

Storming Heaven: A Novel Study Guide

Storming Heaven: A Novel by Denise Giardina

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Plot Summary

The novel *Storming Heaven* tells four different narrators' perceptions of events surrounding life in the coal camps of West Virginia in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The novel begins as coal companies move into the region and culminates in the story of a real-life deadly battle between miners and mine owners backed by government. It is a story rarely covered in history books.

The novel begins before the arrival of the coal companies. Life in rural southwestern West Virginia is much like it has been for generations. The agrarian society farms the land and lives season to season. Rumors circulate that the railroad companies want the mineral rights to the land, and then agents of the railroad appear and begin asking for signatures on documents giving away mineral rights. Some landowners, like C.J. Marcum's grandfather, are adamantly opposed to giving away any portion of their land. When diplomacy fails, C.J.'s grandfather is murdered. Later the sheriff claims that C. J.'s grandfather made his mark on a document signing over the land, but C.J. knows that is not true because his grandfather was literate and could sign his name. Nevertheless, like countless other families, C.J.'s family is forced off their land.

Across the border in eastern Kentucky, the Bishop family resides on their farm they call the Homeplace. Coal companies are not yet attempting to gain control of that land, and the Homeplace continues on as it has.

After the arrival of the coal companies, camps are built near the mines to house the workers. Rondal Lloyd grows up in such a camp, and he describes the poverty and squalor in a place constantly covered by black dust. Though they work hard, miners are never able to save any money or even cover their expenses. They sink ever deeper into debt because of requirements that they must conduct all business with the mining company, including shopping at the company store, a place with inflated prices.

The Homeplace in Kentucky continues to present a sharp contrast to the conditions in the mining camps, as does the town of Annadel. For most of the novel the town of Annadel is outside the control of the mining interests, and it develops a culture unique in the southern United States. At a time of Jim Crow laws and racial discrimination, the residents of Annadel live in racial harmony.

After years of enduring the inhuman conditions of the coal camps and dangerous conditions in the mines, the workers begin attempting to organize a labor union. These efforts are met with severe oppression primarily at the hands of enforcers employed by the coal companies. The oppressive tactics, including forced evictions, assault, and even murder harden the miners resolve to change conditions. Eventually this leads to an armed confrontation between miners and the coal companies backed by hired thugs, corrupt law enforcement, and even the United States Army.

Although the story of the conditions in the West Virginia coal camps that led to the Battle of Blair Mountain rarely appear in history books, they are brought to life in this powerful piece of historical fiction.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

Storming Heaven is a historical novel that tells the story of struggling West Virginia coal miners in the early twentieth century, which is a story that has often been neglected by history books. This novel gives a fictional but accurate account of how the miners stood together and how business and political interests used deadly force to preserve the oppressive conditions.

Chapter One opens with C.J. Marcum thinking about things that can affect a baby before it is born. He remembers a discussion that he had with Dillon Lloyd in 1890. Dillon is making a banjo for the baby about to be born to his brother and sister-in-law. Dillon lives alone in a cabin but helps his brother farm one hundred acres.

The railroad companies are taking the mineral rights from the farmers and then sell the rights to coal companies. The companies claim that they already have the legal ownership of the mineral rights but use intimidation to get farmers to sign anyway. C.J.'s "papaw," or grandfather refuses to sign over his mineral rights. C.J. has a close relationship with his grandfather who calls him by his full name, Cincinnatus Jefferson, and says that C.J. is named after the two greatest men. C.J.'s grandfather is murdered and the sheriff orders C.J. and his grandmother to leave their land. They go to live with their relative, Ermel Justice, and his family.

Dillon refuses to have anything to do with the coal companies. Dillon's brother Clabe will go to work for the mining companies. When his family loses their land, he moves away into the hills to live a primitive and solitary life. C.J. misses his grandfather and Dillon, and he grows close to Ermel. The coal companies do not take Ermel's land because there is no coal under it. Ermel's businesses begin to profit because of all the commercial activity related to the arriving mining companies.

Chapter One Analysis

Modern readers may find it difficult to believe that business interests could take away land that had belonged to families for a long time and in some cases a hundred years or more. It did happen however. The opening chapter describes the first encounter that these agrarian people in this part of West Virginia have had with modern industry. Their lives have been comparatively simple to the commercial and legal concepts they hear about from the railroad company. Most have probably never even heard of mineral rights. They have been chiefly concerned about what they can produce on top of the soil and not what lies beneath it. When diplomacy fails, the business interests resort to murder. This might be a sample of things to come. C.J. says that his grandfather wanted him to study law. We can guess by C.J.'s use of language that he did not go through with that plan.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Rondal Lloyd remembers his father, Clabe, returning from the mines after work. On Saturdays, Clabe would get paid and come home to bathe. As a child, Rondal thought that his father was referring to an actual creature when he used the term "snake" to describe the line across his check to indicate that he did not make any money. All of Clabe's earnings went back to the company-owned store for the food that the family had consumed.

The family now lives in a company owned shack on land that the family once owned. Clabe tells Rondal stories about fishing in a nearby creek that is now polluted. On Sundays the family goes for walks in the woods looking for wild greens. Once they visit the family cemetery and find that the coal company has posted a "no trespassing" sign.

Rondal does well in school, and he gets along with his two younger brothers, Talcott and Kerwin. Sometimes Rondal takes a train to visit C.J. Marcum and goes hunting with C.J. and Ermel. The squirrels, rabbits, and possums that Rondal brings home are the only meat besides bacon that the family has to eat.

C.J. visits the Lloyd family. Rondal plays the banjo his uncle Dillon made for him before he was born. The guards in the employ of the coal companies tell C.J. he can visit only once per month. On one visit, Rondal recites a portion of the Declaration of Independence as he learned it in school. C.J. is annoyed that Rondal has not been taught the entire document. C.J. compares the way the coal companies run the camps to Czarist Russia.

When Clabe plans to take Rondal to work in the mines to supplement the family income, C.J. tries to talk him out of it. Clabe will not listen. On the first day Rondal is supposed to work in the mines, Rondal hides under his bed and is punished by his father. Clabe also takes along eight-year-old Talcott and leaves him to work alongside other young boys. Rondal finds his first trip into the mines terrifying. He goes two miles down into the mine with his father, and he is supposed to help shovel coal after his father and partner detonate explosives. After the first day, Rondal can hardly walk, and Talcott is bruised from being beaten by the boss's stick.

Rondal misses school and reading, and one day he decides to read the newspaper that his mother uses as wallpaper. He holds the lantern too close and catches the wall on fire. His mother does not punish him because she says he works in the mines and is now a man.

One of Rondal's jobs is to take care of the canary his father and father's partner keep to warn them of mine gasses. If the canary dies, the men know to leave the area immediately. One day when comparing birds with some of the other boys working in the



mines, Rondal's canary is killed. He thinks about burying it but decides putting the bird back underground would be cruel. Instead he burns it.

An accident kills Rondal's father's partner, and Rondal is so shocked he cannot talk for three days. C.J. arrives to try to convince the family to let Rondal come live with him and return to school. The adults let Rondal decide and he goes with C.J. The day after Rondal leaves, Talcott tries to run away from home. When he is caught, he is punished.

Chapter Two Analysis

Like the previous chapter, this one is something of a personal history told by a second narrator. This chapter's narrator is familiar with the narrator of the first chapter.

The concept of "company store" is important to understand early in the novel. The coal miners working the mines at this time in history lived on company owned land in company owned shacks. They were required to do all of their trading for groceries, clothing, and other necessary items through coal company owned businesses. The prices could be set at the discretion of the coal company. The company deducted the amount purchased from the workers' pay. Often workers had purchased more than they earned even though most, like the Lloyd family bought barely enough to survive. In many cases employees of the coal companies became increasingly indebted to the company. This kind of condition can be thought of as a form of slavery or indentured servitude.

Though the conditions the child workers face seem unthinkable to modern readers, they were common at the time. At the time that Rondal and his brother Talcott joined other children working in the mines, laws forbidding child labor under dangerous conditions did not exist. These laws were not enacted nationally until the Great Depression.

Rondal's refusal to bury the bird is overtly symbolic of his own feelings of going down into the mines.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Carrie Bishop has fond memories of her Kentucky birthplace, which is a farm that the family calls the Homeplace. She remembers a time she overheard her Aunt Becka saying she was physically unattractive, and she ran to her grandmother, who she called Aunt Jane, for comfort.

Carrie remembers when Ben Honaker arrives as the new schoolteacher. Carrie's older sister, Flora, is sixteen and Ben quickly becomes fond of both sisters and has a romantic interest in Flora. He lends the girls books and Ben soon begins spending time at the Homeplace.

Carrie's brother Miles does not like farming or hunting and he often gets into conflict with his father. In an effort to help Miles, Carrie asks Miles to teach her how to shoot, and she begins doing the hunting. Miles finishes high school, and though his father expects Miles to begin farming some land of his own, Ben wants to go to Berea College. Miles is afraid to ask his father, so Ben brings up the subject. Miles's father agrees to send him to college.

The only person that is unhappy with the announcement of Ben and Flora's engagement is Aunt Becka. Aunt Becka had been married once for one month. She arrived back at the Homeplace after walking for three days and nights. One day Aunt Becka has a private conversation with Flora, and later Carrie finds Flora crying. Flora will not say what Aunt Becka told her but Carrie guesses that Aunt Becka has told her something frightening about men. Carrie tells Flora not to believe anything Aunt Becka says about men.

Later, Carrie discusses some of her thoughts about Aunt Becka with Aunt Jane and Aunt Jane says that Carrie must learn to accept her family members for who they are. She says that although Carrie and Aunt Becka might not get along, Aunt Becka loves Carrie and would never let her be harmed.

One Christmas Eve Aunt Becka tells a story about how animals in the barn pay homage to Jesus. That night Carrie cannot sleep because she thinks about what Aunt Becka said about the animals in the barn. Carrie wants to see the event and even though it is bitterly cold outside, she gets out of bed and goes to the barn. Carrie finds a mound of hay, burrows into it, and spends the night in the barn.

One night in March, someone knocks on the door late at night. A traveling salesman has a son that is sick with fever and pneumonia. The adults do not expect the boy to live. The women tend to the boy, Albion Freeman, and he recovers. A doctor from a nearby town says that he must stay in bed at least another month. The father has no choice but



to leave him at the Homeplace. He says that Albion is a good worker and can help with the chores when he recovers.

When Albion is strong enough, he begins helping Carrie with chores and the two become close friends. In their free time they enjoy fishing. Carrie and Flora convince Albion to begin school in August though Albion has said he has no interest in learning to read.

One day, Carrie and Albion walk together and Miles shouts to them to beware of a rabid dog. Carrie and Albion see the dog and Carrie wants them both to climb a tree. Albion refuses to move and he tells Carrie to run. Miles arrives and shoots the dog. Miles is angry for Albion putting Carrie in danger until Aunt Becka tells Miles that what Albion did was put himself between the dog and Carrie. Later in the evening, Albion is so upset that he cannot eat because he is upset about the dog suffering and then dying. Carrie consoles Albion.

At harvest time, all of the neighboring farmers gather to help each other. Sometimes the children have a contest, and the first boy to find a red ear of corn can ask any girl for a kiss. Albion finds the first red ear of corn and he asks Carrie for a kiss. Later that night, Carrie asks Albion how his family lost their land in West Virginia and Albion says the railroad companies and the coal companies just took the land. A week after the harvest gathering, Albion's father returns and takes him away.

Chapter Three Analysis

This third narrator, Carrie Bishop, has the greatest mastery of written English, yet in her verbal speech is distinct from her written narrative. Her written narrative reflects education and literacy. We learn that Carrie has always enjoyed reading.

In a slightly comical passage, Carrie refers to what her Aunt Becka said to Flora as "scardy things" about men. Likely these frightening things regarding marriage had to do with Aunt Becka's opinions of sexual relations.

Carrie's description of her rustic home place is vivid and colorful. She refers to warm weather as "barefoot weather," and she uses the regionally customary terms, such as "haint" for ghost and "holler" for hollow.

The arrival of Albion illustrates a different culture than the one we know in the modern day. Without modern forms of rapid transportation and plentiful medical facilities, people had to rely more on each other even if those people were complete strangers. Hospitality was more than just a kindness or gracious gesture. It could mean the difference between life and death, as it did in the case of Albion. Still, the modern reader must find it strange that an adult could leave a child for many months with a family he has never met.

Albion soon shows that he is a compassionate and caring person. He even empathizes with non-human creatures. He does not like harming the fish that he and Carrie catch,

and he even feels sorrow for the rabid dog that might have harmed or killed him or Carrie. As Albion said, the dog did not hate him or Carrie. The dog suffered.



Chapters Four through Seven

Chapters Four through Seven Summary

As a child, Rosa cries for a butterfly she accidentally harmed. Seeing the collection of butterflies in Lytton Davidson's house in the West Virginia coal camp reminds her of the childhood incident in Sicily. Rosa had not wanted to marry Mario and leave for America. Mario is abusive. He hits Rosa for drinking wine, and he severely injures their son Francesco. He pours the food the pig eats on Francesco's back and ties the boy to a fence. The pig cuts Francesco many times. The doctor wants to know how Francesco was injured, and Rosa says he fell. Rosa says she plans to leave when the butterflies return.

C.J. does not think highly of Isom. He believes Isom enjoys his family's wealth and lacks ambition. C.J. recognizes that Rondal has an interest in science, and he sends Rondal to talk to Dr. Booker. Dr. Booker lends Rondal some medical books and instruments, and Rondal soon begins dissecting frogs and reading the medical books.

C.J. marries Violet in 1901, and though they have two daughters, they continue to think of Rondal as a son. C.J. continues to think of Isom as a bad influence on Rondal because Isom is fond of drinking and gambling. He tries to forbid from joining Isom in these activities but is unsuccessful.

C.J. gets along well with blacks. There are no Jim Crow laws in Annadel. In addition to having blacks on the town council and police force, Annadel has had a black mayor. C.J. has also served as mayor. C. J. teaches Rondal to respect blacks and immigrants as equals. In a rare instance of praise for Isom, C.J. says that Isom likes everyone equally regardless of race or wealth.

Though the coal company employs a doctor, that doctor refuses to treat black patients. All black employees of the coal companies must see Dr. Booker. None of the black employees of the coal company can afford to pay Dr. Booker. During a cholera epidemic, Dr. Booker asks C.J. to donate medicine from his drug store. After the epidemic passes, Dr. Booker takes C.J. to see conditions among the black coal miners. C.J. is shocked at the poverty, and the Dr. Booker tells C.J. about the high rate of infant mortality due to malnutrition.

Dr. Booker belongs to the Socialist Party, and he tells C.J. about socialism. In time C.J. becomes a socialist, and Dr. Booker and C.J. decide to start their own socialist newspaper. They ask Ermel for financial assistance, but at first he is not interested. A year later the newspaper in refuses to allow Ermel to advertise because he allows racial integration in the businesses he owns in Annadel. Ermel buys a printing press for C.J. and Dr. Booker in exchange for free advertising. In 1906 the Annadel Free Press puts out its first issue.



Miles returns from Berea College and informs Carrie that only the ignorant say "hit" instead of it and "ain't" instead of is not. Miles also often talks to his father and Ben about his economic ideas and what he sees as the end of subsistence farming. Miles plans to accept a job of superintendent of a mine that will soon open in nearby Pond Creek. Carrie worries about whether she will ever marry. She disagrees so often with her father that the two openly show contempt for each other.

Miles tells his father that there is a great deal of money to be made by selling timber to the incoming mining companies. He talks his father into clearing the trees from a large section of the family's land. They will hire extra men, cut the timber, and float the logs down the creek and river to a sawmill. Carrie hates the appearance of the mountainside after the trees are cut, and she resents having to miss school to cook for the workers that come to cut the trees. Miles notices that Carrie misses school, and he says that he will pay for her to go to nursing school once he starts earning money.

The women are worried and depressed while the men are away taking the logs to the mill. A passing traveler tells the women that he heard that a man on the logging trip died. When the men return Carrie is at first overjoyed until she learns that her father has died. Upset at the death of her father Flora goes into labor three months early. The baby lives for only one hour.

Miles is stricken with grief and believes he has caused all the tragedy by suggesting that the family sell timber. Flora is also depressed and she stays in bed for a month. In time, the family recovers and Ben builds a large new house at the Homeplace.

Rosa works in the household of Lytton Davidson. Davidson travels the world and collects butterflies. Mario and Rosa move to the new coal camp named Davidson. Mario still works for the mining company, but he no longer has to go into the mines because he is a fine baseball player. Rosa worries about her sons having to go to work in the mines. Daily she steals a penny and makes a prayer offering at the church.

Chapters Four through Seven Analysis

The fourth chapter introduces the fourth narrator. The language of this narrator is most distinct from the other three. Rosa's native language is not English, and her narrative is written in the present tense. It is not clear what Rosa means when she says she will leave when the butterflies return. Perhaps she means that she plans to leave in the spring.

Much time has passed since the opening. C.J. observes that Rondal is nearing adulthood, and he worries about the young man. C.J. also makes some observations about the town of Annadel that set it apart from every other town in the region. The town seems to have an amazing amount of racial tolerance and harmony. As for C.J. himself he seems to think that struggling white people have far more in common with struggling black people than either do with the wealthy white people that exploit the poor.



Though C.J. does not enjoy reading the works of Marx, he finds that he agrees with the basic principle of socialism after what he has observed at the coal camps over the years. C.J. mentions voting for Eugene Debs, a labor union leader and socialist who ran for U.S. President several times in the early twentieth century.

Miles returns from college and believes his education sets him apart from others in the region. Carrie feels some annoyance at many of Miles' ideas, especially his idea to cut timber from the land, but she also feels gratitude for his generous offer to pay for her to attend nursing school. With the loss of the timber, the loss of the father, and the news that the mining companies are coming, it seems like a way of life is coming to a close.

Lytton Davidson seems unusually fond of Rosa, but this does little to relieve the suffering she expresses through mention of her marriage and constant worry that the mines will harm her children. Butterflies continue to be an image in Rosa's narration.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

Rondal wishes he could go back to when he was seventeen years old. One night when Rondal is seventeen, he and Isom arrive at C.J.'s drunk after spending time at the Hotel Alhambra. Rondal and C.J. argue about whether Rondal will soon go off to medical school or if he will go to work in the mines. Rondal says that a doctor cannot help the miners the way that a union organizer can because a doctor will always be an outsider to the miners. C.J. mentions the work that he and Dr. Booker do with their newspapers and Rondal says that even they are outsiders according to the miners. This hurts C.J.'s feelings.

Rondal has a casual affair with a woman named Ruby Day. Isom is seeing a local black woman and Talcott is in love with Isom's sister, Pricie. Rondal plays the banjo, and he, Isom, and Talcott are in a band. Talcott saves his share of the money from the band because he wants to marry Pricie. Talcott is sixteen and Pricie is fourteen-years-old. As Rondal talks to Talcott about marriage, Rondal realizes that one of the main reasons he chose the mines over medical school is because Talcott is still stuck in the mines.

When Rondal returns to work in the mines, his mother says there is not room for him to live in the house. This hurts Rondal, but he moves into a boarding house. Rondal's mother has affection only for her youngest son Kerwin, who she wants to keep out of the mines. When Rondal's mother changes her mind and invites Rondal to live at home he knows it is only because she wants an ally in her ongoing argument to keep Kerwin out of the mines.

Ermel and Isom inform Rondal that Talcott has eloped with Pricie. When the two return days later, Talcott arranges for them to have a mining shack of their own and Pricie reveals that she is pregnant.

After working in the mines for two years, Rondal writes a letter to the union, United Mineworkers, and asks for an organizer. Rondal does not get an immediate response, so he believes the union is not interested. However, Rondal does notice that the coal company is employing more Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency guards as a response to the increasing rumors regarding the unions.

One day when Rondal is receiving his payroll check, a black man approaches him. Rondal soon realizes that the man is a union organizer. The two cannot talk long, or they will raise the suspicion of the armed guards who are everywhere. The man tells Rondal a meeting place and a time. Rondal arrives at the place, and sees that six other miners have arrived in addition to the black man who spoke to him earlier. The black man's name is Johnson. Johnson gives a short speech, and the men join the union.



One day after work Rondal and Johnson are going to talk to a group of men when they are stopped by some Baldwin-Felts guards, who the locals call "gun thugs." The guards take Rondal and Johnson to a building where other gun thugs are present. They make Rondal watch as they throw Johnson into a furnace, and then they tell Rondal that he has twenty-four hours to leave the area.

Rondal stops to say goodbye to C.J. and Isom on his way out of the area. C.J. asks where he will go, and Rondal says that he will try to find work in coalmines nearby in Kentucky. Isom asks what Rondal will start calling himself and Rondal says his new name is Lloyd Justice.

Chapter Eight Analysis

Rondal is now an adult, and much time has passed since the opening of the novel. While C.J. could be somewhat proud that Rondal has followed in his footsteps as far as his socialist philosophy, C.J. is mostly disappointed with Rondal's decision not to go to medical school. C.J. thinks of Rondal as a son, and he wanted a better life for Rondal.

Rondal has never forgotten that in his escape from the mines as a child he left a brother behind to suffer. Rondal understands that in trying to improve the mines for all workers, he is also trying to resolve his guilt at having left Talcott once before.

The Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency was a real detective agency that operated from the 1890s to the 1930s. While they were sometimes hired to investigate robberies and other crimes, the sorts of crimes companies and individuals would hire "detectives" for, the company was infamous for working with coal and railroad companies to spy on workers trying to organize unions. Other famous detective agencies, such as The Pinkerton National Detective Agency were hired by corporations to infiltrate, intimidate, and crush union organization. While the murder of Johnson is certainly horrifying, it is not unrealistic considering the methods used by these detective agencies.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

After nursing school, Carrie goes to work for the mine company that employs Miles as a superintendent in Pond Creek, Kentucky. Carrie first lives with Miles in his huge and lavishly furnished house, but she feels uncomfortable there and moves into a boarding house. Miles wants to marry, but he is not interested in meeting a local and uneducated woman. He joins an Episcopal church in the hope of meeting social contacts and perhaps a wife.

During an outbreak of typhoid, Carrie notices that the cause is the haphazard way the coal company built the shacks and the outhouse facilities in close proximity to the drinking water supply. Carrie tells Miles the company must make some changes or there will continually be typhoid outbreaks. Miles reluctantly writes to the company, and his request is denied.

One day a miner who calls himself Lloyd Justice or Rondal Lloyd comes to the clinic where Carrie works. He has a broken foot but the doctor is away. Carrie wants to take Lloyd to the nearest facility owned by the same company. The facility is in Justice County West Virginia. They take a train. At the last stop before Justice, Lloyd gets off the train. Carrie demands an explanation, and Lloyd says he once made illegal liquor in Justice, and he has been threatened with death if he ever returns. Carrie talks the local doctor into giving Lloyd the medical attention he needs.

Carrie continues to think of Lloyd days after the incident. She wants to introduce him to Miles. Carrie invites Lloyd to dinner at Miles's house, and after dinner Miles talks about how the unions want to change the social order and how the union's solution will never work because uneducated miners cannot run a mining company. Lloyd humors Miles and does not argue. After leaving Miles's house Carrie says she could tell that Lloyd had humored Miles to avoid an argument. Lloyd agrees that he gets tired of hearing the wealthy say that education and progress are the key and that in time all will be perfect. He did not think Miles worthy of a discussion.

Carrie and Lloyd have an intimate encounter and spend the night together. The next morning Lloyd cautions Carrie that he is incapable of falling and love, and he does not want her to expect too much from him. Carrie is understandably upset and wants to know why Lloyd did not reveal these things the previous evening before their physical encounter.

Weeks pass and Carrie sees Lloyd in passing, but he makes no effort to ask to see her again. One day Miles tells Carrie that a union organizer has been discovered, and it is Lloyd. He also says that Lloyd Justice's real name is Rondal Lloyd. Miles managed to warn Rondal before armed guards could harm him. Carrie goes to her room at the



boarding house and finds Rondal waiting for her. He has come to say goodbye, and Carrie begs him to take her with him. He leaves alone.

In a rage Carrie goes to Miles's house and tells him that she hates him. Carrie then returns to her room and packs. the next morning as she prepares to leave on the train, she sees Miles dividing the mine workers into two groups and firing all those that had anything to do with attempting to organize a union.

After a train journey, Carrie pays a man with a mule drawn wagon to take her the rest of the way to the Homeplace.

Chapter Nine Analysis

Though not an unkind person, Miles does seem to be increasingly guilty of snobbery. Carrie, on the other hand, still speaks in her original accent and takes pride in her heritage. Her spoken words are eloquent even in their own regional accent.

The ignorance and callousness of the coal companies is revealed in Miles's request for better facilities. They claim that it is the filthy habits of the miners that cause the typhoid outbreaks when it was in fact the company who built the camps with flawed designs. The company leadership regards the workers as little more than brute dumb animals.

The immediate attraction between Carrie and Rondal is obvious. Carrie's attraction is more genuine, while Rondal's is more superficial. The reader cannot help but find Rondal selfish in having a relationship and only afterward telling Carrie that it means nothing.

As Rondal is preparing to leave Pond Creek he speaks of the need for him to get out and meet the figures directly involved in union organizing rather than to rely on the inept union administration in Charleston, West Virginia. Rondal speaks of Eugene Debs, the presidential candidate that C.J. voted for, and Rondal mentions Mother Jones. Mother Jones, also known as Mary Harris Jones, was a real historical figure, and she was active in labor union organization. A modern magazine first formed in the 1970s and still published today was named after this historical figure.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

C.J. receives a letter from Rondal and shares the news with the Annadel Political and Social Club. The club consists primarily of C.J., Dr. Booker, Ermel, and Isom. The men have differing political views, but they enjoy their drinking and debating. Rondal is in Ludlow, Colorado helping to organize the union among coal miners. At first C.J. and friends are proud of Rondal and happy about the news coming out of Colorado, but when word of the atrocities committed by police, Baldwin-Felts guards and the military arrive. The friends fear for Rondal. In time C.J. receives words that Rondal is safe and in Chicago.

At one club meeting the men are enjoying debating the causes of World War I when armed men burst into the room. Isom recognizes them as Baldwin-Felts thugs. The club members are marched to the train station and taken to jail in Justice. They start singing the Star Spangled Banner and keep it up for over eight hours. Tired of listening to them, the jailers release them.

When the men arrive home they discover that the guards have destroyed their printing press. It takes over six months to get another issue of the Annadel Free Press in print. To ensure that nothing like this happens again, Isom is made Chief of Police. The men also begin stockpiling rifles.

Chapter Ten Analysis

The events such as the Paint Creek Strike and the Ludlow Strike were actual historical events. The Ludlow Strike is also known as the Ludlow Massacre. The military killed many, including women and children and the private guards burned alive many in their tents. In a bit of humor, the men who are accused of "seditious activities" sing the national anthem non-stop.

Though C.J. makes only passing reference to stockpiling rifles, this is a significant detail, and so is the type of rifle they amassed. The Krag-Jorgensen rifle was the standard military rifle for U.S. armed forces from 1894-1903. It was also used by many other military forces of the world. This is a significant fact because the men are not simply stockpiling whatever hunting rifles or shotguns they can acquire. They are stockpiling military surplus weapons because they expect to one day have an armed confrontation.



Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven Summary

Carrie lives back at the Homeplace. She believes she will die unmarried. Albion returns as a preacher. He jokingly asks if Carrie remembers how as children they talked about getting married. Carrie snaps that they were young and silly. Despite Carrie's cold nature, the rest of the family is delighted to see Albion again and they plan to visit his small farm the following weekend. During the visit, Albion reveals that he makes a variety of wines and everyone enjoys drinking it. Flora and Ben say they want to walk to visit some nearby friends, and they leave Albion and Carrie to talk.

Albion wonders about Carrie's demeanor and he asks if she is missing someone. Carrie cries. Albion admits that he hopes to court her, but she says that she will always love someone else. Albion is not dissuaded so Carrie agrees that he can come and visit the following Friday. After three months Carrie starts to feel affection for Albion. In some of their discussions, Albion talks of wanting to go to Justice County West Virginia to preach.

Albion invites Carrie to a dance. When they arrive, Carrie sees that the band playing is Rondal's band. Albion notices the look on Carrie's face, and he is hurt. Albion and Carrie dance, and then he tells her that he needs to go visit someone nearby and will be gone an hour. Carrie has an opportunity to talk to Rondal. He tells her that he is working in a sawmill because organizing has been suspended until the war is over. Talcott is joining the army. They also talk about personal matters. Carrie admits that she still loves him. Rondal acts in a dismissive manner and says that it has been four years, and she ought to forget.

Hurt, Carrie goes to Albion's barn and cries. Albion finds Carrie asleep in the barn. He tells her that he has decided to return to West Virginia and preach to the miners. He also said that he had hoped that Carrie would go with him as his wife. Carrie realizes that she loves both men. She goes to Albion and says she wants to go to West Virginia with him.

Chapter Eleven Analysis

The compassionate child Albion grew into a kind and understanding man. His views on religion are surprising. He seems to disregard much of the letter of the religion and stick to the spirit, or more general meaning. His reaction to Carrie having affection for another is equally impressive. Rather than try to compete with a rival, Albion is chiefly concerned with Carrie's happiness. He invents a story about having to visit someone just so he can give her time to try to decide what is best for her.

Though not elaborated upon, Talcott's statement that the mine owners are gathering machine guns is disturbing. After atrocities already committed by the coal companies

and those representing them, there is little doubt the mining companies would use machine guns on the workers. When Carrie tells Albion she wants to go with him to West Virginia, it is not clear if she is also saying that she wants to marry him.



Chapters Twelve and Thirteen

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen Summary

C.J. believes that the mining company's formation of baseball teams is a way to keep the workers from feeling united. When Isom proposes starting an Annadel team, C.J. is against the idea, but once he is introduced to the game, he becomes a devoted fan and a good player. The Annadel team is integrated, so some of the coal company teams will not play Annadel, but the Annadel team is talented and wins often. Eventually the public calls for a game between Annadel and the best coal company team in Davidson.

The game is set for August 1918. Before the game begins, the Annadel team learns that Davidson has brought in a "ringer" or professional player posing as an amateur. Some of the Annadel players want to refuse to participate if Davidson uses professionals. C.J. insists that they must play.

When the professional player comes to bat, he hits a home run. Nevertheless, over the next few innings Annadel builds a three-run lead. Talcott visits with the Annadel players and tells them that the miners are all cheering for Annadel and not the mining camp team.

The Davidson team makes a comeback, and has a chance to tie the game when their professional player comes to bat. The professional player hits the ball high, and it is sure to sail over the fence when a gunshot sounds. Talcott has shot the ball out of the air, and he is pleased with himself. Police tackle Talcott, and the umpire calls off the game.

That night gun thugs force Talcott's wife, Pricie, out of their house and break all their furniture. Talcott gets one year in jail, but the sentence is reduced to two months.

After marrying at the Homeplace, Carrie and Albion move to the coal camps in West Virginia. Albion works as a miner and also gets permission to hold daily religious services in the mines. Miners also come to Albion's house for weekly services, and Albion uses these occasions to discuss the union.

Albion and Carrie struggle financially, and often there is not enough food. Carrie begins working as a nurse for Dr. Booker. Carrie thinks Dr. Booker is the best doctor she has ever worked for, and Carrie meets C.J. The two men often talk of Rondal.

An explosion in the Davidson mines kills many, including Clabe and Talcott Lloyd. Carrie is relieved that Albion was not injured. When Carrie rides on a train to Davidson to offer assistance, the train is filled with hundreds of coffins.



Chapters Twelve and Thirteen Analysis

Rosa's husband and one of her sons are good ball players. Her son Carmelo will not have to work in the mines much longer because he has a promising career in baseball.

C.J. and Isom wonder about Talcott's state of mind, and wonder if it has anything to do with what he experienced in the war.

Chapter twelve concludes with saying that a couple of months after the game the Davidson team is "ripped apart." At this time, that statement is unclear. The game itself provided a delightful diversion to the hardships and oppression, but all too soon the reality of the power of the mining companies returns.

In Chapter thirteen, Albion's religious beliefs combined with his memory of his family being forced off the land lead him quickly to believe that the best way to help the miners is to help them organize a union. The woman in a white dress that Carrie sees is Rosa.



Chapters Fourteen through Sixteen

Chapters Fourteen through Sixteen Summary

Rosa says that her sons have only damaged hearing and she believes that the doctor can help them recover. Her children do not emerge from the hospital, and Rosa wonders what is taking so long. Mario is in a drunken and grieving state. In a fit of rage he smashes Rosa's reliquary. Lytton Davidson laments the death of his baseball team.

After hearing of the accident, Rondal goes to Justice County. His mother has moved in with Talcott. Rondal tries to speak to his mother, but she refuses to do anything but hurl accusations. Talcott tells Rondal not to pay attention. He also says that his mother is constantly rude to Pricie, but he cannot throw out his own mother.

Rondal sees Carrie and they have lunch together. Rondal says that he hears that Albion is using his preaching to promote the union, and he proposes that he and Albion could work together if Carrie would serve as messenger. Carrie agrees, but she also says that she still loves Rondal.

Unlike his previous methods, Rondal works in the open. He even notifies the press before he goes to an area. He believes that operating in the public makes it more difficult for the opposition to assassinate him. Rondal is not careless however. Rather than reach Justice County by the most direct route, he took another way. The most direct route to Justice County goes through Logan County, but that county is under the control of the repressive and corrupt Sheriff Don Chafin.

Rondal stays in the hotel Alhambra, and Isom provides guards. Isom and C.J. are not getting along because Isom wants to marry C.J.'s daughter Gladys.

On Labor Day Rondal takes a train to Davidson, but on the train gun thugs assault him. When he makes it back to Annadel, Carrie says he has broken ribs. Rondal decides to stop acting in the open. When Rondal is invited to speak at a black church, he forgets his prepared remarks and tells them the story about witnessing Johnson being thrown into a furnace. Many in the church join the union.

Rondal works through the winter, and by April most of the miners have joined the union. C.J., Isom, Dr. Booker, and Rondal discuss strategy. The union is already amassing tents and food because the first thing the mining companies will do is evict all striking workers. C.J. and Isom are in favor of distributing the stockpiled rifles immediately to protect Annadel. While at the theater, Isom arrives with news of the Baldwin-Felts guard's latest attack. Rondal sends a telegram to the union headquarters informing them that the strike has begun. Mass evictions and the growth of tent cities immediately follow.

In May of 1920 a group of Baldwin-Felts guards arrive in Annadel on their way to force evictions in another camp. Isom does not immediately have enough men to arrest the



gun thugs, so he plans to capture them on their return trip. When the guards return, Isom and C.J. present them with an arrest warrant, but the gun thugs resist and shooting begins. C.J. is killed. Seven of the gun thugs also die.

In Rosa's most confusing and surrealistic narrative yet, she believes her dead mother and her son are with her. Her mother tells her to set free Lytton Davidson's butterfly collection, and her son, Francesco, tells her she must leave the house before it is burned. Francesco takes Rosa to a safe place beside the river.

Chapters Fourteen through Sixteen Analysis

It is unclear if Rosa's four sons are merely injured or dead. The actions of Mario seem to indicate that the tragedy is greater than Rosa believes. Perhaps she is shocked and unable to comprehend the level of tragedy. Something from Chapter Thirteen now becomes clear. When C.J. said that the Davidson baseball team was blown apart, he meant it literally.

Don Chafin was another real historical character. He was the Sheriff in Logan County West Virginia, and though a public official he was paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to use violent methods of repressing the miners.

Despite statements to the contrary, the way Rondal leaves the cafe indicate that he may have feelings for Carrie. Still, he remains true to his main purpose and uses her as a means to promote union organization.

Continually it seems that the principle characters underestimate the brutality of the mining company and the forces in their employ. Rondal thinks that he can operate in safety, but he is soon reminded that the opposing forces care nothing for legality. Rondal's message to the black church is powerful, and this is probably the result of him abandoning speech with slogans and speaking from personal experience in a way that the people can understand.

It appears increasingly likely that all of Rosa's sons have been killed, and her grief has caused her to lose her grasp of reality. Her dead mother cannot be present and speaking to her, and the dead butterflies cannot fly away.



Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Seventeen Summary

Rondal arrives at Carrie's tent and tells her of a problem. Rondal found an Italian woman inside Lytton Davidson's house who lost all of her sons in the mine explosion that killed the Davidson baseball team and hundreds of others. The woman would not leave the house before Rondal helped her break the glass jars containing the butterfly specimens. Rondal took the woman to a safe place beside the river and then went for help. Carrie goes to the woman. She calls Rosa's daughter-in-law who will help get Rosa into the state hospital. Rondal walks Rosa to the train, and all the while she calls him Francesco.

Thousands of miners and their families live in tents through the summer. Occasionally they shoot at the scabs that the mining companies have brought in to replace the miners. In the fall many of the miners have a meeting to discuss information they have received that tells of the Baldwin-Felts guards plans to assassinate Rondal that night. Many want Rondal to leave and go to Charleston. Rondal reluctantly agrees.

Hundreds of Baldwin-Felts guards and state police enter the tent city and declare martial law. Albion and Isom are arrested for the murder of the Baldwin-Felts guards the previous May. Four hundred others are arrested and held without charges. Dr. Booker is ordered to leave Justice County. He plans to go to Charleston and find Rondal. Most of the miners are released so they can starve and freeze with their families rather than wait for trial in the jail. The food supplies sent from the union are usually intercepted and confiscated.

After the death of a black child, the mother organizes a march of some other women. Soon over a thousand women, including Carrie, join the march, most carrying frying pans or brooms. The women encounter police and smash their cars then proceed to loot a company store for food. Another group of police arrive to try to stop the looting, but Carrie uses the machine gun outside the store to fire warning shots. In addition to food and weapons, the women also acquire two machine guns.

One night Carrie cannot sleep and she goes for a walk. She notices a train without lights slowly approaching the station. When the train is even with the tent city, machine guns open fire. Carrie is hit in the arm. Albion asks Miles to take Carrie to the Homeplace, and he wants Carrie to remain until his trial in the spring. The morning before Albion and Isom's trial the husbands and wives meet for breakfast and then walk to the courthouse. When they reach the top of the courthouse steps, Baldwin-Felts guards open fire, killing Isom and Albion.



Chapter Seventeen Analysis

Rosa's confusing narrative from the previous chapter now makes sense. The grief over losing all of her children has driven her insane. Rondal displays a surprising amount of compassion in his efforts to help her.

The days of a happy integrated Annadel are over with the declaration of martial law and the arrival of state police and gun thugs. They carry out reprisals by burning many buildings and taking over the Hotel Alhambra. The law seems to be suspended in the fight between miners and the coal companies. It is illegal in the United States to detain a person without filing charges, but the county governments under the control of the coal companies hold four hundred men until they realize that life in the tent cities is more unpleasant than jail.

The killing of Albion and Isom is very similar to a real life incident that happened in the area in 1921. Sid Hatfield was chief of police of Matewan, West Virginia, and he was sympathetic to the union. Baldwin-Felts detectives shot him on the courthouse steps.



Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen

Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen Summary

Carrie returns to the Homeplace. Her nieces and nephews are fond of her, and she copes as best she can with the death of Albion. Rondal visits and claims he came to get his banjo but later admits that the union needs nurses. During his time at the Homeplace, Rondal has intimate relations with Carrie, and she decides to rejoin the fight to establish the labor union. The two leave for Charleston, West Virginia at night.

Rondal and Carrie stay together in Charleston. Much preparation is being made for continuing the struggle against the mine owners. Talcott uses his military training to drill miners. Rondal and Carrie often disagree but seem to be getting ever closer in a romantic way. Rondal and Carrie hear that martial law has again been declared in the mining camps, and they hear rumors of more atrocities.

Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen Analysis

As it often is with Rondal, it is unclear how much of his attention to Carrie is due to affection, or even physical attraction, and how much can be attributed to the needs of the cause. Carrie is also becoming more complicated. Whereas before she might have left with Rondal due only to her love for him, now it is equally likely that she wants to carry on helping the people that Albion died for.

The frequent arguments between Carrie and Rondal could indicate Rondal's growing affection for her. Previously, it would have been difficult to argue with Rondal because he was so carefree and impossible to engage. Now even he admits that Carrie's facial expressions have a profound effect on him. The rumors of new atrocities make armed conflict seem more likely and more frightening.



Chapters Twenty and Twenty-one

Chapters Twenty and Twenty-one Summary

Rondal, Carrie, and Dr. Booker depart Charleston to march with thousands of other miners to Justice County. Rondal explains that they will have to pass through Sheriff Don Chafin's Logan County, and that is where they expect the battle to occur. The union passes out rifles to the miners. The following morning Rondal brings Carrie breakfast, but instead of eating she vomits. Carrie knows why she is ill, but she will not tell Rondal. The miners commandeer a train and use it to ferry armed miners to a staging area for the upcoming battle.

Rondal, Carrie, and Dr. Booker arrive at Blair Mountain to discover that the union leadership has called off the march. Blair Mountain is all that separates the miners from Logan County, which is all that separates the miners from Justice County. Rondal is furious. He goes to speak to the union leaders. Even after learning that the U.S. President has ordered the U.S. Army to crush the miners, Rondal still wants to attack. While the argument is still in progress, the miners learn that Sheriff Chafin's forces have attacked. Rondal and Carrie share a night together before the upcoming fight and they have an important conversation about the idea of heaven.

Chapters Twenty and Twenty-one Analysis

Although Carrie does not clarify, the reader must wonder if her sickness in the morning and her reluctance to explain to Rondal are due to pregnancy.

The long march and the sight of thousands of armed miners is a frightening spectacle. It is what events have been leading to all along, but it is terrifying to think that as well armed as the miners seem, the opposition with far greater resources is better armed and better prepared.

Rondal realizes that he is in love with Carrie. For the entire novel he has claimed that he did not understand the concept of love and though he will not openly admit it, he is feeling that emotion that he claimed to be unable to possess.

The discussion of the notion of heaven offers clear insight into the characters and views of Carrie and Rondal. Her vision of heaven comes as no surprise, but Rondal's reveals a deeper thinking side to him. Certainly he has been dedicated to the union cause all along, but his words regarding heaven reveal a drive and purpose. They may also offer some insight into the meaning of the novel's title.



Chapters Twenty-two and Twenty-three

Chapters Twenty-two and Twenty-three Summary

Carrie waits in a hotel when news of the attack from Chafin's forces comes. The police and the gun thugs used women as shields. Rondal leaves with the men to fight. Carrie goes to wait for casualties at a schoolhouse converted into a field hospital. After Rondal leaves, Carrie feels panic. She tells Dr. Booker that she is pregnant. Dr. Booker says she is right not to tell Rondal yet. Another doctor arrives and tells of additional men joining Chafin's forces and he tells of them building bombs. Explosions and gunfire sound in the distance and the first casualties arrive.

After three days of fighting, miner reinforcements arrive, and some are from as far away as Pennsylvania. Rondal speaks to Talcott and Talcott compares the fighting to World War I trench warfare. The miners make several attempts to take the mountain, but they are repelled every time. As Rondal prepares some miners for another attack, Talcott arrives and says the U.S. Army is replacing Chafin's men. Talcott begs Rondal to call off the attack. Talcott tells Rondal of the effects of poison gas. Rondal refuses to listen. As Rondal charges up the mountain, he is shot.

Chapters Twenty-two and Twenty-three Analysis

Carrie reveals what we suspected to be true. The news that she is pregnant with Rondal's child makes the upcoming battle and its consequences all the more terrifying. Perhaps even more terrifying are the treacherous methods used by Chafin's forces. Using women as shield would traditionally be thought of as cowardly, but the anti-union forces regard the miners as little more than animals.

The final moment has come. The miners are faced with overwhelming odds and if they want to save themselves, they have no option but to give up the fight and retreat. In a shocking role reversal, Talcott is the voice of reason and Rondal is blinded by his anger and desire to fight. Rondal charges directly into a bullet.



Chapters Twenty-four, Twenty-five, and Afterword

Chapters Twenty-four, Twenty-five, and Afterword Summary

Carrie sees an airplane overhead and an explosion knocks her to the ground. More wounded people arrive and Carrie hears that the miners are withdrawing from the fight. Talcott yells that Rondal is wounded. Rondal says he cannot feel his legs and in an effort to give Rondal the determination to try to hang on, Carrie tells him that she is pregnant.

Dr. Booker removes the bullet but the bullet has severed Rondal's spinal cord. Talcott says that Rondal cannot stay no matter how dangerous it is to move him. Carrie says that if she can get a team of mules she can take him to the Homeplace in Kentucky. Talcott thinks the idea is absurd and he argues with Carrie. Talcott and Carrie tell Rondal to decide and Rondal chooses to go with Carrie. Dr. Booker tells Rondal that he will never walk again, and that he is not likely to live long.

Carrie gives Talcott some money to use to purchase some mules and a wagon. When Talcott returns with mules and a wagon, he and Carrie argue again, and Dr. Booker cries. Carrie changes into a dress and straps a pistol to her leg. She departs with Rondal in the back of the wagon.

On the way Carrie encounters a state policeman and some of Chafin's volunteers. The men are callous and make crude jokes. Carrie aims a pistol at one man, and the state policeman orders them to let her pass. The top of the mountain is crowded with volunteers, but none of them seem to notice Carrie. Carrie sees a man and a woman standing outside a car, and she realizes that they are reporters. Carrie explains that if Rondal is recognized he will be killed, and she asks for a ride.

On the way to Logan, the female reporter asks for Carrie's side of the story and promises to write about it once she gets back to New York. When they arrive in Logan, Carrie hopes to find Miles. The reporters stay with Rondal while she looks. Miles manages to get them on Lytton Davidson's personal rail car. During the journey one of Lytton Davidson's assistants comes and wants to shake hands with Rondal. Before shaking his hand, Rondal shows his red bandana and curses at the man.

At the Homeplace Rondal is bitter and self-absorbed. The birth of his son changes his demeanor entirely. He dotes on the baby. He takes care of the baby when awake and naps with the baby when tired. Once while napping with the baby Rondal stops breathing and dies.

Over sixty years after Carrie's last narrative, her son Dillon Freeman writes the Afterword. Though brief it explains the outcome of the Battle of Blair Mountain and what



happened to all the remaining main characters. Sixty years later the miners are still at odds with the coal companies.

Chapters Twenty-four, Twenty-five, and Afterword Analysis

The scene where Carrie and Talcott ask Rondal to choose whom to go with is a direct parallel to the scene where Rondal's father and C.J. told Rondal to decide where to live. In fact his words were exactly the same except in one instance he said C.J., and in the other he said Carrie. The fight has finally become too much for the aging Dr. Booker. In his exhaustion and anguish over seeing Rondal wounded he cries.

Rondal is the defiant union agitator to the very end. Even though it might cost the lives of Carrie and Miles, he cannot resist cursing at the coal company executive.

Though no miracle happened in Rondal's visit to the barn on Christmas Eve, the experience did mark the beginning of a softening of his character. The birth of his son seemed to bring about a drastic transformation in Rondal and in the final days before his death, he seemed to be content, perhaps for the first time.

In addition to providing some information on the outcome of the important characters, the Afterword explains some mysteries surrounding how the narratives were compiled.



Characters

Carrie Bishop

Carrie is the third narrator the reader encounters and the most prolific of the four principle narrators. Her narrative begins on what she remembers as an idyllic setting, which is the family farm they call the Homeplace. Carrie describes her love of nature, people, and her love of reading. Her formative years sound pleasant and her relatives colorful, but Carrie worries about her looks and her attractiveness.

This worry is one that stays with Carrie into her adult life but it does not stop her intense concern for others. Even as a child, Carrie cares about helping others. When her older brother does not enjoy hunting, Carrie persuades him to teach her how to shoot so she can take over the hunting chores even though she does not enjoy harming animals. Carrie has always been a bright student, and when it comes time to select a vocation, she chooses nursing.

While working as a nurse at the same coal operation that her brother oversees, Carrie meets Rondal Lloyd and immediately falls in love. However, she soon discovers that she is a mere convenience for the moment to Rondal. Carrie is emotionally hurt and her recovery takes a long time, but in time she is reacquainted with a childhood friend. Carrie falls in love a second time and marries.

Through economic hardship, heartbreak over the loss of loved ones, and the constant threat of death from the coal companies determined to stamp out labor union organizers, Carrie perseveres. Home is an important concept to Carrie and she always has her Homeplace to rely on in both a figurative and literal sense.

Rondal Lloyd (a.k.a. Lloyd Justice)

Rondal is the second narrator the reader encounters and the second most prolific. Though born before the coal companies seized the region, Rondal's earliest memories are of life in the coal camps. He remembers his father not making any money despite his hard work, though Rondal does not understand the situation fully while still a child. Though a good student, economic hardship forces Rondal's father, Clabe, to remove him from school and take him to work in the coalmines. Rondal finds the experience exhausting and terrifying, and after witnessing an accident that kills his father's partner, Rondal is able to leave the mines and go live with family friend C.J. Marcum

Rondal never forgets the mines or that his younger brother Talcott is still in the mines. Rondal performs well in school and intends to become a doctor until he is in his late teens. When he is seventeen, Rondal informs C.J. that he is not going to attend medical school but is instead going to go to work in the coalmines so he can help with the labor union movement from within.



Rondal soon learns of the sadistic nature of his adversary, the coalmine owners, when he sees a union organizer murdered. This experience combined with his childhood experience of poverty in the coal mining camps creates hardness and a tenacity that stays with Rondal for the rest of his life. The tenacity serves him well because he is frequently in danger and the target of assassination attempts. The hardness keeps him from being able to understand and return love when offered.

C.J. Marcum

C.J. is the first narrator the reader encounters in the novel. His full name is Cincinnatus Jefferson Marcum, and his grandfather tells him that he is named after the two greatest men who ever lived. They are Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus and Thomas Jefferson. C.J.'s family has owned land and farmed the area for generations, and C.J.'s grandfather, or "papaw" refuses to sign over the rights of the land to the railroad companies. When intimidation tactics fail, the railroad company has C.J.'s grandfather murdered.

C.J. goes to live with his cousin Ermel who prospers from the coming of the industry. When a friend, Clabe Lloyd, has a son, C.J. forms a close relationship with the boy, Rondal. The Lloyd family's land is also taken by the railroad company, and C.J. becomes increasingly determined to have nothing to do with the coal mining companies. Rather than let Clabe Lloyd put Rondal to work in the mines, C.J. convinces Clabe to let Rondal come and live with him in the town of Annadel.

With Ermel's assistance, C.J. opens a drug store and he forms a close friendship with Dr. Booker. Dr. Booker is a socialist, and in time C.J. also becomes a socialist, though he finds reading works by Karl Marx to be dull. Dr. Booker and C.J. start a socialist newspaper, The Annadel Free Press, and the two men serve as town mayor on multiple occasions.

Though he has spoken in favor of labor unions for years, C.J. is heartbroken when Rondal, who he regards as a son, turns down an opportunity to go to medical school in order to become a union organizer.

Albion Freeman

This character first meets Carrie Bishop when both are children. While with his father who is a traveling salesman, Albion develops pneumonia and a dangerous fever. His father seeks aid at the nearest farmhouse, which happens to be the Bishop family's Homeplace. Because the local doctor says that Albion must stay in bed for at least a month, his father has no choice but to leave Albion with the Bishops.

Albion remains with the Bishops for many months, and he becomes close friends with Carrie. For the months that he lives at the Homeplace, Albion and Carrie are inseparable. Albion demonstrates an amazing amount of kindness and caring for all people and



creatures. His departure from the Homeplace is the first time that Carrie becomes aware that outside forces can affect people's lives.

Many years later Albion returns to Kentucky as a preacher and a farmer. He soon forms a close relationship with the Bishop family, but is not so quickly able to form a relationship with Carrie who is still heartbroken after her brief relationship with Rondal Lloyd. After several months, Carrie begins to feel affection for Albion and before he leaves to preach in the coalfields of West Virginia, Carrie marries him and goes along.

Soon after arriving in West Virginia, Albion combines a pro-union message with his sermons and he becomes a leader in the efforts to organize the union. Along with Isom Justice, he is accused of murdering some Baldwin-Felts agents.

Isom Justice

This fun-loving son of Ermel Justice and best friend of Rondal is often a source for annoyance for the serious-minded C.J. Marcum. Isom seems to like everyone regardless of their race or level of wealth, and he takes his own family's wealth for granted as revealed by his free spending ways and his generosity. As Isom ages he does get more serious about important matters, but he never loses his delightful sense of humor and love for good times and company. Isom marries a daughter of C.J. Marcum and becomes the chief of police for Annadel in an effort to protect the town from the violence of the Baldwin-Felts agents.

Talcott Lloyd

This is Rondal's younger brother. He is at times impulsive with a hotheaded temper but he is fiercely loyal to his friends and family and the cause of the miners. Talcott goes to work as a child in the mines and experiences the cruelty that existed before child labor laws. He marries and becomes a father early before volunteering for the Army during World War I. After his return from the war some wonder if what he saw in combat did not add to his tendency for impulsive action. Talcott plays in a band with Rondal and Isom.

Ermel Justice

This cousin of C.J. Marcum is spared the confiscation of his lands because they do not lie atop coal reserves. With the coming of industry his business profit and expansion, he becomes wealthy. Ermel becomes a leading figure in the Democratic Party and though not a supporter of C.J and Dr. Booker's socialist ideals, his sympathies lie with the miners and their families.



Rosa Angelelli

This is one of the four principle narrators, but her narratives are brief and at times difficult to understand because of their broken language and surreal quality. She seems to blend different times and places together in addition to talking to both living and dead people. Rosa married in Sicily and immigrated with her husband to West Virginia where he found work in the coalmines. Rosa is deeply religious, and she adores her four sons. She is often at odds with her abusive and heavy drinking husband Mario.

Dillon Lloyd

This is one of the more enigmatic and interesting characters. He appears only twice in the novel, once in the beginning and once after a funeral. Dillon is believed by many to have supernatural powers, a notion he would scoff at. When his family's land is confiscated by industrial companies, he refuses to be enslaved by the changing society and retreats into the wilderness to live a primitive and solitary life. He supplements his meager existence by manufacturing and selling illegal liquor.

Clabe Lloyd

With a wife and child to provide for, this character does not follow his brother Dillon in the wilderness of the mountains but instead goes to work for the coal companies that stole the family's land. Clabe works hard six days per week but never makes enough to cover his bill at the company store, and he often drinks too much. He loves his sons, but economic hardships force him to take his sons to work in the coalmines.

Flora Bishop

This is Carrie's older and prettier sister. Flora is consistently kind to everyone.

Aunt Becka

This woman, who was once married for a month, seems to have a dislike for men and a cantankerous demeanor that conceals her true kind and caring nature. Carrie is often at odds with Aunt Becka when she is younger but comes to appreciate her aunt as she ages.

Miles Bishop

Miles is the oldest of the Bishop children. He dislikes farming and yearns to leave rural life. After graduating from college, Miles gets a job as a coalmine superintendent. He is kind to his sister Carrie, even paying for her nursing school education, but the two go



apart as Miles becomes more interested in wealth and sophistication and turns his back on his rural heritage.

Ben Honaker

This man arrives as a schoolteacher when one of the narrators, Carrie Bishop, is still a girl. Ben is a kind man and a good teacher who often lends Carrie books. After marrying Carrie's older sister, Flora, Ben leaves teaching and begins farming at the Homeplace.

Mario Angelelli

This husband of Rosa's is a coalminer and a fine baseball player.

Lytton Davidson

This is the owner of some of the mines in Justice County. He alternates between living in the town named after himself and Philadelphia, and he travels the world collecting butterflies.

Dr. Toussaint L'Ouverture Booker

This black doctor is a close friend of C.J. Marcum and a socialist. Together with C.J. he starts the local newspaper called the Annadel Free Press.

Johnson

This black man is a union organizer sent to the coal camps in Justice County. He is murdered by Baldwin-Felts agents.

Sheriff Don Chafin

Don Chafin is sheriff of Logan County and receives large payments from the coal mining companies to suppress union activity. His methods are brutal and illegal but effective.

Dillon Freeman

This character and author of the Afterword is the child of Carrie Bishop and Rondal Lloyd.



Objects/Places

Justice County, West Virginia

This fictional county in southwestern West Virginia is the setting for most of the novel. It is likely based on Mingo County where some of the real-life events depicted in the novel took place.

Mineral Rights

This is the name for the right to extract valuable minerals from below the surface of a property, and it is a separate form of ownership from surface ownership. Because mineral rights include the right to access the subsurface minerals, coal companies were able to use this form of land ownership to completely force families from their land.

Annadel, West Virginia

This fictional town is a model of racial harmony at a time when the rest of the region is under the Jim Crow Laws of segregation.

The Homeplace

This is the name the Bishop family has for their farm in Kentucky.

Pond Creek

This is the name of the nearest coal mining location to the Homeplace and it is administered by Miles Bishop.

The Blackberry Pickers

This is the name of Rondal, Isom, and Talcott's band.

Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency

This detective agency was in operation from the 1890s to the 1930s. They were infamous for their brutal methods in preventing the formation of labor unions. Though the novel *Storming Heaven* is fictional, the real-life atrocities committed by the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency were every bit as horrifying as any depicted in the novel. The characters in *Storming Heaven* refer to the Baldwin-Felts agents as "gun thugs."



United Mine Workers

This national labor union is the one that Rondal joins and then later works for in his efforts to improve the lives of the coal miners.

Ludlow, Colorado

This mining camp in southwestern Colorado was the site of the infamous Ludlow Massacre in 1914.

Annadel Political and Social Club

This club formed by C.J. and Dr. Booker provides a form for members to meet, drink, and have good-natured arguments.

Charleston, West Virginia

This is the capital of West Virginia and where Rondal and Dr. Booker go for a time before the final battle of the novel.

Jim Crow Laws

This was the name for the laws in the southern United States that mandated racial segregation.

Scab

This is the term many union members use for strikebreakers, replacement workers hired during a strike.

Blair Mountain

This is the site of the final battle between the striking coal miners and the opposing forces including Baldwin-Felts guards, state police, Sheriff Chafin's volunteers, and the United States Army.

Berea College

This institution originally formed in 1855 is in Berea, Kentucky. It is where Miles goes to college.



Themes

Home

Three of the main characters contemplate the concept of home. To all three of these characters home is both a place and a concept. One of the characters believes she has a home, and the other two characters have a concept of home and realize they lack the physical, tangible home and may never reacquire it.

Carrie's home is real, and in her mind it is permanent. To her, the Homeplace is a place of origin and a refuge. In reality it exists and resists change longer than most other places in the region. In her mind it is a never changing safe harbor for her and those she loves. In this way, it is much like her notion of heaven.

Albion is the first character Carrie meets that has no home. His family once had land in West Virginia, but the railroad companies took it like they took the land of so many other families in order to prepare for the arrival of coal companies. As a child Carrie cannot understand how something like that can happen, but she is deeply moved by Albion's belief that he will never have a home and no one will know where he is buried after he dies.

Rondal has a different notion of home, and it is in some ways a more developed and complex notion. To Rondal, home has little to do with security, comfort, and happiness. Home is what is most familiar. Since he was born and raised in and near coal camps, to Rondal, home is a place of poverty and suffering.

Outside Forces

Carrie says that she first became aware that outside, unfamiliar, and sometimes unseen forces exert great control over our lives the day that Albion's father returned and took him away. In many ways this is a coming-of-age moment for Carrie. However, awareness of the often harmful control that outside forces exert over the lives of the people in the rural lands of West Virginia and Kentucky had little to do with age. All of the characters are surprised at some point to discover how fragile or weak they are in the presence of outside forces.

Most of the farmers in the early 1900s that lose their land to the railroad companies have never even heard of mineral rights. To them, land is a way to provide for their families. They have no knowledge of commercialization or industrialization and even less interest. Even those characters like C.J.'s grandfather who believe that by refusing to sign a document they can preserve their ownership and right to live on their land are unaware of the awesome power of outside forces.

The miners who toil in the mines see the oppressors as the supervisors or mine operators. What they do not understand is that those in real control are farther removed.



They are tycoons in places like Boston or Philadelphia. Even the union organizers who have some grasp of the complexity commercial partnerships that make up industry ownership have no idea of the size and power of their enemy. They believe they are marching up Blair Mountain to face the men under the command of Sheriff Don Chafin. They do not realize that the United States government has a vested interest in preserving the oppression and exploitation the miners endure.

Heaven

Heaven is a concept that appears at multiple points in the novel, and three of the main characters have differing visions of what constitutes heaven. Carrie, who seems to think about the notion of heaven often, has the clearest and most descriptive vision of heaven. However, her vision of heaven seems very much like her real-life place of birth. She describes heaven as being a place where everyone you care about is safe and together. This sounds very much like Homeplace with the possible difference being that it lasts for eternity.

Carrie's husband Albion is a preacher and a man whose vocation involves constant contemplation and discussion of heaven. However, from Albion we do not receive a description of heaven as some stock image of a place of tranquility and peace. Instead, Albion seems to be more concerned with relieving suffering among the living. In his most detailed discussion on the subject, he asserts that he does not believe in hell as a place one goes after life in order to suffer and from his description of hell, he seems to equate much of it to present events.

Once when Carrie tries to explain her idea of heaven, Rondal responds that it sounds like a cemetery. When pressed, Rondal does have some notion of heaven. He describes it as what is happening at the moment, the gathering of thousands of men attempting to change conditions for the better. It is possible that the author had in mind this notion of heaven when selecting the title of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in *Storming Heaven* is more complex than in many other novels because of the multiple narrators. Each narrator reports from a first-person perspective, and they have their own peculiarities in the use of language. Three of the narrators are steeped in the language of Appalachia and one narrator, a woman from Sicily, is not a native speaker of English.

C.J. Marcum, the first narrator encountered, is perhaps the oldest of the narrators and remembers the way of life in West Virginia before the arrival of the coal producers. Carrie Bishop and Rondal Lloyd are about the same age and they are products of two very different environments, one of which is rural while the other is industrial. Rosa Angelelli is a native of Sicily and her narrative, although in the first person like the other three narratives, is often difficult to follow because of her use of language and questionable notions of reality.

A problem in the point of view seems to arise midway through the novel. Two of the narrators are removed, one through death and the through madness. With the exception of Rosa, all of the narration comes in past tense and it has the feel of narration composed long after events. This problem remains unanswered until the Afterword.

The Afterword is composed over sixty years since the last narrative from Carrie Bishop. Dillon Freeman, son of Carrie and Rondal, delivers it and it gives us a fifth narrator. Dillon informs the reader that during a strike that lasts an entire year, he spent the time compiling the four narratives from newspaper clippings, diaries, and interviews. This explains any questions or inconsistencies in the point of view.

Setting

Storming Heaven has three principle settings. The coal mining camps of West Virginia are in stark contrast to the agrarian environment of the Bishop Homeplace in eastern Kentucky. The town of Annadel, near but temporarily outside the sphere of control of the coal mining operations, enjoys racial harmony like no other place in the southern United States.

The coal mining camps are places of poverty, disease, and suffering. People work long hours under conditions considered inhumane by today's standards, yet they still get further and further in debt to their employers. Children are routinely withdrawn from school and put to work in draconian conditions in an effort to keep families from starving. Still, hundreds die from malnutrition. Diseases like typhoid, cholera, and tuberculosis are commonplace. Medical care is available but it is beyond the financial means of most families.



Carrie describes the eastern Kentucky farm that the Bishops call Homeplace as a pastoral paradise. People live as they have for generations, farming the land, meeting their needs, and enabling their children to get an education. The area farmers cooperate at harvest time and trade services or goods such as butchered meat.

The town of Annadel is like no other town of its time and perhaps like no other town before or since. The residents, white, black, and immigrant, live in a state of racial harmony at a time when mandatory racial segregation is the norm. Annadel has both white and black police officers as well as black and white town council members. It alternates between a black and a white mayor. To the extreme ire of all the outlying towns, it has a winning integrated baseball team.

Language and Meaning

The language of *Storming Heaven* may be difficult for some readers in the beginning of the novel. Denise Giardina presents the language of the people of Appalachia in an accurate manner. Phonetic spelling is often used to convey the sounds of words.

In most cases the meaning of the unfamiliar words can be understood through context. However there are occasions where the contextual clues may be lacking, and a reader will not immediately understand. This can be further complicated by an inability to find a root word. For instance, it may not be immediately clear that the local word "holler" is an alternate pronunciation of the word hollow, meaning a valley or place of lower elevation than the surrounding area. Without contextual clues there is little to tell the reader that the word "haint" means spirit or ghost, probably derived from the word haunt. After a few chapters, the regional language presents no problems for the reader because it is consistent and always contextually the same.

In an interesting and unexpected way, the language of Rosa Angelelli's narrative is easiest to understand. It is generally brief, and it is composed in simple present tense. The meaning of the narrative, on the other hand, is difficult to understand.

In addition to the regional accent spoken by the characters, the language of the novel is vivid and colorful. The narrators go to great effort to describe both the pastoral rural scenes and the nightmarish coal camps and mines.

Structure

The structure of *Storming Heaven* is divided into four parts and an Afterword. The parts vary in length and number of chapters, but they are divided according to major changes in the overall plot. In a general sense the plot can be divided into the time before and shortly after the arrival of the coal companies, Carrie Bishop's first venture away from the Homeplace, the quest to bring union organization to the coal camps, and the final battle.



Each chapter bears the title of a name of one of the four principle narrators. The plot progression is linear and chronological, but occasionally the switch to a new narrator involves backtracking in time and presenting events of the same time period from a different perspective.

The final third of the novel, excluding the Afterword, consists only of the narratives of Carrie Bishop and Rondal Lloyd. The other two narrators have been removed from the plot through death and illness. In the final third of the book, the narration switches back and forth between Carrie and Rondal, and it is here that the time progression most often involves some backtracking.

Though brief, the Afterword is a vital component of the novel's structure. It is composed over sixty years after the last narrative of Carrie Bishop. The Afterword provides resolution to the plot, including information on what happens to all remaining characters. The Afterword also resolves what seem like irregularities in the novel's structure in matters pertaining to point of view.



Quotes

"On Ermel's farm it was easy to think it, most of the time. But when I would pause in the field, lean against my hoe, and the wind would stir and bear a shriek, thin and ghostlike, up from Pliny—the death cry of some huge tree, fallen to make mine timbers and houses for American Coal—then my dream of sanctuary on the farm seemed like a mockery and a reproach" (Chapter One, pg. 19.)

"Snake again," was all he would say, meaning he hadn't been able to mine enough coal to pay off the bills at the company store, that he still owed for food and doctoring and his work tools and blasting powder, that his paycheck had a single wavy line where the money figures should have been" (Chapter Two, pg. 23.)

"He was tall and slender, his hair was the color and texture of corn silk, and thick on top. He told us he had come from just over the mountain on Tater Knob Creek, that he had been to the normal school at Louisa. I was inclined to fall in love with him, but noticed how he kept watching Flora" (Chapter Three, pg. 44.)

"We watched the river. Mosquitoes teased the surface of the shallows and minnows flicked back and forth, chased by their shadows. Albion tore open a milkweed pod and scattered the soft white insides. Some of the seeds were borne away on the water. Others flew on the wind like pale fairies and settled in the brake to take root" (Chapter Three, pg. 56.)

"The women set out the food on tables inside the cabin: fried chicken and salty ham, mashed potatoes swimming in butter, green beans cooked with hunks of fatback, hot pickled corn, biscuits, tallow cornbread, boiled cabbage, sweet potatoes, green poke salad in bacon grease, fresh kale, squirrel meat with dumplings, venison steaks, groundhog, red-eye gravy, milk gravy, stack cakes, apple pies" (Chapter Three, pg. 57.)

"The Baldwin-Felts guards on Blackberry Creek knew I was back. We did everything out in the open. We reasoned that it was easier for a man to get killed if he was operating undercover and no one knew of his presence" (Chapter 15, pg. 187.)

"I had been reminded I was in danger by the route we took to reach Justice. The most direct way was through Logan. But Logan County was ruled by a sadistic sheriff named Don Chafin, backed by hundreds of deputies whose salaries were paid by the coal operators" (Chapter 15, pg. 188.)

"Who can say why the miners were ready to listen to me? They broke their backs and died of roof falls and rib rolls and gas, their children went to bed hungry, and died of the typhoid, their wives took the consumption, they themselves coughed and spit up" (Chapter 15, pg. 192.)



"Albion Freeman at that time seemed to me the most precious person in the world. I loved him with the guilty love of one who had to be convinced, and with a smothering love, for he would not watch out for himself" (Chapter 17, pg. 229-230.)

"I ain't never lived in a place like this. I don't know it. Coal camps is home to me. Hit's like a baby duck when it's born it takes the first thing it sees for its mommy. A baby duck spies an old ugly sow first thing, hit thinks, 'That there is home.' Hit's the same with me. I look for an old rattling coal tipple or a house covered with the black dust" (Chapter 18, pg. 260.)

"I went to the pump to rest five minutes and savor a dipper of water. I sat on the ground with my back against the rough wood of the housing. When I shut my eyes the ground beneath me became unmoored and carried me off into space. A loud crash up the mountain brought me back to earth with a jolt" (Chapter 24, pg. 289.)

"Although the timber was clear-cut, coal was never mined at the Homeplace. The land was purchased by the federal government to build a dam, which was constructed in 1969. But the floodwaters never reached the Homeplace and it stands empty to this day, held for some unknown reason in the control of a distant power beyond our ken" (Afterword, pg. 312.)



Topics for Discussion

Each of the four main narrators speaks in a different voice. Discuss which narrator you found easiest to understand or which consistently delivered the most interesting tales.

C.J. Marcum's grandfather said he was named after the "two greatest men who ever lived." Who were these men and what about them would have earned to admiration of a rural farmer?

Albion Freeman enters the novel when a traveling salesman leaves his son with strangers for months. Discuss how this is an example of how the rural society depicted in the novel is different from our modern society and why reliance on the hospitality of strangers was necessary for survival.

In Chapter Two Rondal reveals that his family rarely has enough to eat despite his father working six days a week in the coal mines, and he says that the only meat besides bacon that the family ever consumes comes from the squirrels, rabbits, and possums that he hunts. In Chapter Three, Carrie goes into great detail in describing the meal shared when farmers help each other. Discuss how this shows a difference in quality of life before and after industry moves into the rural environments of West Virginia and Kentucky.

Examine the character of Rondal Lloyd. At times he does not seem to appreciate the affection and concern that C.J. offers, and he waits until the morning after to inform Carrie that their encounter has no significance. Is Rondal a selfish person or is there a more complicated explanation for his behavior?

Storming Heaven is an example of historical fiction. Historical fiction can vary by degrees of accuracy in terms of how closely it follows events of recorded history. Discuss how Storming Heaven compares to other works of historical fiction.

The Battle of Blair Mountain was an armed conflict involving over ten thousand miners, and thousands of opposing forces consisting of police, volunteers, and finally the U.S. Army. However, this violent conflict is rarely mentioned in history textbooks. Discuss possible reasons why this incident may have been overlooked in the study of U.S. history.