tone. Ruth is up at night worrying about her daughter. The child is not well. Finally, she wakes Harry and asks him to go get his father, the doctor. Harry wakes Pat to go get the old doctor. Dr. Hall assumes Ruth is overreacting and gives Pat a bottle of medicine for the child and a message that he will come by to look in on the child in the morning.

Chapters XI - XX Analysis

Chapter XI provides a brief, stern warning. It foreshadows the death of Daisy. Harry, Ruth, and Daisy are living an idyllic life in their new home. Ruth and Daisy share a love of nature and spend much of their time outdoors. The author paints a beautiful picture of the woods and fields that surround their home. Several of the senses are also used to describe the very strong bond between Ruth and Daisy: the pressure of Daisy's tiny hand in hers; the delicate flush of the child's cheeks. These are very intimate, emotional descriptions that make the warning at the end of the chapter even more fearful.

In Chapter XII, more about the relationship between Dr. and Mrs. Hall is revealed. They are a very unhappy couple. They do not seem to like each other very much, because they constantly bicker. However, they are united in finding fault with others. They move closer to Harry and Ruth just so they can assert their authority over the couple.

Chapter XIII reveals a new character, Dinah. Dinah is a freed slave who works as a house maid for Harry and Ruth. She is a good-humored woman who loves her job and defends Ruth without realizing it when Mrs. Hall grills her with questions. Dinah surprises Mrs. Hall, who is snooping around the house, trying to discover proof of Ruth's inadequacies as a housewife. Dinah is respectful of the old woman and lets her look around the house.

In Chapter XIV, the third-person narrator of the book takes a more active part in the story. Mrs. Hall is snooping around Ruth and Harry's home, trying to find fault with the way Ruth keeps her house. The narrator has a conversation with Mrs. Hall, acting as an advocate for Ruth and sardonically egging the old woman on to open china closets and look anywhere she wants to find fault with Ruth. There will be no evidence. Finally, Mrs.



Hall finds what she believes is evidence of Ruth's negative influence on Harry. It is a reproduction of Venus. Mrs. Hall sees this as practically pornographic and rushes home to tell her husband. The author is pointing out here the hypocrisy of the old woman using an established work of art to point out that Ruth is turning her son away from all of her pious teachings.

The scene depicted in Chapter XV shows that Dr. Hall is just as meddling as his wife. He goes to Ruth and Harry's home when Harry is away at work and redirects all of the hired hands to do things as he thinks they should be done—in direct contradiction to Harry's instructions. It is the height of arrogance when Dr. Hall pulls up all of the bushes Harry has just planted and discards them over the fence.

The narrator reveals another intensely personal scene in Chapter XVI. It is a very intimate mother-daughter conversation where Daisy innocently teaches her mother about the beauty of all of God's creations. The respect and love between Ruth and Daisy is a stark contrast to the negative impressions of Dr. and Mrs. Hall in the previous chapters.

In Chapter XVII Harry learns what his father has been up to while he was away. One of his workers offers his resignation, because he does not want to work for two masters. The author reveals Harry's strength of character when he reasserts his authority over his home and tells the worker that he need not take any further instruction from Dr. Hall. The short scene also shows that the employees who work for Ruth and Harry respect them and value their employment. They think much more highly of Harry and Ruth than they do of Dr. and Mrs. Hall.

Chapter XVIII takes place in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Hall. They continue to delight in bashing Ruth and finding fault with everything she does. When they are not making negative comments about Ruth, they put each other down. There are no redeeming qualities in these two characters.

Chapter XIX is a beautiful scene that is placed in direct contrast to the previous chapter. It displays all of the love and goodness of Ruth, Harry, and Daisy through an intimate family activity of helping Harry get ready to travel to work in snowy winter weather. Unfortunately, the beautiful family scene is marred by a foreshadowing of Daisy's illness—she has developed a cough.

Chapter XX shows through dialogue and actions that Daisy's life is in jeopardy. Ruth is in tune with her daughter and knows something is dreadfully wrong. Harry picks up on her concerns and takes action by sending for the doctor, his father. When they send for Dr. Hall, the old man selfishly prefers sleep to helping his granddaughter and says that he will come by in the morning. He blames Ruth for overreacting. This is a fatal mistake.



Chapters XXI - XXX

Chapters XXI - XXX Summary

At the beginning of Chapter XXI, Dinah sees Pat return on Romeo, and she sees a light on in the house, so she goes to investigate. As soon as Dinah sees Daisy, she tells Harry that he should get a doctor immediately. Dinah is worried that the child will not live through the night. Harry goes to his parents' home himself to get his father.

In Chapter XXII, the doctor finally arrives at Ruth and Harry's home. He knows immediately when he sees Daisy that she is near death. Her breathing is much labored, and she has dark circles around her mouth and eyes. The old man claims there is nothing he can do for her, and they should just let the girl die. Ruth implores her father-in-law to help the little girl. Another younger doctor arrives, and he tries a few remedies. Ruth holds Daisy in her arms as the morning comes, and Harry kneels at Daisy's side. As the first rays of the morning stream into the room, Daisy dies.

Chapter XXIII begins with the burial of Daisy. Ruth does not believe that there can be any greater sorrow than what she feels. Then the scene cuts abruptly to a conversation between Dr. and Mrs. Hall and their neighbor, Mrs. Jones. Mrs. Jones comments that it seems as though Ruth is taking Daisy's death very hard. Mrs. Hall says that the child's death is Ruth's fault.

Chapter XXIV starts eight years after Daisy's death. Ruth is looking out the window of a large hotel in a seaport resort town. She holds Daisy's half-worn shoe in her lap and cries for her firstborn. Ruth's daughter Katy comes to her side and reminds her that she has living children to care for now, and they need her attention, too.

Chapter XXV provides more of a picture of hotel life at Beach Cliff. Ruth observes that the same cast of characters is present on every vacation and the same activities take place. However, there is one person she finds very interesting—Mrs. Leon. One day, Mrs. Leon lets her guard down and is moved to tears when she talks about what a mistake she made when she did not marry for love.

October has arrived in Chapter XXVI. Most other vacationers have returned to the city, but Ruth and Harry linger to enjoy the countryside. Ruth notices that Harry does not seem to be feeling well. Harry's health quickly deteriorates. Ruth spends long hours at his bedside.

Chapter XXVII begins with old Dr. and Mrs. Hall making the trip to see their ailing son. When they finally arrive at the hotel, they learn that there is very little hope for their son's recovery. They blame Ruth for his illness.

In Chapter XXVIII the old doctor openly tells Ruth it is her fault that Harry is dying. The doctor she summoned prescribed all the wrong medicine, according to the old man. Ruth ignores her father-in-law and continues to care for Harry. When Harry regains



consciousness for a moment, the old doctor tells him that he probably will not live another day. Ruth stays by Harry's side until he takes his last breath and then has to be torn away from his body and brought into the next room.

Chapter XXIX begins with Hyacinth observing Ruth in mourning. Instead of having empathy for his sister, he thinks that someone should tell her to brush her hair. Ruth emerges from a hazy sleep, and the realization hits her again that her husband is dead. She goes to see the body in the next room. Hyacinth passes a gentleman as he is leaving the hotel who mentions that friends are taking up a collection for Ruth and the girls. Hyacinth assures him Ruth and her daughters will be well cared for.

Dr. and Mrs. Hall are complaining once again about Ruth at the beginning of Chapter XXX. They believe Hyacinth and Ruth's father, Mr. Ellet, are avoiding a discussion about who will take care of Ruth now that Harry is gone. The dressmaker, Miss Skinlin, arrives and fishes for information about what will become of Ruth and the children.

Chapters XXI - XXX Analysis

Chapter XXI shows the same night at Chapter XXX, but this time the third party observer takes a look at the scene from Dinah's perspective. She hears Pat, one of the field hands, take off on a horse, but she does not know why and assumes he is going courting. Then Dinah sees a light on in the house and goes to investigate. There she finds Harry and Ruth up with Daisy, and she is immediately very concerned for the child's health. Dinah is a sensible woman, and when Harry tells her that her father said he will be there in the morning, Dinah tells him his child might not live that long. That sends Harry into a panic. He realizes when he gets an outside opinion from Dinah that they have cause for alarm.

The scene jumps then to Harry harnessing his horse and speeding to his parents' house to implore his father to come to Daisy's bedside. Old Dr. Hall is very irritated about having to go in the middle of the night.

The scene abruptly cuts again to Paddy (Pat) and Dinah desperately applying home remedies to the child while they wait for the doctor. The author uses these short cuts in scenes to speed up the pace and increase tension in the story.

In Chapter XXII the author directly contrasts Ruth and Harry's desperation to save their child with Dr. Hall's cold indifference. They implore the doctor to do something, but he says they should just let the child die. This intensifies the villainous qualities of the old doctor. Daisy is his grandchild, and he will not do anything to save her. The point is further made when a younger doctor with more sympathy for the family is brought in. He tries every remedy he can think of while the old man sleeps in a chair. At the end of the chapter, the author slows the pace down considerably, describing the gray first light of dawn, the ticking clock, and everyone standing by until the child dies just as the first beams of sunlight shine across her little forehead.



Chapter XXIII starts with a very brief flash of Ruth's agony at Daisy's funeral. Then the scene immediately cuts to the home of Dr. and Mrs. Hall. The old couple is speaking with Mrs. Jones, who has stopped by for a visit. The exchange is meant to bring to light the truly evil nature of the old couple. They openly tell Mrs. Jones that they believe it was Ruth's fault that the child died. Mrs. Jones is a smart woman and knows better. She defends Ruth and Harry for wanting to move away from their home, because there are too many memories of Daisy there, and she contradicts them when they try to once again apply blame to Ruth for their misfortune.

The arrogant Dr. Hall is offended by Mrs. Jones' remarks and tells his wife that he plans to make a complaint against Mrs. Jones to the deacon of their church. He is using his religious piousness to get back at someone who does not agree with him.

In Chapter XXIV the story jumps ahead eight years, but in some ways it has not moved forward at all, because Ruth is still mourning for Daisy. The family is on vacation at a large hotel in a seaport town, and Katy, their second daughter, helps her mother heal by climbing up on her lap and putting her own little shoe next to the one that used to belong to Daisy that Ruth holds in her hands. This achingly intimate moment is not described in detail. The simple actions of Ruth cutting a lock of Katy's hair to save with the lock of Daisy's hair, and the two little shoes side by side depict the cycle of life and death within a family—the pain and the joy.

Chapter XXV provides a picture of family vacations in the mid-1800s. The author inserts her own opinions on the artificial nature of these vacations by describing a list of characters that seem to be the same at every vacation site—fashionable mothers, dimwitted daughters, sons who drink too much, wild bachelors looking for a good time, old clergymen looking for some relief from their illnesses, neglected children running around while maids flirt. She also describes all of the brainless activities that vacationers take part in. This sets the scene for Ruth to languish in boredom. She does not fit into the scene at all. However, she does meet one very interesting woman named Mrs. Leon, and they become friends. Mrs. Leon is a hard person to get to know, but Ruth eventually gets through to her and finds out the regal woman hides a lot of inner pain.

In Chapter XXVI the pace is still very slow. It is now October, and most of the vacationers have gone home, but Harry and Ruth linger. Suddenly the pace of the chapter intensifies when Ruth sees that Harry is not feeling well. He brushes it off and says that he will recover soon, but instead he gets worse. Harry feels an urgency to get back to work and complete unfinished business, but his illness confines him to bed.

The author explains how things progress from here using Harry as a point of reference. His thoughts are a confusing kaleidoscope as he is given various potions from the doctor to make him feel better. Suddenly his world is a confusing blur.

The perspective then changes to Ruth. She is compared to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, because she will not leave her husband's side. She keeps watch even while others fall asleep.



Chapter XXVII is a flurry of activity set up by a continual list of questions that Mrs. Hall drills at Dr. Hall as they prepare to travel to see their ailing son. She wants to make sure she has everything she needs, and she is very irritated with her husband for not being more helpful. The old doctor responds with biting comments meant to put her down. They arrive at the hotel flustered and anxious to see their son, and the perspective then changes to a waiter who watches the old couple arrive. This provides another negative outside opinion of Dr. and Mrs. Hall. Of course, Dr. Hall once again finds a way to blame Ruth for Harry's illness.

In Chapter XXVIII the death scene of Harry is painfully slow, similar to Daisy's death scene previously. Dr. Hall once again shows a horrible bedside manner when he frankly tells Harry that he probably will not live through the day. Ruth strives to give her husband comfort in spite of the old doctor's insensitivity. When Harry dies, Ruth throws herself across his body in mourning, and Dr. Hall coldly tells the attendants to remove her to another room.

Chapter XXIX begins with Hyacinth, another villain in this plot. Instead of having sympathy for his sister, he suggests that someone tell her to comb her hair. Hyacinth is about to get married himself and does not stay for the funeral. Of course, he is not really in love with his fiancé. He is in love with her money.

The perspective changes to Ruth waking from a drug-induced sleep. It describes how the crushing reality of Harry's death comes back to her as she gains consciousness. The author does this in an innovative way through internal questions that Ruth asks, as her eyelids flutter. Where is Harry? Where is his body? She is barely awake as she goes searching for him.

Then, the scene returns to Hyacinth's perspective, and the reader sees him fleeing the hotel. Before he can get away, a friend of Harry and Ruth stops him and mentions that Harry did not leave his family much money, so they plan to take up a collection for the family. Hyacinth blandly reassures the man that Ruth and the children will be provided for, but the reader can assume at this point that Hyacinth will probably not make good on his word. He is far too selfish to part with his money.

In Chapter XXX, Dr. and Mrs. Hall should be in mourning for their son, but Mrs. Hall is concerned with looking fashionable at the funeral and has summoned a seamstress. The dialogue between Dr. and Mrs. Hall and the nosy seamstress, Miss Skinlin, makes it clear that they have no intention of offering Ruth any aid. She is not their problem. They also want the seamstress to make Mrs. Hall's dress in a way that shows she is just as deeply afflicted by Harry's death as the widow. When Harry was alive, they competed with Ruth for his attention. Now that Harry has died, they continue to compete with Ruth to get their fair share of sympathy.



Chapters XXXI - XL

Chapters XXXI - XL Summary

Chapter XXXI describes Harry's funeral. There is a slow funeral procession, the coffin is lifted from the hearse, and Harry is buried beside his daughter Daisy.

The character of Bidy McPherson makes a brief entrance in Chapter XXXII. She is the nursery maid for Katy and Nettie, but Ruth has to let her go after Harry dies, because she can no longer afford to pay her. Bidy is very devoted and offers to work without wages, but Ruth will not allow it. Bidy gives a tearful goodbye to the two girls, running from the room with her apron hiding her face.

In Chapter XXXIII, the scene is back at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Hall. Mr. Ellet pays them a visit and they quarrel over who should financially care for Ruth and her children. Each man claims that the other is wealthier and more capable of putting up the money. They decide that Ruth will have to take care of herself, and Dr. and Mrs. Hall will take the girls.

Ruth has a terrible headache from endless crying and fasting at the beginning of Chapter XXXIV. Her father comes to visit her and tells her that the old doctor and his wife have generously offered to take the children. The only thing they ask is that they have full control of the girls and Ruth must promise to stay away from them. Ruth flatly refuses to let the Halls take her girls.

Chapter XXXV begins with Dr. Hall reading a letter from Mr. Ellet explaining that Ruth refuses to part with her children. Mrs. Hall vows that she will get the children some day by whatever means necessary. They agree that they should provide a certain sum of money for Ruth for a short period of time, just so they look good. Mr. Ellet arrives and they quarrel over money again.

Ruth, Katy, and Nettie move into a boarding house in the city in Chapter XXXVI. It is a big step down from what they are used to in the country. A couple of men lounging in the drawing room notice Ruth and decide she would be pretty enough to court.

In Chapter XXXVII, Harry's former friend Tom Develin receives a letter from Dr. Hall at his office in the city. The old man wants Tom to send Harry's clothes to him. Tom knows that legally Ruth should get Harry's clothes, but he thinks the doctor might reward him for sending them to him instead. He decides to send the clothes to the doctor.

In Chapter XXXVIII the author produces a very brief snapshot of Ruth, Katy, and Nettie in their new home at the boardinghouse. It is a dismal place, and the girls want to go home. They also want to see their papa again. These are two wishes Ruth cannot grant for them.



Mr. Develin confronts Ruth in Chapter XXXIX. He shows her the letter from the doctor and explains that he will send Harry's clothes to the old man. Ruth asks directly if she has a legal right to the clothes, because it would be a great comfort to her to keep some of Harry's things. Mr. Develin dodges the question and convinces her that she must let him send them to Dr. Hall.

Two new characters are introduced in Chapter XL: Tom and Mary Herbert. Tom owns a clothing store in the city, and the couple is very wealthy. Tom tells his wife that Ruth recently came to the shop and asked him for a sewing job. He feels bad that Ruth and her children are left destitute. Mary tells her husband that Ruth could not possibly be destitute, because her father and brother are wealthy.

Chapters XXXI - XL Analysis

Chapter XXXI is a very solemn and heart-wrenching scene. It focuses on the pain of Ruth and her two daughters. At the end of the chapter, the theme of Gethsemane comes up again. This time, however, there is no risen Lord. Ruth feels as though the beautiful nature that surrounds them at the cemetery mocks her pain.

In Chapter XXXII, the reader sees that Ruth immediately has to make sacrifices after Harry's death. She is forced to let Bidly the nursery maid go, even though she is a loyal employee and very good with the girls. Ruth simply cannot afford to keep her. We find out through the dialogue with Bidly that it will be very difficult for Ruth to manage on her own, but she has no other choice. Another painful separation takes place when Bidly says goodbye to the family and runs from the room in tears.

Chapter XXXIII contrasts the intense emotions of the previous chapter with a very callous conversation between Dr. and Mrs. Hall and Mr. Ellet. They are willing to starve Ruth out until she gives the children over to the Halls to care for them properly. None of them are willing to help Ruth.

In Chapter XXXIV, the reader sees how unsympathetic Ruth's father is to her situation. She is still deeply in mourning, but he comes to her to tell her that she should give up her children and let Dr. and Mrs. Hall raise them. Mr. Ellet's only motive is to avoid responsibility for Ruth or her children. He does not care that his daughter will be torn away from her children. His is irritated by her weeping instead of empathetic.

Chapter XXXV begins with Dr. and Mrs. Hall bickering again. They decide that they will have to send some money Ruth's way for a short period of time in order to look good to the church and the community. Then, they go on to put down Ruth and her entire family.

The next scene is a dialogue between Dr. Hall and Mr. Ellet where they each dance around the question of supporting Ruth for a period of time. Neither man wants to part with his money. Finally, they agree to pay for a short time, but only because they will look bad in the eyes of the church if they do not.



Chapter XXXVI sets the scene for Ruth, Katy, and Nettie's new living arrangements. They are forced to live in a dingy boarding house in the city. As soon as they arrive, a couple of male boarders are lurking around trying to get a good look at Ruth. A woman who is poor and alone is seen as easy prey. The dark, narrow streets and unsavory characters create a dangerous mood as Ruth and her children set up house in unfamiliar territory.

Chapter XXXVII highlights another betrayal of Ruth. Without her knowledge, Dr. Hall asks Mr. Develin to send Harry's clothes to him instead of Ruth, and Mr. Develin agrees. Ruth is the one who should legally receive her husband's belongings, but the old doctor goes behind her back to steal them from her. Mr. Develin is not described in a very good light in this chapter, either. He is not an attractive man, but he thinks all of the ladies want him. Additionally, he is not loyal to the memory of his old friend Harry when he decides to send Harry's clothes to Dr. Hall instead of turning them over to Ruth, as he should.

Chapter XXXVIII is another brief and sentimental moment between Ruth and her daughter, Katy. They are living in an ugly boardinghouse, and they all miss Harry terribly. As Ruth cries, she considers how difficult it is to teach "thy will be done" to her young daughters—especially when she is having difficulty with it herself.

Chapter XXXIX paints Ruth as the victim once again. Mr. Develin convinces her that she must send Harry's clothes to Dr. Hall, even though legally Ruth has a right to them. Mr. Develin is not moved by her tears and instead considers her "peculiar" as he summons a porter to take the trunk away. Again, everyone around Ruth is looking out for only themselves, and she is left with nothing.

Chapter XL explains Ruth's dire situation through the dialogue of two new characters. Tom and Mary Herbert own a clothing store, and Ruth has come to Tom asking if he would hire her as a seamstress. Tom will not hire Ruth, because he assumes she would want him to bend the rules for her. They lament Ruth's position, but they do not do anything to help her. This exemplifies how difficult it is for a woman in Ruth's position to get work.



Chapters XLI - L

Chapters XLI - L Summary

In Chapter XLI, two of Ruth's former friends come to pay her a visit. However, when they see her meager accommodations they decide they do not want to be seen in such an awful establishment. They have their own reputations to consider. They leave for the famous La Temps instead.

In Chapter XLII two maids, Betty and Gatty, talk about what they have seen while working in the Millet household. Ruth Hall comes to the kitchen every Monday to wash out her clothes with the other servants. She is Mrs. Millet's cousin, but she is given no special favors. Gatty comments that white people are stone-hearted.

Chapter XLIII brings a surprise for Ruth, Katy, and Nettie: the delivery of a bunch of flowers and a basket of apples. Ruth thinks it must be a mistake, but she finds out they are from Johnny Galt, one of their former servants who comes into the city every day with vegetables.

Chapter XLIV is a brief conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Millet in their home after finishing dessert. Mrs. Millet does most of the talking. She mentions that Ruth's father paid her a visit. He wants the Millets to take a turn paying Ruth's stipend. Mrs. Millet told him that she does help Ruth out by letting her wash her clothes in the kitchen once a week—provided she brings her own soap.

In Chapter XLV Ruth asks Katy to go visit her grandfather alone. Katy pretends to be brave, but the busy city streets are frightening to her. Mr. Ellet is very gruff with his granddaughter when she arrives. He treats her like a beggar and tells her she should have to work to earn her money instead of steal it from him. Katy is in tears when she returns to the street, and a man stops and asks her if she is okay. Through their brief conversation, the man realizes that the little girl is the daughter of a man he knew. He slips some money into the girl's bag and tells her to tell her mother that he owed Harry some money. The little girl is very happy to meet someone who also loved her papa.

Ruth anxiously watches out the window for Katy to return in Chapter XLVI. She gazes out at large brick tenements, poor emigrants, a tailor, a pale-faced woman washing clothes, and old woman caring for a crying baby. Everyone in the neighborhood is barely getting by. Eventually, Katy returns with the surprise donation, and the little family has a reprieve for one more day.

In Chapter XLVII, the housemaid of the boardinghouse announces that she is leaving, because the landlady, Mrs. Skiddy, has abandoned her husband with a seven-month-old baby, and the maid refuses to take care of it along with her other duties. Ruth finally follows the endless cries of the infant and helps John Skiddy take care of the child. Mr.



Skiddy develops a new respect for his wife when he has to take over all of her duties in the boardinghouse.

Chapter XLVIII begins with Ruth watching her daughters sleep. She must find a way to provide for them. She decides to start her own school. The next Monday Ruth tries to ask her cousin for help in starting the school. The cousin ignores her request. She is too busy putting the finishing touches on a dress for her daughter. The daughter decides that the dress would be perfect with a coral pin that Ruth used to wear. It was a gift from Harry, Ruth explains. Mrs. Millet and her daughter badger Ruth into selling the broach to them for a dollar and a quarter.

In Chapter XLIX, Ruth makes little progress in finding a teaching job. However, she finds out that there is an open teaching position at a primary school, and Mr. Millet and Mr. Develin are both on the school committee. Ruth knows that both men are aware of how desperate she is to find work, and she resolves to talk to them about the open position.

Ruth visits both Mr. Millet and Mr. Develin in Chapter L. She hopes that they will use their influence to put in a good word for her regarding the open teaching position. Both men are cool and indifferent. Ruth is not discouraged, though. She sends in her application anyway.

Chapters XLI - L Analysis

Chapter XLI is a biting satire of society women in the mid-1800s. They are more concerned with their clothes and stuffing their faces at fashionable restaurants than they are calling on a friend who is in trouble. They abdicate responsibility for Ruth, saying to each other that it is not their business to come to Ruth's aid if her own family will not help her. The author juxtaposes their fancy plumed hats and six flounces against the poverty of their surroundings. The two former friends giggle about frivolously spending \$50 on a collar for their dresses while Ruth is barely living from day to day.

In Chapter XLII more hypocrisy is revealed through the dialogue of two maids in the Millet household. Mrs. Millet is Ruth's cousin, but she treats Ruth like a servant girl, allowing her only to come in the back door and wash her clothes in a wash tub in the kitchen. Regardless of the fact that Harry and Ruth were very generous to the Millets when Harry was alive, now that Ruth is a poor widow, they want little to do with her. Gatty points out that Mr. Millet is very pious when he says his prayers in the morning, but she wonders if he is paying attention to the message the minister gives on Sunday.

Chapter XLIII is a bright spot after a number of gloomy chapters. One of Ruth's former servants—not her family members or her wealthy friends—had the thoughtfulness to deliver a bouquet of flowers and a basket of apples to Ruth and her daughters. The unexpected gift renews Ruth's faith in humanity. Not all people are selfish and callous. Ruth finds a reason to smile again, and her happiness cheers her daughters, as well.



Chapter XLIV is another scathing portrayal of Ruth's family. The Millets are living in luxury, but they choose to do nothing to help their cousin Ruth in her time of need. Mr. Millet is described as a wooden man who speaks little—except to correct his wife when she misapplies the king's English. Mrs. Millet is a snobby woman who is striving to reach the height of fortune and popularity in society. She does not want to be associated with anyone who might tarnish her reputation.

In Chapter XLV, the author finds another opportunity to compare the callous behavior of Ruth's own father to the generosity of a man on the street. Mr. Ellet is miserly and chastises his own granddaughter for being poor. The man on the street is barely an acquaintance of Harry's, but he sees the pain in the little girl's eyes and realizes that she is living in poverty, and he does something about it by offering the girl some money and a kind word.

The author describes what Ruth sees out the window in Chapter XLVI to give a clearer picture of the horrible conditions in which they are now living. It is a hopeless sight. The picture of poverty is painted in the tired faces of people in other windows, the shoeless children running through the streets, and the cries of hungry babies. It is a very sentimental, depressing scene. However, Ruth's entire mood is changed instantly when Katy arrives home with the unexpected surprise. Once again, someone Ruth does not even know, a former friend of Harry, has helped her more than her own family.

Chapter XLVII humorously points out how little men know about taking care of children and household chores. When John Skiddy's wife leaves him, he is at a loss for how to care for their young baby. He soon angrily starts calling the child her baby, as if he had nothing to do with its existence. John is also worn out after one day of caring for boarders and setting up meals, but at least he receives help from Ruth in taking care of the child.

In Chapter XLVIII Ruth's relatives go beyond being merely snobby to being overtly cruel. When Ruth asks for help, Mrs. Millet ignores her request. Instead, she practically steals a brooch from Ruth that was a gift from Harry. Her actions are outrageous—a biting commentary on the selfish behavior of some families.

Chapter XLIX is the set-up for yet another defeat for Ruth. She sees an opportunity for a teaching job, and she knows two of the school committee members. This might give her a chance to win the job. However, the readers are now well-aware of the character of Mr. Millet and Mr. Develin. The mere mention of their names foreshadows defeat for Ruth.

Chapter L plays out what is predicted in the previous chapter. Ruth visits both Mr. Millet and Mr. Develin, and it is revealed through their clipped dialogue that neither man is willing to put in a good word for her.



Chapters LI - LX

Chapters LI - LX Summary

Chapter LI is examination day for Ruth. She travels to City Hall to with a large number of other desperate applicants to apply for the one open teaching position. It is a ridiculous process, and Ruth does not win the position. In fact, Mr. Millet and Mr. Develin both vote against her.

In Chapter LII, Mrs. Skiddy returns a week after abandoning her husband. When Mr. Skiddy returns from work, he is surprised to see his wife holding their child as if she never left. Everything picks up exactly where it left off, but Mrs. Skiddy warns her husband never to mention going to California again.

In Chapter LIII, Mrs. Skiddy realizes that her husband has not returned from work. She goes looking for him, catches him trying to board a boat for California, and drags him back home. After a probationary period, he is allowed to go to the store for groceries. Mr. Skiddy takes off for the shipyard again, and this time he makes it to California. About a year later, Mrs. Skiddy receives a letter from Mr. Skiddy. He has lost everything and begs her forgiveness and passage back home. Mrs. Skiddy smiles, pats her purse of money, and says, "Never!"

Chapter LIV returns to Ruth's story. She walks by a hospital for the insane, and Katy looks at the beautiful lawns and says that she would like to live there, which sends a shudder down Ruth's spine. Ruth finds out that her friend Mrs. Leon recently died in the hospital. She talks the superintendent into letting her see the body. Ruth finds out that no one was with Mary when she died, but she did leave a note. The matron hands Ruth a piece of paper that says, "I'm not crazy. I cannot die here. Dear Ruth, come take me away." Ruth and her two daughters are the only mourners at the funeral.

In Chapter LV Ruth finds a room without board in the lower part of the city. Her new landlady, Mrs. Waters, is an interesting character. She thinks of herself as a physician, because she has dissected a few cats and read a number of medical books. Ruth's room is on the top floor, and it is extremely hot. When Ruth develops a cough, Mrs. Waters offers a remedy for three shillings. Ruth refuses it, and the next day she tells Ruth that she must wash the stairs at least once a week as part of her board.

Ruth wakes up early in Chapter LVI because of a cough that has been bothering her. She hears a whirring noise coming from Mr. Bond's room (the other lodger in Mrs. Waters' house) and wonders what it is. When she sees the paperboy go by on the street, Ruth gets the idea that maybe she could earn her living by writing for the papers. She excitedly sends a letter to her brother, Hyacinth, who is an editor for a popular magazine, in hopes that he can help her get started. Hyacinth finally sends a response weeks later. In his letter, he tells Ruth bluntly that she has no talent for writing.



In Chapter LVII, Mrs. Hall decides that it is a good time to try to take one of Ruth's children. She has heard from a friend that Ruth is buying a smaller loaf of bread at the store every day, so she assumes Ruth is desperate enough to consider parting with her child. The old lady goes into the city and convinces Ruth to let Katy visit for a week.

Chapter LVIII begins with Ruth running into her father on the street. He congratulates his daughter on giving Katy over to Dr. and Mrs. Hall to raise and tells her that she should also give Nettie to the old couple. Ruth is shocked and explains to her father that Katy is only there for a visit. Mr. Ellet tells her not to make a fuss and accept that the girl is better off.

In Chapter LIX, Ruth goes door-to-door contacting editors of various newspapers to sell her columns. She has no luck getting a job. Meanwhile, her funds are dwindling to nothing.

At the beginning of Chapter LX, Ruth is hopeless. It is a hot summer Sunday morning, and she feels as though life is no longer worth living. Ruth takes her younger daughter Nettie to church. During the church service, Ruth hears the soothing words she needs to hear. God has not abandoned her.

Chapters LI - LX Analysis

Chapter LI is a satirical look at the application process for jobs in education. The school committee members act more like inquisitors than individuals with a genuine interest in the applicants. They are given humorous names like Mr. Squizzle and Mr. Fizzle. The author describes Ruth sitting in the "victim's chair" for the interview, and she is bombarded with meaningless questions like whether she uses quill or steel pens. The final question to all candidates is in the form of an essay: "Was Christopher Columbus standing up, or sitting down, when he discovered America?"

Chapter LII is a humorous break from Ruth's tragic saga. Mr. and Mrs. Skiddy are a peculiar and funny couple. Their actions tell the story. Mrs. Skiddy comes home and drives off the maid who is taking care of her child while her husband is at work. Mr. Skiddy makes mistakes at work because he is dreaming about a new romance, but he snaps right back into the role of devoted husband when he finds his wife has returned.

Chapter LIII concludes the brief comic story of Mr. and Mrs. Skiddy. The author even takes part in the humor by giving a first-person comment about how someone should have taken a picture of Mrs. Skiddy when she got the letter from her husband. "My pain fails!" the author exclaims.

Chapter LIV is a sad commentary on the powerlessness of women during this time period. Mrs. Leon's husband had her committed to an insane asylum, because he no longer wanted her around. She is not insane. She ends up dying in the hospital alone and unloved while he is off in Europe enjoying himself.



Ruth's situation goes from bad to worse in Chapter LV. Her new landlady is a scary woman. The author uses simile to form a frightening description of the lady: her hands and wrists are like the yellow claws of defunct chickens; her feet are of turtle flatness; her eyes look like a provoked cat's eyes. When Ruth does not buy Mrs. Waters' potion, the landlady punishes her by giving her extra duties in the boardinghouse.

Chapter LVI is the turning point of the book. Ruth gets an idea that will help her use her own talents to climb out of her terrible financial situation. Her brother is predictably rude and offers her no help at all, but Ruth's determination shines through. She will succeed on her own. The final lines of the chapter foreshadow Ruth's success. She tells her daughter Katy that she will remember this day when she is a woman. There is also an interesting description of Ruth's fellow boarder in this chapter. The author uses simile to describe Mr. Bond's hair as being like a zebra's—one strand is jet black and the next one is white.

In Chapter LVII, Mrs. Hall reenters the story and threatens to foil Ruth's happiness once again—and the happiness of her daughters. She makes Ruth feel guilty about not being able to provide for her daughters and uses that to talk Ruth into letting Katy go visit Dr. and Mrs. Hall for just a week or two. Of course, old Mrs. Hall has no intention of returning the child once she is in her care. Katy's danger is foreshadowed when Mrs. Hall makes mental notes of the characteristics of the child she plans to change when she has control of her.

Chapter LVIII is a scene that exemplifies how powerless women were during this time period. Ruth's father and her in-laws wait until she is in a desperate financial situation, and then they openly steal one of her children. Ruth is told not to make a fuss. She is not given any say in the matter at all, and the elders all know that she is incapable of going to get the child, because she does not have money for the train trip to the country. Ruth is outraged at their duplicity, but there seems to be no way she can fight them.

In Chapter LIX, Ruth is desperate to earn money, and she cannot find any newspapers that will hire her to write for them. Most of the editors dismiss her immediately without looking at her work; others have their own religious agenda that she does not match. The author uses the metaphor of Ruth having to start on the lowest round of the ladder. She has to start with the smallest papers, because she is unknown as a writer, and none of her influential friends or family members will introduce her to the editors of more well-established papers.

Chapter LX is a sentimental return of Ruth's faith in God. She is hopeless at the beginning of the chapter and full of faith by the end. The author uses metaphor to compare Ruth's life to a burning candle. It seems so worthless to her, that it is barely worth keeping the flame flickering. She goes to church, and she is then compared to a bird, fluttering with a broken wing. She is transformed during the service and leaves the church soaring and singing.



Chapters LXI - LXX

Chapters LXI - LXX Summary

In Chapter LXI, Mr. Ellet has invited a country clergyman from his parish to dinner. The clergyman compliments Mr. Ellet on his successes. He is a very wealthy man. Mr. Ellet enjoys the praise and says an extra-long prayer before dinner to prove his piousness. Meanwhile, in the city, Nettie pleads with Ruth for a little more food.

Chapter LXII starts with good news. Ruth has found a job as a columnist with The Standard. Unfortunately, they will not pay her until her column reaches print. She is worried that her daughter Nettie could starve to death in the five days before she gets paid.

Chapter LXIII sets the scene for a hot August afternoon. Dr. Hall is snoring in his chair, Mrs. Hall is knitting, and poor Katy is forced to sit in silence without moving. Suddenly, there is a knock on the door. It is Ruth and Nettie. Ruth has walked all the way from the city carrying Nettie so that they can see Katy, even for a brief moment.

In Chapter LXIV, Ruth finds out that her columns are well-received by the public. She is writing under the pen name "Floy," and fan mail has started to come in to The Standard. She then takes on an additional writing job at The Pilgrim. Hyacinth is not happy with her success and asks Mrs. Millet to convince Ruth to find some other type of work. Ruth ignores them both.

Chapter LXV shows that Ruth's circumstances have not changed much. She continues to write all the time to make her deadlines, but she still does not have enough money to live on. She reads two new fan letters. In one, a man suggests that she write a book. The other letter is an emotional thank you from a dying woman. Ruth says a small prayer.

Chapter LXVI shows what is going on in Katy's life. She dislikes school and is suffering through life with Dr. and Mrs. Hall. In one particularly cruel moment, Mrs. Hall cuts off Katy's beautiful curls, because they remind her of Ruth. Katy wonders why God took her father away and prevented her mother from earning enough money to bring her home.

A new character is introduced in Chapter LXVII: Mr. John Walter. He is the editor of The Household Messenger and a fan of Ruth's writing. He guesses that Floy is a woman, and she probably is not well paid for her writing, which he believes to be genius. He decides to write her a letter.

In Chapter LXVIII, Mr. Lescom hands Ruth what he supposes is another fan letter. Ruth walks wearily home and then reads the letter. It is from Mr. Walter, offering to pay her more than her current two salaries at The Pilgrim and The Standard. However, he must know her real name and exactly what they are paying her. Ruth decides to trust Mr. Walter and replies to his letter.



Mr. Walter receives Ruth's letter in Chapter LXIX. He is outraged by what she has gone through in her life and how poorly she is paid by the other two papers. He vows to get her what she deserves and sends a contract to her immediately, requesting an answer by the next post. Ruth receives the letter and without much hesitation signs the contract and sends it back.

Chapter LXX begins with Mr. Lescom complaining that Ruth's latest articles are too short. When she suggests that if he wants a longer article, she wonders why he is not willing to pay her more, Mr. Lescom scoffs at her remark and tells her that she is welcome to go elsewhere if she thinks she can do better. Ruth takes that moment to tell him that indeed she has decided to do exactly as Mr. Lescom suggests. Ruth explains that she signed an exclusive contract with Mr. Walter. Mr. Lescom suggests that they both write to Mr. Walter to ask that he make an exception for The Standard.

Chapters LXI - LXX Analysis

Chapter LXI displays the paradox of Mr. Ellet talking at length with his clergyman about how important it is to save even one soul from poverty or sin. Meanwhile his own daughter and child are starving in the city not far away. He invites the clergyman to a lavish dinner and talks about how blessed he is with wealth, but he will spare none of it for his daughter and her family.

Chapter LXII is a lesson in trust for Ruth. Her daughter becomes ill, and she has no money for medicine and no one to turn to. Mr. Bond offers a homeopathic cure. She is unsure what to do, but eventually she trusts him to help heal Nettie, and his medicine seems to work.

In Chapter LXIII, the author acts as a sort of third party tour guide, inviting the reader to look into the old doctor's house to see what is going on. The scene outside is a beautiful summer day; inside it is stiflingly hot, because all the windows are shut tight. The doctor snores in his chair, and the old lady knits. Katy is forced to sit in silence. Katy's prayers are answered when Ruth shows up at the door with Nettie. They walked the entire way from the city just to see her. At the end of the chapter, old Mrs. Hall is nervous that Ruth is going to cause trouble for them. She wants to ban Ruth from ever seeing her daughter, Katy, again.

Ruth's columns are starting to gain popularity in Chapter LXIV. Subscriptions are up as a direct result of her writing, but nevertheless, Mr. Lescom refuses to raise her skimpy salary. When Ruth gets an additional job at The Pilgrim, she struggles just as much with that editor, Mr. Tibbetts, to get a meager salary. She has no choice but to take the job, though. She uses the metaphor "every pebble serves to swell the current" to explain the fact that she has to take any job that is offered to her in order to survive. This chapter highlights the unscrupulous behavior of editors in the newspaper business at that time. The author also uses alliteration in this chapter, "her little bark breasted the billows," to describe how Ruth continues to move toward success.



Chapter LXV is an emotional chapter. Ruth's situation is not much better than it ever was, but she finds out by reading her fan mail that she has touched people's hearts. That renews her faith once again, and she says a quiet, private prayer of thanks to God.

In Chapter LXVI the author takes an ironic tone when describing the school committee for Katy's school. Who would be insane enough to question members of a school committee? What do they care if the children suffer all sorts of discomforts in the school? They are busy with other more important adult issues. Their children are physically suffering from the poor conditions in the school and will most likely have permanent damage to their health, but it that is not the concern of the town. Katy is living a dismal life with her grandparents, who are cruel and punishing. The chapter ends sentimentally as Katy falls asleep wondering why God has taken so many things that she loves away from her.

Chapter LXVII foreshadows the meeting of Mr. Walter and Ruth. Mr. Walter is the editor of *The Household Messenger*, and he is dying to find out the true identity of Floy. It is not idle curiosity. Mr. Walter sees the genius in Ruth's writing, and he believes she is overworked and probably underpaid. He wants to give her the pay and prestige she deserves. He vows to find out her true identity. At the end of the chapter, the author says "fate folds her hands," which alludes to the fact that Mr. Walter will make good on his promise.

Chapter LXVIII sets the stage for a resolution to Ruth's problems. The author increases the tension a couple of times: once when Mr. Lescom holds the letter that he does not know comes from a rival editor; and a second time when Ruth has doubts about whether or not to reply. The letter does reach its destination, and Ruth does believe its sincerity, so two potential problems are averted. The chapter ends with a very sentimental simile using Ruth and the Bible's Noah. Ruth sends off the letter with more hope than Noah experienced when he sent the dove from the ark the third time.

In Chapter LXIX, revenge is in the air. Mr. Walter finds out how mistreated Ruth has been by family, friends, and the editors of the other two papers. He offers her an exclusive contract, but she must sign and return it by the next post. Ruth has become a shrewd businesswoman. She realizes that he is doing this so that she will not have a chance to talk to Mr. Lescom first. Ruth also sees that the contract is a very good offer. The author inserts a slightly sarcastic feminist statement here about how Ruth is able to understand the contract—even though she is a woman. She knows it is a good deal, and she signs.

Revenge is sweet in Chapter LXX. An unsuspecting Mr. Lescom complains about the length of Ruth's latest articles. He has no idea that she knows now that he has been unfairly compensating her. He arrogantly tells her to go somewhere else for employment if she thinks she can do better. Ruth tells him that is exactly what she plans to do and offers her resignation. However, Mr. Lescom talks her into writing a letter to Mr. Walter to ask him to make an exception for *The Standard*. Ruth agrees if Mr. Lescom will also condescend to write to Mr. Walter, and they send the letters together in one envelope.



Chapters LXXI - LXXX

Chapters LXXI - LXXX Summary

In Chapter LXXI Ruth goes to the offices of *The Standard* and finds a letter from Mr. Walter waiting for her. Mr. Walter tells Ruth in the letter that she is kind to feel obliged to Mr. Lescom, but she should not feel that way. He has cheated her out of payment that she rightly deserves for her talent. Mr. Walter includes a copy of the letter that he sent to Mr. Lescom. In that letter, Mr. Walter chastises Mr. Lescom for claiming any hold over Ruth. She made his paper's reputation, not the other way around.

In Chapter LXXII, Ruth returns home and begins to open her fanmail. One is from a southern gentleman who wants to marry her. The second letter is from a publishing house offering her \$800 for the copyright to a collection of her articles they would like to publish. Ruth decides that she will not sell her copyright. The third letter is from a gentleman who wants her to pay for his college.

Chapter LXXIII takes place in Mr. Tibbetts' office at *The Pilgrim*. He is upset to find out when he returns from the country that Ruth has resigned. He, too, claims that he made Floy's reputation. When he sees that Ruth is unmoved, Mr. Tibbetts resorts to threats to try to force her to stay. Ruth does not raise her voice, but she makes it very clear that she will never again write for *The Pilgrim*.

Chapter LXXIV takes a slight detour from the main story. It takes place in the garret of Mr. Horace Gates, who is a poorly paid, overworked employee of *Hyacinth*. Mr. Gates does most of the work for *Irving Magazine*, but *Hyacinth* takes all the credit. Mr. Gates reads a letter from *Hyacinth* telling him not to publish any articles by Floy. In the letter, *Hyacinth* tells Mr. Gates that Floy is his sister. Mr. Gates rightly guesses that *Hyacinth* is jealous of his sister's growing popularity.

Mr. Walter and Ruth meet for the first time in person in Chapter LXXV. He pays her a visit in her tiny room at the boardinghouse and is moved to tears when he sees the poverty in which she and her daughter Nettie live. They sit together and talk like brother and sister for many hours, and Ruth tells Mr. Walter her life story. Then, she asks his advice about three offers she holds to publish her first book. Ruth is a novice in the business, but Mr. Walter tells her that her common sense gives her an advantage. He agrees that she should not sell the copyright.

In Chapter LXXVI, Mr. Walter talks Ruth into getting a phrenological examination. This was a popular practice in the 19th century, where some scientists believed they could tell a lot about a person's physical and mental health by feeling the bumps and contours of their head. Ruth reluctantly agrees, even though she does not believe the practice holds much merit.



By Chapter LXXVII Ruth has become a businesswoman. She spends much of her time working as her own secretary answering letters, running to the post office, and writing her columns. Ruth knows that everything she does will take her one step closer to getting Katy back. Finally, her book is published.

Chapter LXXVIII takes place at Hyacinth's lavish home. He is speaking with his colleague Mr. Lewis and divulges the fact that Floy is his sister. His friend is dumbfounded and cannot believe he did not tell him before. Mr. Lewis starts to question Hyacinth further, but Hyacinth dodges the questions and then plots to himself how he will manage to keep the real facts out of the press.

In Chapter LXXIX Mr. Lewis asks Mr. Walter if it is true that Hyacinth really is Floy's brother. Mr. Walter tells Mr. Lewis the entire truth about how poorly Ruth has been treated by her family, and how, now that she is famous, Hyacinth wants to share in her glory.

Chapter LXXX brings the good news Ruth has been working for: she has made enough money to retrieve her daughter, Katy. Mr. Walter sends her a letter stating that she is making a small fortune with her book, and he will come to help her retrieve her daughter in two days.

Chapters LXXI - LXXX Analysis

The author uses Mr. Lescom's and Mr. Walter's letters in Chapter LXXI to further the plot and bring out just how unscrupulous editors were during this time period. Mr. Walter's letter to Ruth explains to her that she is very kind to think of Mr. Lescom, but she is absolutely not obligated to him. She can gain her financial independence without this deceitful editor. Mr. Walter's letter to Mr. Lescom is filled with anger. He says that Ruth alone has built the reputation of The Standard, and he had nothing to do with it. Her genius is the source of the success. Mr. Walter refuses to make an exception for Mr. Lescom and suggests that he bid for her services after his exclusive contract ends in a year.

Chapter LXXII continues to use letters as a way to supply the reader with information. This time the letters are from Ruth's fans. They exemplify the extent of her popularity, as they come from many different locations and personalities. The possibility of Ruth writing a book emerges once again.

Ruth gains strength in Chapter LXXIII. She will no longer be bullied by crooked editors. When Mr. Tibbetts tries to tell her she is obligated to stay and work for The Pilgrim, Ruth responds in a tone so low that he can hardly hear her. She will not be frightened, threatened, or insulted by the likes of him. Mr. Tibbetts then takes his threats up a notch and claims that he will use his friends in the industry to damage her reputation. Ruth makes an overtly feminist statement by telling him his actions are "manly," but his threats do not move her. Then, she triumphantly walks out the door, ignoring his screams behind her.



In Chapter LXXIV, the author addresses the reader directly in the first person to elicit their agreement on her low opinion of some editors. Then, through the monologue of Horace Gates, an overworked editor employed by Hyacinth at the Irving Magazine, the author rants about injustices in the publishing business at that time. Mr. Gates mentions a book by the name of Uncle Sam's Log House, which is a play on Harriet Beecher Stowe's best-selling book of the time, Uncle Tom's Cabin. Mr. Gates complains about the self-serving policies of editors. For example, Hyacinth directs Mr. Gates not to make any comments that might offend southern readers. The author is commenting on a real-life incident here, as a similar policy was in place at the Home Journal in the 1850s.

Chapter LXXV is a sentimental scene. Mr. Walter sees firsthand how Ruth and her daughter, Nettie, have been living. He holds back tears as he looks around the barren room where they live and sees the small bit of milk and bread they have to eat. The future is bright for Ruth and her children, but even she shudders when she thinks of what they have been through. Ruth pours her heart out to Mr. Walter, and then after he says goodbye, she reads some of her fan mail. The opinions are quite varied, and they most likely mimic the wide range of responses the author received from fans of her columns.

In Chapter LXXVI, the author uses a phrenological examination to highlight all of the good traits of Ruth. It is a lengthy description of her fine points, and although Ruth brushes it off as flattery, Mr. Walter believes the physician is accurate. The reader learns more about Ruth's views as she talks to Mr. Walter while he walks her home. Through Ruth's monologue, the author has a chance to emphasize more of her own opinions.

Chapter LXXVII swings back to the sentimental side. Ruth works harder than ever so that she can get her book published and have enough money to get her daughter, Katy, back. When the book is finally published, Ruth thumbs through the pages and remembers what she was going through when she wrote every single article. It has been a long and difficult road for her. At the end of the chapter, Nettie mentions that she might be a writer, too, when she grows up. "God forbid," Ruth answers. She believes that only unhappy women write.

In Chapter LXXVIII, Hyacinth's self-centered behavior is starting to catch up with him. He tells his friend that Floy is his sister, and his friend cannot believe it. Floy is supposed to be a poor woman with no connections. How could she possibly be a sister of wealthy Hyacinth, who is the editor of a prominent magazine? Hyacinth begins to realize that he is going to look very bad when the truth comes out, and he hopes the alliances he has made by buttering up other people in the business will come through for him in the upcoming crisis.

The author utilizes a dialogue between Mr. Lewis and Mr. Walter in Chapter LXXIX to exact revenge on Hyacinth and the rest of Ruth's family. Mr. Lewis inquires about the true story behind Floy, and Mr. Walter gives him an earful about how poorly Hyacinth, Mr. Ellet, and other members of her family treated Ruth when she was destitute. He brings out every ugly detail about how Ruth was wronged—and one particularly alarming fact surfaces. The reason Harry did not have much money to leave Ruth when



he died was because he had been generous in lending money to Hyacinth, who never paid him back.

Once again, the author uses letters in Chapter LXXX to further the story. The reader finds out that Ruth is making a fortune with her first book and will be able to be reunited with her daughter through a letter from Mr. Walter. There is a short snippet of celebratory dialogue between Ruth and Nettie, and then four more fan letters display the views of a variety of Floy's admirers.



Chapters LXXXI - XC

Chapters LXXXI - XC Summary

Chapter LXXXI begins with a rain storm that lasts for seven days. As the sun finally starts to return, Dr. Hall realizes that his basement is flooded and he needs to retrieve some hams that are hanging down there before they go bad. Mrs. Hall calls little Katy and tries to force her to do the job. Katy is very frightened, but Mrs. Hall tells her that she owns her now. Katy must do what she says. Suddenly, Ruth appears in the doorway just in time to save her child. The old couple argues with her that the law says they own Katy, because Ruth cannot support her. Ruth triumphantly announces that she now has more than enough money to support her daughters and herself. She and Katy leave the house by way of a coach driven by Mr. Walter and his brother-in-law, Mr. Grey.

In Chapter LXXII the happy group of travelers stops at a nice hotel. Ruth and the girls will stay here for a few weeks before they move to a permanent home. Mr. Walter, Mr. Grey, Katy, and Nettie enjoy a celebratory dinner together where Nettie entertains everyone with her wit, and then Ruth entertains the group by reading some of her fan mail. Mr. Walters then talks about the favorable reviews the book has received.

While the adults are talking, Nettie and Katy sneak away, and Katy tells Nettie about how Mrs. Hall used to beat her. Nettie is so angry, she wishes the old woman dead. However, Katy reminds her that she is supposed to forgive, and Ruth comes to them and explains that old Mrs. Hall is an unhappy woman who should be pitied.

Chapter LXXXIII begins with both daughters sitting on their mother's lap. Ruth alternately cries and laughs as she hugs them both. Then Nettie takes over the conversation and tells Katy all about their life in the boardinghouse. Finally, she reveals her biggest secret—she is in love. Katy can hardly stop laughing as Nettie gives her all of the details about her little boyfriend and shows her a picture he drew for her.

Weeks have gone by at the beginning of Chapter LXXXIV. Katy and Nettie never get tired of telling each other stories about how they suffered. Katy tells Nettie about her cruel grandparents; and Nettie tells Katy about the life of poverty she endured. Nevertheless, Ruth smiles as the two girls fall asleep cheek to cheek. They are all happy and safe now.

That night, Ruth has a beautiful dream about her entire family (including Harry and Daisy) wandering through a lovely garden. Eventually, the dream turns into a nightmare. People are screaming and running from a devastating fire. Ruth coughs and starts to wake, and suddenly she realizes the fire is not a dream. The inn is in flames. Ruth grabs her girls and throws them out the window into the safe arms of onlookers. A gallant fireman named Johnny Gant climbs a ladder and carries Ruth to safety.



In Chapter LXXXV, Ruth's extended family gets what they deserve. The tables have turned for the Millets. Their son, John, is now a physician trying to make a living in the city. He wishes that he could use his relationship to Ruth to build his reputation, but she refuses to admit to knowing him. John admits he made a mistake by asking Ruth to tell her girls not to call him cousin on the street when they were poor.

Revenge is bestowed on Mrs. Hall in Chapter LXXXVI. Mrs. Hall lends a book to one of her cronies and talks about how much she enjoyed reading it. She and her friend wonder about the real identity of the author, Floy. They ask the squire's son, Mr. Dana. He is surprised Mrs. Hall does not know. Floy is her own daughter-in-law Ruth. Mrs. Hall immediately backpedals and tries to find fault with the book. After her friend and Mr. Dana leave, she rants on about how it just beats all that Ruth has become a famous author and columnist. She hopes that Ruth's luck will soon change.

Chapter LXXXVII is a short conversation between Mr. Ellet and his colleague, Mr. Jones. Mr. Ellet reveals that Floy is his daughter, Ruth, and Mr. Jones is quite surprised. He starts to drill Mr. Ellet with questions about how Ruth got started, but Mr. Ellet has no idea and avoids the question. Then, Mr. Jones comments that Ruth must write for her own amusement, because she does not need to make any money. She is the daughter of a wealthy man. Mr. Jones says that Ruth writes very truthfully about the poor and wonders how she could possibly know about poverty. Mr. Ellet replies that she has a vivid imagination. Finally, Mr. Jones says that Ruth must be making quite a bit of money, even though she does not need it, and other writers are starving. Mr. Ellet replies that no one can understand fate.

In Chapter LXXXVIII a man walks into Mr. Develin's bookstore and asks about popular female offers. Mr. Develin names a few, and when the man asks about Floy, Mr. Develin downplays her fame, saying that she owes it all to her brother Hyacinth. Then, the man reveals himself. It is Mr. Walter, and he sets the record straight. Ruth gained notoriety on her own merit. Her brother had absolutely nothing to do with it. Mr. Walter admonishes Mr. Develin to stop spreading false rumors.

Chapter LXXXIX begins with Nettie entertaining Ruth and Katy with her latest pun. Johnny Galt retrieves Mr. Walter from the depot, and when he arrives, the girls tell him all about the fire and how brave Johnny Galt was when he saved them. Ruth and Mr. Walter agree that they will leave for Ruth's new home the following day. Then, Mr. Walter hands Ruth a piece of paper that says she owns 100 shares of Capital Stock of the Seton Bank. She is officially wealthy. Nettie complains that she is not allowed to tell anyone that Floy is her mother, even though she is very proud of her. Mr. Walter teases Nettie by saying that she will never change her mother's mind once it is made up.

In Chapter XC the day is beautiful as Ruth, Katy, and Nettie climb into the carriage and start to travel to their new home. Mr. Walter will escort them, and as they start the trip, Mr. Walter and Ruth sit in comfortable silence, each lost in their own thoughts. They stop at Harry and Daisy's graves before they leave this part of the country. Ruth lingers in the graveyard for a long time, and then they all get back in the carriage and start off for their new home.



Chapters LXXXI - XC Analysis

The author uses simile in Chapter LXXXI to describe the scene in the countryside after seven straight days of rain. The hides of the cattle looked as sleek as the "pomatum'd" heads of their owners on Sunday. Finally the sun comes back out, but life for Katy remains bleak. Her old grandparents try to force her to wade down into the flooded cellar to get a ham, even though she is very frightened. In a melodramatic scene, old Mrs. Hall is just about to force Katy down the stairs when Ruth appears heroically just in the nick of time. She whisks her daughter away from the horrible grandparents and vows that neither of them will ever cross that threshold again.

Chapter LXXXII is a joyous reunion chapter. The reader finds out that Nettie is fond of puns as she comes up with one after another while they are seated around the dinner table at the inn. When the conversation turns to the success of Ruth's book, Ruth uses simile to compare a book to water. She says that a book, like water, will find its level. She also compares launching a new book to launching a ship. Mr. Grey is astonished at her low-key reaction to her success. Mr. Walter describes Ruth's life for Mr. Grey in a sentimental series of opposites: there were rainbows and storm clouds; flowers and thorns; clusters of the Promised Land and the Dead Sea apple.

Chapter LXXXIII is a humorous scene between mother and daughters. Nettie has most of the lines in the conversation. She is a little chatterbox and has a lot of catching up to do with her older sister. She tells Katy about the dismal little room where they lived and how they could not even afford to feed the mouse that also inhabited the room. Then Nettie reveals that she is in love with a little boy from her school. This is cause for uproarious laughter.

In Chapter LXXXIV, everything seems to be right again. Ruth's financial problems are resolved, and she and her daughters are reunited. Then, a fire in the inn threatens their happiness. Ruth and the girls barely make it out alive. The author takes a moment at the end of this chapter to give homage to unsung heroes. She describes a bleak scene of the fireman, Johnny Gant, returning to his home alone and anonymous and adds a blessing to un-honored heroes.

The author once again uses a letter as a tool to further the story line in Chapter LXXXV. The Millets receive a letter from their son, John. He is struggling to build his medical practice in the city and could use Ruth's influence to help him get started. The author puts John in an almost an identical situation to where Ruth was. John realizes that he made a mistake when he pretended not to know her when she was poor. Of course, John is still more concerned with material gains than doing the right thing. He completely misses the point of having compassion.

Chapter LXXXVI is an exciting piece of dialogue, because the reader knows that Mrs. Hall is about to discover that her favorite writer is the woman she likes least in the world. Mrs. Hall ends up trapped in her own words. She would never intentionally praise Ruth, but she does so accidentally before she finds out her true identity. At the end of the



chapter, Mrs. Hall uses a balloon for a metaphor of Ruth's success. She has heard that even balloons land in mud puddles. She hopes that is what happens to Ruth.

In Chapter LXXXVII Mr. Ellet is the next villain to squirm. He is audacious enough to claim Floy as his daughter now and tell his clergyman that her talent is a result of the way he raised her. Then, when he boasts to a colleague that Floy is his daughter, the colleague goes on and on wondering how Ruth could write so truthfully about the poor, when she could not have ever experienced poverty. After all, her father is a wealthy man. The man mentions that Ruth must be currently making thousands of dollars, and she does not even need the money, because she comes from a wealthy family. Mr. Ellet ironically replies that providence is inscrutable.

The author is now making every scoundrel in the story suffer, and in Chapter LXXXVIII, it is Mr. Develin's turn. Mr. Walter catches him spreading lies about how Ruth gained fame as an author. Mr. Develin claims she owes her success to Hyacinth. Mr. Walter corrects him by using a train metaphor. When the train picked up speed, Hyacinth tried to jump on and enjoy the ride. He had nothing to do with getting the engine started. As Mr. Walters walks away from the shop, he comments that the meanest person is one who tries to rob a woman of the literary fame she deserves.

In Chapter LXXXIX, Ruth and Katy laugh at another one of Nettie's puns—she says the rain is pour-severing. When a worried Mr. Walter arrives, Ruth tells him that they have recovered from the fire and are just fine. She says that her wardrobe is now slimmer, but that is nothing compared to what it was like to have a slim pocketbook. They agree that Mr. Walter will take them to their new home the following day, and the chapter ends triumphantly when Mr. Walter hands Ruth 100 shares of stock. She was destitute a year ago, and now she is a bank-stock holder.

Chapter XC is a very sentimental ending of the book. Ruth stops at the grave of her husband and first-born daughter before she leaves to start a new life in another part of the country. The author uses nature to describe the passage of time (the silver moon on the chapel turrets and the dew on the flowers) as Ruth lets her memories flow while she stands by the graves. The author also uses images of the sleeping dead beneath the soil in the graveyard. They have come to a restful place, and some day Ruth will be there, too, beside her husband.

Finally, Ruth is ready to go, and they all climb into the carriage. As they leave the graveyard, a startled lark lets out a little song. Mr. Walter sees it as a good omen that Ruth has harmony in store for her.



Characters

Ruth Hall

The heroine of the book. She is a quiet beauty who defies the rules of conventional society. Ruth becomes a widow with two young children at a very young age. Her family refuses to offer her much support, so she turns to writing as a means of making a living. Ruth creates a very good life for herself and her children, supporting them through a career as an author and a journalist.

Ruth is respectable and reserved throughout most of the book, but does eventually give fiery responses to Mrs. Hall and Mr. Tibbetts. She is a strong woman under her quiet demeanor. Many of the villains in the book underestimate her wit and her strength. Mrs. Hall wrongly assumes Ruth must be a frivolous, dimwitted doll, because she is a beautiful woman. Mr. Lescom and Mr. Tibbetts wrongly assume they can walk all over her because she is a woman.

Ruth loves Harry and is devastated by his death and the death of her first daughter, Daisy. However, she carries on and is a good mother to Katy and Nettie. Ruth enjoys nature. She especially loves flowers. Ruth also has a strong faith in God.

Mrs. Hall

Ruth's mother-in-law and the main antagonist in the story. A pious, mean-spirited woman who is overly attached to her son. She is an unattractive old lady who wears a severe wig, pulled back in a bun and a cap with strings that flutter when she is angry or upset. She dislikes everyone except for her son, Harry, who can do no wrong.

From the moment Mrs. Hall meets Ruth, she hates her, because Ruth is a threat to her relationship with Harry. There is no way that Ruth can ever measure up to Mrs. Hall's notions of a good and pious housewife. Mrs. Hall is not merely rude to Ruth, she is openly hostile. She blames both Harry and Daisy's death on Ruth and believes that Ruth is incapable of raising Katy and Nettie correctly. When Mrs. Hall gets a hold of Katy, she beats her because she loves her mother. Mrs. Hall also cuts off Katy's hair, because it reminds her of Ruth.

Mrs. Hall does not particularly like her own husband, Dr. Hall, either. She bickers with him constantly and believes he has fallen short of most of her expectations.

Mrs. Hall is a sad, bitter, old woman who finds little happiness in life.



Harry Hall

Ruth's husband. A tall, handsome, curly-headed, kind man with a good job at a counting house. He loves his wife and children dearly. Harry dies of typhoid fever early in the story.

Katy Hall

Ruth and Harry's second daughter. She is quiet and thoughtful but also a very strong and sensible girl. Katy has brown, curly hair and looks much like her father.

Nettie Hall

Ruth and Harry's youngest daughter. She is more daring, independent, and playful than her sister. She looks like a miniature version of Ruth.

Daisy Hall

Ruth and Harry's first child. She is a beautiful little girl with blond curls and blue eyes, much like her mother. Daisy dies in childhood from the croup.

Dr. Hall

Ruth's father-in-law. A penny-pinching, pious man who often wears a cheap, red wig. He thinks himself vastly superior to everyone around him.

Mr. Ellet

Ruth's father. He is a difficult man who does not show much love for any member of his family. He often embarrasses the family in social situations. He does not wish to help support Ruth when she becomes a widow.

Mrs. Ellet

Ruth's mother. She dies when Ruth is young. Ruth does not remember much about her, other than the fact that she often tries to cover up the father's rudeness with jokes.

Hyacinth Ellet

Ruth's brother. He is arrogant, selfish, and successful because he married a wealthy woman. Hyacinth offers no help to his sister Ruth when she goes through difficult times.



Betty

The cook for Dr. and Mrs. Hall. She considers herself one of the family, because Dr. and Mrs. Hall share a room with her in the evening (to save the expense of burning an extra lamp). She is lazy and often takes long naps in Ruth's rocking chair.

Mrs. Jiff

Ruth's nurse after the birth of her first child, Daisy. Mrs. Jiff is very fat. She drinks a lot of wine, eats a lot, and perspires a lot—especially when she is caught snooping in Ruth's drawers. Mrs. Jiff makes a lot of noise while she walks, because of her stiff gingham gown and new, thick shoes. She also wheezes a lot. Mrs. Jiff is more of a danger to the child than a help, and she gives Ruth no relief as she recovers from the birth. Mrs. Jiff even sleeps in the bed with Ruth and borrows Ruth's brush to comb out her hairpiece.

Dinah

Black house servant for Harry and Ruth. She is a good humored woman who enjoys working hard. She is probably a freed slave, because she mentions that she much prefers working without the lash of a whip. Dinah is merry and very loyal to Harry and Ruth.

Pat Donahue

One of the field workers for Harry and Ruth. A brawny Irishman.

Johnny Galt

A field worker for Harry and Ruth. After Harry dies and Ruth and the girls move into a boardinghouse, Johnny is one of the few people who thinks of them and sends Ruth and the girls a bouquet of flowers and a basket of apples. Later in the story, he is the brave fireman who saves Ruth and her daughters from the burning inn.

Mrs. Sally Jones

Neighbor of old Mrs. Hall. A kind woman, who sympathizes with Ruth when she loses her child.



Mrs. Mary Leon

A wealthy, beautiful woman that Ruth meets on vacation at Beach Cliff. She seems very rigid and cold, but Ruth finds out that she has a soul. She later dies in a hospital for the insane.

Miss Skinlin

Old Mrs. Hall's dressmaker. A whiny woman. She spreads a lot of gossip and enjoys getting juicy bits of information from her clients. She hides her curiosity under a veil of piousness.

Biddy McPherson

An Irish nursery maid that Ruth and Harry hire to help care for their daughters. She is very loyal and loves Katy and Nettie as if they were her own. She is let go after Harry's death, because Ruth can no longer afford to keep her.

Jim

A man who lives in the first boardinghouse Ruth moves into. He thinks she is pretty and decides he might try to court her.

Sam

A boarder at the first boardinghouse where Ruth lives. He is described as a low-browed, pig-faced man who likes to dress in a flashy way. He agrees with Jim that Ruth is a beautiful widow and thinks he might also like to get to know her better.

Mr. Tom Develin

Owner of a bookstore in the city and a former friend of Harry's. He is described as a bachelor with very precise taste. He has slicked-down hair that could withstand any wind storm and an apple-sized head. He believes he is a lady killer.

Tom Herbert

A clothing store owner in the city. He thinks Harry was a noble man and remembers that Harry used to buy clothes for Ruth in his store.



Mary Herbert

Tom's wife. She used to go to school with Ruth.

Mr. and Mrs. Millet

Ruth's cousin and her husband. When Ruth hits hard times, Mrs. Millet lets her do her wash in the kitchen with the slaves, but she offers no further assistance.

Matilda Maria Skiddy

The owner of the first boardinghouse Ruth and the girls live in. A tough woman who demands to be paid on time and bosses her own husband around.

John Skiddy

Mrs. Skiddy's husband. He continually threatens to leave for California to make his fortune, and finally he follows through on his threat.

Mrs. Bunce

The matron of the insane asylum where Mrs. Leon dies. She is gaunt, sallow, and bony and has yellowish, black glaring eyes like a cat's eyes in the dark. Her voice is loud and harsh, and her movements are quick.

Mrs. Waters

Ruth's landlady at the second boardinghouse. She thinks of herself as a female physician. She wears clothes that give her a pole-like form, her feet are flat, and she has eyes that look like a crazed cat.

Mr. Bond

Ruth's neighbor at the second boardinghouse. A thin, elderly, gentleman who always dresses very plainly and neatly. He is polite, does not say much, and only leaves the boardinghouse at night. His hair and whiskers are black and white striped, and he is slightly hunched over.

Mr. Lescom

Editor of The Standard, the newspaper where Ruth gets her first job as a writer.



Mr. Tibbetts

Editor of The Pilgrim. Hires Ruth to write two columns a week for his paper.

Mr. John Walter

Editor of the popular Household Messenger and advocate for Ruth. An energetic and honest young man who has built his own success from the bottom up.

Mr. Horace Gates

An overworked editor who works for Hyacinth's publication, the Irving Magazine. He is a slim, gentlemanly man who looks scholarly.

Mr. Grey

Mr. Walter's brother-in-law. He drives the carriage with Mr. Walter, Ruth, and Nettie to retrieve Katy.

John Millet

Mr. and Mrs. Millet's son. A relative of Ruth. He is a young, snobby, materialistic physician.



Objects/Places

Harry and Ruth's First Home

A haven in the countryside five miles from the city. This was a place where Harry and Ruth spend many happy days early in their marriage. It is also a sad place, because their first daughter, Daisy, dies here.

Daisy's Little Red Shoe

Ruth keeps this shoe as a keepsake after Daisy dies.

Daisy' Lock of Golden Hair

Ruth keeps this lock of Daisy's hair after she dies.

Dr. Hall's Wig

A cheap red wig that Dr. Hall wears most of the time.

Mrs. Hall's Cap

Mrs. Hall always wears this cap as a sign of her pious nature. Its strings flutter when she is agitated.

Harry's Wedding Vest

One of the few things of Harry's Ruth is able to keep after he dies.

Coral Pin

A pin belonging to Ruth that was a gift from Harry. Mrs. Millet forces Ruth to sell it to her for one-tenth of what it is worth.

Ruth's Purse

Also a gift from Harry. Ruth continually checks it to see what money they have left.



Mr. and Mrs. Skiddy's Boardinghouse

The first boardinghouse where Ruth, Katy, and Nettie live when they move to the city.

Mrs. Waters' Boardinghouse

The dismal place where Ruth and Nettie live during their worst moments of poverty.

Mr. Walter's Letter

The first letter from Mr. Walter that changes Ruth's financial situation almost overnight.

The Standard

Newspaper edited by Mr. Lescom.

The Pilgrim

Newspaper edited by Mr. Tibbetts.

Household Messenger

Newspaper edited by Mr. Walter.



Themes

Economic Independence

One of the main themes of *Ruth Hall* is economic independence. Ruth is left destitute when her husband dies. She has two young daughters to care for and no means to make a living. Her cruel family members refuse to offer help, and Ruth finds out quickly that she must find a route to economic independence, or she and her children will starve.

Economic independence means survival, but it also signifies freedom from the constraints of 19th century society. If she is dependent on a husband for financial support, she cannot do what she chooses with her life. If she is dependent on a family member for financial support, then she has to endure their ridicule. In the case of Dr. and Mrs. Hall, Ruth loses a child because of her lack of economic independence. They believe they have a legal right to steal Ruth's child if she cannot support herself.

Economic independence is also synonymous with happiness. If Ruth can find a way to support herself, she no longer has to communicate with her horrible family, she will get to keep both of her daughters and she will also have a great feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment.

The triumph of this story is when Ruth achieves economic independence.

A Woman's Place in Society in the Mid-1800s

Another theme of *Ruth Hall* has a feminist ring to it: a woman's place in society in the mid-1800s. Ruth finds that as a young widow she has no standing in 19th century society. According to the law at the time, she is the property of her husband. When Harry dies, where does that leave Ruth? She cannot be divided up with the rest of his property, so instead she is discarded.

Ruth tries to get a job, but she finds out right away that it is not easy for a woman to find a job in the 1850s. Ruth was raised to become a wife, so she is unsure at first what practical skills she can use. She tries sewing, but many of her potential employers know she is from a wealthy family, and they refuse to hire her for a job that is considered below her class. Next, she tries to become a teacher, but powerful people on the school committee—one of whom is a cousin—vote against her. Finally, Ruth becomes a writer, and even then her road is difficult. The publishing business is a man's world, and they take advantage of Ruth whenever they can.

When Ruth starts to gain notoriety as a columnist and then as a book author, her family is embarrassed. They ask her to find a more suitable, unobtrusive job.



Ruth has to carve a new place for herself in society, because there is no place for a woman of her circumstances. That is why this book was sometimes considered anti-feminine and too bold. Ruth Hall blazes a new trail for women to reach their own success and have economic independence.

Hypocrisy

A third theme in Ruth Hall is hypocrisy. Fanny Fern gives a truthful account of the hypocrisies that she sees all around her in 19th century family and society.

First of all, there are the underhanded tactics of publishers. They take credit for all of the great writing in their newspapers and magazines, but they pay the real writers next to nothing and never grant them the notoriety they deserve. They give good reviews to certain writers and certain celebrities just because they think those influential people will return the favor in the future. They are seldom concerned with publishing great literature. Instead, they focus on their reputation, their subscription levels, and making as much money as they can while paying their writers the least amount of money they can get away with.

Then there are Ruth's family members. The Halls are outwardly very pious, but in reality they are spiteful and cruel. Mrs. Hall even beats little Katy when she is in her care. Mr. Ellet, Ruth's father, refuses to help support her when she is starving to death in a boardinghouse. However, when Ruth starts to gain popularity, Mr. Ellet tells everyone she is his daughter and she owes her talent to his wonderful upbringing. Hyacinth is also a man of great literary reputation, but he is so self-centered that he will not help his own sister get started in the writing business. Finally, Mrs. Millet, Ruth's cousin, takes a broach from Ruth, because she wants her daughter to have it. The broach was a gift from Ruth's dead husband, but Mrs. Millet could not care less.

This book is filled with evil characters who are perfect members of society on the outside and perfect monsters on the inside. Fanny Fern brings this hypocrisy to light.

Style

Point of View

Fanny Fern uses the third person omniscient point of view in *Ruth Hall*. She takes the reader into the minds of the various characters in multiple locations while still maintaining an idea that the reader is a separate entity who is observing what is going on rather than being part of the action.

For example, in Chapter XIII, when Mrs. Hall is snooping through Ruth and Harry's house trying to find fault with Ruth's housekeeping, the reader is set apart, watching what Mrs. Hall is doing and even taunting her to open the china cabinet. The all-knowing narrator already knows that there will be no evidence in the cabinet and teases the old lady from afar as she looks for clues.

Another good example of the use of the third person omniscient is after Daisy dies. In chapter XXIII, the third person omniscient point of view allows the reader to experience the pain that Ruth feels at the loss of her daughter. Then, a few lines later, the reader sits in on a conversation between Dr. and Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Jones. Emotions are expressed along with the dialogue, so that the reader knows Mrs. Jones feels empathy for Ruth and is disgusted by how Dr. and Mrs. Hall have reacted.

Occasionally, the author will switch to the first person omniscient. In Chapter LXXIV, she speaks in the first person directly, as the author of the book, and asks the reader to join in her low opinion of unscrupulous editors.

Setting

The setting for *Ruth Hall* could be in and around any large American city in the 1850s. The author never says specifically where the story takes place, but she does specify that it is in a radius around a prominent northern city. It might be New York City, Boston, or Philadelphia.

Dr. and Mrs. Hall live in the countryside. They are far enough away from the city that one would take a carriage or a train to get to where their home is located. It is a feat of perseverance when Ruth walks to their home from the city.

When Harry and Ruth get their first home, it is located five miles from the city, also in the countryside.

After Ruth becomes a widow, she and her daughters live in two different boarding houses in poorer neighborhoods in the city. The second boardinghouse is in the lower part of town and presumably in an even worse neighborhood than the first boardinghouse.



All of the business action in the book takes place in the city. The newspapers are located there; Harry's job is in the city; Mr. Ellet and Hyacinth both have offices in the city; Ruth applies for all of her jobs in the city.

At the end of the book, Ruth and her daughters leave this area to move to another part of the country, but the author does not specify where that might be.

Language and Meaning

The language of Ruth Hall alternates between a sentimental style that was popular in the mid-1800s and a very straightforward, modern tone that Fanny Fern is known for in her newspaper columns. The language may seem corny to modern readers in some areas, but in other parts of the book it is quite strong and even contemporary sounding. Fanny Fern was criticized when this book was released for having an unladylike tone in some of her chapters. Others who praised her work called the tone satirical and a harsh view of the truth.

Fanny Fern's background was in journalism, and that writing style comes out in her brief descriptions and frequent use of dialogue. She is not overly descriptive. In fact, there are very few details given about the numerous characters in the book. Fanny Fern does take the time to be more descriptive in scenes that take place in nature and also when describing the emotional pain that Ruth endures.

Structure

Fanny Fern would have been a wonderful cinematographer. She tells the story in a montage of 90 brief chapters—building evidence of events just like a journalist, doling out short bites of information. The story follows a chronological order, but the montage effect comes from scenes that are constantly skipping from character to character and place to place, so that the story is revealed through a series of short snapshots. The effect is quite modern for this time period.

Fanny Fern makes ample use of dialogue, letters, and actions to further the plot. There is very little description throughout the book. She slows down the pace in emotionally packed scenes, such as the death scenes of Harry and Daisy. That is where she adds quite a bit of sentimental description. The author also takes some time to describe nature—a popular sentimental subject of this time period. For example, in chapter XI, Fanny Fern takes her time to describe the woods and meadows that surround Harry and Ruth's house as Ruth and Daisy play in the countryside and collect flowers.

Nevertheless, most of the book is fast-paced, because the author provides just a quick glimpse into each scene, as if the reader is entering after the scene already started and leaving before it ends.



Quotes

"The old couple, like two scathed trees, dry, harsh, and uninviting, presenting only rough surfaces to the clinging ivy, which fain would clothe with brightest verdure their leafless branches." Ruth Hall, chapter VI, p. 18.

"Each bright summer morning, Ruth and the little Daisy, (who already partook of her mother's love for nature,) rambled, hand in hand, through the woods and fields, with a wholesome disregard of those city bugbears, sun, dew, bogs, fences, briers, and cattle." Ruth Hall, chapter XI, p. 26.

"The noisome, flaunting weeds of earth have not wholly choked the modest flower of gratitude. 'Smile more, mamma!'" Ruth Hall, chapter XLIII, p. 104.

"Poor Ruth! And this was human nature, which, for so many sunny years of prosperity, had turned to her only its bright side!" Ruth Hall, chapter L, p. 125.

"Can good people do such things? Is religion only a fable? No, no; 'let God be true, and every man a liar.'" Ruth Hall, chapter LVIII, p. 152.

"She pulled her gloves off and on, and finally mustered courage to clothe her thought in words." Ruth Hall, chapter LXIV, p. 167.

"All sorts of rumors became rife about 'Floy,' some maintaining her to be a man, because she had the courage to call things by their right names, and the independence to express herself boldly on subjects which to the timid and clique-serving, were tabooed." Ruth Hall, chapter LXIV, p. 170.

"That first miserable day at school! Who that has known it—even with a mother's kiss burning on the cheek, a big orange bumping in the new satchel, and a promise of apple-dumplings for dinner, can review it without a shudder?" Ruth Hall, chapter LXVI, p. 176.

"As Mr. Lescom finished this business-like and logical speech, he looked smilingly at Ruth, with an air which might be called one of tyrannical benevolence; as if he would say, 'Well now, I'd like to know what you can find to say to that?'" Ruth Hall, chapter LXX, p. 190.

"Ruth smiled derisively, then answered in a tone so low that it was scarcely audible, 'Mr. Tibbetts, you have mistaken your auditor. I am not to be frightened, or threatened, or insulted,' said she, turning toward the door." Ruth Hall, chapter LXXIII, p. 202.

"The humbuggery of this establishment is only equaled by the gullibility of the dear public." Ruth Hall, chapter LXXIV, p. 206.

"No happy woman ever writes. From Harry's grave sprang 'Floy.'" Ruth Hall, chapter LXXVII, p. 225.

"It might have procured the sale of a few copies at first, but a book, like water, will find its level." Ruth Hall, chapter LXXXII, p. 244.

Topics for Discussion

Discuss how the author uses short chapters and frequent scene changes to set the tone for the book.

How is Ruth Hall an unconventional heroine for the mid 1800s?

How does Fanny Fern use this fictional story to satirize 19th century society?

Why is Ruth Hall often considered modern writing and ahead of its time?

What portions of Ruth Hall do you find outdated or overly sentimental?

What evidence can you find in Fanny Fern's writing style that reveals she was a journalist?

In what ways does Fanny Fern speak to ordinary 19th century women through her writing in Ruth Hall?

Was Fanny Fern a feminist? Why or why not?