

Summer of My German Soldier Study Guide

Summer of My German Soldier by Bette Greene

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Plot Summary

In this classic story, set during the Second World War, an intelligent young Jewish girl named Patty Bergen lives with her family in Jenkinsville, Arkansas. Isolated from other children by religion, she is also isolated from her family. Her father, the owner of the town department store, is dismissive and abusive. Her mother is disapproving of Patty's tomboy ways. Her parents dote, however, on Patty's younger, prettier sister, Sharon. Patty's only true friends are Ruth, her black maid, and a local boy named Tommy of whom her father disapproves, although Patty is not sure why.

Things begin to change when Jenkinsville is chosen as the site of a prisoner of war camp for captured Germans. When a group of POWs are brought into the store to purchase hats, one young man is called upon to translate. As the others are making their purchases, Patty waits on him. She finds him polite and friendly, as well as handsome. In her mind, he doesn't seem to be anything like the Nazis she was warned against. He introduces himself as Frederick Anton Reiker, or Anton to his friends.

Patty has a secret hideout in an abandoned garage behind her parents' house. Here she hides her most precious things, including the books she buys with money given to her on the sly by her grandmother. The hideout is her escape from her friendless world, where she spends her days reading and learning vocabulary words from the dictionary.

On the same day that several U-Boats are captured off the coast of the U.S., a prisoner escapes from the POW camp. The FBI becomes involved immediately, and a woman reporter from Memphis comes to write an article about the escape. She takes Patty with her to the camp, and finds Patty has the potential to become a writer. She encourages Patty to consider journalism, and offers a mentoring type of friendship to the lonely girl.

Anton has used a clever ruse to escape from the POW camp, seeking freedom rather than collusion with the Nazis. Patty finds him and hides him in her secret place. Although she momentarily considers turning him in (in an attempt to gain her parents' approval and love), she doesn't. Patty and Anton become friends, and although she doesn't think it possible, he tells her he truly cares for her and finds her beautiful. He proves his devotion when he sees her father beating her, and momentarily runs out of hiding to attempt to stop it. He catches himself in time to prevent being seen by all but Ruth, the maid, who has compassion for him and aids Patty in helping him. After a serious discussion, however, Ruth and Anton agree he should move on in order to avoid putting Patty and her family in danger.

Before he leaves, Anton gives Patty a ring that belonged to his father. It is the most precious possession he has, and he tells her she is a special person. He then disappears out of her life.

For a while, she is happy and content, but as life begins to return to its former oppressive drabness, she seeks validation from others by showing her ring to a woman who works in her father's store. She tells an elaborate story about how she came by the



ring, and the woman calls Patty's father's attention to it. Patty's father demands to know where she got the ring. She repeats her story, and her father takes the ring, accusing her of immoral behavior. When Ruth stands up for Patty, Mr. Bergen fires her.

The local Sherriff comes to talk to Patty and gives her back her ring; she tells him the same story she told Sister Parker and her father. Soon after, the FBI questions Patty, showing her Anton's picture. They also show her a telegram stating Anton was shot and killed while resisting arrest.

Patty is arrested. Despondent, she tells the FBI everything, except for the fact that anyone else knew of her actions. Although encouraged to find local counsel, Patty's father uses his money and influence to hire her a Jewish lawyer from Memphis, where Patty is staying with her grandparents. The Bergens find themselves pressured by the locals to leave Jenkinsville. At her trial, Patty is found guilty of lesser charges, and due to her age and naïveté, is sentenced to four to six months in a girls' reform school.

In reform school, Patty is just as lonely as ever. She does not make friends easily, and is teased for being a "Nazi" and a "spy." Ruth comes to visit Patty, bringing her news, food, and her ever-present wisdom. She warns Patty she may never gain her parents' love and approval, but that does not mean she is not an important person. Patty tells Ruth about her correspondence with Charlene, and informs her the paper is considering publishing Patty's article on conditions in the Reform school.

In the end, Patty is still left aimless, wondering if she will ever "make it" in life. However, she seems determined, somehow, to try.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Chapter 1. A crowd gathers at the train station in Jenkinsville, Arkansas. Among the crowd is Patty Bergen, the twelve-year-old protagonist. The crowd has gathered to see a group of German soldiers who are being transported to Jenkinsville as prisoners of war. Many of the people there have never seen a foreigner before. Chester, a porter at the department store owned by Patty's father, is also in the crowd. He is black and the only person of color present. The crowd is so intent and packed the fact he is in "arm-touching contact" with white people is going unnoticed. The Germans arrive, and despite being in POW uniforms, seem rather ordinary looking to Patty. She feels rather disappointed.

On her way home, she notes the government has suggested every family should grow their own food, and while her family has a victory garden, it was actually planted by a colored man named Grover. Patty's maid is also black, large, and warmly nurturing. She has been encouraging Patty to be extra good, and to allow the sweet side of her nature to come through so her parents might notice. Patty offers to keep Ruth's son Robert, who is away at war, in her prayers, which makes Ruth smile. They discuss Patty's habit of choosing a word each day from the dictionary to learn. Today's is "formidable," though Ruth liked "fastidious" and had, in fact, used it herself in a discussion with her husband.

Ruth sends Patty to get her six-year-old sister, Sharon so they can have lunch. As Sharon is saying grace, Patty prays her father does not come in to the room, since he would not approve of Christian prayers. The Bergen family used to attend the nearest synagogue, but as it was in Memphis and an eighty-mile round trip, they did not have enough gas rations to attend. Gasoline was one of the many items rationed during World War Two. Patty, her sister, and Ruth have a comfortable relationship, with laughter, jokes, and affection easily shared.

Patty fantasizes about a blizzard, in which she saves her parents from death and gains their love. Sadly, it a common fantasy for her, and only that. She decides to walk down to the store to tell them news of the war. Ruth suggests she dress up a little and remember to be sweet to her parents. She suggests to Patty she has to have pride in herself. Patty muses it's Ruth's pride in herself enabling her to carry herself with her head high, and look white people in the eye, a behavior most of them consider "uppity."

Patty visits her father's store. Both of her parents work there, and they have several employees. Her parents are dismissive of her. Her father questions her presence there, and her mother is condescending when a clerk compliments Patty's dress, saying she must have worn it only because Ruth made her. She laments the fact that Patty does not care about her clothes or hair, while Sharon is just like her mother, fastidious and pretty. Sent to comb her hair, Patty feels ugly. She returns to her mother, who is making an appointment in a nearby town to have her hair done.



A woman enters the store to tell Mrs. Bergen she should fire her maid because Ruth got to the counter first, and bought the last of some on-sale meat at the supermarket. Mrs. Bergen insists she can't. Not because they care for Ruth, but because she's good at her job. Patty goes to inform her father about the German soldiers, but he seems unimpressed, so she makes up a story about how one tried to escape. Still unmoved, he dismisses her.

On her way back home, Patty looks down the dirt road leading to "Nigger Bottoms," where the black people of Jenkinsville reside. She wishes she were black so she could visit there. She points out several of the town businesses, including an empty grocery store with a hole in the window. It used to belong to Chu Lee, a man townspeople called "the Chink." He and his wife lived in the back of the store until they were run out of town in the wake of Pearl Harbor. When Patty questioned her father, he told her not to mention it, but that it might have made more sense if Mr. Lee been Japanese.

Chapter 2. Patty and her family go to Memphis to visit her maternal grandparents. Her mother enjoys these visits home, and the children like spending time with their cousins and grandparents. Patty's father does not enjoy these visits, but tolerates them for his wife's sake. Patty does not understand why her father dislikes her grandparents, but thinks it may be because her grandfather did not ask Mr. Bergen to join his family real estate business, since it is prosperous enough to hire outside employees. Patty thinks perhaps her father resents the fact that he grew up poor, that his father died young, and he did not have a good relationship with his mother (whom Patty resembles.) If not for a loan from his father-in-law, he may not have been as successful, which he also resents, because he doesn't like to be "obligated."

On their trip, Patty attempts to make light conversation and jokes, and her father tells her to leave him alone, but when Sharon begins to engage her parents, they laugh and play with her for a while, before tiring of it, and insisting Patty entertain her. As they cross the Mississippi river, Patty thinks about the people who attempt to swim it and fail; however, Patty thinks she knows the secret to making it to the other side: absolute refusal to fail.

Patty ponders her mother's beautiful face, and wonders how people could possibly be beautiful on the outside, unless they are also beautiful within. She figures she, and her own imperfection, is the reason her mother doesn't love her. She goes to kiss her mother, and is rebuffed. Her mother tells her if her Grandmother offers her money, she is not allowed to take it. Patty questions why, then, is her mother allowed to accept gifts from them? Her mother states they are gifts for specific occasions. She also says Sharon is allowed to take money, because she's still little.

They arrive at the grandparent's house, and are greeted warmly. The family talks, and Grandpa Fried brings up Mr. Bergen's brother Max. This upsets Mr. Bergen. Patty recalls Max telling a story about Mr. Bergen's bad temper as a child, to which Mr. Bergen's response is to get angry. Grandma Fried asks Patty why she never visits, and Patty reveals her mother won't let her. Grandma Fried tells her she will plan a day for



just the two of them. She also slips Patty ten dollars for books, insisting Mrs. Bergen doesn't need to know.

More family arrives, and Mr. Bergen flirts grandly with Patty's aunt. He is very flattering to women; his brother Max has stated he was a "ladies' man" in his youth. The men talk about politics, until Patty's mother changes the subject. When her brother talks about a business trip he and his wife are going on, Patty's mother is jealous her parents don't send her on trips, too. Grandpa Fried points out it's business. Grandma Fried points out her daughter is never satisfied with what she has.

On the way home, Patty feels as if she is leaving her true home behind.

Analysis

Patty Bergen is a lonely girl. Isolated in her small Southern town due to her minority religion (Judaism), she is also isolated at school (she is smart but makes poor grades and is a tomboy, not fitting in with other girls). At home, her father is angry and abusive and her mother is shallow and narcissistic. Patty lacks the flighty charm and cuteness of her younger sister, Sharon. Patty longs for her parents' love, but they are either unwilling or unable to give it to her. Her self-esteem is nil, and though she tries her hardest, she thinks of herself as homely, bad, and unworthy.

Patty's mother grew up as an only daughter in a wealthy Jewish family. She was indulged and spoiled, and continues to expect such treatment from her parents, accepting gifts such as furniture and mink coats. She allows her pretty younger daughter to accept gifts as well, but denies the privilege to Patty, who would more likely spend the money on books than on frivolities.

Patty's father, in contrast, grew up "the poorest of the poor." His father died young, and he felt unloved by his mother, whom Patty is said to resemble. It seems as if Mr. Bergen has transferred his anger toward his mother onto Patty, as he constantly derides her and is physically abusive to her.

Her paternal grandparents are dead, but Patty's maternal grandparents are important figures in her life. They treat her with respect, and offer her the kindness and affection only Ruth shows her at home. Patty feels as if she is truly "home" with them, and is disappointed they have their own lives and can't parent her fully.

Whether it is in self-defense or to make herself seem more important in others' eyes, Patty constantly dreams up fantastic scenarios, is evasive, and tells elaborate lies. She often does this with her parents, hoping to impress them and gain their respect and love. It does not work. Her parents ignore her altogether, for the most part.

The major themes of the novel are introduced in the first chapter. In the 1940s, de jure racial segregation (commonly known as Jim Crow laws) is in full force, especially in the Southern states, such as Arkansas. At the train station, Patty points out that Clarence, the only person of color in attendance, is in physical contact with whites due to the



crush toward the train. The fact that it is not noticed by anyone but Patty is a testament to the people's rapt focus on the incoming prisoners.

In her family, black servants perform all domestic tasks, including cooking, cleaning, gardening and raising the children. Patty points out her parents aren't really following the President's request for citizens to grow their own wartime food if they have servants to plant and tend it. Ruth, the Bergen family's maid, provides loving advice and affection for Patty, in place of her distant and critical mother.

Black people in Jenkinsville live in a segregated neighborhood called "Nigger Bottoms." The word "nigger" is considered perfectly normal to a majority of the populous, who use several racial epithets showing their bigotry and ignorance (i.e. referring to a Chinese man as a "Chink", and then running him out of town after the attack on Pearl Harbor, an act incited by the Japanese.) Most commonly, however, black people are referred to as "Negroes" or "Nigras."

Ruth is considered "uppity" (i.e. not exhibiting proper behavior of blacks toward whites) because she dresses well, changing into and out of her uniform at work and preferring to wear her own clothes on the street. She also dares to look white people in the face when she speaks to them, and refuses to defer to them automatically in her off hours. These behaviors are often considered acceptable reasons for dismissal in Southern society; however, since she is a competent maid and cook, the Bergens keep her on despite her "proud" behavior. Even though the Bergens are also a minority, they would not question the bigotry of others in town, even if they wanted to, as they do not wish to draw attention to their own difference. This is a mild example of the hypocrisy weaving throughout the novel.

Vocabulary

patriotic, porter, foreigner, holster, brutality, Jerries, caravan, ravaged, embankment, wringer, fastidious, pimento, plumb, pulsate, conscience, jubilee, isolated, asphalt, anticipate, particular, courtesy, manikin, uppity, genuine, lavished, cobbler, obligated, impulse, merchandise, elegant, bureau, resolute, ottoman, synagogue, brocade, damask, kasha, systematically, swoon, dire, knishes



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3. Patty is bringing a bag of change to the store from the bank, when she notices an Army truck parked in front of the store. Seven POWS are entering the store, accompanied by two guards. They have come for field hats to prevent sunstroke as they pick cotton. Patty follows them inside. The guard calls upon one particular soldier to translate for the others, as he knows English. He speaks English very precisely, and with a British, rather than a German, accent.

Patty notices the soldier is roaming the store freely, and briefly hopes he will escape. Instead, she sees him examining some pencils. All of the clerks are busy, so she goes to wait on him. They converse, and she finds him nice. She wonders how he could be a Nazi. She asks him how he learned English, and discovers his mother is British, and his father is a history professor, educated in London. They introduce themselves, and she wonders if they could be friends. The prisoners are called to leave, and at the last minute, Anton asks Patty to sell him a gaudy pin from the jewelry case. He leaves smiling.

Chapter 4. Sister Parker, a cashier at the store, finds the bag of change from the bank, which Patty had accidentally left on the stationery counter. Patty begs her not to tell her parents, as she simply got distracted waiting on a customer. She takes the change to her mother. When her mother makes a cutting remark, Patty lies to her, saying she received a compliment from a woman at the bank. Her mother responds by asking her, "Can't you do anything about that hair?" Then she turns back to a customer to make a sale. She is an excellent saleswoman, and can sell people things they don't want. Patty observes her mother will lie to do so, but then considers she, herself, lies, too.

Patty's thoughts are all on Anton Reiker. She wants to tell someone how she feels about him, but knows she likely won't get a favorable reaction. She starts with Sister Parker, trying to ease into conversation. Sister Parker gets suspicious, and asks Patty if she likes the boy. Patty becomes defensive and tells another lie: that the prisoner told her he hated Hitler. This seems to put the clerk's mind at rest.

Analysis

Patty is intrigued by Anton Reiker's speech: he speaks the Queen's English. When she sees he needs assistance in the store, she tries to disregard him, but is fascinated. Her thoughts are very self-centered, in that she assumes he won't want her to wait on him, since she is just a young girl. Patty is curious, and asks him how he learned English. Her innate curiosity is her mode of getting to know people, and it is also one of the strengths giving her the aptitude to become a journalist. When Anton is polite to her, makes conversation with her, and treats her kindly, her desire to be liked springs to the



fore. This initial politeness and openness on Anton's part is the catalyst for Patty's future decisions. She opens her heart to Anton because he gives to her what almost no one else does: attention and kindness. In fact, the only people who do show true friendship to Patty are outcasts in Jenkinsville society: Ruth, Freddy, and Anton.

Patty however, has an almost pathological need to be accepted by everyone. She tends to over share in an attempt to have her feelings and thoughts validated. She then equivocates (manipulates the truth) in order to backtrack when her attempt goes awry. She needs someone to validate her opinion of Anton, so she tests the waters with Sister Parker. When the saleslady becomes suspicious of Patty's feelings for the soldier, Patty defends him by lying about the conversation, twisting it in an attempt to make Anton seem more sympathetic. This pattern is eventually her undoing.

As we discover as the tale unfolds, Anton is truly kind, and a good person, but not content to remain in prison. He is already planning his escape. His impatience and restlessness does not make him a bad person, but it is, eventually, also his Achilles heel.

Vocabulary

chlorine, formidable, brisk, stationery, adrenalin, stenographic, adequate, gaudy, jaunty, aloft, presumably, abiding, acquire, ventilation, gracious, straggle, cheesecloth, contradicting, residential, abundant, hospitable, anointing, mauve, repelled



Chapters 5-6

Summary

Chapter 5. Patty travels to Memphis to spend the day with her grandmother. Her grandmother takes her to a fancy restaurant. There they discuss Grandma Fried's sisters, who are still in Europe. Although Patty tries to resist as her parents have demanded, her grandmother spoils her with lunch, dessert, and clothes shopping, in addition to loving her and giving her undivided attention. At the end of the day, Patty expresses her hope to see her grandmother the following week, and is disappointed when her grandmother tells her she and her grandfather will be going on vacation until August. Patty responds coldly, figuring her grandmother, like her parents, doesn't want her. After she is home, however, she writes her grandmother a kind thank-you note.

Patty's summer is long and boring. Her schoolmates have all gone to Baptist summer camp, and her mother refuses to let her go, even though Patty promises not to listen to the Jesus messages. Ruth is busy, and her little sister has her own friends. She has read all her books and her father doesn't want her at the store. Occasionally, she rides her bike down by the prison camp, but she does not see Anton.

Patty's only solace is her hideout, the servant's quarters over an abandoned garage behind the Bergen's house. The front stairs have been pulled out, and the stairs leading up to Patty's hideout are inside, preventing her from being seen. In her hideout, Patty watches trains from the window and passes time memorizing words from Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.

Patty and Ruth walk Sharon to her friend's birthday party. Patty contrasts Sharon's attractive likeness to her mother with her plainness which people say resembles her father, whom she does not wish to be like. Ruth is quiet and not in the mood to talk. Patty thinks perhaps Ruth is angry with her, but she is just thinking of her son, who is fighting in the war. Patty tries to reassure her, telling her that Robert is strong and will help win the war. They discuss the war and the will of God.

When Ruth starts to dress a fresh hen, Patty leaves her in the kitchen. Patty daydreams about a black horse called Evol who will take her far away. When people ask the meaning of the name she will say it's short for "Evolution," but really it is "Love" spelled backwards. Patty dreams she will find her real mother, someone who understands the meaning of the name without asking.

Freddy Dowd comes by just as Patty is gathering stones to throw at cars' hubcaps as they pass. Patty's father does not approve of Freddy and Patty playing together, and has forbidden her to do so. Patty does not understand, as Freddy is nice, if a bit slow and from an underprivileged family. She invites Freddy to play her game with her, and as they play, Patty accidentally breaks a car's window. Scared, she runs away, but later thinks better of it. She borrows money from Ruth and heads toward the department



store. As she is walking, her father pulls up beside her in his car. Enraged, he slaps her across the face so hard she sees stars. He continues to hit her and then whips her with his belt before getting back in his car and driving away.

Chapter 6. On Saturdays, Patty is allowed to go downtown and help in the store, as it is often busy. She notes the differences between the black and white families she sees, finding the black people very polite. They speak with respect to one another, using the titles Mr. or Miz, while the white people use only first names. Patty observes people, listening to what they say and noting things, such as hypocrisy.

Patty dresses carefully on Saturday, and feels positive towards her self. In front of the café, she hears the men gossiping about the FBI's apprehension of eight Germans as they attempted to attack the U.S. in U-boats. She rushes to tell her father, who doubts her and turns on the radio. When one of the men comes in and tells Mr. Bergen the same news, she hears her father tell him he's already heard the details from her. Feeling proud, she wants to gain approval from her mother, too, and goes to inform her, but her mother ignores the news, instead making small talk and telling her to run along and play with her friends, forgetting they are all gone for the summer.

Incensed, Patty makes a desperate play for approval by telling a lie saying she had made a big sale. Ignoring her, Mrs. Bergen arranges for Patty to get a perm: not from her hairdresser, but from Mrs. Reeves, an inferior hairdresser in town. Patty feels shame at being the ugly daughter, as well as rising anger at her mother, and yells at her, saying she will not go. Her father becomes angry and threatens to beat her if she is not at the hairdresser's in two minutes. Patty hurries over, just to hear the phone ring as she arrives. It is her father. She and Mrs. Reeves make small talk, and Patty gets her perm, which leaves her hair scorched and frizzy.

Analysis

The Bergen family dynamics come to the fore in this section. We see the contrast in the treatment Mr. and Mrs. Bergen offer each of their two daughters, and we also see the contrast between the Bergens and Patty's maternal grandparents, the Frieds. The Frieds are warm and generous, and Patty feels safe and loved with them, and her grandmother insists on giving her money for books, the only possessions Patty really values (i.e. knowledge.) Her mother and father however, have different values: money, position, and prestige.

In this section, we gain insight into Mr. Bergen's personality and why he cannot love Patty. She reminds him of his mother, and his mother (at least in his mind) did not love him. Therefore, he pours out flattery on women to gain their approval, but lashes out at the women who challenge him in any way, thus reminding him of the woman who raised him.

Grandma and Grandpa Fried provide Patty with approval, comfort, affection and love. She feels "at home" with them. When they leave to go on vacation, she feels



abandoned, and assumes they just don't want her. She rejects them temporarily (she does this often throughout the book to those she loves, as it is her defensive reaction) but soon forgives them, as she is desperate for love and approval.

Isolated, without playmates or anything to do, Patty sequesters herself in her hideout. She also hides in her daydreams and fantasies, riding away on her horse Evol to find her true mother, who will decode the puzzle and offer Patty all the love she longs for. Bored, she tries to invent ways to amuse herself, but they turn awry, and she is beaten, proving in her mind she is unlovable and she must try even harder.

Even when trying hard to be perfect and to please her parents does bear a little fruit (as when her father is interested in her news) Patty is not satisfied, and seeks more. She is always disappointed, therefore, as the measly emotional crumbs they toss her can never satisfy the emptiness within. Frustrated, she lashes out, only to be threatened. She blames herself for not being good enough to be treated well by her mother or father.

Patty points out the black citizens of Jenkinsville (who are supposedly "inferior") are kinder and more polite than the white folks. They defer to white people as is the expectation, but more so, they are respectful to one another. They are oppressed but behave better than those who are privileged. Although Patty doesn't fully realize it yet, this behavior shows us, just because certain people are marginalized, it does not mean they do not deserve kindness and respect. The fact that they provide it for themselves, even when others do not, shows the reader they acknowledge themselves as persons of value, a lesson which Ruth has tried to explain to and instill in Patty, but she has yet to learn.

Vocabulary

maître d', encrusted, contagious, preoccupied, galvanized, whitewashed, fragile, tiresome, engulfed, foxhole, conviction, blacktop, grotesque, bungalow, galloping, peculiar, agate, loping, pinged, lackluster, simulated, deflected, gnarled, throes, subsided, yelps, middy, U-boats, smithereens, juttled, saboteurs, scheme, curlicues, jostled, trestle, conspirator, peculiar, persimmons, disfigure, luster, obstinate, scorched



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Chapter 7. Patty has cleaned up the hideout until it is spotless. She considers inviting Ruth to see it, but on the other hand, she wants to keep her secret to herself. Ruth has trimmed Patty's hair, which has improved it somewhat.

From the window of the hideout, Patty spies a man running near the railroad tracks. She thinks perhaps he is running to catch the train that is soon to arrive. Looking closer, she realizes that it is Anton. She runs out of the hideout, and chases after him. She calls his name several times, and finally he hears her. They touch hands, and the train rushes by them.

At dinner, Ruth serves a feast of fried chicken and potatoes. Patty wishes she could take some to Anton. Her parents make small talk, but Mr. Bergen gets angry when Mrs. Bergen questions him, and they begin to fight. Even though she has hardly eaten anything, Patty gets sick to her stomach.

In bed, Patty thinks about Anton and the beating she would get from her father if he knew she had hidden the German in her hideout. She also knows no one else would approve, and if discovered, she would have to face the derision of the entire town. She wonders why it was she who saw Anton's escape, and not someone who wouldn't have felt the impulse to act as she had. She thinks of her sister, and the ease with which she seems to get along in life. She imagines teaching her sister words, and once Sharon has enough, receiving the wisdom her sister innately owns.

Once her parents are asleep, she sneaks to the kitchen to get food for herself and Anton. However, her father awakens, forcing her to abandon her plan.

Chapter 8. Patty waits until her father leaves in the morning to get out of bed. Ruth offers her oatmeal, and Patty asks for two boiled eggs as well. The newspaper's front page has an article about the captured Nazi saboteurs, and quotes the Articles of War that promise death for the treason of spying. Patty feels fear. She knows she is not a spy, but she also knows hiding a captured German soldier will not gain government approval. She briefly hopes Anton had escaped on a train in the night. On viewing the obituary of a local G.I., she becomes defensive of Anton, and once again feels fearful.

Once Ruth is busy with chores, Patty gathers the food from the previous night and heads to the hideout. Half-hoping he is gone, she calls out his name. He is there, and admonishes her for calling his name aloud. He smiles and looks at her, and she becomes self-conscious. Apologizing for not coming the night before, she gives him the food, and he offers some to her. She declines, and he politely offers to wait until she is hungry to eat. She relents and takes some food. He eats heartily while talking to her of his home and family. She finds out his father had been admonished for speaking



negatively about Hitler, and he had chosen to desist in order to protect his job. He speaks affectionately of his mother and sister, and his longing to see them again. He admits his imprisonment left him both bored and scared. Patty thinks him a coward, and questions if American soldiers are scared. Anton figures it isn't considered masculine to admit it. They discuss emotions, and the hope Anton will not be recaptured.

Patty asks him how he managed to escape, and he recounts how he used the jewels from the pin he purchased at Bergen's Department Store to bribe a guard, convincing him the glass was actually diamonds. He tells her he used a tactic that Hitler used: layers of lies based upon a foundation of undeniable truth. Anton asks Patty if she helped him because she was German, and if perhaps his father secretly supported Hitler's cause. Aghast, Patty informs her she is, in fact, Jewish. Astounded, Anton asks her why, then, did she do it? She admits it's because she doesn't want anything bad to happen to him.

Analysis

Patty takes a huge risk to save Anton, but it is an impulse more than a deliberately rebellious act. Driven by her desire to be treated kindly and accepted by the handsome young prisoner, she chases him down; reaches out to him, and for a moment literally will not let go. Patty cannot conceive at this point of the far-reaching consequences. The first thing she thinks of is that her father will beat her. She knows the townspeople will not approve, but treason does not cross her mind until the following day when she sees the news article.

Patty has a hard time dealing with the reality of the situation she has created. Wishfully, she wishes she had not been the one to see him, and hopes he has disappeared in the night. She is defensive of him, yet she thinks he is a coward because he was frightened while in the POW camp. His kindness and genuine friendliness confuse her, as does his openness about his feelings, thoughts, and emotions. She has a crush on him, but is sure he can't possibly find her pleasant to look at. She is surprised when he is not angry, but pleased to find out she is Jewish. This supposed Nazi, the enemy, is kinder and more accepting than her own father.

Patty brings Anton food, which represents not only physical but emotional nourishment in this novel. To Patty's surprise, Anton insists she share the food she brought to him, a symbol of shared affection and friendship. In many cultures, shared food means acceptance and kinship; one would never break bread with an enemy. For once, Patty's affectionate gestures toward a man are returned in kind, and ironically, from a man who is supposed to embody evil and hate.

Vocabulary

chenille, linoleum, frizzled, embankment, depot, labored, blotted, martyred, excavated, rotation, tactless, harmonic, palatable, rendezvous, degrade, grating, latch, accelerate, morale, imminent, treason, patriot, meditate, gazebos, jeopardize, scholarship, abruptly,



acquiescence, generic, greengrocer, simmering, inconsolable, emphatic, pertinent,
fabrication, latrine, symmetry



Chapters 9-10

Summary

Chapter 9. The FBI arrives in Jenkinsville to investigate the escape. Rumors fly that the escaped prisoner may have something to do with the German saboteurs. The train that night had been searched, and it is suspected the prisoner had been aided in his escape.

The agents come into the department store to question Mr. Bergen. Mr. Bergen is not sure if he can identify the photograph, but he does mention Anton's formal speech. He insists he will do anything to help, as Mr. Hoover is one of the two greatest Americans along with General Douglas McArthur.

Both Mrs. Bergen and her salesgirls say they do not recognize him, but then Sister Parker remembers Patty waiting on him, talking and laughing with him. They question her, and she begins to cry. She tells them generally about the transaction, omitting details such as the exchange of names and his purchase of the glass pin. When asked if there was anything peculiar about him she remembers, she says yes, politeness.

News of the escapee comes over the radio, and the men in the store begin to discuss the treatment of the POWs, saying they should be treated more harshly. Mr. Bergen says he thinks prisoners should not be taken alive.

A young newspaper reporter from Memphis, Charlene Madlee, arrives at the store looking for Sheriff Cauldwell. Patty offers to help her track him down. On the street, Patty notices there are no other women in sight, and the sky has turned gray. Patty asks Charlene about becoming a reporter. They discuss Patty's love of words, although she is honest about doing poorly in school. Charlene takes Patty with her to visit the prison camp, asking her to take notes as she interviews the prison Commandant. He offers information to the young reporter. Ms. Madlee also interviews the prison doctor, who tells her he does not believe Anton was sympathetic to the Nazi cause. Instead, he was a scholar, a loner, and a decent man, who only sought his freedom. As Patty and Ms. Madlee leave the prison, Patty considers the doctor's assessment of Anton, and feels joy.

Chapter 10. As Patty and Ms. Madlee part ways, Ms. Madlee offers to send Patty an autographed copy of the story, and also offers her assistance in the future. Patty asks if she can write Ms. Madlee, who invites her to tour the paper next time she visits Memphis.

Patty goes to the store to buy some chocolate bars for Anton, but her father admonishes her and sends her home, because there is a criminal on the loose. She asks permission to play in the yard, and he grants it, as long as she goes no farther than the garage.

Patty takes a bath and asks Ruth for food. Ruth is curious, as this is out of the norm for the tomboy, but she goes along with it. Patty takes the food to Anton. She also takes



him fresh clothes, which belong to her father. She brings him a fine shirt, still unworn and in the box, recalling how she had spent her own money to buy the shirt for her father on Father's day two years prior. Her mother had admonished her for spending so much money, but Patty was determined to buy her father a fine gift. Although she was tempted to buy books, she spent her money on the shirt, made of Egyptian cotton and sporting pearl buttons. She had the pocket monogrammed with her father's initials, hoping that he would be pleased with her gift. Instead, he simply said "thanks," and tossed the shirt aside. When she tried to point out its qualities, he became irritated with her.

Offering the shirt to Anton, he is impressed with its qualities, thanks her, and touches her cheek. Patty tells him about her interrogation by the FBI, and he seems confused by the attention. She tells him about the U-boats, and he is upset his escape had such bad timing. He tells her when he is home again after the war, he will tell his family of her kindness. She becomes quiet thinking of his departure. He teases her, and she becomes angry inside. He smiles at her, and she leaves on the pretense of getting coffee. Once alone, she begins to despair over her growing feelings for Anton, comparing his handsomeness to her homeliness. She cannot believe he could truly care for her, only that he is kind to her because she is useful to him. Caring too much, she despairs at losing him.

Patty hears her name, and imagines it is Anton and that he will ask her to go away with him. However, it is only Freddy Dowd, who wants her to go with him to catch crawdads. She tells him she does not want to go, but she does talk with him for a few minutes. As they are talking, her parents drive up. Patty tells Freddy to go home immediately, but her father has already seen them together. Although her mother tries briefly to discourage him, Mr. Bergen, enraged once again that his daughter is disobeying his commands, rushes to her, yelling. When Mrs. Bergen gets in his way, he pushes her roughly away. Patty backs up and tries to explain, but her father does not stop. He pulls her violently by one arm into the back yard and begins to beat her. As he whips her with his belt, Patty watches as Anton rushes from the hideout. She screams at him to go away, but he is frozen in horror. Before Mr. Bergen can notice him, he returns quietly to the garage.

Analysis

The arrival of Charlene Madlee in town is a turning point in Patty's life. Charlene is the first friend Patty makes who is not an outcast. Although she is a female reporter, many women held jobs during wartime, and many even kept them afterward. Charlene is white, American, and successful. She is not only an excellent role model for Patty, she is also acceptable in society. Charlene immediately accepts Patty's offer of help (i.e. friendship), and sees potential in Patty, encouraging her. She in turn, extends her hand to Patty in a sort of mentorship. This is a great introduction for Patty into the world of mature social relationships, and evidence that she is likable (and able to be accepted) just as she is.



On their trip to the POW camp, they find the prison doctor has come to the same conclusion as Patty regarding Anton. He is not a political enemy or a professional soldier, but a decent man put in the position of fighting for his country, much like Ruth's son Robert, who was studying to be a minister, but was sent off to war instead. Not every German soldier chose to fight this war for Hitler's cause; not every soldier chose to fight this war at all.

The contrast between Mr. Bergen and Anton is emboldened in these chapters. Anton has already shown himself to be largely non-violent in nature, a scholar whose father was a scholar, who complied to "fit in" and avoid coming to harm (much as Mr. Bergen does in Jenkinsville), and not the vicious Nazi he is painted to be. His kindnesses directly contradict that. He knows Patty is Jewish, and he treats her with affection. He is grateful for her help and tells her so. Most of all, he risks his life by rushing out of hiding to protect her from her father's savage beating. Fortunately, he catches himself and retreats before anyone (save Ruth) discovers him.

Mr. Bergen has been exposed as the opposite: angry, violent, intolerant, resentful, ignorant (in that he is not interested in knowledge, personal growth or change), and abusive. He doesn't represent all Jews, of course, and the author would not want the reader to assume this. However, one might point out people are all individuals, and it is impossible to know the nature of a culture or race by the example of one or two members (or even a powerfully vocal group) of that culture or race.

Vocabulary

espionage, smart aleck, unison, appraisal, precaution, regulating, agitator, suspicion, essential, apprehended, muttered, vicinity, buckboard, complexion, aptitude, enthusiasm, precisely, sentry, commandant, lax, chevrons, jurisdiction, persuasive, ridicule, infirmary, swivel, conventional, parlance, fanatical, scholar, pitched, nestling, exultation, lukewarm, gushed, embossed, determination, scenic, intact, inconspicuously, edging, accustomed, implication, homely, endure, crustacean, futile, barrage



Chapters 11-12

Summary

Chapter 11. Patty's mother is upset when she notices food missing from the kitchen, and suspects Ruth is taking it home with her. Mr. Bergen offers to fire her, and says he never liked her anyway. Patty lies in bed, sore and listening, waiting until her parents are gone to get up. However, when she hears her father's comment, she yells out she, her sister and her friend have eaten the food. Her father then admonishes his wife. Patty notes her father is generous about food, if nothing else.

Ruth arrives and offers breakfast. Mr. Bergen has already has his Corn Flakes, which is what he eats every day, and Mrs. Bergen refuses breakfast, as it is "fattening." Ruth comes in to Patty's room to check on her, and asks her to come into the kitchen.

In the kitchen, Patty does not eat, but does sip at some hot chocolate. Ruth confronts her about Anton. She had seen him as he ran out of the garage to help her. Patty is reluctant, but tells Ruth the truth. Ruth is worried and confused, but she makes Anton a hearty breakfast. Patty tells Ruth Anton is her friend and likes her. Ruth agrees, after all, he had risked his life to help her, and is the greatest love there is.

When Patty visits Anton, he is concerned for her and upset about what he witnessed, worried he is somehow responsible. He asks her what she did to deserve such treatment. Although she questions that herself, She tells Anton about Freddy, and he wonders why her father disapproves of what seems like a good friend. She says she is not sure, but she cannot ask her father, as he would take it as a contradiction.

Anton angrily asserts he doesn't like her father, and Patty admits she doesn't like him, either. Anton tells her, after the beating, Mr. Bergen remained in the yard, repeating over and over that no one had ever loved him. Patty wonders how he can be so cruel, yet still worry about being loved. Anton posits that men without humor or the detachment to observe their own actions are capable of the most cruelty. He compares Mr. Bergen to Hitler, although he points out one cannot truly compare degrees of cruelty.

Patty is impressed with Anton's wisdom, says she wants him to teach her all he knows; she would rather be intelligent than pretty. He retorts she is already intelligent and pretty, assuring her she is unique. He encourages her to read the essays of Emerson, and shows her a book he took from the prison library. When questioned, he admits he stole the book, and is thus a thief, as well as an escapee. She is impressed by his honesty.

Ruth calls them to breakfast, and Anton is aghast Patty has divulged their secret. Patty assures him Ruth will not expose him, but she saw him as he came to protect her. Realizing for the first time what he did, Anton expressed gratitude he could be brave enough to risk his safety for another human being.



Chapter 12. Anton and Patty have breakfast in the Bergen's kitchen, where Ruth has set the table with the best dishes. Anton sits in her father's place, enjoying his breakfast. When Ruth enters the room, Anton invites her to sit with them, but she refuses. Patty notices Ruth calls him "Mr. Reiker" rather than "Mr. Anton," another sign of what some call her "uppity" behavior. Still, she does eventually join them with a cup of coffee, and talks easily with Anton, who compares her to his mother.

Ruth speaks openly and asks Anton how people of color are treated in Germany, and he replies there are none. Shocked, Ruth asks how they keep their houses clean, and Anton replies German housewives do their own cleaning. They discuss politics and morals, and Ruth recounts the story of how a local businessman Mr. Jackson (who happens to be the late grandfather of Patty's school friend Edna Louise) bilked her mother out of the money she had saved for Ruth's education. She tells Anton about her son Robert, who was headed off to college when he was drafted. She begged the draft board to allow her son to finish college, but was denied.

During their discussion, Anton questions whether or not there is anything that can overcome the evils of the world. He questions religion, education, and psychology, pointing out none of these has proven much more than a panacea for those desperate for comfort. Ruth points out, in a cold world, people may need some comfort, and Anton cannot disagree.

Patty asks Anton if there is anything he does believe in, and he says he believes love is better than hate. At that moment, they hear a car in the drive, and worried it is Mr. Bergen, Anton hastily hides beneath Patty's bed. However, it is only Sharon's friend's mother, asking if she can take Sharon for a while.

Realizing the risks both Patty and Ruth are taking to conceal his presence, Anton resolves to leave that night. While Patty resists, Ruth supports the decision, offering some money and food for his journey.

Analysis

When food goes missing, Mrs. Bergen is quick to point the finger at Ruth. She is a stingy woman, never wanting anyone to have anything she can't have. She rejects food as "fattening," but resents others for eating (for example, she admonishes Ruth for being too fat.) Food, on the other hand, is one thing Mr. Bergen is not stingy with. Even though he doesn't particularly like Ruth (he doesn't like any uppity women), he doesn't try to push the issue once Patty claims responsibility for the missing food.

Anton is distressed, believing he may have had something to do with Patty's beating. However, when he finds the true reason, it gives him even less respect for Patty's father. Confronted with Anton's dislike, Patty admits for the first time she doesn't like him, either. This is a step in the eventual realization it is her father, not she, who is the unlikeable one. Not because he Jewish, or because he was raised poor, or because his mother didn't love him, but because he treats people cruelly. Anton compares Mr.



Bergen to Hitler, because they are both humorless and cruel. He points out they are not one and the same, but also reminds Patty (and the reader) one cannot truly compare degrees of cruelty or murder, as it is what it is: abominable.

Ruth confronts Patty about Anton. Although she is worried (she can see clearly the consequences of such actions) she is a woman of great love. She accepts Anton because he proved himself in Ruth's eyes: he showed devotion to Patty by attempting to protect her. Ruth offers him food. She also provides him support with the understanding he can only hurt Patty (and her) by staying.

Anton again shows his true mettle by accepting Ruth unconditionally. He speaks to her politely, engages her in conversation, and invites her to sit at the table as an equal. He is not only the antithesis of the "ethnic purists" of the Nazi party, but also of the patriotic true blue citizens of Jenkinsville, who are equally racist. In sitting at the table together, the black woman, the Jewish child, and the POW/German soldier are shown as persons of equal value.

If there was any question of Anton's moral character and stance on Hitler's politics, it is dismissed for good as he speaks at the table. Love, he says, is stronger than hate. It is out of love that Anton, who is also adult enough to know the consequences of his actions, and the harm it could cause those who have aided him, decides to take his leave.

Vocabulary

kosher, emphasis, prophecy, vigorous, percolator, inquiry, feeble, perplexed, inquire, conceited, amusing, detachment, inflict, enthusiasm, maestros, ineptitude, mingled, percolator, uppity, subservience, sapling, appreciative, incredulous, reckon, excessive, perpetrated, enthusiasm, pretext, impose, affirmation, coiffure, agitated



Chapters 13-14

Summary

Chapter 13. Patty contemplates her feelings for Anton compared to those for her father, wondering whom she would more willingly sacrifice. Sharon approaches with her baby doll, and Patty encourages her to rock her doll and tell her she loves her, and Sharon complies. Mr. Bergen arrives home, and drives into the garage. Patty thinks about how, if her father turned Anton into the law, he would finally receive full acceptance from the townspeople. He would be famous and hailed as a hero. She imagines him, afterward, coming to her and offering apologies, approval, and affection. She imagines if she tried, she could be perfect, or at least as sweet as her sister. Heading in for dinner, she tries to be sweet to her parents, but is, again, rebuffed. Patty imagines leaving her parents, and wonders if they would miss her. She realizes it is only Sharon and Ruth she would truly miss.

Patty offers to walk Ruth part of the way home, as she is not allowed to enter the black neighborhood referred to as Nigger Bottoms. She wishes Ruth a good evening, and Ruth returns the salutation, warning Patty to stay away from the garage because Anton is leaving, and she worries about the trouble they could be in if discovered. They have an awkward exchange, and Patty returns home.

At home, Patty surveys her bedroom and is embarrassed at its childishness. The desk her grandmother gave her is the only piece of furniture she likes. She considers her diary, in which she has noted several criticisms from her mother. As her mother bathes Sharon, Patty packs clothes in a paper sack. When her sister and parents are asleep, she drops the bag from her window. Standing over her sister, she says a goodbye.

At the door of the hideout, she whispers Anton's name. When he doesn't answer, she calls out more loudly, and he answers with "Quiet!" and leads her into the dark room. Patty begins to cry, and Anton squeezes her hand. When she apologizes, he brings her hand to his face to let her know he has also been crying. She tries to convince him to let her go with him, but he rejects the idea, although he acknowledges she is expressing love for him. He tells her he loves her, too, and will miss her. He readies himself to go, and Patty gives him some money. He thanks her, and gives her his most valuable possession, his father's ring. He tells her always to remember she is a person of value, and he is her friend. He kisses her and leaves.

Chapter 14. At first, Patty keeps track of time without Anton, but she soon stops when the time begins to seem too long and he seems too far away. Back in school, she daydreams of him, holds his ring, and remembers herself as a person of value whenever others put her down.

Patty decides she wants to brandish Anton's ring proudly. She heads to the department store to find Sharon performing for a small gathering of people. Her father is proudly



bragging Sharon is as cute and as talented as Shirley Temple, how he should take her to Hollywood to become a movie star. Jealous, Patty becomes angry, and turns her aggression on her little sister.

Immediately afterward, she feels remorseful, and decides to atone by helping Sister Parker at the counter. Feeling empowered by Anton's ring, she tries to engage Sister Parker in conversation, and then decides to show the woman her ring, bragging it is solid gold. Sister Parker asks her if she has a boyfriend. When Patty says no, Sister Parker asks her where she got the ring. Stuck, Patty fabricates a story in which she gave a hungry stranger, an old man, some food, and he gave her the ring in exchange for her charity. She continues the tale, saying not only did he tell her she was a person of value, but the man was really a wealthy man in disguise, in search of good people in the world.

Doubting her story, Sister Parker brings Mr. Bergen's attention to the ring. She attempts to tell him the same story, but he is impatient with her. He questions her as to the man's identity: his race, his age. He accuses her, albeit not directly, of inappropriate behavior, giving something to the man in exchange for jewelry. He calls her names, and hits her. She falls backward, after which she yells to him that she doesn't love him: nobody does.

Analysis

Patty is still a child, and she struggles internally with her feelings. She is supposed to love her father, but he is cruel. She is supposed to hate Germans, but Anton is kind. As is natural for any person, but especially a child, she longs desperately for her father's love, so much so she actually considers betraying her beloved friend to placate and please her abuser. Her decision to keep her secret is justified when her attempts to be sweet to her parents are again rebuffed. Although she is a child, she is also on the verge of adolescence and longs to escape her own prison. She packs her bag to run away with Anton.

Fortunately, he has other plans. He cannot be the father substitute, the lover, or the protector she wants. He does leave her, however, with his affection, both verbal and physical (a chaste kiss), and the assurance she is a "person of value," not only to him, but also to the world. As a reminder he gives her a ring. A ring is a symbol of fidelity, in this case the fidelity of friendship, and a reminder for Patty to be faithful to his words.

Even though Anton's words begin to work their magic on her, Patty's need for validation and approval eventually gets the best of her, and she gives in to the childish impulse to show off the fact that someone cares for her. By showing the ring to Sister Parker, she exposes herself to further isolation, ridicule and danger. Not only that, but she exposes those she loves: Ruth, Anton, and even her parents, to the same. She lies again, so grandiosely that no one can believe her. Her indiscretion brings the attention of her parents, the Sheriff, and eventually the F.B.I. This negative attention is a form of self-sabotage. Her attempt to prove she is a person of value only causes others to disparage her as the opposite.



Vocabulary

stoop, smudge, congealed, prominent, apprehend, sarcastic, idiotic, simulated, shortcomings, cockleburs, reluctant, concealed, audible, luminous, curt, spigot, abruptly, conviction, curtsy, cellophane, relevance, receptive, confidential, periodicals



Chapters 15-16

Summary

Chapter 15. While Sister Parker tends to Patty in the back of the store, Mr. Bergen calls the Sheriff. Mrs. Bergen is concerned, wanting to know what the trouble is. She and Mr. Bergen begin to argue. Patty is in pain and nauseated. She realizes her father has her ring. She steels herself not to cooperate with anyone until her ring is returned.

The sheriff arrives, and her father demands she speak to him. The sheriff asks to speak to Patty alone, but Mr. Bergen refuses to leave. The sheriff attempts to speak with Patty gently, but her father continues to interrupt. She asks the sheriff if she can have her ring. At first Mr. Bergen refuses, but complies when the sheriff insists. He tells Patty the ring is hers, and she can keep it. The sheriff has Patty repeat her tale, and asks if the man hurt her or touched her. She replies no, except to touch her hand to say goodbye. She tells him Ruth was inside, and didn't see anything, but assures him she was close enough to hear if she had yelled out or needed help. Sheriff Cauldwell is satisfied that no assault occurred, but Mr. Bergen insists he asks why the man gave her the ring. She confabulates the perfect reason: the man wishes he had a daughter just like her.

Chapter 16. Mr. Bergen's attitude seems to have changed slightly towards Patty, almost as if bearing her a grudging respect. Patty's mother continues her nit-picking insults, harping on Patty's lack of friends. As for Patty, she dreams of the day she turns eighteen and is no longer answerable to her parents. She imagines taking the war bond her grandparents bought and using it to travel to Germany and find Anton. She prays to God to make her beautiful, with beautiful hair and a bosom. As she daydreams, Ruth calls to her to tell her Mr. Bergen is coming home from work. Worried, Patty wonders what she has done now. Ruth advises her to be obedient and just do whatever he asks. Afraid he will take the ring again, Patty slips it into Ruth's pocket for safekeeping.

Mr. Bergen arrives home with two men, and they confront Patty in her room. The men are FBI agents. Mr. Bergen is angry, threatening Patty and warning the agents she is a liar, yet insisting she would never harbor a Nazi. The agents question Patty, who gives them half-truths. When they finally show her a picture of Anton, she becomes distressed, trying to think of what to say. Then they reveal her father's shirt; the one Anton was wearing when he left. The agent confronts her directly. She notices a hole in the shirt, surrounded by purplish stains. Blood. Patty panics, and finally breaks. The agents inform her Anton has been shot and killed. She attacks the agent and calls him a murderer.

Analysis

Patty's father imagines the worst when he sees Anton's ring, takes it from her, and beats her. He then calls the Sheriff. She sticks to her story, gets the ring back, and gets the



Sheriff on her side. This seems to have an interesting effect on her father, as he sees she will not be defeated by his intimidations or abuse. However, when he returns home from work early, she still hides the ring in Ruth's pocket to keep him from confiscating it again.

Patty retreats into fantasy even more, dreaming of leaving her parents' house and joining Anton for good. This fantasy of love, family and acceptance is destroyed when the FBI visit her home and start to chip away at her story, finally confronting her with her father's shirt, which is stained with Anton's blood. Her dream shattered, she breaks down completely. In this way, she returns Anton's favor, rushing to his defense at risk of her own safety. This is the deeply human nature of compassion.

Vocabulary

merchandise, bolster, putrid, disintegrated, evidence, crest, accurate, mysteries, incapable, intact, random, prophecy, brittle, terrain, blasphemy, gushed, vile, stenographic, tramp, blotches, ascot, lunging,



Chapters 17-18

Summary

Chapter 17. After Patty's virtual confession, the FBI is preparing to arrest her. Mr. Bergen demands she be taken to Memphis rather than Little Rock, as he wants her defended by a lawyer in Memphis.

Mr. Bergen confronts Patty with sorrow and disbelief, which soon turns to his customary rage when Patty admits she helped Anton because he was good to her. Her father threatens to hit her if she doesn't confess to him something physical had occurred, and Patty defends Anton, comparing his kindness to her father's cruelty. Aghast at being compared to a Nazi, he launches into a tirade. Ruth comes to Patty's defense, and Mr. Bergen fires her.

Chapter 18. Patty is instructed to pack a suitcase for her trip to Memphis. She feels numb, and does as she is told. Mr. Bergen uses his influence to hire a well-known Jewish lawyer in Memphis. As she and the agents approach the car, a crowd of townspeople begins to berate her, calling her a Nazi-lover and "Jew-Nazi." Sheriff Cauldwell pushes them back, and gives Patty a Bible in hopes that it will comfort her. As they pass the prison camp, Patty sadly thinks of Anton.

Patty stays with her grandparents. The phone rings off the hook. News comes that Mr. and Mrs. Bergen may have to sell the department store. Mrs. Bergen is pressuring her mother to convince her father to hire Mr. Bergen. Grandma Fried is kind and loving to Patty, despite the trouble she is in, and informs her that Miss Madlee has called for Patty, and will be coming later to see her.

Patty cooperates with the FBI, only omitting the fact Ruth was in any way involved. The FBI suggests Patty remain in Memphis as her parents are facing harassment in Jenkinsville.

Miss Madlee visits Patty and has supper with the family. After convincing Grandpa and Grandma Fried she is there as a friend, not a reporter, she gives them some information. She has found out through her publisher the government is uncomfortable prosecuting a twelve-year-old for treason, but may choose to convict her of a lesser charge. She concurs with Grandma Fried's opinion had Patty not been Jewish, it may not have been such a big deal, however she also postulates some people will see the situation as an act of love and brotherhood. Patty may escape prison, but may still be sent to a reform school.

Analysis

Mr. Bergen is devastated by Patty's admission, and aghast when his daughter compares him unfavorably to the German. As his temper rises, Ruth steps in to protect



her from his abuse. In return, he fires her. This is another example of injustice, wherein the good get punished for doing what is right.

Patty's adamant defense of Anton stands directly in the face of her father's sorrow, disbelief and rage. Ironically, her father seems to want to protect her, insisting they take her to Memphis, and using his influence to hire her a prominent Jewish lawyer. This may be in his self-interest, though, as the town quickly turns against them. Patty has tainted all the Bergens with the stain of difference.

Although Sheriff Cauldwell is a leader in the town, he does not share the others' bigotry. He offers Patty a Bible for comfort, not as a confrontation. He protects her from the town's derision as she leaves for Memphis. He stands in contrast to the townspeople, including the minister's wife, who screams "Jew Nazi-lover!" at the little girl.

In Memphis, Patty is no longer an outcast. Not every place is like Jenkinsville, not every town is so isolating and small-minded. Patty's grandmother welcomes her warmly; she sees Patty's act as one of childlike ignorance and charity. Although Patty is more aware than Grandma Fried thinks she is, her grandmother's faith in the purity of her intentions is a reminder of Patty's goodness, and of her age. A twelve year old is still a child, which certainly works to her advantage when it comes to the trial. Her grandparents are not her only supporters. Charlene Madlee, another person from outside Jenkinsville, comes to visit Patty. She is a symbol of the wider world Patty envisions escaping into some day. Charlene reminds Patty she is not alone in the world, and many will see her action as an act of love and brotherhood, and will see its greater value.

Vocabulary

contorted, virtual, slumped, disgraced, vulnerable, refuge, tormenting, endurance, conscious, milling, obstructing, credentials, nourishment, harassed, subside, encouraging, strudel, abruptly, prosecute, hullabaloo, anti-Semitism, outcry, delinquency, inordinate



Chapters 19-20

Summary

Chapter 19. Patty is convicted of the lesser charge, and is sentenced to four to six months at the Arkansas Reformatory for Girls at Bolton, Arkansas.

Mr. Grimes drives Patty to the reformatory. On the way, she thinks of her dreams of being beautiful and reunited with Anton. She begins to see the blessing of their friendship, as brief as it was.

Despite the fact it is against the rules, Mr. Grimes stops at a roadside diner and buys Patty a meal. He is kind to her, and she appreciates his kindness, and how he refers to Anton as “that German boy” and not a Nazi, especially after her experiences in court, where she was called a traitor, and refused the chance to tell her side of the story.

Patty considers the fact her lawyer had not even wanted to take her case until Mr. Bergen used his influence with the local Synagogue to convince him to take the case. The lawyer decided to play on Patty’s age and ignorance to defend her, and Patty did not contradict him. He did tell her, however, she was an embarrassment to Jews and had brought all Jews’ loyalty into question.

Back in the car, Patty falls asleep until they approach the school. Patty notes the wire screening on the windows, the same sort of screening used for the animals at the Memphis Zoo.

Chapter 20. A month into her stay at the reform school, Patty has fallen into a routine. She wakes early to have time to herself. She gives herself a pep talk, and then tries to convince herself to think in practicalities. Still, she dreams of going to Germany; no longer to find Anton, but to meet his family. She feels sad with the loss of him, she has also lost the chance to be part of his family.

Her roommate brings her back to reality. She calls Patty “Natz,” while other girls call her “Nazi” or sometimes “Spy.” Patty asks her to call her by her real name instead. After Patty shares her breakfast with her, she complies. While the other girls attend “nondenominational” Sunday services, Patty opts out, noting her one experience proved they were not nondenominational for Jewish girls. All she finds on the radio are Christian sermons, so she returns to her room to read *The Commercial Appeal*, of which Miss Madlee has gifted her a subscription. Miss Madlee has remained a sympathetic friend, writing to Patty and encouraging her in her idea to become a reporter.

As footsteps approach her room, Patty becomes nervous, but it is only the head matron come to inform her Ruth has come to visit her. They greet each other joyously, and Ruth tells Patty about her new job. Patty has to fight disappointment, remembering Ruth was fired, and did not abandon her. Ruth has come on a Greyhound bus to visit her, bringing ginger snaps and fried chicken breasts. At Ruth’s inquiry, Patty admits her mother has



not been to visit her. Ruth tells Patty she had seen Mrs. Bergen and Sharon recently in the grocery store. When Patty asks if her mother had mentioned her, Ruth reluctantly confesses she claimed Ruth was the only one who could ever “handle” Patty. Patty is angered and upset. She asks Ruth to tell her, honestly, what is wrong with her. Ruth insists there is nothing wrong with her, and that her ability to be herself and not bend to the will of others is what makes her special. Ruth tells her she has always loved her best of all the children she cared for, and reminds her Anton loved her too, enough to risk his life to protect her.

Patty considers the truth of this, and laments she has lost Anton’s ring, and since then has forgotten its meaning: a reminder of her own value. Ruth surprises her by taking the ring from her purse and reminding her she had taken it for safekeeping. Kissing the ring, Patty acknowledges Anton’s affection, and hopes aloud someday her parents might love her, as well. Ruth decides to be brutally honest with Patty. She tells her her parents are not good people, and will never truly love her. She tells Patty their feelings have nothing to do with her, but rather is a reflection on their own lack of positive qualities. Comforted, Patty feels a renewed sense of self-worth as she embraces her dear friend.

Analysis

On the way to the reformatory, Patty makes a connection with another kind person, Mr. Grimes. She is moving into the world beyond Jenkinsville. Here she meets people who are willing to look beyond black and white, and see situations from her perspective. Her friendliness, compassion and empathy receive understanding and kindness in return

For protecting an escaped prisoner, Patty finds herself in a prison of her own. In the reformatory, she is not treated much better than she had been in Jenkinsville. She is still called names, isolated by her differences (e.g. expected to attend “non-denominational” services which do not include Jews in a positive light), and looked down upon by authoritarian figures. However, she has a new strength, which comes out, allowing her to stand up for herself. She refuses to go to services, asks her roommate to stop calling her “Natz,” and begins to write an article about conditions in the institution. These behaviors cause the Matron to resent her, and consider her uppity.

Vocabulary

static, kerosene, delta, ascent, bounty, privilege, reverie, capacity, meringue, reformatory, spouting, dander, ledger, notion, density, clarify, onyx, squander, bleakness, estimated, byways, punctured, grits, lieu, nondenominational



Chapter 21

Summary

In the comfort of Ruth's embrace, Patty imagines all is well again, but soon has to return to reality. She tells Ruth she doesn't want to go back home, but Ruth reminds her at twelve, she does not have much choice. She admonishes her not to run away, but to go home and finish her education so she can go to college and make something of herself. Patty tells her she wants to be a journalist, and has already chosen a nom de plume, Antonia Alexander. In fact, she is already planning her first article, about the conditions at the reformatory. Ms. Madlee has encouraged her, suggesting if the article is good, the paper might publish it. Ruth encourages her.

The matron comes to tell them the visit is over. When Patty resists, Ruth asks for a few more moments. The Matron launches into Patty, berating her and accusing her of caring about no one but "Nigras and Nazis." Patty holds tight to Ruth, and the Matron calls for backup to split the two apart. As the women approach, Ruth stands up firmly to both women, who retreat. Ruth and Patty say their goodbyes, and as Patty watches one of the only people who ever loved her walk away, she wonders if she will ever be able to truly succeed on her own. However, she is determined to discover the answer.

Analysis

When Ruth visits, Patty retreats for a moment into the childish neediness of home. She resents Ruth for "abandoning" her, but then realizes that was not the case. She begs for information about her parents, searching for signs they might miss her, but Ruth is honest with her in ways she could not be while she was in their employ. This honesty and straightforwardness puts the woman and the girl on a more even footing. While Ruth still nurtures her, she does not coddle her, telling her she cannot run from her problems, but must stand up and make something of herself. Patty is coming into a new maturity, where she must take responsibility for her own actions, while rejecting the burden of her parents' inability to see her inherent value. Patty is coming of age. She has learned some valuable lessons, made some good friends, and has found some dreams she can base in reality, such as becoming a journalist. Most of all, she has found a new awareness of self, internalizing Anton's words of encouragement, and wondering, if not knowing, if she can make it on her own.

Vocabulary

ablare, anguish, genuine, optical, presumptuous, authority, gloss, betrayal, chauffeur, disloyal, vagueness, scaling, pussyfooting, aspersions, galoshes, alliteration



Characters

Patty Bergen

Patty Bergen is a 12 year-old Jewish girl who lives in Jenkinsville, Alabama. She is intelligent and curious, although she is also socially isolated and does not do well in school. Patty is dismissed, disapproved of, and emotionally and physically abused by her parents, who dote on her younger, prettier sister, Sharon. Patty has very little self-esteem, and will do almost anything to gain the approval of her parents, to no avail. She often tells lies to make herself feel important.

Patty's grandparents love her, and do their best to show her love, but they live in Memphis, and have their own lives. Her only friends are her maid Ruth, Freddy the neighbor boy of whom her father disapproves, Charlene Madlee, a reporter for The Commercial Appeal and Anton, an escaped German soldier/American prisoner of war, who shows her that she is, indeed, an important person.

Frederick Anton Reiker

Anton is a captured German soldier who is sent to an American POW camp in Patty Bergen's hometown. He is only half German, as his mother was born in Manchester, England. His father was also educated in England, and Anton speaks excellent, if formal, English. Because of this, he acts as a translator for the other POWs, which is how he meets Patty in her father's store. Anton is a reluctant soldier. He has no particular sympathy for Hitler or for the Nazi party. In fact, his father had been disciplined for anti-Hitler comments prior to the war.

When Anton decides to escape, he uses his intelligence, rather than violence, to do so. When Patty helps him, he grows truly fond of her, although he realizes in the end, that he must leave in order to keep her and her family safe, even if it means risking his life. In fact, he is later shot and killed trying to run from FBI agents.

Ruth Hughes

Ruth is the Bergen family's black maid. Racism is rampant in Jenkinsville, Alabama. The lower half of town, where Ruth and her family live, is called "Nigger Bottoms." Black people are referred to as "Negroes" or "Nigras" at best. Ruth is often looked upon as being "uppity" as she walks a fine line between servitude and pride. Mrs. Bergen lets it slide, however, as Ruth is such a good cook and maid.

Ruth has a loving husband and a son, Robert, who is serving in the War, whom she often worries about. Ruth truly cares about Patty, even more as she sees the abuse and neglect Patty suffers at the hands of her parents. She does what she can to make up for it with her warmth and guidance. When Ruth discovers Anton, she supports Patty in



hiding him, finding him a respectful, egalitarian person. However, in her wisdom, she subtly suggests that Anton might do Patty more harm than good, were he to be discovered.

Harry Bergen

Harry is Patty's father. He owns Bergen's Department Store, and is very conscious about money, although he is generous with food. Warm, charming, and genial to strangers, especially women, he is cruel to his elder daughter, perhaps because she reminds him of his mother, who never loved him. Instead, he showers all of his affection on his younger daughter, who can do no wrong in his eyes.

Pearl Bergen

Beautiful, fashionable, and status conscious, Patty's mother works at her husband's store. She is vain and often disparages of Patty's looks in front of others. However, while she goes to a hairdresser outside town, she sends her daughter to a cut-rate stylist. She neglects Patty, considering her beyond help, and instead dotes on her youngest, Sharon, who is a carbon copy of her in both looks and temperament.

Sharon Bergen

Sharon is Patty's six-year-old sister. Although her parents obviously prefer her to Patty, her sweetness and cuteness are genuine, and Patty adores her too, despite being jealous of her.

Freddy Dowd

Freddy is Patty's only friend from school. Her father forbids her to play with him, and beats Patty with a belt for going against his wishes. Perhaps her father's disapproval stems from the fact that Freddy is a boy (Patty is "too tomboyish," but is also grown enough that her father may suspect her of immoral behavior), or that he's poor (The Bergens care about their social standing.) Also, Freddy's "slow," which may also make him an unsuitable playmate. Freddy is kind and naïve, which makes it difficult for him to understand why Patty would reject his friendship, and also makes it difficult for her to do so.

Edna Louise Jackson

Edna is a girl with whom Patty is nominally a friend. She is very wealthy, and her parents send her away to camp for the summer. Patty wants to go, too, but her mother will not allow it, as it is a Baptist Church camp. Edna's grandfather once bilked Ruth's mother out of her life savings.



Charlene Madlee

Charlene is a reporter for a Memphis newspaper, The Commercial Appeal, who befriends, encourages, and mentors Patty as she considers becoming a journalist.

Sister Parker

Sister Parker works at Bergen's Department Store. Patty shows her Anton's ring, and it is Sister Parker who calls Mr. Bergen's attention to it.

Sherriff Cauldwell

Sherriff Cauldwell is the town Sherriff who interrogates Patty, but returns Anton's ring to her after her father had confiscated it.

Calvin Grimes

Calvin is the man who transports Patty to the Reform School. He is kind to her, and buys her dinner on the way.

Grandma and Grandpa Fried

The Frieds are Patty's maternal grandparents who live in Memphis. They love her, and her grandmother slips Patty money even though her parents direct their daughter to refuse it. Mr. Bergen does not like his wife's parents, partly because Mr. Fried did not ask him to join his real estate business. Patty is disappointed when her grandparents go on vacation and can't spend time with her. They take her in after her arrest as she awaits trial in Memphis.



Objects/Places

Jenkinsville, Arkansas

The main setting of the novel, Jenkinsville is a small southern town, predominantly white and Christian, with a population of marginalized and segregated African Americans who mostly serve white families as maids, gardeners, porters, and the like. Racial prejudice is common and those who are different are often targeted for harassment.

Books and Words

Books are important to Patty, and she buys them with the money her grandmother gives her. Patty often memorizes words from the dictionary. Her vocabulary gives her a sense of power. Patty manipulates words as she daydreams, and as she tells her outrageous lies. Anton's words of encouragement and advice help heal Patty's fragile esteem, and he also shares with her a book of Emerson's essays. Patty's words, in conjunction with her curiosity, give her the aptitude to become a journalist. She puts these words to use when she writes letters to, and eventually an article for, the newspaper.

Bergen's Department Store

The store owned by Patty's parents, Harry and Pearl Bergen. The success of the store helps raise the Bergen's social status, which helps them fit in and be accepted in Jenkinsville, even though they are Jewish.

Nigger Bottoms

This is the area of Jenkinsville where the black people live.

Food

Food is nourishment, and it represents kindness and generosity. Ruth cooks generously, and is large-sized. Mrs. Bergen refuses food, as it is "fattening." She is cold and stingy with her affections. Patty's first act of generosity after hiding Anton is to bring him a large amount of food. Grandma Fried, also a warm and caring person, takes Patty to a fine restaurant, and Mr. Grimes takes Patty for a meal on the way to the reformatory. It is pointed out Mr. Bergen is generous with food, as well, but he seems to be generous in many ways with everyone except Patty, which indicates his problem is specifically with her.



It is interesting to note Patty often refuses to eat, and she has a sensitive stomach. She also orders something then is unable to finish it. This may symbolize Patty's inability to nourish herself or to accept love and kindness, even though she craves it.

Wire

The POW camp is surrounded by barbed wire. The reformatory has wire over the windows, and Patty points out it is the same wire they use at the Memphis zoo. This shows that the prisoners and the girls in the reformatory are on the same par as animals.

Trains

There is a train that goes through Jenkinsville. It brings the POWs to town, and the same train is searched after Anton's escape. Patty sees Anton by the train tracks when she approaches him. It is the train that takes Patty to and from Memphis, and on which Anton eventually makes his escape from Jenkinsville.

Hide Out

Patty's hideout, an abandoned servant's quarters over the garage, is her sanctuary. She hides her self, her knowledge, her books, and eventually her friend Anton there. It is one of the only places where Patty feels safe.

Bergens' House

Patty lives with her mother, father and sister in a nice house in Jenkinsville, Arkansas. They have a garage, a victory garden (with a gardener), and a housekeeper.

POW camp

The camp for the captured German soldiers is just outside of Jenkinsville, yet close enough for Patty to reach riding her bike. Prisoners are transported there by train or by truck. The camp is heavily guarded, but Anton escapes from by bribing a guard.

Reform School

Patty is sent to the Jasper E. Conrad Arkansas Reformatory for Girls in Bolton, Arkansas for four to six months after being tried for her role in hiding the escaped prisoner. The conditions there are poor, and she is looked down upon by the matron for being Jewish, among other things.



Memphis

Patty's grandparents live in Memphis, 40 miles from Jenkinsville. Patty is tried for her crime in Memphis. Memphis is also the location of the Beth Zion Synagogue, which is the closest in proximity to Jenkinsville.

Soldiers

Several German soldiers are interred at the POW camp near Jenkinsville. Meanwhile, several of the town's citizens, including Ruth's son Robert, are serving as soldiers in the U.S. military overseas.

Car

The sound of Mr. Bergen's car often strikes fear into Patty, as she fears her father's abuse. This is especially true when he arrives home early. Patty is beaten severely after she throws a rock at a car and accidentally breaks a window.

Hair

Patty's hair is a bone of contention between her and her mother. Mrs. Bergen's hair is dark and always perfectly coiffed. She spends money on a hairdresser outside of town so that she can look her best. She complains about Patty's hair, which is often messy and unkempt. She sends Patty to get a permanent at a local hairdresser's, who does an inferior job, prompting Ruth to cut off the scorched ends. Patty's sister, Sharon, has dark curls like her mother, while Patty's hair is auburn, which reminds her father of his mother, with whom he had a terrible relationship.

Religion

Patty's family is Jewish in an almost exclusively Christian town. The local authorities will not grant extra gas rations so that the Bergens can attend the synagogue in Memphis. Patty wishes to go to camp with her schoolmates, but her mother refuses, as it is a Baptist church camp. At the Reformatory, the Sunday services are touted as "non-denominational" but are clearly Christian in nature.

Gifts

Gifts are symbols of affection and love. While Mrs. Bergen both expects and accepts expensive gifts from her parents, she refuses to let Patty accept money from them. Patty carefully selects a Father's day gift for Mr. Bergen, but he casts it casually aside. Patty receives a ring as a gift from Anton. She wishes she had a gift to give Ruth when she comes to visit the reformatory and brings a gift of food.



Ring

Anton gives Patty his grandfather's solid gold ring as a token of gratitude and affection. It is his most precious possession and becomes a symbol to Patty of her self-worth. It is also her downfall, leading to her complicity in Anton's escape after she shows it to a woman who works in her father's store. The ring is given to her by Anton, taken from her by her father, returned by the Sheriff, given to Ruth for safekeeping, and then returned to Patty by Ruth: a symbol again, of Patty's sense of self-worth. It is a belonging that represents her sense of belonging.

Water/Swimming

In several places in the novel, Patty refers to the idea of water and swimming, especially the struggle of the swimmer to reach land, and the need for willpower and strength. Patty often feels as if she is drowning, and clings to Anton's ring (a life ring?) and Ruth's nurturing love (her life raft, as she refers to Ruth in the last chapter) to stay above water emotionally. However, by the end of the novel, she expresses hope she can learn to swim on her own to land, where she can stand on her own two feet.



Themes

Coming of Age

Patty is twelve years old, but in many ways she seems much older. In fact, she tries to convince Ruth she is in fact, a teenager, as any person with an age of two digits is teenaged, although no one says “tenteen” as it sounds like a brand of gum. Patty is smart if unmotivated in school, has an excellent grasp of language, and her survival instincts are firmly in place. However, in many ways she is still extremely immature. She tells outlandish lies, makes desperate plays for attention, struggles with discretion, and does not fully consider the consequences of her actions.

Meeting Anton is a turning point in Patty’s life. Through her friendship with him, she begins to see the positive consequences of her generous nature. She begins to see herself as he (and Ruth, and Freddy) see her: a kind and beautiful person with inherent value. She grows to love him, and in his own way, he loves her (although in this day and age, people would certainly frown upon any suggestion of mutual romantic feelings between a twelve and a twenty-two-year old.)

During this time, she also builds a friendship with Charlene, who becomes a mentor for her, and helps her begin to find a focus in her life outside simply surviving her family dynamic.

Over the course of the novel, Patty learns to accept the consequences of her actions. She learns to tell the truth, omitting details to protect others, but accepting all the responsibility. In doing this, she shows a burgeoning maturity, as well as a developing confidence and sense of self-esteem.

Family Dynamics

The Bergen family dynamics are complex and difficult. Harry Bergen is a complex man. Charming and flirtatious towards women, regardless of their attractiveness, he is labeled a “ladies’ man” by his siblings, and has chosen for himself an extremely attractive wife from a wealthy family. Raised in brutal poverty, he is a successful businessman although he resents the fact that he had to depend on his father-in-law’s money to start his business. He might also hold resentment against his wife’s father due to the fact that he was not invited to join the family firm after his marriage. Due to these resentments, he has a chilly relationship with his in-laws. He also had a bitter relationship with his mother, who raised him and several siblings after his father’s death at a young age. He believes she never loved him, and it continues to bring him grief into his adulthood. He then turns his rage against his mother towards his daughter Patty, who is said to strongly resemble his mother. In contrast, he showers affection on his youngest daughter Sharon. Perhaps because she is sweet natured and pretty like his wife, or perhaps because she is simply not old enough to contradict him yet.



According to his brother, Max, Harry has always had a violent temper, which his parents did their best to soothe. In fact, Harry becomes enraged at his brother, and calls him a “damn liar” for relating such stories of his childhood. Although he is a charmer to others, Mr. Bergen is intolerant of any woman who has a strong personality or who offers an opinion which contradicts his own. This is his main reason for punishing Patty. Although he saves the physical abuse for his daughter, he berates his wife for voicing her opinions, and when Ruth stands up against him to protect Patty, he fires her.

Although Mrs. Bergen’s parents are generous and kind, they have indulged Patty’s mother Pearl until she has become spoiled and selfish. Even her mother admonishes her for never being satisfied with what she has. Pearl is selfish in that she demands the best for herself (and for her younger daughter, who is her mirror image) but refuses the same indulgences to her oldest child. Patty believes she is unworthy and a disappointment to her mother because she is a tomboy, and was born “ugly.” She secretly hopes to grow up beautiful so that she can be loved. She tries to engage, please, and interest her mother, but to no avail. Pearl is cold, dismissive and constantly critical of Patty. She is more indulgent towards Sharon, but disengages quickly and hands the job of entertaining her to others: Ruth, Patty, or playmates. It seems obvious that overall, Pearl has no particular love for children.

Sharon’s sweetness is genuine and engaging. Perhaps she is an unspoiled version of her mother. Patty loves her, although she is jealous when she sees her parents (especially her father) lavish love and affection upon her. At one point she wishes to slap her, but feels bad about it. Sharon is the one person in her immediate family unit that Patty truly loves and feels loved by. She wishes, however, that she could know Sharon’s secret to success, as her lovable nature just seems to show up Patty’s shortcomings.

Patty does not fit in to her family in any way. She is unpretty, opinionated, curious, tomboyish, and most of all, unpretentious and unprejudiced. She likes people regardless of race, religion, or social status. She longs for love, and gives it unsparingly. Her individuality seems a curse to her, but she also seems unable to curb or correct it. Whatever she tries (and she tries hard to overcompensate for her “flaws”) ends in abject failure. She even considers betraying Anton, the person who has been nothing but kind to her, to gain her father’s approval and love. In the end she does not.

In lieu of her parents’ love and approval she creates a family around her of other misfits: the maid Ruth, her neighbor Freddy, and the escaped prisoner of war. As she grows in confidence, she attracts other supporters as well: the bold woman reporter, the kind sheriff, and the good-hearted man who drives her to the reformatory. Most of all, she learns to love herself. Family dynamics are complicated things, and cannot always be healed. One cannot choose their family of birth, but they can create their family of choice with a warm circle of true and loyal friends.



Love (Longing For / Absence Of)

Harry Bergen grows up in a world without love, and passes that world on to his daughter Patty. No matter how harshly he treats her with his emotional, verbal and physical abuse, she still desires his love and will do anything to gain it. She lies to impress him (and to prevent his wrath), she spends her valuable money on gifts for him, and tries to engage and assist him in any way she can. Although she fears and dislikes him, the lack of his love and approval only pushes her harder to change herself. She internalizes her feelings, believing she is not good enough to earn his love.

Pearl Bergen, on the other hand, received love as a child, but does not know how to give it. Her sense of entitlement does not extend to her children. Her criticism and coldness only exacerbate Patty's feelings of inadequacy. Although she wants her mother's approval as well, she does not long for it with the intensity of her father's; perhaps it's because she knows her mother is incapable of warmth, or because mother's love has been amply provided by her substitute mother, Ruth.

Patty builds elaborate fantasies of how she will gain love, whether it is saving her parents from a blizzard or growing bosoms and traveling to Germany to find Anton after the war. She makes up lies regarding others' praise of her as a daughter and as a person. When she does receive love in return for her caring and kindness, she's not exactly sure how to process or accept it. Still, it takes root within her, and she realizes she has to love herself, as she is a person of value.

Beauty (Outer vs. Inner)

Mrs. Bergen has outer beauty, but lacks inner-beauty (character, kindness, generosity, humility). Her daughter Patty on the other hand, is plain but bursts with the willingness to give love. She has her flaws, of course, but Patty is generous and responsive to kindness. She knows when she does wrong, and feels remorse. In addition, Anton tells Patty that someday she will grow up to be beautiful on the outside as well. This may be true, which shows that beauty on the inside may grow into beauty on the outside, while surface beauty alone is empty and shallow. Being beautiful on the outside, however, does not connote lack of inner qualities. Sharon is young and innocent, beautiful on both the inside and the out. She is full of love and kindness. This shows true beauty comes from love, not from lucky genes.

Racial/Cultural relations and Prejudice

Jenkinsville is the stereotypical small Southern town. It is fully segregated, with blacks and whites living in well-defined, separate areas of town. Black people are expected to stay in their "place" and defer to whites in every way and at all times. Otherwise they are "uppity," and their jobs (and it is implied, safety) could also be at risk. People who are "different" had better fit in, or else. Mr. Lee, a Chinese merchant who some townspeople referred to as "The Chink," was harassed, threatened and run out of town after Pearl



Harbor, even though the perpetrators of that attack (and, hence, the country's enemy) were Japanese. This shows up people's ignorance, which is a huge factor in bigotry.

Mr. and Mrs. Bergen are different in that they are the only Jewish family in town. However, they can "fit in" because they are white-skinned, and because they are prosperous. Still, they do not fit in perfectly. Mr. and Mrs. Bergen also help themselves fit in by buying into, perpetuating, or at the very least, tolerating bigotry towards others. That way, the town's attention shifts focus off their difference, and allows them to live undisturbed. Patty's arrest, however, shoves the Bergens into the spotlight, and the fact they are Jews becomes an issue, both to the townspeople and to other Jews. Both groups see Patty as a traitor, either to her country or to her race, and her parents bear the brunt of it.

Injustice and Hypocrisy

minister's wife, who complains about the greed of others, yet complains out of the other side of her mouth because her husband can't afford to hire her a maid or buy her new clothes. One would also think a minister's wife would be more tolerant or kind, yet she is the one who insists Mrs. Bergen fire Ruth for being "uppity." Luckily for Ruth, Mrs. Bergen's desire for a good housekeeper outweighs her desire to please Mrs. Benn. Mrs. Bergen is also a hypocrite, as she refuses to let Patty accept gifts from her grandmother, even money for books, yet she accepts (and expects) them herself; gifts such as a mink coat and new furniture. Mr. Bergen tolerates prejudice and will even play into it to preserve his place in society, especially if it brings him business.

Injustice also runs rampant in the novel. Mr. Bergen beats Patty brutally for just playing with a little boy who is perfectly nice. He also charms and flirts with women, but treats his wife and daughter with contempt. In fact, both parents' treatment of Patty is unjust, as she does not do anything to merit their treatment of her. Later, he fires Ruth for standing up for Patty. Other injustices include the embezzlement of Ruth's mother's savings by Eugene Jackson, the town's harassment of Mr. Lee and later the Bergens, and the denial of gasoline vouchers to the Bergens so that they might attend synagogue.



Style

Point of View

This story is told in the first person point of view by its protagonist, Patty Bergen. This allows the reader to get inside the mind of the young girl and better understand her complex feelings and motivations. By seeing the world through Patty's eyes, the reader becomes sympathetic to her and can understand her character on a deeper level than those outside her world can.

Setting

The novel is mainly set in the Southern United States, in the small town of Jenkinsville, Arkansas. It is set in the 1940s, during the Second World War. Segregation between the races is strictly adhered to, and any form of difference is alien and suspect. The Bergens do whatever they can to fit in so that they can prosper in the mainly white and Christian town.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is tinged with a Southern flavor, and its tone reflects the attitudes of the time in which it was set: Arkansas in the 1940's.

In this novel, language is used to show character. Patty speaks in the casual vernacular of a child, yet she sprinkles her dialogue with the sophisticated words she memorizes from the dictionary. This shows her desire to stand out, but also highlights her difference, which isolates her from others.

Ruth speaks in a "Black dialect," which is common in books depicting the pre-integration South. These days, many people avoid this convention, as some feel it makes African-Americans sound ignorant. However, she betters herself by learning good vocabulary, and she also speaks her mind, which makes the (white) townspeople uncomfortable, and they label her as being "uppity."

Anton's mother was British, and his father was educated in Britain, hence, he speaks English with a British accent. The precision of his language causes Mr. Bergen to scoff at him, as if the prisoner, like Ruth, is acting "above his station."

Grandma Fried's language is peppered with Yiddish phrases, which imbues her speech with Jewishness, which gives casual warmth to her tone. Even though she is wealthy, she is not pretentious, unlike her daughter, Mrs. Bergen, whose language is usually cool and dismissive. Even when Patty's mother is momentarily caring (i.e. towards Sharon), she soon becomes bored and foists her preferred daughter off on Patty to entertain.

Structure

Summer of My German Soldier is approximately 230 pages in length and is divided into twenty-one short chapters, each ranging from five to twenty pages in length. The author tells the story in a linear fashion through dialogue and internal exposition. Since the story is told from Patty's point of view, the reader is aware of her opinions, reactions and insights as the story unfolds.

This novel contains one main plot, and no major subplots. Events that occur outside the main plot (such as the attempted sabotage by German U-boats) are only brought in to provide texture and context to the story. The plot follows Patty Bergen as she meets the Prisoner of War Anton Reiker, befriends him, hides him, and faces the consequences (both external and internal) of her actions. While there are many interwoven and complex themes, they are all explored within the context of a singular story.

Quotes

If there were no mirrors or mothers I probably wouldn't know how ugly I am. But it was all there, plain as my reflection in the glass. (Chapter 1)

The secret is in absolutely refusing to let the river beat you down. If I had to, I'd measure my progress in inches. One more inch I've swum—one less inch to swim. Once you know the secret, then nobody's river can bring you down. (Chapter 2)

Reiker laughed and for a moment, this moment, we were friends. And now I knew something more. He wasn't a bad man. (Chapter 3)

Betrayed! By whom? Anton? No, by myself. By my ugly, stupid self. Always having to talk, always having to tell people things. (Chapter 4)

But someday it would happen. I'd find her and she'd understand right away that Evol has more power spelled in reverse. And that would be the sign between us. She would be my real mother and now at last I could go home. (Chapter 5)

Another thing that's different about them, and I do a lot of listening in on other people's conversations so I know, is how they speak to one another. So respectful and everything. It's as though they try to give each other the respect that the rest of the world holds back. (Chapter 6)

Once I figured out that the only thing that Sharon didn't have was enough words. But I could teach her. All kinds. Thin ones like ego and ode. Fat ones like harmonic and palatable. And I'd reach her some beautiful ones like rendezvous and dementia praecox. Maybe, just for variety, throw in some ugly ones like grief and degrade. And when Sharon knew enough words she could teach me all those things she was born knowing. (Chapter 7)

My father chose acquiescence and life rather than resistance and death. Not a very admirable choice, but a very human one. (Chapter 8)

Some of our prisoners, mostly former members of the S.S., are truly fanatical men. They're arrogant and they don't care who knows it. Reiker wasn't cut from that mold. He was a scholar, interested in books and ideas. And, perhaps more important, he was a loner. (Chapter 9)

P.B.' he called me, and my initials took on a strength and beauty that never before was there. And now that I had of my own free will broken faith with my father and my country, I felt like a good and worthy person. (Chapter 10)

I think I'm going to enjoy being your teacher if you'll keep in mind that like produces no maestros, only students of varying degrees of ineptitude. (Chapter 11)



[If] Ruth played the piano I think she'd play only the cracks between the keys. She seems best suited for walking that thinnest of lines between respectfulness and subservience. (Chapter 12)

I believe that love is better than hate. And that there is more nobility in building a chicken coop than in destroying a cathedral. (Chapter 12)

Even if you forget everything else I want you to always remember that you are a person of value, and you have a friend who loved you enough to give you his most valued possession. (Chapter 13)

By the time I had walked the block to the store I had come to a decision—a ring of such power and beauty has no business being hidden away beneath some dress front. It should be worn proudly for all the world to see. (Chapter 14)

I heard the air rushing like a powerful vacuum through my father's nostrils. I prayed that if God wouldn't protect me, surely Sheriff Cauldwell would. (Chapter 15)

The tear was not so much a tear as a hole, quarter-sized, with purple stains smeared around I and two thick blotches of stain below. It was exactly the color you would expect to see if you mixed the blue of the shirt with the color red. (Chapter 16)

My father looked as if I had just finished telling him the world's most incredible lie. 'Are you going to tell me or do I have to knock it out of you?' 'I've already told you. He was kind to me.' 'And I don't believe you. You let him put his hands on your body, didn't you?' His thin lips contorted into a sneer. 'You—you filth!' 'That's a lie! Anton's a good man. A better man than you. (Chapter 17)

Does a person have to ask for credentials before they can give food to a hungry man? Are you responsible because you gave nourishment to a bad man? The whole business is a mishegoss. (Chapter 18)

Don't have to spend my money for sadness. Plenty of that to be had for free. (Chapter 19)

When I goes shoppin' and I sees the label stamped "Irregular" or "Seconds," then I knows I won't have to pay so much for it. But you've got yourself some irregular seconds folks, and you've been payin' more'n top dollar for them. So jest don't go a-wishing for what ain't nevah gonna be. (Chapter 20)

I watched her. It was like watching my very own life raft floating away towards the open sea. And yet somewhere in my mind's eye I thought I could see the faintest outline of land. Then it came to me that maybe that's the only thing life rafts are supposed to do. Taking the shipwrecked, not exactly to the land, but only in view of the land. The final mile being theirs alone to swim. (Chapter 21)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Who is Patty Bergen? Why does she feel out of place in Jenkinsville? How does she feel about herself? What does she want most out of life? Who are her friends? What is the role of words in her life? Why does she lie? What does she value? What is her greatest strength? What is her greatest weakness? Why does she hide Anton? What does she learn by the end of the book? What do you think she will do with this understanding?

Topic 2

Who is Anton Reiker? In what ways is he different than people perceive him to be? Discuss the relationship between Patty and Anton. What is its nature? Do they have the basis for an enduring friendship? How does Patty feel about Anton? How does Anton feel about Patty? How does their relationship affect each of them? Explain. How does Anton treat Ruth? Why is this significant? Why does Anton risk his life to help Patty? What happens to Anton?

Topic 3

What is the role of difference (cultural, racial, personal) in the novel? What does it take to “fit in” in Jenkinsville? What are the consequences of being different? How does each of the following characters deal with their own individual differences: Mr. and Mrs. Bergen, Patty, Ruth, Freddy, Anton? How do Mr. and Mrs. Bergen relate to others who are different? How do people in Jenkinsville respond to cultural and racial differences?

Topic 4

What is the role of the Bergens' Jewish faith and culture in the novel? How does it affect the Bergens' life in Jenkinsville? How does it affect their relationships with the townspeople? How do the Frieds express their culture differently than the Bergens? Is there a reason for this? Does Patty's religion affect Patty's relationship with Anton? How? How does being Jewish affect Patty and people's perceptions of her when her secret is discovered?

Topic 5

What is the nature of the relationship between Patty and her parents? How does she fit in to her family? Explain? What sort of relationship does she long for? How does she try



to gain it? Will she ever succeed? Discuss why or why not. How does Patty compensate for this lack of relationship?

Topic 6

Who is Ruth? What is her role in the Bergen's household? What is her relationship with Patty? Why do you think Patty is Ruth's favorite? How do the people in Jenkinville perceive Ruth? Is that perception accurate? Why or why not? How does Ruth see herself? What advice does she have to lend Patty?