

# The Solitary Short Guide

## The Solitary by Lynn Hall

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">The Solitary Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Overview.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">About the Author.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Setting.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Social Sensitivity.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Literary Qualities.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Ideas for Reports and Papers.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">For Further Reference.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>



## Overview

Jane Cahill has suffered years of neglect and abuse in the home of her aunt and uncle. Her aunt is a kindly person, but too weak to stand up to her husband. Jane's uncle blames the girl for being part of his brother's murder and as a consequence has treated her like dirt. When Jane was a little girl, her mother murdered her father, a nasty, abusive man who beat his wife and threatened Jane. Jane's mother is serving a long sentence in prison for the crime and specifically asked that Jane never try to get in touch with her. The unhappy circumstances of her life have made Jane a withdrawn loner. As soon as she is able, Jane leaves the home of her aunt and uncle and returns to the now decrepit home of her parents.

There, she plans to live alone, surviving on what she can grow in a garden and what she can earn by rabbit farming.

## About the Author

Lynn Hall was born November 9, 1937, in Lombard, Illinois, to Raymond Edwin Hall and Alice (nee Seeds) Hall. Her father worked for Standard Oil; her mother was a high school teacher of English and Spanish.

While she was still a child, her family moved near Des Moines, Iowa. Hall remembers being a loner, not for a particular reason, since her family life was a happy one; she simply preferred being alone. She developed a fondness for animals, especially horses. When fourteen years old, she used money she 4020 The Solitary had earned to buy herself a horse. She rode everyday; her knowledge of horses provides backgrounds for several of her books.

After graduating from high school, Hall held a wide variety of jobs in Colorado, Texas, Indiana, Kentucky, and Wisconsin, as well as Iowa. On May 1, 1960, she married Dean W. Green; they were divorced in September 1961. From 1955 to 1966, she seems to have been unsatisfied with her life, moving as she did from one unfulfilling job to another, and having what appears to have been an unfulfilling marriage. For a time, she had a chinchilla herd; her experiences raising the herd may have inspired the rabbit raising in *The Solitary*. She remembers being inspired to write by seeing a badly written, inaccurate horse book in a book store; she believed she could do better. She sold her chinchilla herd to pay for her living expenses while writing her first book, *The Shy Ones*, about a dog. Horse stories soon followed, and by the end of 1968, Hall had established herself as a full-time writer.

In the early 1970s, Hall moved to the country, living in a farmhouse. In the late 1970s, she built a stone cottage she calls Touchstone. There, she lives with cocker spaniels, horses, and other animals. Her love of country life and animals continues to inform her writings.

In 1972, her book *Sticks and Stones* was selected a "best book" for young adults by the American Library Association, as were *The Leaving* in 1980 and *Uphill All the Way* in 1984. In 1981, *The Leaving* received the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award.

## Setting

Most of the action takes place in and around Jane's house, which had become her property with the death of her father and her mother's conviction for murdering him.

The house was much smaller than she remembered. Its gray boards showed no sign of paint. The porch that spanned the front side of the rectangular building was rotten and sagging, and part of the roof was gone. Many of the small windowpanes were broken or missing. Still, it was better than she'd feared. The place might have burned down or rotted away in those twelve years.

The property includes a small barn with old rabbit cages, some woods, and a steady water supply: "An iron pipe had been driven into the face of the rock and tapped into an underground spring, so that even in January, water flowed from the pipe and down into the creek."

A couple of retirees from down the road help Jane out with some of the necessary repairs to the house. She lives in an area of Arkansas where people live far apart. More than a mile down the road is a small store where she can buy food and other goods. The town of Prosper is far enough away that Jane needs to ride there.



# Social Sensitivity

A few of the characters in the book are worried about Jane's being alone and far from help. If *The Solitary* has a major weakness, it is in minimizing the dangers a seventeen-year-old girl faces in a society in which human predators often prey on young women. Perhaps Hall wished to avoid sensationalism in a novel which appeals to the minds and good sense of its audience. Still, young readers would be wrong not to worry about what might happen to a young woman who is known to live alone and far from help.

In *The Solitary*, Hall touches on some significantly sensitive social themes.

For instance, Jane's father was a vicious wife beater who threatened his own daughter with harm. To protect Jane, her mother murdered her father.

In spite of sensational television motion pictures and a few celebrated court cases, women who kill their husbands, for whatever reason, tend to be imprisoned, just as has happened in *The Solitary*. Hall does not explore the rightness or wrongness of Jane's mother's action, although significantly Jane visits her mother in prison and achieves a degree of reconciliation with her. Jane's abuse at the hands of her aunt and uncle is well motivated, although still unjustifiable. Her uncle's closeness to her father makes Jane a very painful reminder of a terrible loss.

The abuse of Jane was primarily emotional: She was left out of holiday celebrations, most notably Christmas, her birthdays were ignored, and even the food she was fed was begrudged her.

Such emotional abuse can be devastating to a child, and Jane's withdrawal into herself is a psychologically realistic reaction to it. Her discovery of selfworth through hard work and pride in her accomplishments may seem trite, but it vividly succeeds in *The Solitary*.

Work and taking care of herself bring Jane dignity.



## Literary Qualities

Survival stories have long been popular with readers. They often feature a main character trapped on a remote island or lost in a place far from civilization. The character slowly learns how to survive, using intelligence and ingenuity to provide food, clothing, and shelter. Jane is not entirely cut off from civilization, but her home is in a remote place where help is hard to find.

Returning to live with her aunt and uncle is not really an option, so her effort to live on her own is a matter of do or die. What Hall does with the traditional story of survival is what makes *The Solitary* an exceptional book.

She parallels Jane's physical isolation with her emotional isolation. Jane begins the novel lost within herself, moved only by her determination to leave her aunt and uncle. To truly survive, Jane must learn to come to terms with her awful past. Thus each step toward physical self-sufficiency is matched by a step toward emotional strength. The appeal of the story extends beyond the interesting and ingenious steps Jane takes toward surviving on her own; it includes the courageous facing up to herself and her past, making *The Solitary* an exceptionally fine literary effort.

## Themes and Characters

Jane Cahill is a particularly fine literary creation. She begins the novel with a low opinion of herself and through hard work and the help of new friends makes herself into a tough but likable person. She believes herself to be homely and unattractive to boys; emotionally she is unsure of herself and is frightened by the implications of her past. When gazing into her parents' bedroom she sees "her father lying faceup, a startled expression frozen onto his features by death. He wore a gray one-piece suit of long underwear, and in the middle of his chest a stain of red was slowly spreading. His fingers were outstretched, as though reaching for the throat of his wife." This is a frightful hallucination but Jane faces it down with what will become typical determination. "Is he going to drive me out of here? I can't let him. This is my place in the world now, and I'm not going to let him spoil it for me." She even makes the room her own bedroom.

Jane's growth in *The Solitary* is enjoyable to follow. Bit by bit, she makes the hard choices that will determine whether she will survive in her home.

She has several hundred dollars to work with—very little under the circumstances—and she handles it judiciously. She invests in some breeding-quality New Zealand White rabbits, which she plans to breed and sell. She has to learn to slaughter them, a grim business, but she forces herself through the procedure. From them she gets pelts she can sell or turn into clothing, and their carcasses can be eaten or sold. To her credit, Jane allows herself a little fun now and again, but she must survive on meager food and in a house with no electricity or telephone until her rabbit business earns enough for her to be truly independent. The steps in the development of her rabbit business parallel her personal growth.

By the novel's end she is ready to breed rabbits for show rather than food, and this expansion in her business horizons reflects the expansion of her personal horizons as she has learned not to be afraid of the outside world and to deal with people on her own terms. The lonely girl has turned into a woman with friends and a life of her own. This may sound a little dull, but it is not. The narrative is riveting and each step in Jane's personal growth is shown to be important. *The Solitary* is an assertion of the importance of each individual human life.

The other characters in the novel are not extensively developed. Beau and Marian Smith are Jane's nearest neighbors, and they befriend her. Through them, Jane learns to accept help when she needs it and to give help to others.

Iva Oliphant owns a small store more than a mile from Jane's home. It sells "souvenir caps, fishing supplies, dusty packets of potato chips and corn curls," as well as "Popsicles and ice-cream sandwiches." She remembers Jane's family and knew Jane "when you were knee high to a toad." She supplies friendly advice, is willing to trade goods for dressed rabbits, and helps Jane get her parents' old jeep to run.





Aaron works for Freez-Fine, the company that buys rabbits to sell to grocery stores. He is handsome, talkative, and self-absorbed. He takes Jane on a date to a rabbit show, spends nearly all the time talking about himself, and expects Jane to hop into bed with him.

Jane develops a crush on him and seems to think that he and she are boyfriend and girlfriend. It is a crushing disappointment for Jane when after waiting expectantly for him that Aaron is not going to visit her again. Getting over this disappointment is one of the major hurdles Jane faces before she matures into adulthood. Fortunately the support of her friends and the self-esteem built up by learning to fend for herself enable her to get over Aaron without withdrawing again deep into herself.

# Topics for Discussion

1. Is Jane a likable person? Would she make a good friend?
2. Is the scene in which Jane first kills a rabbit too explicit?
3. Why does Jane dislike her aunt? 4. Why does Jane write to her mother even though her mother asked Jane to forget her?
5. Does *The Solitary* make Jane's survival seem too easy?
6. Jane has a plain face and does not expect boys to be interested in her because of her plain looks. Are there any other reasons why boys took no interest in her in high school?
7. How attractive is Jane at the end of the novel?
8. Why is Jane happier selling rabbits for pets, for shows, or for breeding than she is about selling rabbits for food?
9. Why would Jane have unrealistic expectations for her relationship with Aaron? Why would Aaron have unrealistic expectations for his relationship with Jane?
10. What is the value of friends in *The Solitary*?
11. Jane shows no interest in going to college. Why not?



# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Describe a real-life rabbit show.

Why would Jane want to see the judging?

2. What are some of the ways a fryer rabbit can be prepared as food?

3. Describe the business of raising and selling rabbits. Is the portrayal of the business in *The Solitary* accurate?

4. What are the real-life effects on a child of the kind of abuse Jane endured?

5. Jane's increasing competence is very appealing. What other books emphasize a character's growing competence? How does *The Solitary* measure up to them?

6. Jane grows much of her food in a garden. What should a person grow in a garden if he or she wishes to live off the food grown in it?

7. In America, how often do wives murder their husbands? What happens to the wives? Is Evangeline's experience typical? Do men who murder their wives receive the same legal treatment?

8. What, exactly, are the steps Jane takes to become self-sufficient?

9. Hall mentions several different breeds of rabbits in *The Solitary*. Describe the characteristics of each kind of rabbit and what people value in them.

10. What are the laws governing the selling of rabbit meat? How are those laws reflected in *The Solitary*?

## For Further Reference

Butler, Judy M. Review. *School Library Journal* 33 (January 1987): 82. Butler admires the characterizations and descriptions in *The Solitary*. She points out that the "butchering of the rabbits may disturb some readers."

Commire, Anne, ed. "Hall, Lynn." In *Something About the Author*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1987: 97-104. Includes extensive autobiographical account of Hall's background and career.

Hall, Lynn. "Lynn Hall." In *Fifth Book of Junior Authors & Illustrators*. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1983: 145-147.

Brief autobiographical article about how Hall became a writer and her interest in animals.

Hearne, Betsy. Review. *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* 40 (December 1986): 68. Calls the characterization of Jane an "absorbing portrayal, partly because the challenge of the protagonist's physical survival makes a good plot, and partly because she's an unusual and worthwhile subject."

## Related Titles

Hall's books usually feature independent, strong-minded young women.

Part of the appeal of the books comes from following the protagonists' increasing competence in coping with life's problems. The books subtly suggest to young readers that they cannot only learn to cope with adult problems but that they can even triumph over the problems, turning each step in acquiring self-sufficiency into a victory in the process of learning to control one's destiny. *The Solitary* is an excellent example of how Hall's main characters mature by fulfilling responsibilities.

# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996