

The Song of the Lark Study Guide

The Song of the Lark by Willa Cather

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Plot Summary

Willa Cather's "The Song of the Lark" is primarily the story of a young girl's coming of age and her development into a great artist. However, it also tells of her struggle against adverse circumstances to become successful. Thea Kronborg is raised in the suffocating and gossipy small town of Moonstone, Colorado. In order for her to reach her full potential Thea must leave her hometown, and sacrifice her family and personal life. This true to life novel depicts the difficulty of life and the hurdles one must clear to achieve greatness.

Thea's story begins when she is an eleven-year-old living with her large family in the town of Moonstone. As the daughter of the Methodist minister Thea is well known in her town. She prefers to socialize with the musical Mexicans in Mexico Town and Herr Wunsch a professional musician who has ruined his career with alcohol. Thea takes piano lessons from Wunsch who recognizes a great talent and willingness to work in her. Thea's other supporters include her mother who recognizes that Thea is different from her other six children and has special qualities they don't have. Howard Archie, the town doctor, is also a close friend of Thea's. Archie also recognizes Thea's special talent and intelligence that sets her apart from the other townspeople of Moonstone.

Ray Kennedy, also a friend of Thea's from Moonstone, is the one who gives her the funds she needs to start serious music lessons. Unfortunately Kennedy is killed when his caboose is hit by a train engine. However, he had a life insurance policy which named Thea as the beneficiary. At Kennedy's request Thea uses this money to spend a winter in Chicago taking piano lessons. The next summer, Thea realizes how different she is from her family. After an argument with her sister Thea leaves her home and vows not to return until she has made something of herself.

The following winter Thea takes voice lessons from Madison Bowers, an experience that leaves Thea discouraged and exhausted. Fred Ottenburg sends Thea to spend the summer exploring cliff dwellings at Panther Canon. The experience refreshes Thea. During the summer Thea falls in love with Ottenburg and agrees to marry him. The two travel to Mexico where Thea discovers Ottenburg is already married. As promised Ottenburg takes her to New York where Thea plans to go to Germany to study music. In order for her to afford her studies, however, Thea borrows money from her old friend Archie.

After making a name for herself in Germany, Thea returns to New York to sing. Her old friends Archie and Ottenburg join her in New York to hear her performance. Thea's career is determined by a Mexican who unknown to Thea visits one of her New York performances. The man is Spanish Johnny, a Mexican from Moonstone who recognized Thea's talent when she was just a small girl. The smile on Johnny's face would have let Thea know how useful and full of meaning her life had become.



Part 1, Chapters I - V

Part 1, Chapters I - V Summary

Willa Cather's "The Song of the Lark" is primarily the story of a young girl's coming of age and her development into a great artist. However, it also tells of her struggle against adverse circumstances to become successful. Thea Kronborg is raised in the suffocating and gossipy small town of Moonstone, Colorado. In order for her to reach her full potential Thea must leave her hometown, and sacrifice her family and personal life. This true to life novel depicts the difficulty of life and the hurdles one must clear to achieve greatness.

Howard Archie, the town doctor in Moonstone, Colorado, is called to the home of Peter Kronborg to assist in the birth of Kronborg's seventh child. While there Archie discovers the Kronborg's daughter Thea is deathly ill with pneumonia. Although he is afraid she will die of her illness, Archie nurses her back to health. Chapter II records that a week after the birth of the new baby Thea is well enough to sit up reading and watching the baby. Archie brings her a bunch of grapes as a treat. Thea and Archie are friends and visit awhile. Thea is angry when Archie asks her how her music teacher Professor Herr Wunsch behaves when he is around her. Although she admits she does not like practicing as much as Wunsch wants her to, she is very defensive of her teacher's lifestyle. In Chapter III Thea is well enough to return to school. In this scene the rigidity of life in the Kronborg house is displayed. The children are taught to take care of themselves and to behave properly. In addition to their mother, the children are cared for by Anna their oldest sister and Aunt Tillie, their father's unmarried sister.

Summer arrives in Chapter IV. Thea sets off for her piano lesson at the Kohler's home where her teacher lives. Wunsch recognizes that Thea has musical talent. He is an accomplished musician but his drinking problem has kept him from being successful. Wunsch lives in Moonstone with the Kohler's. This husband and wife have "adopted" Wunsch and have managed to make him presentable enough to teach piano to the children of Moonstone. He teaches Thea at the Kohler's home because he is more comfortable there and can give serious lessons. After her lesson, Thea chats with Wunsch for awhile then makes her regular visit to see Fritz's piece picture. Finally, Thea sings for Wunsch before she leaves. As Wunsch thinks over his student's talent, he admits it is Thea's willingness to work hard that impresses him.

In Chapter V Thea is invited by Archie to pick strawberries from his yard. Thea doesn't want to go because she doesn't like Mrs. Archie. Mrs. Archie is known for being mean to her husband, stingy and hateful. She prefers to close her house up and keep people out of the house. She cleans obsessively. When Thea and Thor arrive at the Archie home to pick berries, Mrs. Archie brings her a tiny bucket to put the berries in even though Thea has brought a large basket with her. Thea leaves after picking only a few berries. She goes home in tears because she is embarrassed for Archie.



Part 1, Chapters I - V Analysis

Two of the book's main characters are introduced in these first five chapters. Thea is the main character of the novel. The story traces her life from age eleven through approximately the next 25 years of her life. Thea is one of seven children born to the town's Methodist preacher. Her mother appreciates the fact Thea has musical talent and sees that Thea takes piano lessons and practices regularly. However, at the onset of the novel Thea's untreated illness shows that her parents have not really paid proper attention to the child.

Doctor Howard Archie is one of the major male characters in the novel. He is one of Thea's supporters throughout her career. It is apparent from the beginning of the novel that Thea and Archie have a very close relationship. He is one of the few people in Moonstone who recognize from the start there is something special about Thea. He and Thea communicate with each other through a series of special winks and facial expressions. Archie appears to be more attentive to the young girl than her own parents.

The main theme of the novel, which is Thea's journey from a talented child to a great artist, begins to develop in the first section of the book. It is known from the time that Archie glances at the exercise book open on the piano that Thea is taking piano lessons. She is being taught by Wunsch, a man who is a great musician despite his drinking habit. Wunsch recognizes her talent both in piano and voice, but is afraid he will jinx her chances if he hopes she will have a great future.

Another interesting theme that begins to be seen in these first few chapters is the idea of marriage. While the Krongborgs' and the Archies' marriages are neither what one would call perfect, they are very different in the downfalls. The Archie relationship, for example, is practically non-existent. Mrs. Archie is mean and forces her husband to look for love, and food, elsewhere. She controls Archie through her meanness. The Krongborgs, on the other hand, seem to have a fulfilling relationship. Although Mrs. Krongborg loves her husband and lets him appear to be head of the family in public, it is she who handles the family's finances and raises the children. Krongborg is allowed by his strong-natured wife to be only the religious leader of his family.



Part 1, Chapters VI - XI

Part 1, Chapters VI - XI Summary

While walking back from a patient's home during a sandstorm Archie meets Thea and Thor. Archie invites Thea to go with him that evening to tend to Spanish Johnny. Johnny has returned exhausted from one of his mysterious trips. Johnny would embark on one of these trips after he spent a night singing in the saloon. He would then travel the country singing and playing his mandolin in saloons until he becomes completely used up and returns exhausted and sick from his adventure. Mrs. Tellamantez tells Archie and Thea that Johnny goes on these trips because he is fooled by the excitement he feels when people hear him sing and play. She contends he does not have the knowledge to realize he can't succeed as a musician.

In Chapter VII Ray Kennedy is introduced. He plans to marry Thea. Thea likes Kennedy because he takes her to visit her beloved sand hills. On one trip to the sand hills, Thea, Kennedy and a group of friends stop at the Cup for lunch. They talk and share stories. Winter begins in Chapter VIII. Thea has started giving piano lessons. She teaches three students. The money she earns teaching piano is used to fix up her own room in the upstairs of her family's home. This upstairs room allows Thea to develop a second life and gives her a place she can read and think.

Also in Chapter VIII the city's Sunday-school Christmas concert is given at the Moonstone Opera House. Thea is chosen to play piano while adversary Lily Fischer plans to recite. Thea would prefer to sing since these vocals are more popular among the audience. Instead Wunsch insists she play a "Ballade." The audience is bored by Thea's "Ballade" but entranced by Lily's recitation which combines recitation and singing.

Chapter IX addresses Tillie's unusual knowledge that one day Thea will be great. In fact, Tillie alienates herself from her drama club when she insists Thea is not ready to perform yet, but that one day when she is ready, she will surprise them all. In the tenth chapter Thea discovers a copy of Gluck's "Orpheus" on Wunsch's piano. Wunsch challenges her with the idea that there was only one woman who could ever sing the song well. Thea takes the score home to study it. In Chapter X Wunsch and Thea discuss the possibility of her learning to sing. Wunsch teaches her a few lines of German and tells her that if she wants to sing, she must learn this language. After their conversation Thea contemplates this possibility.

Part 1, Chapters VI - XI Analysis

The most important occurrence in this section of the book is Wunsch and Thea's discussion about the possibility of her learning to sing. Although Thea has said nothing to those around her about her plans for the future, it is assumed she has been thinking



about a future in voice. These plans begin when Thea moves to her private upstairs room. During the time by herself, she reads and thinks, two activities that broaden her horizons beyond the borders of Moonstone.

Although Thea is not yet of marriageable age, she already has a suitor who plans to marry her. Ray Kennedy is described as being a faithful and devoted person. Ray takes Thea to the sand hills often, a trip Thea enjoys. Wunsch, however, is jealous of these side trips since they take time away from Thea's music and practice. In one conversation Thea tells Wunsch she'd rather devote herself to music than marry and keep house for a man. Meanwhile, Archie continues to insist that Wunsch pushes Thea too hard in her lessons. Again, Thea tells him Wunsch is not too hard on her.

Thea's personality begins to develop in this section of the book. She is portrayed as a hard worker with a determined will. She accepts things that are hard as a challenge from which she will not back down. Wunsch is impressed with her willingness to work hard. While Wunsch realizes there is something special about Thea. Tillie also realizes Thea is special. Tillie tends to anger people with her undying belief that Thea will be famous one day.



Part 1, Chapters XII - XV

Part 1, Chapters XII - XV Summary

Thea and Archie run into each other as they attempt to find something to do one July night. Everyone else is asleep. Archie warns Thea he believes Wunsch will leave Moonstone soon. Archie wonders why he and Wunsch are in Moonstone. There is nothing happening there and nothing to learn. Archie then changes the subject and asks Thea what she plans to do with her life. He encourages her not to just marry and settle down but to give herself a chance to do what she wants. Thea admits she wants to "learn to do something well." She has chosen music because that is where she excels. She needs Wunsch to teach her all he can. Thea tells Archie she wants to study in Germany not only because Wunsch has told her that is the best place to study but also because a book she read suggested Germany is the place to go to study music.

As Dr Archie has suggested, Wunsch begins to drink more heavily in Chapter XIII. At times he is unable to give Thea her lessons. One day in September on her way to the Kohler's home Thea comes upon Mrs. Tellamantez sitting next to Wunsch who is covered with a blanket. Spanish Johnny has gone to round up Archie and a group of men to carry Wunsch home. Once the men arrive both Ray and Archie tell Thea to leave. Once Wunsch is settled in the Kohler's home Archie gives him a sedative in hopes that it will keep Wunsch from becoming violent when he wakes. Spanish Johnny stays with the Kohlers to help with Wunsch. In the middle of the night Wunsch wakes and is in the process of throwing a chair at Johnny when Johnny slips out the window to get help. By this time the Kohlers are awake and barricade themselves in their bedroom. Wunsch is in the garden with an axe. As they watch, he chops down the dove house. Before he can do further damage to the garden four men arrive and subdue him. After this incident, Wunsch loses all of his music students. He has become a disgrace to the town. His last act in Moonstone is to fix up the score of "Orpheus" with the Kohler's help as a gift for Thea. He leaves town soon after this. Thea is there to bid him good bye.

After Wunsch's departure Mr. and Mrs. Kronborg decide in Chapter XIV to take Thea out of school and let her teach music lessons. Many parents had expressed a desire for their children to take lessons from Thea. Mr. Kronborg suggests they raise Thea's prices and use the extra money to pay for an additional room on the house. This room would be Anna's sleeping room, but would also be a place for Thea to give lessons during the day. Mrs. Kronborg is concerned about the effect the strain of teaching will have on Thea but agrees to Mr. Kronborg's plan.

In Chapter XV Thea teaches her students with gusto. While she is patient with the younger students, she sometimes loses her temper with the older ones. Once she is called down by the mother of one of her pupils, an action that embarrasses Thea gravely. Despite this incident Thea is exhausted by her teaching but is happy. She is allowed to do as she wishes. Thea also uses the money she makes to improve her



family's way of living and buy gifts for the children. Thea begins spending more time with Ray. Ray amuses her with his interesting stories. He also encourages her to go to Chicago to take lessons. He believes she will come back to Moonstone and impress people. Thea likes to spend time with Ray because he is restful for her. He does not recognize her ability to be truly great.

Part 1, Chapters XII - XV Analysis

The atmosphere of chapters XII and XIII is restless as Wunsch lives out his last few days in Moonstone. He has given in to alcohol and has become sick and violent. His violent and disgraceful behavior has caused him to lose all of his students with the exception of Thea. Thea and the Kohlers are the only ones who miss the great musician once he leaves Moonstone. Also during these two chapters Thea tells Dr. Archie about her plans to study music in Germany one day. Archie encourages Thea to follow her dreams. He begs her not to just settle down and be content with marriage and a home. When Wunsch leaves town Thea becomes the town's only piano teacher. She seems well suited for her job. Her parents even allow her to quit school and work at her profession part time.

Although it appears Thea finds her teaching exhausting, she uses the proceeds from her lessons to better her family. It is said that she is generous with her salary and often buys new things for the house and gifts for the children. These actions show how deeply Thea feels connected to her family and wants them to be happy. It is important to remember the unselfish way in which Thea gave to her family, these actions will be important later on.

Thea and Ray's relationship continues to develop. Thea sees Ray only as a dear friend whose companionship is restful to her because he does not suggest or hint at her ability for greatness. Ray continues to plan for a marriage between himself and Thea in the coming future. This romance develops against the backdrop of Archie's failed marriage. Although he remains married to his wife because he doesn't want the disgrace of a divorce, Archie admits that the mistake of marrying Belle has ruined his life. He knows the townspeople talk badly about his wife. He feels out of place among them not only because of his mean wife, but also because he holds romantic ideals which none of them, except perhaps Thea, can understand.



Part I, Chapters XVI - XX

Part I, Chapters XVI - XX Summary

In Chapter XVI Thea and her mother ride with Ray in his freight train caboose. Thea considers it the most pleasant experience of that summer. Ray and Thea enjoy talking as they watch the scenery go by. One particular item they discuss is the Indians and their habit of building houses into the sides of cliffs. Ray wants to take Thea to visit the habitats of the cliff dwellers one day. In Chapter XVII Mr. Kronborg pushes Thea to be more active in church. He insists she add playing the organ and leading singing on Wednesday night to regular work that she does with the choir. In time Thea begins to almost enjoy the mournful Wednesday prayer services. She uses them to bolster her own desire to live and be happy.

In the first half of Chapter XVII Thea's sister Anna joins the church. Although Mr. Kronborg is delighted about his daughter's religion, the rest of the family is plagued by it. Anna tries to convince Thea that it is improper to practice secular music on Sundays. One day the two sisters get into a heated argument about the subject and Mrs. Kronborg steps in. She refuses to take Anna's side and instead assigns her a section of the Bible to read. Anna argues their neighbors will hear the music and talk badly about the noise.

In the last half of Chapter XVII a tramp comes to Moonstone. He claims to have been a clown with a circus. He tries to put on a show and collect money at the Moonstone saloon. The manager of the saloon has the man arrested for putting on a show without a license. The tramp is ordered to leave town. A week after the tramp disappears the town's water begins to have a bad taste and smell. It is found that the tramp had lowered himself into the town's standpipe and died. There are several deaths attributed to the contaminated water.

Because Thea had seen this tramp when he first entered the town and because she knows he saw her cover her nose to keep out his stench, Thea is deeply affected by the incident involving the tramp. Ray will not talk to her about the incident so Thea goes to Dr. Archie. She tells him she thinks that if people had really believed the Bible, they would have taken care of the tramp and helped him instead of turning their backs on him. Archie tries to pacify Thea with the knowledge that most who practice religion are passive. Accidents, like the tramp, happen but don't leave a lasting scar. He encourages Thea to concentrate on being the best she can be. Thea remembers this conversation as being the most grown-up talk she had ever had with Archie. She leaves his office feeling renewed and joyous.

In Chapter XIX tragedy strikes again. This time Ray is hit by a train and killed. Dr. Archie, Mr. Kronborg and Thea are called to go and see about the dying man at the site of the wreck in the town of Saxony. Archie checks on Ray and talks with him awhile before Thea is allowed to see him. She and Ray are left alone together to talk one last



time. Thea enjoys the feeling of being able to comfort Ray and make him happy just by being with him. She realizes for the first time how much Ray cares for her. As Ray looks back over the failures in his own life, he realizes that in Thea he has for once "backed a winner."

In Chapter XX Archie visits Mr. Kronborg to tell him that Ray had a six hundred dollar life insurance policy that named Thea as the beneficiary. Archie explains that Ray wanted Thea to use the money to go to Chicago and study music. Although Mr. Kronborg is hesitant to let Thea go at her age, Mrs. Kronborg and Archie convince him it is the right thing to do. Thea is excited about her opportunity. She, her mother and Tillie have new clothes made for her trip. Dr. Archie travels with Thea to Chicago to see that she gets there safely and that she finds a good place to stay.

Part I, Chapters XVI - XX Analysis

Although tragic, Ray's death is a turning point for Thea. He provides her with the funds and the motivation she needs to leave Moonstone and pursue her talent. Thea is beside herself with excitement. Her friend Archie is there to go with her to Chicago and help set her up in a good boarding house. Thea feels pulled in two directions about her trip. It is as though she knows that once she leaves Moonstone things will never be the same, her childhood will be over. On the other hand, she knows her trip to Chicago is the first step on her journey toward becoming a great musician.

Changes have occurred in the Kronborg family during the last chapters of Part I. Anna has joined the church and uses her Christianity as a weapon against Thea. She tries to encourage her mother to keep Thea from practicing secular songs on Sundays. Anna's reasoning is that people will hear the music coming from their house and talk. Mrs. Kronborg, however, is content to let people talk. The family does live in a certain fear of what people say about them and their way of life. Being the family of the minister puts Thea's family in an even more prominent position in the gossip world. While Mrs. Kronborg believes people will say what they will, her husband tries to subdue the gossipy tongues by having his family behave the way the townspeople believe a minister's family should behave.

Along the lines of Christianity and hypocrisy, the story of the tramp is very disturbing and troubles Thea greatly. She is upset that none of the people around her who claim to believe in the Bible came to the man's aid. They simply ran him away because he was dirty and smelly. The man got his revenge on the town by crawling into the standpipe and dying. Many members of the town became sick and even died when they drank the contaminated water.



Part II, Chapters I - IV

Part II, Chapters I - IV Summary

After the first few depressing days in Chicago, Dr. Archie and Thea visit the Reverend Lars Larson, a friend of Thea's father. Thea has been accepted as a pupil of Andor Harsanyi, but has not yet found a place to stay. After hearing her voice, Larson offers Thea a temporary position of soprano in the church choir, a paying position. He also believes she can pick up some extra money singing at funerals. Larsen also directs Thea and Archie to Mrs. Lorch and Mrs. Anderson two German women who rent out rooms in their house. Chapter II describes Thea's room and details her settling in the room. She finds her accommodations pleasant.

In Chapter III Thea begins her lessons with Harsanyi. Harsanyi finds Thea to be a talented musician but one with limited experience. Like Wunsch, he admires the way she struggles with her challenges until she defeats them. It is while studying with Harsanyi that Thea realizes how much she has to learn. She is frustrated she is far behind in her studies without even realizing it. One night while dining with the Harsanyi's Thea mentions the fact that she sings in a church choir. It is one this evening as Thea plays and sings the song that Wunsch taught her that Harsanyi realizes what a great voice the girl has. In Chapter IV Harsanyi begins to add voice lessons to Thea's piano. He wants to do some experimentation with her voice before he recommends a voice teacher.

Part II, Chapters I - IV Analysis

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these first four chapters of Part II is the transition in Thea's personality once she begins to take lessons seriously. She is depressed and almost inconsolable when she learns how far behind she is in her studies. Also, it seems piano become hard for her. She does not seem to have any natural ability, only the desire to work hard and succeed. Playing piano tires Thea while singing does not tire her. Away from her old friends and familiar surroundings, Thea appears to be more withdrawn and less social. It is only with the Harsanyi children that Thea seems to be herself.



Part II, Chapters V - IX

Part II, Chapters V - IX Summary

After being in Chicago nearly four months, Thea finally visits the Art Institute. Once there she is upset with herself for not having experienced this before and vows to visit the Institute once weekly. It is here that Thea discovers her picture, "The Song of the Lark." She connects with the girl in the painting and visits it often. In the beginning of spring Thea also takes the opportunity to hear a symphony orchestra. Thea is so excited and engrossed by the music she hears that she leaves the concert hall in a daze. Once outside it seems to her as if everyone there is trying to take away the joy the music brought to her. It is then and there that Thea decides she will have the joy of the music for herself so that no one and no circumstance can take it away from her.

In Chapter VI Harsanyi pays a visit to the conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to confirm that Madison Bowers is the best voice teacher he can get for Thea. In Chapter VII Harsanyi tells Thea he believes she is meant to be a vocalist instead of a pianist. Thea is deeply distressed that she will no longer be studying with Harsanyi and is afraid it is because she has not been a good enough student. Harsanyi assures her Thea is one of his best students and that he doesn't want to lose her. He tells her he has thought long and hard about his decision to encourage her to switch to studying voice instead of piano. Mrs. Harsanyi is also disappointed when she learns her husband has turned Thea over to a new teacher. She had hoped Harsanyi would find fame through this student.

Thea returns to Moonstone for the summer in Chapter VIII. On the train ride home Thea contemplates her decision to switch to voice. She had studied piano with the idea of being a teacher. She is unsure why she should study voice. Thea is aware, however, that her singing voice is very much a part of her self confidence and inner well being. Thea reaches Moonstone in Chapter IX. Her older brothers are afraid Thea will be snobby because she has been to Chicago. As soon as Thea arrives Anna tells her sister that a request has been made for Thea to sing at a funeral the next day. Thea tells her sister she plans to rest her voice this summer and won't be singing at any funerals. Anna gives their mother a spiteful look. At this point Thea realizes her sister dislikes her.

The next morning Thea's mother surprises her by bringing her breakfast in bed. The two talk about Thea's time in Chicago then her mother encourages her to sing at the funeral. Mrs. Kronborg reasons that the dead girl had showed great interest in Thea's talent. She also assures Thea the church will not run her ragged as they had before, she had already talked to Mr. Kronborg about that. Thea agrees to sing at the funeral.



Part II, Chapters V - IX Analysis

In these five chapters Thea makes another life change as she decides to switch from piano to voice. Harsanyi believes Thea has a natural ability to sing that will take her much farther than all of her work at piano will ever take her. Although Thea has been singing all of her life, it is interesting that Harsanyi is the first to recognize Thea's vocal talent and make the suggestion that she pursue this talent. Although Wunsch knew Thea could sing, he did not encourage her to pursue voice.

Also interesting are the differences Thea sees in her family when she returns to Moonstone. For the first time she realizes that Anna has always disliked her. The older boys in the family are afraid Thea will have become snobbish and will hold her Chicago experiences over their heads. Thea does not intend to do this, in fact, she has missed her family greatly and is happy to be back with them. Thea's mother is the only one who talks with Thea about her experiences in the city. Thea feels special because of her mother's individual attention and enjoys her private visit with her mother immensely.



Part II, Chapters X - XI

Part II, Chapters X - XI Summary

In Chapter X Thea meets with Spanish Johnny at the drug store and they talk about music. He invites her to a ball the Mexicans are planning. Music is provided by Johnny on his mandolin, two violinists and a double bass. This dance has a different feel and atmosphere from any dance Thea has ever attended before. There is an air of friendliness and openness among the Mexicans as they enjoy themselves and the music. Thea dances repeatedly with the Ramos brothers who are in awe of her beauty. At midnight the group goes to Johnny house for ice cream and more music.

After they eat their ice cream Johnny suggests Thea sing with him. Thea is overwhelmed by the response these Mexicans, who truly enjoy music, give her. At the request of the Mexicans she sings song after song with them. The Kohlers, who live just across the gulch from Mexican Town, are awakened by the sound of Thea's voice. They wonder at the beauty of her voice and wish Wunsch were with them so he could hear also.

Some of Thea's family members voice their displeasure in Chapter XI that Thea spent the evening with the Mexicans as the family sits down to eat Sunday dinner. Charley, who doesn't like the Mexicans immediately begins berating Thea for her choice of company. Mrs. Kronborg suggests they change the subject. After dinner Anna chides Thea for her behavior as the two are clearing the table. She insists it was rude of Thea to spend the night singing with the Mexican when Thea won't sing in church or have any dealing with the acceptable people in the town. Thea injects that it is because the Mexicans appreciate talent that she enjoys singing for them. Anna accuses Thea of throwing that fact that Thea is talented up in Anna's face, a fact Thea tells her the family will have to learn to deal with sooner or later.

Thea leaves the kitchen and goes to her room. She realizes now she will never be able to come back to her home again, this is her last summer there. Although she had never been particularly close to any of her brothers or sisters, she felt she had always been loyal to them. She had never betrayed them or held a grudge. Now she feels as if she has been dislodged forcibly from her family because she has an ability they do not have. They are common Moonstone people while Thea is something different, a different class of person.

After the family leaves for evening church, Thea wanders out of her room and goes for a walk. She finds herself at Dr. Archie's office. She discusses with Archie what she wants out of life, that she doesn't want anything small. Archie encourages her to go after her dreams, but warns her that the journey won't be easy. Although he admires her determination, Archie admits to himself that this grown-up Thea is different from the one he knew as a child. He also realizes he would do anything he could for her.



When Thea leaves her family at the train station on the way back to Chicago, she is deeply aware this will be the last time she will see them. She is going away for good. Thea allows herself to cry in the train, but vows she will never cry like that again. She steels herself for the fight ahead of her.

Part II, Chapters X - XI Analysis

Thea's last summer at home with her family proves to be very disturbing for her. Her three oldest siblings are angry at her when she attends a Mexican ball and sings with the Mexicans but will not sing at church. They do not understand the fulfillment Thea finds in singing for people who actually enjoy music, they simply don't want the people of the town to talk about them. It is at this point Thea realizes that her siblings have turned into common Moonstone people although she had always thought they had the same special qualities she had. She feels she owes too much to her talent to be concerned about the small things of life, the things her brothers and sisters think are so important. As a result of this experience, particularly her conversation with Anna, Thea realizes she will never again return to her home.



Part III

Part III Summary

Thea is in Chicago again. She is paying for her keep by working at a church position and providing piano accompaniment for some of Bower's students. Thea has been staying at the Studio Club but tells Bowers she has to miss her lesson to look for a new room. She doesn't like the chummy atmosphere of the club. Bowers tells Thea she needs to learn to be more pleasant so that people will like her and so that she will earn more money as an artist. Thea replies that she does not want money if she has to smile for it. Mrs. Priest arrives late for her lesson. Although Mrs. Priest is a good singer Thea resents her because Mrs. Priest does not recognize her own shortcomings.

Thea learns the Harsanyi's will not be returning to Chicago but will instead stay in New York. Thea visits with Mrs. Harsanyi one last time in their old studio apartment and tells her how discouraging her singing lessons and her experience with the professional singers has been. Thea explains that Harsanyi would not have taken time with some singers, such as the popular Jessie Darcey. Mrs. Harsanyi indicates she believes working with Bowers is the wrong atmosphere for Thea.

In Chapter II Thea bounces from boarding house to boarding house unable to find one she likes. She doesn't realize that her unhappiness comes from her need to be around people who have ideals. The people whom she meets at Bower's studio and those at the boarding houses don't have these characteristics. The singer Thea dislikes most is Jessie Darcey. Darcey sings off pitch and cannot herself understand why she is a popular singer. Bowers asks Thea why she does not like Darcey. Thea responds that Darcey does not correspond with who she thinks a singer should be. Thea tells Bowers she got this ideal from Harsanyi, a statement that offends Bowers.

In Chapter III Thea meets Fred Ottenburg, who has come to see Bowers and plans to come again the next day. Thea shows up early at Bower's studio because she believes Ottenburg wants her to meet him early. Ottenburg has a way of bringing Thea out of her doldrums. He asks her to sing for him. When Bowers enters the studio Ottenburg is playing piano and Thea is singing. Bowers notices an elasticity about Thea's back that he has not noticed before. He listens to her singing with admiration.

Ottenburg arranges a paying singing position for Thea in Chapter IV. Mrs. Nathanmeyer, the lady who is sponsoring the event, can even provide appropriate clothes for Thea. Ottenburg takes Thea to meet the Nathanmeyers, sing them some songs, and try on the dresses. The Nathanmeyers are impressed with Thea's singing. They believe hers is the first real voice they have heard in Chicago.

Thea becomes sick with tonsillitis and is forced to stay in her room at the boarding house. She does not encourage visits from her housemates and seems to think they dislike her. Thea believes they are kind to her only because they are self-righteous. The



medical student in the house uses the cover of an examination as a reason to fulfill his curiosity about her. Ottenburg sends Thea fruit and long-stemmed roses. As Thea thinks to herself she realizes she wants Ottenburg as a sweetheart. In Chapter VI Ottenburg suggests Thea spend some time at Panther Canon. A friend of his owns a ranch near this canon which is full of cliff dweller ruins. Ottenburg recognizes how Thea's body language gives away how she is feeling. He sees how even the waiters at restaurants notice Thea's discouragement.

Part III Analysis

Fresh from her disheartening and disappointing summer with her family Thea finds herself in another discouraging situation in her work with Bowers. The singers for whom Thea plays accompaniment do not live up to the standards to which Thea believes these artists should try to reach. Thea is unable to ignore the singers' shortcomings and instead holds personal grudges against the faulted singers. In addition Thea is unable to find a boarding house where she is comfortable. All of these circumstances combine to leave Thea in very low spirits.

One interesting point that Thea learns from her experiences at Bower's studio is that although they are city people, the people of Chicago are not much different from those in Moonstone. She realizes that Jessie Darcey is just another Lily Fisher. Even professional singers don't live up to the ideals Thea believes they should.

Fred Ottenburg emerges as a bright spot in Thea's discouraging life. He encourages her to put herself back into her music. He is the idealist for whom she has been looking. Although she learns from Ottenburg and he brings her joy in life back, she knows she does not want him simply as a teacher or friend, but as a sweetheart.

An interesting point about Thea that is brought out in these three chapters is the communicative nature of Thea's body language. This is particularly true of Thea's back. Even Bowers notices the elastic nature of Thea's back. Her back is described as molding itself to her emotions, particularly when she is singing. Ottenburg reads this same language in Thea and realizes how tired and discouraged she is.



Part IV

Part IV Summary

As Thea travels toward the Ottenburg Ranch, she reflects on her musical career so far and believes it is a complete failure. Being out of needless business of the world gives Thea a chance to relax. Chapter II details the way Thea spends her days at the ranch. During the days she explores the cliff dwellings of Panther Canon. She chooses one of these rock rooms as her own and lines it with rugs to make a snug resting place. It is during her days of rest that Thea begins to think of music more as a sensual experience that a thing to be struggled with and conquered.

As Thea spends her days in the homes of the ancient Indian people, she begins to feel a special connection with these people. Chapter III describes the sadness she still feels coming from the rock surfaces of the dwellings. Thea feels she learns from these people just by being in their homes. One day while bathing she realizes the connection between music and water. She thinks that art and music is a way of capturing life. Just as the Indians used pottery to capture and hold water, a life-giving substance, so song is a way to capture the meaning of life.

In Chapter IV while Thea is still alone in the canon, she realizes what her next step in her career must be. She must go to Germany and study. She no longer believes there will be lucky chances or fate that will step in and get her where she wants to be. She realizes that she must take charge of her own life and achieve her goals using any means available. In Chapter V Ottenburg joins Thea in the canon. Henry Biltmer, owner of the canon, is curious about the young couple and watches them one day as they throw stones in the canon. Thea tries to out distance Ottenburg with her throwing even though she is not able. Ottenburg surprises Thea by kissing her, causing Thea to react defensively. Biltmer watches as the two talk, apparently making up, then run away beyond the curve of the canon.

In Chapter VI Thea and Ottenburg visit the canon early to watch the sun rise. Ottenburg fixes breakfast for them and they enjoy each other's company. Ottenburg takes advantage of the opportunity to feel out Thea's ideas of marriage. Thea makes it clear she is not interested in marriage. She instead challenges Ottenburg to take her to the other side of the canon where the path is more difficult but the houses more interesting. In Chapter VII Thea and Ottenburg are caught in the canon during a storm. As the two sit in Thea's rug lined rock house and wait for the rain to pass, Ottenburg again talks to Thea about how much he cares about her. Thea admits she is interested in him, but is not sure if she is in love with him or not.

Thea and Ottenburg leave Flagstaff the first of September. During their ride on the train they discuss their plans for the future. Ottenburg encourages Thea to go to Mexico with him. He promises her that if she decides not to marry him she can go back to Chicago and they will pretend their affair never happened. Thea requests only that Ottenburg not



change from the man she knew in the canon. He then leaves Thea to consider his proposal.

After Ottenburg leaves Thea, he thinks over his rash proposal. His proposal is rash because he is already married, a fact he hasn't mentioned to Thea. He had met his wife and agreed to marry her in one night. Ottenburg's parents were not happy with the match. Ottenburg is soon not happy with his wife either. After two years of marriage Ottenburg hates his wife because she is both cruel and wasteful. Following a huge fallout between Ottenburg's and his wife's families the wife agrees to live in a house in Santa Barbara owned by the Ottenburgs. She, however, will not agree to a divorce. Ottenburg is transferred to Chicago where he meets Thea. He feels comfortable getting close to Thea because he does not think she will ever agree to marriage. When Ottenburg returns to Thea at lunch time, he is surprised when she agrees to go to Mexico with him and get married. Despite his encumbrance Ottenburg tries to convince himself he will be better for Thea than any other man would be.

Part IV Analysis

Much happens in Part IV of this novel. In the canon Thea is able to relax and re-energize after what she considers wasted time in Chicago. While she explores the cliff dwellings, Thea gains a respect for these ancient people. Through her quiet time of retrospection Thea grasps certain ideas about the nature of music that had until that time evaded her. During this time Thea gains a better knowledge of both herself and her art. Thea had listened to Kennedy's stories of the cliff dwellers during their time together. When she experiences the dwellings personally she is finally able to understand Kennedy's affections for the ancient structures.

It is interesting that it is against this backdrop of the cliff dwellings that Kennedy hoped to share with Thea that Thea and Ottenburg fall in love with each other. Thea has never thought of herself as the kind of girl who would get married. Ottenburg believes this same idea about Thea. Therefore, he is surprised when Thea agrees to travel to Mexico with him where they plan to be married. Unfortunately, Ottenburg is already married.

Somewhat like Archie, Ottenburg is also the victim of a cruel wife. Ottenburg's wife convinced him to marry her in one day, before he could learn her true nature. Within two years, the two live in different houses in different states. Unlike Archie who will not get a divorce because he does not want to be disgraced, Ottenburg's wife will not agree to a divorce. Ottenburg pretends to be single and ignore the fact he has a spouse while Archie accepts his mistake and makes the best of his situation.

Despite the fact that Ottenburg will be committing bigamy by marrying Thea, he believes there are worse things that he could do. He reasons with himself that his infidelity will not hurt her as badly as marriage to another man might. Ottenburg does not seem to realize at the time that Thea will eventually find out about his marriage. He does not consider how this knowledge will hurt her.



Part V

Part V Summary

While in Denver for a stockholder meeting Archie receives a letter from Thea asking for friendship, advice and money. He makes arrangements to travel to New York to do what he can for her. First, he visits a tailor to fit himself up with proper clothes. In the second chapter Ottenburg waits to see Thea at her hotel. When she lets him come to her room she tells him Archie is coming. Ottenburg is upset that Thea plans to take money from Archie but won't take money from him. Thea reasons that if she takes money from Ottenburg it will look as if she is a "kept" woman. Ottenburg argues he has done much more for her than Archie. He tells her it is he that helped her to develop and feel comfortable in her own personality.

In Chapter III Thea visits with Ottenburg again after she has seen Archie. She is happy and relieved that she has been able to tell Archie the story of her and Ottenburg's relationship without him being angry or disappointed with her. Ottenburg suggests the three of them go to dinner together. In Chapter IV Thea, Archie and Ottenburg dine together. In the final section of this Chapter Thea prepares to set sail for Germany. Ottenburg's mother is injured in an accident and he is called away to help care for her.

When Ottenburg returns to Thea she makes him promise that he will get Dr. Archie his money back if Thea is unable to. While in Thea's room Ottenburg spies the score that Wunsch gave her. He asks Thea if she has any idea where her first teacher is. Thea replies she does not know where he is but that she did sing successfully for Harsanyi. Thea wakes the next day excited to board the ship that will take her to Germany.

Part V Analysis

This section is very interesting in that it is here that Archie and Ottenburg first meet. Although both men obviously love and care for Thea very much, there seems to be a bit of jealousy particularly on Ottenburg's part. Ottenburg tries to convince Thea he has had a bigger impact on Thea's life than Archie. Thea is at her best when she is near both Archie and Ottenburg. When Ottenburg is forced to leave Thea because his mother has been injured, Thea loses some of her joy. Although she repeatedly tells Ottenburg she needs to be away from him, she loses her shine when she is away from him.

It is interesting the way in which Archie reacts to the news that Thea was romantically involved with a married man. Archie's only concern seems to be that Ottenburg was good to Thea while they were together. One must take into consideration that Archie was also the victim of an unhappy marriage, much like Ottenburg. Thea is happy that Archie does not think badly of her because of her relationship with Ottenburg. Note that Cather does not include any details of Thea and Ottenburg's time in Mexico.



Part VI, Chapters I - VII

Part VI, Chapters I - VII Summary

Ten years have passed since Thea left the United States for Germany. Archie has earned wealth and a new position with the San Felipe Mining Company. He is no longer just a country doctor. While he takes messages from his secretary Archie learns a character by the name of Jasper Flight wants the company to grub-stake him again. Although the secretary seems disdainful of the old, eccentric man, Archie speaks of him fondly and agrees to the stake. Ottenburg stops by Archie's office and is admitted. The two men greet each other warmly and make dinner plans.

Archie now lives a comfortable life in Denver. His wife was killed in an explosion while attempting to clean furniture with gasoline. The explosion burned Archie's house to the ground and gave him good reason to move to Denver to pursue his mining ventures. While still living in temporary quarters in a hotel one of the mines Archie had invested in began to give forth a good deal of silver. At this point Archie became a rich man. He built a house in Denver which is tended by three Japanese boys. These boys prepare for Archie's dinner parties and look after Archie's visitors.

In Chapter II Archie and Ottenburg met at Archie's home for dinner. Ottenburg asks the doctor why he does not remarry to which Archie replies he'd rather not take his chances on getting another bad woman. The conversation then turns to politics, then to Thea. Although Thea has been performing in New York for two seasons, Dr. Archie has yet to see her. He tells Ottenburg he is afraid he will not properly appreciate the music and that he will not recognize her voice. Ottenburg assures Archie he will still recognize Thea and that her way of singing makes one appreciate the music.

Through their conversation Archie learns that Ottenburg is still married although his wife has been in a sanitarium for nearly seven years. Laws will not allow him a divorce now. The two then discuss Thea's mother and Thea's decision not to return home when her mother was ill and dying. Ottenburg defends Thea's decision and insists she had no choice but to stay where she had been offered a tremendous singing part. Ottenburg adds that staying away from her mother made Thea herself physically sick, but she gave a good performance and made great progress in her goals by not leaving. The only other Kronborg Archie stays in touch with is Thor. He is currently employed as Dr. Archie's chauffeur.

After Ottenburg leaves, Archie thinks back over his life. He realizes his college years and the years he spend in Moonstone with Thea are the only times he would like to relive. Although he didn't realize it at the time he had more in common with Thea than he realized. Their continuing friendship has been a bright point in his life.

Chapter III gives the reader information about what has happened with the Kronborg family in the past ten years. Mr. Kronborg has died of liver cancer and his wife began to



decline after his death. Archie visits Mrs. Kronborg and gets the feeling she wants to see Thea. He writes to Thea asking her to come home but Thea is unable. Thea writes her mother begging her to hold on for six months until her part in Dresden is finished. At this point Thea plans to take her mother back to Germany with her.

Mrs. Kronborg tells Archie how she always enjoyed Thea's voice when the girl would sing around the house as a child. She feels she gave Thea the best chance she could to make her way in world. Mrs. Kronborg is only sorry she was not able to help Thea more financially. She states that she misses Thea but she realizes bright children do not stay at home as dull children do. These talented children must make their own way and their own name in the world.

In Chapter V Archie finally makes it to New York to hear Thea sing. Archie describes his first few minutes of seeing Thea as being like buck fever. After listening to her sing, he realizes how little he knew of her. Archie goes to Thea's hotel after the performance in an attempt to see his friend. He waits for her in the lobby. When she finally appears Archie is disturbed by how old she looks. Thea asks him to come back tomorrow when she will be more herself.

Archie returns to his hotel in Chapter VI. He has an invitation from Ottenburg to call on him that evening. Ottenburg asks where Archie has been. Archie tells him he has been to see Thea. The two discuss her performance. The next day Archie visits Thea as planned. He is relieved that she no longer looks as old or worn as she did the night before. Ottenburg joins the two and they spend their time catching up.

In Chapter VII Thea, Archie and Ottenburg plan to spend another evening talking when Thea is alerted one of the other singers is ill. Management is asking her to finish singing this lady's part. Thea must prepare in about an hour to go on stage. She turns pale but steadfastly agrees to do the part. The men help as Thea prepares to leave for the theater. Archie and Ottenburg buy standing room tickets to the performance and are amazed at how beautifully Thea conquers the part on such short notice. The audience is in awe of her.

At the conclusion of Chapter VII Thea invites Archie and Ottenburg to see her sing the part of Fricka, which she describes as a really beautiful part. She tells Dr. Archie she believes the way her hair will be dressed will remind him of Mrs. Kronborg. The three part with Thea's promise to finally spend some time alone with Archie.

Part VI, Chapters I - VII Analysis

Cather's novel skips details of the ten year period when Thea is in Germany learning and making a name for herself. She uses Archie and Ottenburg's conversations as a way to catch the reader up on the important occurrences that have happened in the missing years. Through his investments in the silver mines, Archie has become rich. As information in the novel states, Archie is one of those people who deserves to live a comfortable life. His wife is dead and although he refuses to credit his happiness to her



death, he now lives in a comfortable way that he would not have been able to if she were still alive. It is poetic justice that Mrs. Archie came to her end while cleaning her house. Even those in Moonstone admitted the explosion that killed her was necessary because there would have been no other way to kill such a mean person.

Meanwhile, Thea has become a well known singer. Although she is still insecure about her talent and her abilities, she has the self-confidence that allows her to take a part on a moment's notice and do well with it. Although Archie expects a reunion with a grown up version of the young girl in Moonstone, he has to admit he is proud of the woman he meets. Archie is not well versed in musical terms or the lifestyle of musicians, so Ottenburg does him a service in filling in the gaps for him. In the passages where Ottenburg explains the individuality of Thea's tone and style to Archie, it is also explained to the reader. This conversational tone makes a much better impact than if Cather had just matter of factly listed the credits of Thea's voice in a paragraph written from a narrator's point of view.

Notice that while Archie and Ottenburg appear to be good friends, there also seems to be a bit of rivalry for Thea's affections. Although Archie has known Thea longer than Ottenburg, Ottenburg seems to think he knows Thea better, particularly her musical nature. Notice Ottenburg seems to be keeping tabs on Archie, particularly when it comes to his visits with Thea. There are few times Archie visits his old friend that Ottenburg does not show up either expected or unexpected. This may indicate a bit of jealousy on Ottenburg's part. There is also the continual hint of Archie remarrying. It may be that because Archie is now free from the constraints of Mrs. Archie, Ottenburg is afraid Archie will marry Thea. This idea, however, seems to be the farthest thing from Archie's mind.



Part VI, Chapters VII - Epilogue

Part VI, Chapters VII - Epilogue Summary

Ottenburg spends an evening with Landry, an entertainer who owned his own home in New York. The two discuss music and Thea. They are both very impressed with her voice. In Chapter VIII Thea again dines with Ottenburg and Archie. Thea is distressed because she is finally being allowed to sing the part of Sieglinde, a part for which she has had prepared for two years. However, her responsibilities of singing the part will take time away from visiting with Archie. Ottenburg leaves early allowing Thea and Archie time to talk. Archie asks her if she hasn't reconsidered marrying Ottenburg. Thea comments Ottenburg is not able to marry. Archie chides her for not having enough of a personal life. Through their private talk Thea assures Archie she is the same girl with the same values she had while in Moonstone. She still measures things by the six hundred dollars bequeathed to her at Kennedy's death. Archie admits to Thea that he is a romantic and that Thea has been his romance.

In Chapter XI Thea's Thursday before her big performance does not go well. When she tries to settle down for sleep she finds herself restless. In order to relax and go to sleep, she imagines being in the house she grew up in, going to sleep in her upstairs room, she wakes the next morning rested and fresh.

At Friday's performance all Thea's dear friends are present at the opera. Ottenburg and Archie have seats while Harsanyi and his wife are in a box. Harsanyi's wife expectantly waits to see how Harsanyi will receive Thea's performance. After listening for a few moments, Harsanyi is enthralled with Thea's voice. The crowning glory of Thea's performance is seen in the face of a Mexican who listens to her performance from the top gallery of the theater. Spanish Johnny is in New York performing with a Mexican band in a circus. He is deeply moved by Thea's performance. He waits on the sidewalk after Thea's performance. Although Thea does not look up at him he is close enough to touch her. The smile on his face as he leaves the theater shows how deeply he is moved by her performance.

The epilogue recounts Moonstone twenty years after Thea has left. Tillie still talks of Thea. The people of Moonstone feel sorry for Tillie because they think Thea should give her more money or take her to New York to live with her. Tillie, however, has been given more by her niece than most people realize. Tillie spent a dreamy week in Kansas City with Thea. That week is the pride of the older woman's life. Despite the way Thea left Moonstone, she is now the pride of the town.

Part VI, Chapters VII - Epilogue Analysis

In the conclusion of the novel Thea does all of her old companions, friends and supporters proud by her Friday performance. The effect her voice has on people is



summed up by the smile on Spanish Johnny's face when he walks away from the theater after the performance. The novel leaves the reader with a good feeling that if one works hard enough toward one's goal, they can achieve their dreams.

The epilogue, however, introduces a bit of a mystery. It is noted that when Tillie visits Thea in Kansas City, Tillie is treated to dinner with Thea's husband. The book, however, includes no details of Thea getting married. This comment leaves the reader's imagination open as to whom Thea might have married.



Characters

Thea Kronborg

Thea Kronborg is the heroine of the novel. Thea is first introduced as an eleven-year-old child who almost dies of undiagnosed pneumonia. She is a Swedish girl with a distinct look that sets her apart from other girls her age. Her father is the Methodist minister of Moonstone. Although Thea does not profess religion, she is very upset by those who claim to believe the Bible but don't follow its principles. For example, Thea is deeply disturbed by an incident involving a tramp who is forced to leave town. Instead of leaving the town the dirty tramp climbs into the town's standpipe and dies. Moonstone's drinking water is contaminated by the corpse and many die from illnesses related to the contaminated water. Thea believes if people lived the way the Bible dictated, this tragedy would not have taken place.

Thea is known by a few people in her hometown of Moonstone as being musically talented. Thea gets her start in music taking piano lessons from Wunsch, a used up old drunk who was once a great musician. After Wunsch is forced to leave town Thea becomes the town's piano teacher. Her parents encourage her to drop out of school and teach piano full time. Thea has never been one to talk a lot or well. It is only when she sings or recites that Thea is able to communicate. She spends much of her time, especially after she has her own room, thinking and reading. Although she is not the best speaker Thea writes well.

Ray Kennedy, the man who wanted to marry Thea, is killed on his job as a freight engine conductor. Upon his death Thea benefits from his six hundred dollar life insurance policy. At Kennedy's request Thea uses this money to take piano lessons in Chicago for one winter. After an argument with her family Thea returns to Chicago a second winter with a vow never to return to Moonstone until she has done something to become successful. During her second winter in Chicago Thea takes voice lessons, a undertaking she considers a failure.

A friend sends Thea to Panther Canon where she is able to rejuvenate from her exhaustion. At the end of the summer Thea agrees to marry this friend, Fred Ottenburg. Unfortunately Ottenburg is already married. When Thea discovers this she returns to Chicago and makes plans to go to Germany to study music. When Thea returns from Germany she has made a name for herself as a singer. Although she worries whether she is truly doing her best, her old friends are proud of the person she has become.

Doctor Howard Archie

Doctor Howard Archie is the only doctor in the small town of Moonstone. He is perhaps Thea's best and oldest friend and supporter. Archie saved Thea's life when he discovered her lying sick with pneumonia in her parent's house. In their excitement over



their new baby Thea's parents had neglected to get medical treatment for the girl. Archie feels Thea's skull often because he believes there is something different inside this skull than other children's skulls. Archie often wishes he had a daughter like Thea. He believes that if he had a daughter like her, life would be more meaningful.

Archie is described as an idealist, much like Thea. He is the kind of person who does not belong in Moonstone. He has a respect for human life and does not like to hear course jokes about death or birth. He has a special respect for the bodies of women and children and is at his best when dealing with them. Archie also holds the idea that the human body is governed by something greater than what can be explained by anatomy.

While Thea is a child Archie supports her emotionally. He is a sounding board for the young girl to bounce her ideas and dreams off of. Both Thea and Archie share the same intellectual and idealistic natures. As an adult, Archie supports Thea financially by helping her fund her trip to Germany. Without Archie's help Thea might never have realized success in her singing career.

Phillip Frederick Ottenburg

Fred Ottenburg is the head of the Chicago branch of the family's beer business. He is Thea's first and only true love. Ottenburg has a love of life and a joviality that brings out Thea's best side. He meets Thea when he visits Bowers studio looking for promising new talent. Although she had never considered herself the marrying type, she agrees to marry Ottenburg. Ottenburg, however, has a secret he attempts to keep from Thea. Like Dr. Archie, Ottenburg is married to a mean woman. He agreed to marry this woman in one night and later discovered her true nature. Although the two are separated Ottenburg's wife refuses to grant him a divorce. Ottenburg rationalizes that his lie will hurt Thea less than her marriage to another type of man might hurt her.

Ray Kennedy

Ray Kennedy is a thirty year old freight train conductor who plans to marry Thea as soon as she is old enough. Kennedy and Thea are close friends. Thea respects Kennedy's honesty and his willingness to work hard. Thea feels comfortable with Kennedy because he does not understand the depth of the soul and her intelligence. He does not set off any thoughts that excite or stimulate Thea. It is Kennedy, however, who gives Thea the funds she needs to go to Chicago the first time. Kennedy hopes these lessons will give Thea self-confidence and the ability to be a better piano teacher. Thea takes these lessons much further.

Juan

From the time she is a small child Spanish Johnny knows Thea will be a great musician. He remembers a time when he was playing his guitar and singing outside his house and Thea came up to him. Although she did not know the song he was singing Thea joined



him in singing and Johnny recognized the beauty and promise her voice held. Spanish Johnny has an interesting relationship with music himself. He has a tendency of getting caught up in the joy of performing for people and running away from home to pursue his music. His wife waits patiently for Johnny to return so she can nurse him back to health.

At the end of the novel it is Spanish Johnny who comments most decisively on the success of Thea's career. His smile as he walks away from Thea's performance lets the reader know that Thea is a success in Spanish Johnny's book.

Herr Wunsch

Herr Wunsch is Thea's first music teacher. He teaches her piano and also encourages her to try to study one day in Germany. Although Wunsch was once a professional musician and music professor, he is now a broken down old man who likes to drink. Although Wunsch believes Thea is a promising student, he is afraid he will jinx her if he holds any high expectations for her. When Wunsch is forced to leave town, he fixes up a score of "Orpheus" to give Thea as a parting gift. This score becomes Thea's most prized possession.

Andor Harsanyi

Andor Harsanyi is Thea's piano teacher when she first goes to Chicago to study. Harsanyi is the first person to whom Thea becomes close outside the people of her home town of Moonstone. It is Harsanyi who first suggests to Thea that her natural and true talent lies in her voice and not in piano. Harsanyi arranges for Thea to study with Madison Bowers, the best vocal teacher in Chicago. Although he believes he is doing his best for the girl, Thea's experience with Bowers turns out to be very discouraging and disappointing. Harsanyi and his wife remain friends with Thea through out her life.

Madison Bowers

Madison Bowers is the vocal teacher from whom Thea takes voice lessons. Although he has a good voice and good musical experience Bowers is not a good teacher because he has not empathy for his students. Although Bowers appears to try to encourage Thea to be less severe and more friendly, he actually admires her guarded nature. It is in Bowers studio that Thea meets Ottenburg.

Thor Kronborg

Thor is Thea's youngest brother. He is the only sibling with whom she has a close relationship. Their relationship is mostly due to the fact that Thea practically raised the child. Thea takes Thor everywhere she goes by pushing him around in a child's express wagon. It is only while Thea is practicing piano that their mother makes Thor leave Thea alone. After he is grown up, Thor works as Archie's chauffeur.



Peter Kronborg

Peter Kronborg is Thea's father. He is the minister of the local Methodist church. He is not close to his daughter nor does he understand her. Kronborg cares only about what the people of the town say about him and his family. The only decisive thing Kronborg does for his daughter is to insist that she play organ and lead singing at the prayer meetings. Kronborg uses Thea's job of giving piano lessons as a reason to add a new room onto the house.

Anna Kronborg

Anna is the name given to both Thea's mother and her older sister. Thea's mother recognizes her daughter's talent and makes it possible for Thea to pursue this talent. Mrs. Kronborg tries to keep the peace between her musical and talented daughter and her non-musical family. It distresses Thea greatly that she is not able to return to Moonstone to visit her mother when her mother becomes ill. Thea also does not attend her mother's funeral.

Anna Kronborg

Thea's mother and oldest sister are both named Anna. Thea's sister Anna does not like Thea, a feeling Thea does not recognize until the summer after she comes back from Chicago. Anna openly chides her sister for spending the evening singing with the Mexicans when she refuses to sing in church. It is at this point that Thea realizes her sister does not understand or appreciate her talent. Anna is one of those people who professes to be a Christian but doesn't follow the principles set forth in the Bible.



Objects/Places

French Painting

Thea visits this painting often at the Chicago Art Institute. She considers it her painting because she relates to the emotions of the girl in the picture.

Czerny's

This exercise book laid open on the Kronborg's piano lets the reader know Thea takes piano lessons.

Piece Picture

A rendition of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow created from cloth by Fritz Kohler. Thea loves to look at this picture when she visits the Kohler's home for her lessons.

Mrs Kohler's Linden Trees

It is under these trees that Wunsch hopes to be buried when he dies. After he leaves Moonstone, however, it is uncertain where his final resting place is located.

Child's Express Wagon

Thea uses this vehicle to transport herself and the young Thor around the town of Moonstone.

Mexico Town

Mexico Town is a Mexican settlement in Moonstone where Thea goes often to visit Spanish Johnny and sing part songs with the Mexicans.

A Tattered Score of

Wunsch fixes up this score and gives it to Thea as a going away gift when he leaves Moonstone for good. Thea keeps this score with her and even takes it with her to Germany when she goes there to study.



Saxony

Saxony is the location where Ray's caboose is hit by another train and he is killed.

Bowers' Studio

This is the location where Thea and Ottenburg first meet.

Panther Canon

It is this canon and its cliff dwelling habitations that refresh and renew Thea's spirit.

A Little Blue Silk Bag of Orris-root Powder

Thea admits to Ottenburg she stole this sachet from a Chicago store.



Themes

Coming of Age

The idea of coming of age is a theme used frequently in novels. Stories with this theme generally begin when the main character is a small child and follow this child through its formative years. In the case of "The Song of the Lark" Cather traces the development of a great singer from her childhood to the achievement of her success. When Thea begins her journey she is the daughter of a Methodist minister growing up in a small town. She takes piano lessons from Wunsch, an old broken down man who was once a professional musician. A few people in the town including Thea's mother, the town doctor, Wunsch and a Mexican called Spanish Johnny recognize that Thea has an unusual talent for music. Although she is talented, Thea struggles with her piano. Her teacher suggests it is voice she should concentrate on instead of piano. Although Thea's voice is good, she is tormented by the discouragement she feels when she realizes her fellow singers do not share her same ideals and values. It is not until Thea travels to Germany that she is able to make a name for herself as a singer.

Along with the development of Thea's talent, Cather also details the development of Thea's body and emotions. Thea grows from a small child into a beautiful woman with whom many men could fall in love. Thea's single-mindedness about her music, however, leads many people, including some members of her family, to believe she is selfish and self-centered. It is only with people who share Thea's ideals and her love for music that she feels comfortable. Fred Ottenburg is one of these people. Thea has little time or patience for people who want superficial relationships. For this reason Thea appears to be emotionally distant from most people. She treasures her few close friends and wants them to see her at her best.

Success

Success, or more specifically the characteristics that define success, is another theme presented in "The Song of the Lark." While Thea becomes successful according to the standards of the world, she still wonders if she is the artist she should be. Thea's idea of success is not built upon how much money she makes or how well she is liked by her audience but by her own standards of perfection. Had Thea seen the expression on Spanish Johnny's face after he heard her perform, she would have realized how great of a success she had become.

Thea's friend Archie, on the other hand, becomes successful by the world's definition of success. His work in investments pays off and he becomes a rich man. It is at this point that Archie begins to enjoy a comfortable life. As Moonstone's town doctor Archie was very unhappy with his lack of intellectual stimulation. He was required to take this first available job because he was married just out of medical school and needed a way to support his family. Archie was often disappointed in the failure of this marriage. Although



he stayed married to his wife, his marriage was unhappy and unfulfilling. It is only after his wife dies and Archie is able to move away from Moonstone that he begins to enjoy his successful life.

Although Ray Kennedy's life was short, his life was successful. Kennedy wanted to marry Thea. Although he didn't realize how great Thea's talent was, he encouraged her to spend time in Chicago and take lessons from a real musician. It is his death that allows Thea to finally be able to take these lessons. Just before Kennedy dies as he thinks back over his life, he believes that in Thea he finally chose a winner. Thea realizes that in a way she owes much of her success to Kennedy.

Friendship

Friendship is another theme that is discussed in Cather's novel. At the conclusion of the novel Thea gives a performance attended by her friends Archie, Ottenburg, Harsanyi and Spanish Johnny. Although Thea could have drawn to her a larger circle of friends by being pleasant and "grinning" like Lily Fisher or Jessie Darcey she chose instead to be true to herself. At the conclusion of the novel she knows that those people who surround her are her true friends and not casual acquaintances.

One of Thea's more prominent personality traits is that she refuses to be friends with people to placate them. She also refuses to choose her friends based on popular opinion. Two of her best friends in Moonstone are looked down upon by society. Her piano teacher Wunsch is termed by most as being unacceptable. Although he is run out of town after a heavy drinking spell, Thea goes to the train depot to see him off. Thea also enjoys spending time with the musically inclined Mexicans, a people with whom she has a special connection. Even Thea's family is offended when Thea spends time singing with the Mexicans, particularly her friend Spanish Johnny.

Style

Point of View

"The Song of the Lark" is told through the third person point of view. Although the narrator is all knowing and includes insights into all of the characters thoughts and motives, the emphasis of the story is on Thea and her development as a woman and a singer. Although a first person point of view might have worked for this book, it is better suited to the third person point of view. This is because third person point of view allows the narrator to share information about other characters, even when Thea isn't part of the action.

Thea's story is told mostly through exposition. Throughout the novel Cather describes the lifestyles and backgrounds of different characters. She also puts much emphasis on describing the settings on which the action occurs. There is not a great deal of dialogue. This lack of dialogue may simply be a characteristic of Cather's writing style, or it may make a statement about Thea's quiet and non-conversational personality.

Setting

There are a variety of different settings included in the novel "Song of the Lark." For Cather setting is extremely important to the development of the story. Thea's story begins in the fictional town of Moonstone, Colorado. It is interesting that Cather gives Thea's hometown the name of a gem stone, especially since Thea likes gem stones so much. Important settings in Moonstone include the Kohler's home where Thea takes piano lessons, Mexico Town where Spanish Johnny lives and Thea's room in her parent's house.

Thea then moves to Chicago where she studies piano one winter with Harsanyi and voice the following winter with Bowers. During the summer between these two winters, Thea returns home to Moonstone one last time. Important settings in Chicago include the Art Institute where Thea's favorite painting is displayed, Harsanyi's apartment, and Bower's studio. Thea rents a room from a German woman and her daughter her first winter in Chicago. During her next visit to Chicago Thea bounces from boarding house to boarding house unable to find one that she likes and is happy with.

The next major action of the novel takes place in Panther Canon. It is this land of cliff dwellers where Thea regains her strength and her motivation for becoming an artist. These cliff dwellings are also important because they are a place where Thea and Ray used to talk about visiting. It is detailed in the novel that Thea and Ottenberg travel to Mexico but the details of this trip are not included in the novel.

The action of the novel then moves to New York where Thea travels after she learns Ottenberg is already married. After spending a short time in New York Thea moves on to Germany to study music. Like her time in Mexico the novel does not discuss her time



studying in Germany. Thea then returns to New York after she has earned a name for herself as an artist. It is in New York that her friends and supporters including Ottenberg, Archie and Spanish Johnny see her perform.

Language and Meaning

The language of this story is beautiful and free flowing. Cather allows her reader to see the settings she describes as she tells Thea's story. There is little dialogue but in the dialogue Cather attempt to distinguish between different characters especially when the characters are of different nationalities. For instance the Mexicans are given slightly different speech patterns than the native English speaking people. In times of surprise, such as when they hear Thea singing with the Mexicans, the Kohlers revert to speaking in German, their native language. Wunsch, Thea's first piano teacher, is also given speech patters of a native German who has learned English as a second language.

Structure

Cather divides her novel into six different sections, with each section corresponding to a particular section of Thea's life. The first section of the novel is the longest section covering about one-third of the book. This section, entitled "Friends of Childhood," details Thea's growing up years in Moonstone. It ends when Archie and Thea leave Moonstone for Chicago the first time. The second section carries the same name as the novel, "The Song of the Lark." This section charts Thea's first winter in Chicago and the summer after she returns to Moonstone.

The third section of the novel "Stupid Faces" is one of the shortest sections in the book. Information in this section covers Thea's time as a student with Madison Bowers. The section called "The Ancient People" details Thea's time in Panther Canon. "Doctor Archie's Venture" records Thea's time in New York before she goes to study in Germany. The final section of the novel "Kronborg" describes Thea's success as an artist. A closing "Epilogue" describes Tillie's pride in her niece's success.

Each of these six sections is subdivided into several different chapters. Each of these chapters is notated only with a roman numeral. Some sections have as few as five chapters while the longest section has twenty chapters.

The novel only deals with one plot, Thea's development into an artist, there are no subplots. Although there is quite a bit of description in the novel, this description is very crucial to the story line. Without these descriptions Thea's story would not be nearly as deep or as rich as Cather has presented it. Even with the long description passages, this book draws the reader in and keeps them interested in the story.



Quotes

"The idea! he muttered; 'to be such an ass at his age about the seventh! And to feel no responsibility about the little girl. Silly old goat! The baby would have got into the world somehow; they always do. But a nice little girl like that - she's worth the whole litter.'" Part I, Chapter I, pg. 8

"No, he couldn't say that it was different from any other child's head, though he believed that there was something very different about her." Part I, Chapter I, pg. 9.

"It was his pupil's power of application, her rugged will, that interested him. He had lived for so long among people whose sole ambition was to get something for nothing that he learned not to look for seriousness in anyone. Now that he by chance encountered it, it recalled standards, ambitions, a society long forgot." Part I, Chapter IV, pg. 27.

"From the time she moved up into the wing, Thea began to live a double life. During the day, when the hours were full of tasks, she was one of the Kronborg children, but at night she was a different person." Part I, Chapter VIII, pg. 53.

"Lilly Fisher was pretty, and she was willing to be just as big a fool as people wanted her to be. Very well; Thea Kronborg wasn't. She would rather be hated than stupid, any day." Part I, Chapter IX, pg. 58.

"Mrs. Kronborg watched her daughter thoughtfully. She found her more interesting than her other children, and she took her more seriously, without thinking much about why she did." Part I, Chapter IX, pg. 59.

"Wunsch had noticed before that when his pupil read anything in verse that character of her voice changed altogether; it was no longer the voice which spoke the speech of Moonstone. It was a soft, rich contralto, and she read quietly; the feeling was in the voice itself, not indicated by emphasis or change of pitch." Part I, Chapter XI, pg. 70,

"He rested Thea because he was so different; because, though he often told her interesting things, he never set lively fancies going in her head; because he never misunderstood her, and because he never, by any chance, for a single instant, understood her! Yes, with Ray she was safe; by him she would never be discovered!" Part I, Chapter XV, pg. 99.

"She curled up on the seat again with that warm, sleepy feeling of the friendliness of the world - which nobody keeps very long, and which she was to lose early and irrevocably." Part I, Chapter XVI, pg. 113.

"The fear of the tongue, that terror of little towns, is usually felt more keenly by the minister's family than by other households." Part I, Chapter XVII, pg. 114.

"It seems to me, Doctor Archie, that the whole town's to blame. I'm to blame, myself. I know he saw me hold my nose when he went by. Father's to blame. If he believes the



Bible, he ought to have gone to the calaboose and cleaned that man up and taken care of him. That's what I can't understand; do people believe the Bible, or don't they?" Part I, Chapter XVIII, pg. 125.

"She felt as if she were being pulled in two, between the desire to go away forever and the desire to stay forever. She had only twenty years - no time to lose." Part I, Chapter XVIII, pg. 127.

"There is no work of art so big or so beautiful that it was not once all contained in some youthful body, like this one which lay on the floor in the moonlight, pulsing with ardor and anticipation." Part I, Chapter XVIII, pg. 127.

"That simple, humble, faithful something in Ray's eyes went straight to Thea's heart. She did feel comfortable with him, and happy to give him so much happiness. It was the first time she had ever been conscious of that power to bestow intense happiness by simply being near anyone. She always remembered this day as the beginning of that knowledge. She bent over him and put her lips softly to his cheek." Part I, Chapter XIX, pg. 133.

"In these two good women Thea found faithful friends, and in their house she found the quiet and peace which helped her to support the great experiences of that winter." Part II, Chapter II, pg. 158.

"Every artist makes himself born. It is very much harder than the other time, and longer. Your mother did not bring anything into the world to play piano. That you must bring into the world yourself." Part II, Chapter III, pg. 160.

"Now, I think you have vocation, but for the voice, not for the piano. If you knew' - he stopped and sighed - 'if you knew how fortunate I sometimes think you. With the voice the way is so much shorter, the rewards are more easily won. In your voice I think Nature herself did for you what it would take you many years to do at the piano.'" Part II, Chapter VII, pg. 190.

"See, here we were, you and I and this instrument" - he tapped the piano - "three good friends, working so hard. But all the while there was something fighting us: your gift, and the woman you were meant to be. When you find your way to that gift and to that woman, you will be at peace. In the beginning it was an artist that you wanted to be; well, you may be an artist, always." Part II, Chapter VII, pg. 191.

"Now they had all grown up and become persons. They faced each other as individuals, and she saw that Anna and Gus and Charley were among the people whom she had always recognized as her natural enemies." Part II, Chapter II, pg. 217.

"They were calm and cheerful; they did not know, they did not understand. Something pulled in her - and broke. She cried all the way to Denver, and that night, in her berth, she kept sobbing and waking herself. But when the sun rose in the morning, she was far away. It was all behind her, and she knew that she would never cry like that again.



People live through such pain only once; pain comes again, but it finds a tougher surface." Part II, Chapter 11, pg. 222.

"Chicago was not so different from Moonstone, after all, and Jessie Darcey was only Lily Fisher under another name." Part III, Chapter 2, pg. 236.

"So far she had failed. Her two years in Chicago had not resulted in anything. She had failed with Harsanyi, and she had made no great progress with her voice. She had come to believe that whatever Bowers had taught her was of secondary importance, and that in the essential things she had made no advance. Her student life closed behind her, like the forest, and she doubted whether she could go back to it if she tried." Part IV, Chapter 1, pg. 266.

"It was while she was in this abstracted state, waiting for the clock to strike, that Thea at last made up her mind what she was going to try to do in the world, and that she was going to go to Germany to study without further loss of time. Only by the merest chance had she ever got to Panther Canon. There was certainly no kindly Providence that directed one's life; and one's parents did not in the least care what became of one, so long as one did not misbehave and endanger their comfort. One's life was at the mercy of blind chance. She had better take it in her own hands and lose everything than meekly draw the plough under the rod of parental guidance. She had seen it when she was at home last summer - the hostility of comfortable, self-satisfied people toward any serious effort." Part IV, Chapter IV, pg. 276.

"I began the world on six hundred dollars, and it was the price of a man's life. Ray Kennedy had worked hard and been sober and denied himself, and when he died he had six hundred dollars to show for it. I always measure things by that six hundred dollars, just as I measure high buildings by the Moonstone standpipe. There are standards we can't get away from." Part VI, Chapter IX, pg. 393.

"Do you know what they really taught me?" she came out suddenly. "They taught me the inevitable hardness of human life. No artist gets far who doesn't know that. And you can't know it with your mind. You have to realize it in your body; deep. It's an animal sort of feeling. I sometimes think it's the strongest of all." Part VI, Chapter X, pg. 397.



Topics for Discussion

Consider the idea of success as presented in the novel. How is it that some characters, such as Thea, have talent and use it to become successful while others, like Wunsch and Spanish Johnny, never reach success even though they have talent? Explain your answer.

Identify the sacrifices Thea made in order to pursue her career, in particular the way she "abandoned" her family and didn't return, even for the funerals of her mother and father. In your opinion are these sacrifices proof of her dedication to her talent, or was she just being selfish?

Consider the impact of Ray Kennedy and his death on Thea and her career. Describe at least two ways in which this tragedy helped to advance her career.

Explain the differences between natural ability and learned ability. In your opinion, why does it take so long for Thea to find a teacher who recognizes and encourages her to pursue her natural ability to sing?

Consider the way in which Moonstone's opinion of Thea changed after she became successful. Although the people were proud of Thea do you think they ever truly appreciated her talent? Pick one or two people who knew Thea as a child in Moonstone and describe how Thea's success impacted their lives.

Thea seems to draw her emotional color from those around her. If she is around happy people and a supportive environment, she is happy and well adjusted. If her environment is depressing, however, Thea becomes very depressed and low. Do you believe this emotional shadowing helped Thea's career? Why or why not?

Although Thea's story is a success story, it is not one that would be considered inspiring. How do the elements of tragedy and sacrifice that Cather weaves into her novel make Thea's story true to life and grounded instead of reading like a fairy tale?

Do you admire Thea? Why or why not?

In what ways did Thea's youth in Moonstone influence her singing?

Compare and contrast Archie and Ottenburg. In what ways are they similar? How are they different?

Why do you think Cather omits Thea and Ottenburg's time in Mexico. What impact does this have on the story?