

# **The Truth According to Us Study Guide**

## **The Truth According to Us by Annie Barrows**

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# Plot Summary

"The Truth According to Us" by Annie Barrows is a Depression-era historical fiction that explores the secrets of the Romeyn family of Macedonia, WV. Twelve-year-old Willa's determination to prove her ferocity and devotion lead her to discover long-hidden family secrets as she strives to protect her father from falling in love with Layla Beck, a writer researching the town's history. Meanwhile, Aunt Jottie's journey to acquire security for Willa and her sister turns to a path of self-discovery when Willa unveils Felix's darkest secret. "The Truth According to Us" is an interesting novel that clearly captures the souls of its characters as they struggle to reconcile the inevitability of history with the reality of their present existences.

The summer that she is twelve years old, Willa Romeyn determines to be ferocious and devoted when she begins to suspect she is being lied to. At the same time, Layla Beck is sent to Macedonia, WV to write the town's history after her Senator father financially cuts her off, and Layla boards with the Romeyn family. Eager to become Layla's confidante, Willa spies on the boarder's research, learning about Vause Hamilton who stole money from the mill and died in the mill fire but is oddly connected to Jottie. When Willa expresses shame of her family, Jottie begins pondering how to provide her nieces with security.

After seeing her father, Felix, emerge from Coeey's Red Apple, Willa begins to suspect him of being a bootlegger, and her continued investigations uncover more about the friendship between Felix, Vause and Jottie. Determined to make the History of Macedonia worth reading, Layla seeks assistance from several locals, including Jottie. When Felix shows an interest in Layla through his flirting, Jottie disapproves wholeheartedly, while Willa grows to hate Layla and determines that she will protect Felix from the writer. Layla is obviously falling in love with Felix, and on the frequent occasions that Jottie thinks of Vause, she reminds herself that she has a duty to hate him for what he put her family through.

Emmett disapproves of Jottie spending her life tending to Felix's demands, and after several chance encounters with Sol, Jottie escorts Layla to the mill where she agrees to a date with Sol, seeing him as a means of providing security for Willa and Bird. During her snooping, Willa discovers several of her father's cases in Mr. Tare Russell's basement; she finds a lot of money and a coat that obviously belonged to Vause as there is a picture of Jottie in the pocket. Jottie secretly dates Sol until Felix finds out and reminds her that she owes her brother loyalty, and he hates Sol for accusing Felix of being involved in the mill fire that took Vause's life. When Layla gets wind of these accusations, she feels that Felix is poorly misused.

When the mill workers strike, Sol is fired for colluding with the union, and Jottie meets with him to apologize for causing him to lose his job. She refuses his proposal, but on her birthday, she sneaks off to a horse show in Charles Town where she agrees to marry Sol. Willa lies to her family so she can stay home to interfere in Felix's romance with Layla, and when Jottie realizes that Willa is missing, she rushes home.



Felix is furious when Sol announces his engagement to Jottie, and trying to dissuade his sister from the match, he informs her that Vause never loved her, causing Jottie to cry. Unable to bear her father's cruelty or her aunt's tears, Willa emerges to inform Jottie that she found Vause's coat in Mr. Russell's basement and the photo of Jottie obviously indicates his love for her. It also proves Felix's involvement in the mill fire, causing Layla to refuse Felix as Jottie banishes him from her home.

Now that she knows Vause was not a liar, Jottie permits herself to love him again, but she begins questioning her feelings for Sol. Devastated that she has lost everything, Willa stops speaking. Sol believes he has everything he has ever wanted when he is promoted to president of the mill. Although she laments her indiscretions with Felix, Layla completes her manuscript with Jottie's help, and because of the book's success, she is given a new assignment on which she requests Jottie's help. Layla decides to stay in Macedonia because she feels that she belongs with the Romeyns. Emmett begins courting Layla who agrees to marry him only after she knows everything about him.

When Willa leaves the sesquicentennial picnic early, Felix accompanies her onto the roof, and at Willa's behest, Jottie joins them. Because Jottie is unable to forgive Felix, Willa explains that he loved Vause too and felt badly about his friend's death, but he lied to Jottie because he was afraid to lose her too. Pointing out that they cannot change the past, Willa observes that they must decide whether to hate each other, and although Felix leaves that night, Willa knows it will be okay. Jottie calls her engagement off with Sol and reconciles with her brother. Emmett marries Layla, and Willa is happy with her family.



# Chapters 1-3

## Summary

Chapter 1 opens in 1938 as the small town of Macedonia, WV celebrates its sesquicentennial. Willa Romeyn is 12 years old when everything begins; this is when she first hears of Layla Beck, wonders about her father, and notices that she is being lied to. While Willa and Aunt Jottie watch the parade, Jottie explains that the town's founder, General Magnus Hamilton, named the town after the Macedonian virtues of ferocity and devotion, causing Willa to question whether she possesses those virtues. When Sol McKubin stops to speak to Jottie, Willa wonders why her aunt blushes, but she enjoys feeling like Jottie's confidante as her aunt shares the history of the people they encounter. They run into Mr. Tare Russell who questions Jottie about her brother, Felix, who is Willa's father, but Willa is upset when Jottie mentions that they are getting a new boarder. Jottie encourages Willa to pay more attention, so Willa promises herself that she will summon up ferocity and devotion to get to the bottom of the mysteries she is beginning to question.

In Chapter 2, Layla laments that her father is forcing her to work on the Writers Project under her uncle, Ben, and she begs Ben not to send her to West Virginia; reminding Layla of how scarce work is, Ben advises her to be grateful. She also complains to Charles who lauds the nobility of work and rising from her degenerate life. Layla receives a letter from her mother insisting she must take the job and avoid Charles because her father is angry at her refusal to marry Nelson who is heartbroken over her rejection. Writing Rose that she has no choice but to go to Macedonia, Layla ponders her father's sudden annoyance at her frivolity when she's been frivolous for years. When she refused to marry Nelson, she threatened to get a job and become independent so her father is forcing her hand, and she is determined to prove that she can manage her life on her own. Since her father cut her off financially and she must live on her own salary, Layla is boarding with a respectable family in Macedonia. She also reports that things have ended with Charles, but she sends him several letters before writing to her brother, Lance, to plea for him to take her in and serve as her role model.

In Chapter 3, Jottie sends Willa and Bird to retrieve Layla from the train station, urging them to make a good impression, but on the way, Willa is knocked over and skins her hands so Bird proceeds alone while Willa returns home where her aunts Jottie, Mae and Minerva express concern over her wounds. When Bird returns with Layla, the Romeyn sisters greet her nervously, glaring at her in offense to her beauty. Willa is surprised her father returns home, but Felix focuses his attention on Layla, causing Jottie to look concerned. Felix goes into town but promises to be home in time for supper.

On June 14, Layla writes to Lance that her ignorance is already scandalous, though she has only been in Macedonia for a few hours. She recalls the dreary appearance of the town as noted in her journey from the train station, as well as her fear that the Romeyns



are religious zealots because they were yelling about the stigmata when she arrived. She wonders who Felix and the children are in relation to Jottie. After dinner, Layla paces her room because she fears getting lost if she ventures out, and she dreads another encounter with the Romeyns since she feels out of place, even though they are considerably nice. Layla begs Lance to visit her, claiming she will not last for three months since this single day seemed to last years.

## Analysis

"The Truth According to Us" begins from the first-person perspective of Willa Romeyn who explains that the narrative is set in Macedonia, WV in 1938. She explains that this is one of the few areas in the state that sided with the Confederacy, indicating the town's affiliation with the Civil War. Willa also mentions that half of the town works at the mill, foreshadowing the importance of American Everlasting in the novel. Her observation that this was the summer that everything changed because she realized she was being lied to and started questioning her father's occupation provides foreshadowing of what is to come. She also mentions the arrival of Layla Beck who plays a large role in the events that transpire that summer. When Jottie talks about how the town was named after the Macedonian virtues of ferocity and devotion, Willa's interest is piqued, foreshadowing her determination to exhibit those characteristics. Jottie's blush when she encounters Sol foreshadows their romance, while a neighbor's comment about how Felix would be displeased hints at his feelings about Sol. The introduction of Mr. Tare Russell combined with his interest in Felix foreshadows his role in Felix's history. Willa feels secure and privileged in her role as Jottie's confidante, but when she learns that a new boarder will be arriving soon, she realizes she was deceived in her conviction and fulfills foreshadowing by deciding to use ferocity and devotion to uncover the secrets being kept from her.

Chapter 2 introduces Layla Beck, the boarder previously mentioned. A series of letters between Layla and her friends and family reveal that her father has forced her to work because he is displeased by her refusal to marry Nelson. Her mother's warning against Charles indicates an unapproved romance that Layla has indulged in despite her parents' wishes. Her father is a Senator, and his position suggests Layla's ladylike appearance. Despite Layla's haughty tone, she is obviously unhappy with her current situation and vainly appeals to her uncle and brother to extricate her. Regardless of her feelings about staying with the Romeyns in Macedonia, Layla's determination to prove that she can manage her life on her own foreshadows her successes even as her frivolous past predicts the difficulties she will face as an unprotected young woman living far from her family.

Layla's arrival in Chapter 3 creates a fiasco when Willa injures herself on the way to the train station to retrieve the boarder. This chapter also introduces most of the Romeyn family with Bird, Mae, Minerva and Felix making their first appearances. Layla's first impression of the Romeyn family occurs as they are exclaiming over Willa's wounds, likening them to the stigmata and causing her to fear that they are religious zealots; she feels like their glares see into her sinful heart. In reality, the Romeyn sisters are



offended by Layla's beauty, while their brother's attention is quickly gained by the same feature, foreshadowing his romantic interest in Layla. This interest concerns Jottie, suggesting Felix's reputation as a playboy. Comments about Felix's behavior indicate his lack of stability and his frequent absences from home which create foreshadowing in regards to the secrets Willa will uncover later in the narrative. Layla's letter to her brother on June 14 indicates her discontent in Macedonia which serves as a foil to her later feelings of belonging. Layla also sets a timeline for the novel when she indicates the plan for her to reside in Macedonia for three months.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What observations does Willa make in Chapter 1 that could indicate possible foreshadowing?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does the reader learn about Layla's situation in Chapter 2?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is Layla's first impression of the Romeyn family?

## **Vocabulary**

sesquicentennial, commemorated, tableaux, seceded, brigade, ferocity, confidante, relented, furrows, scandal, enhanced



## Chapters 4-7

### Summary

On the day Layla arrives in Chapter 4, Jottie is so distracted that she lights two cigarettes, but mocking herself, she decides it does not matter how fancy Layla looks since she is on relief like half the town. Willa is intrigued by the mysterious stranger in her silk dress and eagerly answers Layla's questions about the people she has met. Although Willa knows that Layla is not a princess, it is obvious that she has never been in a house such as the Romeyns' home. During dinner, Jottie is annoyed that Layla does not eat her apples and promises herself that she will not accept this type of boarder again, and she imagines Layla's fall from riches to rags while Felix talks to Layla about Berlin. The Romeyn sisters mock Layla as they clean up after dinner, but although they invite her to join them on the porch after, Layla excuses herself because she is tired, and Felix assures her that she will get used to it all.

The night is calm as the Romeyn family sits on the porch in Chapter 5, but when Bird asks if Jottie misbehaved as a child, Felix's affirmative answer leads to his sister recounting his youthful misdeeds. The conversation turns to work and hard times when Harriett and Richie stop by, and Felix soon goes inside and does not return; Jottie makes up the excuse that he needs cigarettes, but Willa knows it is a lie. That night, Jottie listens to the rain and wonders if the storm woke Layla, but she determines that Layla will get used to it so it does not matter.

In Chapter 6, Ben writes to Mrs. Chambers about the importance of local publications and informs her that he has hired a new field worker for the Macedonia project. When Mrs. Chambers objects to Ben hiring a worker without her authority, he explains that Layla is his niece who was ruined by finishing school and banished from luxury so they must make the best of her. In Macedonia, Layla is out of the way, and he is certain that the Macedonians will be too distracted by the distressed gentlewoman to notice the poor quality of her writing. On June 15, Layla writes Ben that she is in Macedonia and will do his will, but his response instructs her to blame her father, not him, for her current situation.

In Chapter 7, Willa wakes earlier than usual the morning after Layla arrives, waiting on the stairs for the opportunity to befriend their new boarder and become her assistant, only to learn that Layla has already left. Willa goes to the headquarters of Geraldine's Army instead; she longs to join Geraldine's group, but since she is unable to wrestle Geraldine to the ground, she devises a cunning strategy utilizing the element of surprise. When Geraldine exits her house, Willa attacks her and is permitted to join Geraldine's Army, even being promoted to officer after she promises to fight the Reds. At home, Willa shares her triumph with her aunts, but Jottie warns her away from politics and implies that she does not hate the Communists like everyone else does, causing Willa to wish her family was like everyone else because she is tired of lying.





Entering a corridor, Layla discovers that she has found the jail instead of the library, but a police officer directs her to the library on the third floor where Miss Caroline Betts guesses Layla is from the Writers Project since she has never seen the young woman before. Layla asks for background information on Macedonia only to learn that nothing has been written and she will be the town's first historian. Miss Betts informs Layla that she will need to conduct interviews to acquire her research, and when Layla mentions receiving a letter from Mr. Davies, Miss Betts tells her to bring the letter tomorrow and offers to answer Layla's questions.

## Analysis

Jottie is very distracted by Layla's arrival in Chapter 4, but she quickly decides that it is irrelevant that Layla seems to be a lady since she is impoverished like everyone else in town. The concept of being ladylike extends to Jottie's belief that ladies do not smoke in public which is why she confines her habit to the kitchen. In contrast to Jottie's dismissal of Layla's status, Willa is intrigued by the stranger and her fancy clothes. Still, she and Bird are more excited by their father's arrival, a fact that highlights his frequent absences. Mae and Minerva's distaste for their guest is apparent in their smugness at her discomfort in the heat, and annoyed when Layla refuses to eat her apples, Jottie imagines how Layla fell from a lady to an impoverished boarder in her home even as she promises herself that she will never accept this type of boarder again. Over dinner, Layla bonds with Felix as she recounts the gloominess of Berlin in 1930 when she visited as a child, and her disapproval of Hitler causes Jottie to imagine that Mrs. Beck ran off with a Nazi. The Romeyn sisters' disapproval of Layla continues after dinner, likely enhanced by her unwillingness to join them on the porch. The kindness Felix offers foreshadows Layla falling in love with him.

In Chapter 5, Jottie's thoughts about the sameness being the important part indicates how she has lived her life and also foreshadows imminent changes. The anecdote about Felix's youthful misdeeds is the first in a series designed to emphasize his dishonesty and characterize other characters in the novel. When Felix excuses himself from the conversation about the mill, this shows his obvious discomfort with the subject, while Jottie covering for him with an excuse indicates her protective role towards her brother.

Chapter 6 contains a series of letters about Layla's situation which includes disapproval from the project's head, showing that Layla is not qualified for her position but has received it because of her father's influence. Uncle Ben speaks poorly of his niece to Mrs. Chambers, and his letter also shows that he has no great expectations for her writing skill. When Layla disgracefully agrees to comply with her assignment, Ben reminds her to blame her father, alluding to her misdeeds that has caused this form of punishment.

Chapter 7 begins with Willa's unsuccessful attempts to ingratiate herself into Layla's confidence, but when she learns that the boarder has already left, her attention turns to joining Geraldine's Army. Willa exhibits sneakiness in attacking Geraldine, and this trait



is praised, foreshadowing Willa's belief that her sneakiness is a positive attribute. Jottie's comments about politics and Communists indicate that the Romeyn family do not hold popular political beliefs, causing Willa to lament her family not being like everyone else. This shame foreshadows Jottie's desire to eradicate it. The small town atmosphere of Macedonia is emphasized by the fact that the jail and the library are housed in the same building, and in the library, Layla first meets the librarian, Miss Caroline Betts, who agrees to help with her research. She also alludes to receiving a letter from Mr. Parker Davies, foreshadowing the contents of his correspondence.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How do each of the Romeyn women feel about Layla on her first evening in Macedonia?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does the story of Felix's youthful misdeeds indicate about him as a character?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why is it important for Willa to join Geraldine's Army, and how does Geraldine employ Willa's skills?

## **Vocabulary**

cylinder, distracted, expose, refined, surreptitiously, idly, consumptive, rejuvenated, frivolous, heirlooms, disparaging, foist



# Chapters 8-10

## Summary

As Willa quickly does her chores so she can return to playing with Geraldine in Chapter 8, two ladies arrive summon Jottie because Vause Hamilton is at it again and only Jottie can stop him from burning a boot to mourn the death of his son who died young. Mr. Hamilton calms under Jottie's influence, observing that his son liked her better than any of the other girls, and everyone's reactions to this encounter inspires Willa's curiosity about Vause Jr. Mae and Minerva tell her that he died in a fire at age 20, but she can tell they are not telling her everything. Their answers to her questions reveal that Vause was good friends with Felix and Jottie, but he died in a fire he set at the mill while trying to steal money from their daddy's office so he could run away to California. Mae and Minerva warn Willa not to question Jottie or Felix about Vause.

As Jottie rests, she envisions Vause, recalling his compliments and reminder that he can marry now that he is 18 years old, but the vision fades as a conversation about maps between Layla and Felix intrudes. Punishing herself for her weakness, Jottie reminds herself that Vause was a liar and thief. As she hears Layla talking about the interviews she needs to conduct, Jottie knows that Felix is sitting close and smiling, but she is surprised he makes plans when he offers to take Layla to Dolly's Ford, and she is also irritated at her brother for going after her boarder. When Willa arrives and recounts Jottie's visit to Mr. Hamilton, Jottie feels that Willa should not talk about Vause since she did not know him, but she cannot block out the noise because he is gone.

Layla tries and fails to summon interest in the Macedonian house she visits, and as she walks home, she smiles at Felix passing on the street, only to realize it is not him. The group of men she passes wishes they knew Layla, and although Emmett discusses the 44 men fired at the mill yesterday, he cannot stop thinking about the girl who smiled at him.

Jottie is frustrated with her long day in Chapter 9, and it hurts that Willa lies about her family since that means she must be ashamed of them. She worries what Willa has heard about all of them, but she also acknowledges that Willa will discover everything eventually since the entire town knows; still, she wishes the Romeyns were still safely respectable so Willa could enjoy the same pride that Jottie felt in her youth. As Jottie considers how to ensure Willa and Bird's safety, she decides that she will join the ladies' club to acquire respectability for her family again. When Jottie rouses, Felix reminds her that she does not owe anything to Vause or his father, and since she is supposed to despise Vause, Jottie asks about Felix's trip and suggests he find a job in town since it would make his daughters happy. Pointing out that there are no jobs in Macedonia because of the Depression, Felix indicates that he may stick around for a while, leading Jottie to grow suspicious that he is interested in Layla. She urges him to think of the consequences and to be careful so they do not embarrass Willa and Bird, but Felix insists he will never be a Macedonian gentleman like their father. He claims that what



they had as children was worthless so there is no use in trying to reform him, and realizing her brother will never change, Jottie decides she will just have to do it all by herself.

In Chapter 10, Layla receives a letter from Parker Davies in which he welcomes her to town, proclaims that he and his wife are descendants of the town's founders, and provides lists of historical events, public buildings, natural sites and the town's most illustrious families. Miss Betts treats the letter with disdain, agreeing to provide Layla with some background before she meets Mr. Davies the next afternoon. Before Miss Betts begins, Willa arrives to do some research on Albania, but her close stare makes Layla wonder what the child is thinking. When Layla observes that the Romeyns have been kind to her, Miss Betts says they are a prominent family who figure into most of the town's most historic and dramatic episodes, though she refuses to indulge in gossip by elaborating. Layla wonders why they do not appear on Mr. Davies' list, but Willa's eavesdropping yields no more information about her family as Layla continues her research. Waiting until Layla leaves to depart the library, Willa walks through the town streets without seeing anything.

## Analysis

In Chapter 8, Willa stands witness as neighbors summon Jottie to help with Mr. Vause Hamilton who is burning a boot in his yard to mourn the birthday of his son who died 18 years earlier. Jottie calms Mr. Hamilton who notes that his son liked her better than all the other girls, and this, combined with Mae and Minerva's comments about Jottie not wanting to talk about it, piques Willa's curiosity, foreshadowing her attempts to learn more about Vause and Jottie's relationship. Although her aunts inform her that Vause died in a fire at the mill after stealing money, Willa knows they are not telling her everything, foreshadowing the family secrets related to Vause, especially due to the mention of his close affiliation with Jottie and Felix. Jottie's memories and feelings show that she loved Vause and feels betrayed by his actions as she reminds herself of his misdeeds. Jottie is distraught when she hears Felix making plans with Layla, and it is apparent that she fears his intentions. Willa informs Layla about Vause, and Jottie's irritation that Willa is talking about Vause when she does not know him reinforces her love for the deceased man. As the chapter ends, Layla encounters Emmett for the first time, mistaking him for Felix at first, and despite his conversation about the recent firings at the mill which foreshadow the mill strike, Emmett cannot stop thinking about Layla, foreshadowing his romantic interest.

Jottie is hurt by Willa's shame of her family in Chapter 9, and while her fear of what her niece will learn suggests family secrets, her realization that Willa will eventually learn everything foreshadows Willa's discoveries. Her desire to gain respectability for her nieces' sakes leads to her consideration to join a ladies' club and foreshadows these efforts. Felix shows his aversion to all things related to Vause when he expresses disapproval of Jottie's visit to Mr. Hamilton. Her desire for stability for the girls causes Jottie to talk to Felix about settling down at home, but his refusal leads her to accept that she must do it on her own, again foreshadowing these attempts.



Chapter 10 returns to Mr. Parker Davies' letter which includes a list of the town's most prominent families; the absence of the Romeyns indicates the truth behind Jottie's fears that her family is not respected. Willa's arrival at the library shows her continued desire to discover her family's secrets, particularly as she eavesdrops on Layla's conversation with Miss Betts and learns that the Romeyns figure into a lot of the town's dramatic history. Unfortunately for Willa, Miss Betts refuses to elaborate so she leaves the library in a confused daze, pondering her family's past which foreshadows her continued snooping which leads to unforeseen discoveries.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What does Willa learn about Vause in Chapter 8? What else can be inferred?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How does Jottie's conversation with Felix lead her to make an important step in her self-discovery?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does Willa learn as a result of eavesdropping on Layla's conversation with Miss Betts in Chapter 10?

## **Vocabulary**

mused, flummoxed, wary, infuriating, metropolis, haughtily, caricature, irreproachable, ruminatively, reprieve, crusader



# Chapters 11-14

## Summary

In Chapter 11, Willa stops suddenly when she notices her father's car since none of the nearby storefronts look like places she would expect him to visit. As she waits in the car to surprise him, she observes his briefcase and considers asking him to show her all the valuable chemicals inside, but noise behind the car draws her attention to Felix exiting Cooney's Red Apple with three other men who she assumes are buying chemicals from him. After they leave, Uncle Emmett passes and finds Willa in the car, but when she questions him about Felix, he advises her not to ask questions if she will not like the answers. At home, Jottie grows infuriated when Willa asks about first families because Mr. Davies' list makes Willa feel ashamed. Returning from tea with the Davies, Layla joins the Romeyn women on the porch and shares the information she learned. She questions why Mr. Hamilton was not on the list of prominent families since he is related to the town's founder, and Jottie explains that old families often become unhinged, sharing how General Hamilton drove a sword through his son's foot to prevent him from running off to marry a Native American woman. Jottie notes that the truth always comes out, approving when Layla insists that it is her duty to write the town's true history.

Layla writes to Lance in Chapter 12, refusing to ask their father's forgiveness or marry Nelson. Besides, she had a duty to write Macedonia's history, and she intends to give the characters their proper due. She recounts her visit with the politely condescending Davies who remarked on the oddity of the Romeyns after learning that Layla is boarding with them; they note that the family was well off when their father ran the mill and that everyone has expected Felix to take over. After listening to the Davies' tedious stories about the town, Layla decides to make the History of Macedonia worth reading no matter how dreary the first families may be. She proceeds with writing the history of General Hamilton, incorporating information she learned from the Davies as well as from Jottie.

In Chapter 13, Willa confirms Geraldine's suspicions that she is a natural-born sneak by helping her track Sonny Deal and hit him with ammo, but when Mrs. Fox catches them at their game, Willa lies about the situation and visits with the neighbor. She asks about Vause and learns that he was nice and his death broke Jottie's heart because she liked him especially, but even though he stole from the mill, Jottie is still nice to his father. When Willa sees Jottie on the porch upon her return home, she wonders if Vause broke her heart, and despite her fear of hurting her aunt, she asks why Jottie never married. Jottie explains that she never found anyone nice enough to marry because she wants an honest, clear man. Knowing that Jottie is thinking of Vause, Willa wishes he was alive so she could kill him for breaking her aunt's heart. Convincing herself that she needs to join a ladies' club for Willa's sake, Jottie recalls how her mother was president of the Rose League and how Felix and Vause stole the pies for a meeting. Back in the present, Jottie calls Inez Tapscott who would be pleased for her to attend their next meeting.



On Saturday morning in Chapter 14, Jottie summons Willa and Bird to accompany her to inspect the farms. First, they visit the North Farm which is rented by Sam Spurling, a solitary man, and then they take Mae to Uncle Waldon's farm where Mae spends her weekends. When Willa goes inside to use the restroom, she catches Mae and Waldon kissing so she rushes back to the car for fear of getting caught. While Jottie talks to the resident of the Big Farm, Willa thinks about Mae and Waldon and wonders if Jottie has ever liked someone that much. On the drive home, Bird complains about their boring morning, so Jottie drives crazily, causing the girls to scream in delight.

## Analysis

In Chapter 11, Willa first enters her father's car with the intent to surprise him, but when he exits Cooney's Red Apple, a known bootlegger establishment, her sneaky tendency reveals itself as she hides. While her innocence still allows her to believe he is selling chemicals to the men, her curiosity about Felix's job and his locked briefcase foreshadows her exploration into his world, and this inclination is motivated by the loneliness caused by her realization that his other world does not include her and their family. Although Willa believes she has ruined her chances of becoming Layla's confidante, she is learning things and indicates that she has her own research to do. When Willa questions Emmett about her father, his hint that she may not like the answers to her questions foreshadows Willa's discoveries about Felix as she intends to continue her research.

Jottie's anger at Willa's shame that the Romeyns did not make Mr. Davies' list of prominent families leads her to consider the need to establish respectability for Willa and Bird. Layla's subsequent question about Mr. Hamilton's absence from the list, combined with Jottie's explanation that old families often come unhinged, poses the question of what nefarious secret the Romeyn family hides to have suffered the same fate. Supporting this, Jottie tells a horrific story of the insane General Hamilton; this may also be designed as a distraction which it seems to work as since Willa's thoughts turn to the injustice of the tale. Layla's insistence that it is her duty to write history truthfully earns Jottie's approval, and she begins to suspect that Layla may have more than just a pretty face; she may have a backbone too.

Layla rejects her brother's advice to ask their father's forgiveness in Chapter 12, showing her backbone and pride. She stands by her decision to refuse Nelson and declares her duty to her project, even determining not to mention her father's career as a senator because she will make it on her own. Her aversion to the Davies is apparent in her description of her visit which depicts them as elitists and snobs. The only point of interest Layla finds during the visit is their comments about the town's expectations that Felix would take over the mill after his father, indicating her interest in Felix. By incorporating what she has heard of General Hamilton's history from the Davieses and Jottie in her writing, Layla again demonstrates backbone, shows that she stands by her convictions and truly is striving to portray history as it was.



In Chapter 13, Willa again proves her adeptness at being sneaky while playing with her friends, foreshadowing her ability to uncover many family secrets. When caught at their game, Willa questions Mrs. Fox about Vause, and learning that Jottie's heart was broken when he died, Willa begins to suspect her aunt's romantic involvement with Vause. During Willa's conversation with Jottie about men and marriage, she feels her suspicions are confirmed, and she expresses animosity toward the man that wounded her aunt, foreshadowing her desire to protect Jottie. Their conversation reinforces Jottie's desire to offer security to her nieces, and following in her mother's footsteps, she decides to join a ladies' club. Her memory in this chapter centers around Felix and Vause, as most of them do, and demonstrates the boys' mischievous tendencies.

During Jottie's visits to the farms in Chapter 14, Willa wonders about Sam Spurling who lives on the north farm, isolated from people and surrounded by cats. She ponders if he has always been so withdrawn or if people can grow up strange without noticing. Willa is uncomfortable when she catches Aunt Mae canoodling with her husband, and it causes her to consider whether Jottie has ever kissed someone like that.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Emmett run into Willa in Chapter 11, and what does his advice suggest about her suspicions?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe Layla's visit with the Davieses in Chapter 12.

## Discussion Question 3

What suspicions does Willa develop about Jottie and Vause's relationship in Chapter 13?

## Vocabulary

contemplated, recalling, endanger, divans, adulterated, descent, repartee, intervened, dismal, subjugated, ominous, mangy





# Chapters 15-17

## Summary

In Chapter 15, Jottie is happy when Emmett visits, but she grows worried when he admits that he came to town to talk to Sol because he heard some troublesome gossip about American Everlasting. Entering the room with Felix, Layla notes that she mistook Emmett for Felix the other day before the pair leaves to explore local historical sites. Observing that Layla is pretty, Emmett is upset at the idea of looking like Felix, but Jottie assures him that no one who knows them would mistake the two brothers; Emmett laments Felix's ability to always get what he wants without paying for it. When Jottie turns the conversation back to the mill, Emmett recounts the rumors that Shank fired employees and expects the others to pick up the slack. Mentioning their need to unionize, Emmett confesses that he advised them to strike and has come to warn Sol. At Dolly's Ford, Felix amuses Layla with anecdotes about Joe Dolly's stint in prison, and when she ponders why the town council wants a history book, Felix suggests they believe it will make Macedonia look respectable. She dissents with her belief that they want to prove that what they have become was inevitable. The pair flirt a bit as they tour the ford. Sol expresses gratitude to Emmett for telling him about the strike, and though he agrees that they should unionize, he points out that they signed a pledge when they were hired. Sol's smile disappears when Emmett relays Jottie's best, but when he asks about Layla, Emmett agrees that she is attractive, though it seems that Felix has already got her.

Willa wakes in Chapter 16 to her father reading a book, and when he asks her to tell Jottie he has gone to a business meeting, she asks about who he sells chemicals to and is proud when he answers her question. While she is disappointed that he cannot stay for supper, she is also relieved that he does not leave a message for Layla, but Willa wants to slap Layla when she discovers her sniffing Felix's room, and she is distraught to find that he left their boarder a note about going to the Fish Hatchery next week. Layla's response to Felix conveys her enjoyment of their trip to Ice Mountain, and then she proceeds to write about Dolly's Ford and Ice Mountain for her book.

Saying nothing about Sol, Emmett is quieter than normal at supper, while Jottie, noticing Layla's glow, hopes the girl is smart enough to know what Felix is up to. She considers warning Layla but knows the girl will not listen, just like the others would not listen. Trying to engage Emmett in the conversation, Jottie mentions that he teaches history, and Layla asks about religious institutions in Macedonia, leading to Jottie's offer to tell her about Reverend Goodacre the next day. While Emmett helps clear the table, Jottie suggests that he should marry, and noting that the same advice applies to her, he relays Sol's best to Jottie who is disappointed. Emmett suggests Jottie should apologize for no longer talking to Sol because Felix will not allow it and for being too cowardly to leave her house; he does not understand why Sol still cares for Jottie, but she accuses Emmett of refusing to see Felix's side of the dispute since he has a right to be upset that Sol blamed him for Vause's death. Noting that Jottie gave up college to raise the girls,



Emmett asks why she paid as if it were her fault, and Jottie responds that she is to blame for being so in love with Vause - that she did not see what he was truly like; she feels she could have saved them all if she had known. At bedtime, Willa and Bird ask for a story about something bad their father did as a child, so Jottie recounts Felix's attempts to shoot Sol with an arrow after Sol prevented him from shooting at her. Jottie is already asleep by the time Willa asks about Sol because she wants to know how the story ended, but she already knows that something happened with Sol to make Jottie blush when they talk, and she is certain that her aunt liked Vause better than anyone else.

On the way to church in Chapter 17, Jottie answers her neighbors' questions about her boarder, but after someone mentions how cozy Felix looked with Layla, Willa spends Sunday school imagining Layla and Felix as Samson and Delilah. Sitting in the Romeyns' front room, Layla thinks how strange it is that she just arrived in Macedonia and met Felix six days earlier. She asks Jottie where Mae and Minerva are and learns they spend the weekends with their husbands but live with her during the week because they cannot stand to be apart. When Jottie mentions how Henry adores Felix, Layla cannot imagine anyone disliking Felix, but Jottie can think of plenty of people who have negative things to say about him, such as the mother of Sylvia, the woman Felix eloped with three weeks after they met because they were both engaged to other people. Although he soon divorced Sylvia, Layla thinks it is unfair that Jottie calls him fickle and notes that he seems like a devoted father and brother. Unable to deny it, Jottie thinks of how Felix encouraged her to get dressed and take a walk to end her depression over how Vause made her look like a fool. She offers to tell the story of Reverend Goodacre, and Layla retrieves her notebook.

## Analysis

Although Jottie shows her love for Emmett by her pleasure in his visit in Chapter 15, his news about American Everlasting foreshadows the strike, while Jottie's request that he send her best to Sol foreshadows the beginning of their relationship. After Layla and Felix leave to explore historical sites, Emmett's reaction indicates his interest in the writer, and when Jottie instructs Willa to make sandwiches, Willa knows her aunt is trying to get rid of her. With Willa gone, Emmett expresses his attraction to Layla as well as his dismay at being mistaken for Felix, showing his distaste for his brother. Further conversation about the mill foreshadows Emmett and Sol's involvement with the pending strike. The flirtation between Layla and Felix at Dolly's Ford foreshadows the romance developing between them, while Layla's observation that the town council wants the history written to show that what they became was inevitable demonstrates her astuteness as well as her realization that many secrets are hidden in the small town. Sol's reaction to Emmett's news foreshadows his role in the strike, but his reaction to Jottie's greeting, combined with his warning for his sister to avoid the Romeyns, demonstrates his love for Jottie and his wounded feelings caused by her ignoring him. At the end of his visit, Emmett again expresses his interest in Layla as well as his disappointment that Felix seems to have already attracted her attention.



In Chapter 16, Willa reveals her curiosity about Felix's job when she questions him, and she exhibits pride when he answers her. Willa's desire and intent to continue snooping is verified by her commentary about how her family shares nothing and she must find out for herself. Her relief that he does not leave a note for Layla demonstrates her disapproval of the affair; however, she is disappointed when her snooping reveals that he has privately left a note for their boarder. The notes between Felix and Layla show their mutual attraction, but the difference in their intents is evident from early on. The proximity of Jottie's observations about Emmett's silence and Layla's glow suggest a connection between the two, while Jottie's desire to warn Layla about Felix further indicates his dishonorable intentions and foreshadows Jottie's attempt to save Layla. Jottie tries to engage Emmett in the conversation by talking about his career as a history teacher, but his continued silence prompts Jottie to offer to tell Layla about Reverend Goodacre, foreshadowing that tale. Jottie's advice for Emmett to marry quickly turns against her as he points out that she is also unmarried, and their subsequent argument again shows Emmett's disdain for Felix. It also reveals the nature of the dispute that divided Jottie and Sol which was largely influenced by Jottie's feelings that she owes her loyalty to Felix. In response to Emmett's suspicion that Jottie has punished herself for Vause's death, Jottie admits that she feels responsible for not seeing his true intentions; later revelations will demonstrate how Felix used Jottie's guilt to manipulate her into doing his will. The conversation about Sol is obviously still on her mind that evening when Jottie tells her nieces a story about their father which involves Sol's attempts to protect her. Ever attentive, Willa knows there is something between Jottie and Sol since her aunt blushes whenever they talk, and she struggles to reconcile this suspicion with her certainty that Jottie preferred Vause to any other man.

In Chapter 17, neighbors' comments about Felix and Layla looking cozy together creates more concern for Willa as she imagines them as Samson and Delilah, a Biblical allusion that demonstrates Willa's view of Layla as someone who will destroy her father if she learns his secrets. This makes her more determined to learn Felix's secrets so she can protect him. Layla's questions about Mae and her husband lead Jottie to comment on people who dislike Felix, constituting an attempt to warn Layla away from her brother; however, tales of the women he misused do not move Layla who feels he is being treated unfairly and being penalized for not loving the people he is supposed to, like she has been punished for refusing to marry Nelson. Feeling guilty for her betrayal, Jottie thinks of how loyal Felix was to her after Vause's death, demonstrating yet another way he manipulated her when his secrets are finally revealed.

## Discussion Question 1

In Chapter 15, Emmett's conversations with Jottie and Sol yield a lot of useful information and foreshadowing. Explore.

## Discussion Question 2

What does Emmett tell Jottie about Sol and herself in Chapter 16?



## Discussion Question 3

How does Jottie try to warn Layla away from Felix in Chapter 17?

## Vocabulary

reeling, snide, pondered, inevitable, capitalist, jalopy, proprietor, traverses, euphoniously, rectitude, faltered



# Chapters 18-21

## Summary

Felix returns home in Chapter 18 only to leave a few days later, but Willa cannot ask about his trip. While she plays with Geraldine, Mrs. Lee notes that Willa does not look like her mother and nastily observes that the girl is a Romeyn through and through. Rather than admit that her mother lives in sin with the married Mr. Parnell Rudy, Willa lies that Sylvia is a leper before leaving to avoid Mrs. Lee. She enjoys being alone as she thinks about her visits to Sylvia who mourns that her children are lost to her, but when she sees Felix, she follows him to Mr. Tare Russell's house, watching silently as he enters the basement. Walking along with Inez Tapscott, Jottie is relieved at the freedom when she excuses herself to buy ice cream for the girls, but she feels guilty for fleeing. Although she looks like a lady, she does not understand half of what they discuss, yet she is convinced that she must pretend for Bird and Willa. Back on the street, Jottie sees Sol and thinks about his silent plea to be friends again at the parade. She thinks that the girls would be safe if she married him but immediately rejects the idea as silly, though it hurts her to acknowledge that he is living his own happy life.

Layla writes to Ben in Chapter 19 about her adventures in Macedonia. She also writes to Rose, expressing joy that Nelson found a match and suggesting that she would rather not marry unless she met a man in another place, such as Macedonia. She enumerates on how kind, mysterious and alluring Felix is but insists she has not lost her heart indiscriminately; although she is waiting for someone worthy of her virtues, she confesses that she is somewhat taken with Felix. Her book continues with an exploration into Macedonia's religious turmoil in the 1820s and 1830s which includes an anecdote about how Reverend Goodacre's philandering resulted in several pregnant women but was only confirmed by his sister who ultimately married the deacon he had accused of his misdeeds. After reading the story, Miss Betts warns that this version is provocative and will upset many Macedonians who disregard these rumors, but Layla argues that there would be no history at all if it were defined only by stories that can be verified. When she ponders why Jottie did not offer to introduce her to Mr. Shank since Mr. Romeyn was the first president of American Everlasting, Miss Betts explains that Shank suffers by comparison to the benevolent Mr. Romeyn, proceeding into a tale of Felix's childhood mischief to demonstrate that no one is capable of objectivity. Layla observes that makes all history suspect, causing Miss Betts to ask what she wants her book to be, and although Layla claims no stake in the matter, she realizes her words are untrue; she wants her book to be witty and to advance the Romeyns, showing that she perceived all that the Davies were blind toward. Noting that Layla has the advantage because of her indifference, Miss Betts expresses faith that the truth shall prevail.

In Chapter 20, Willa is glad that Felix is away on business for a week since it separates him from Layla, but she knows he has returned when she finds money in the fridge. After ascertaining that no one is home, she sneaks into Layla's room, finding a letter from Senator Beck and one from her father. She is saved from the temptation of reading



her father's letter by Jottie's announcement of her arrival. When Felix returns during dessert and expresses contempt at Miss Betts' advice for Layla to be cautious of her sources, Jottie laments that he always wins, feeling tired of his invincibility and her own lack thereof. She wishes Sol had seen her the other day so she would know how he feels, and when she offers to take Layla to the mill, Felix raises his eyebrow suspiciously. Willa watches attentively as Layla clears the table, glancing back to ensure that Felix is watching her leave.

Charles writes to Layla in Chapter 21, claiming he misses her and offering to visit, but Layla reminds him that he banished her at their last encounter and states that she has met someone superior. Writing to Rose about Charles' offer, Layla is furious that he expects her to swoon at his revived interest even as she is embarrassed by the knowledge that he acquired that impression from her actions. Insisting he deserves no more of her thoughts, Layla claims interest in Macedonia's history, feeling it is her duty to bring the characters to life. She asks if Rose can guess who the superior man is that she referred to in her response to Charles.

## Analysis

In Chapter 18, Willa's statement that she cannot ask Felix about his business trip indicates his secretive nature and enhances suspicions of his bootlegging activities. Mrs. Lee's comments reveal disdain for the Romeyns, eliciting Willa's shame and causing her to lie to her friend; she chooses to tell Geraldine that Sylvia is a leper rather than admit that her mother lives in sin with a married man, and this demonstrates the societal pressures the young girl is under and reemphasizes Jottie's need to provide security for her nieces. Continuing her snooping, Willa follows her father to Mr. Tare Russell's basement, and the questions raised from this venture foreshadow Willa's return to the basement and her subsequent findings. Meanwhile, Jottie's attempts to provide security by joining a ladies' club prove successful based on her acceptance by Inez Tapscott, yet Jottie feels uncomfortable because she is not interested in the same things as the other ladies. This discomfort leads to an errant thought about marrying Sol when she sees him on the street, her thought that such a marriage would ensure her nieces' security foreshadowing her romantic relationship with Sol.

Layla's letters to family and friends in Chapter 19 indicate her contentedness in Macedonia, and her comments about Felix admit that she is quite taken with him. In combination with Jottie's thoughts about her brother's dishonorable intentions, this foreshadows Felix breaking Layla's heart. Her bravery and determination to provide an accurate history are again demonstrated by her recounting of the tale about Reverend Goodacre which includes instances of his philandering, and Miss Betts warns that people in town will not be pleased because they believe these stories are only rumors, discounting their credibility since Reverend Goodacre's sister married the man she defended. Layla's argument that there would be no history at all if it only included stories that could be verified shows an astute understanding of the concept of history and indicates her desire to include all aspects of the topics she covers in her book. Miss Betts' comment about Mr. Shank foreshadows his distaste for the Romeyns which is



evident in later parts of the narrative, while her story about Felix again shows him to have been a mischievous child, calling his character into question. In discussing the need for objectivity, Layla lies to Miss Betts when she claims no stake in the matter, showing her partiality to the Romeyns through her desire that her book advance their family. Miss Betts' belief that the truth will prevail sets a precedent that is repeated throughout the novel and places an importance on the truth by the end of the narrative that is not present when it begins.

The money that Willa finds in Chapter 20 calls its origins into question, suggesting that Felix may have acquired the money from Mr. Tare Russell's basement since Felix does not go on a weeklong business trip as planned. Her continued snooping allows her to learn that Layla's father is a senator, and she also finds letters from Felix which indicate his pursuit of Layla. Jottie's irritation over Felix's obvious manipulation of Layla causes her to lament that he always gets his way, lowering her own self esteem. Thinking of Sol again, their relationship is foreshadowed by Jottie's offer to take Layla to the mill, an offer that raises Felix's suspicions. Willa's close observation of Layla and her father shows her continued disapproval and foreshadows her attempts to separate the two.

In Chapter 21, Layla is offended by Charles' letter which expresses his certainty of being forgiven, and her response contains an allusion to a superior man who has caught her attention. Despite being affronted by Charles' confidence, Layla recognizes that her own actions have caused this, but while she seems to learn something from her romance with Charles, she does not seem to apply it to Felix, hinting to Rose that he is the superior man she referenced in her letter to Charles. Layla's dedication to her work is apparent as she stresses her duty to bring life to the stories she shares in her History of Macedonia.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Willa show that she is ashamed of her family in Chapter 18?

## Discussion Question 2

In Chapter 19, what does Layla admit to herself that she wants from her book?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Willa react to her suspicion of Felix's romance with Layla?

## Vocabulary

statuary, leprosy, conservatory, vigorously, supplications, mesmerized, unimpeachability, diligently, cultivated, deacon



# Chapters 22-24

## Summary

Becoming inspired about the mystery surrounding Felix and Coe's Red Apple in Chapter 22, Willa lies that Mrs. Bucklew wants to see her, and during her visit, she offers to go to Mr. Houdyshell's store to buy whisky for her friend. After buying blue thread to conceal their secret, Willa proceeds on to Houdyshell Tack and Saddle, but when she asks Mr. Houdyshell if Felix is a bootlegger, the proprietor looks shocked but answers in the negative; however, Brennus, a customer who recognizes Willa as Felix and Sylvia's child, brags on Sylvia's beauty but says the whole town knows Felix is a bootlegger and crooked. Returning to Mrs. Bucklew, Willa asks if Mr. Houdyshell is a criminal and learns that, while he could get in trouble for breaking the law, everyone knows what he does. On her way home, Willa recalls how Brennus seemed angry at her, yet she believes him instead of Mr. Houdyshell because he looked her in the eye when answering her questions, plus she saw Felix coming from Coe's. She wonders if her father is a criminal but decides that "outlaw" is a more accurate term. Realizing that she is Mrs. Bucklew's bootlegger, Willa thinks that she and Felix can go into business together and share secrets, promising herself that his secret is safe with her.

When Jottie escorts Layla to the mill for her appointment with Mr. Shank in Chapter 23, she runs into Sol who offers her a tour, and when he suggests she stopped being his friend at Felix's orders, she asks to put the past behind them and pretend they just met. During Layla's interview, Shank claims the mill is the only industry in Macedonia, bragging about how many people he employs, but he refuses to answer questions about whether he intends to sell the company, insisting he has his employees' best interests at heart and denying the need for a union. Although he agrees that Mr. Romeyn was beloved, he claims that his predecessor was not much of a businessman and enumerates the operational changes he has put into effect. During her tour of the mill, Jottie feels uncomfortable with the number of people who recognize her through her father, and when Sol walks her out, he asks her out. Despite her fears of being seen and reported to Felix, Jottie agrees to a date with Sol, offering to meet him for a show to prevent him from calling the house and alerting her brother to their intentions.

In Chapter 24, Layla is writing about the mill when Emmett joins her, and asking how Shank gets away with refusing the union, Emmett explains that employees have to sign an agreement preventing it. Layla considers including the mill's hiring policies in her book since it is so important to present the truth. At home, Layla and Felix flirt in the kitchen, but as he kisses her, Jottie intrudes, creating confusion for Layla as she observes Felix's interest in his sister's reaction consuming him more than his passion for Layla. In bed that night, Jottie debates whether she made a mistake by agreeing to see Sol, but she covets the safety he represents. She recalls her plan to run away with Felix and Vause when she was 11 years old and how Vause took the blame for her wrecking the car, yet she reminds herself that he never really cared about her. In the morning, Emmett brings apple butter and a book for Layla, but after Felix confiscates





her treat and she follows him outside, Emmett sadly departs as Jottie laments her inability to protect anyone.

## Analysis

Willa's tenacity is revealed in Chapter 22 by her continued fixation on discovering the truth of her father's career, and in July, a burst of inspiration leads her to visit Mrs. Bucklew. Willa and Mrs. Bucklew share a secret: that Willa buys her friend's whiskey for her, and this creates an affiliation between Willa and Felix. Mrs. Bucklew is suspicious about Willa's offer, but she agrees, sending Willa to Houdyshell's Tack and Saddle. Although Mr. Houdyshell tells her that Felix is not a bootlegger, Brennus states the contrary, defaming Felix. When Willa questions Mrs. Bucklew about whether Mr. Houdyshell is a bootlegger, her friend insists he is not a criminal but warns her away from Cooley's; this could indicate that Cooley's is more dangerous, or Mrs. Bucklew may be trying to prevent Willa from learning secrets about Felix. Thinking about the conflicting answers she received from Brennus and Mr. Houdyshell, Willa decides her father is a bootlegger because Brennus could look her in the eye while Mr. Houdyshell could not, plus finding Felix's locked case and seeing him at Cooley's provides enough evidence for the girl. Rather than admit her father is a criminal, she settles upon the term "outlaw" and thinks they could go into business together since she secretly gets liquor for Mrs. Bucklew. She demonstrates her loyalty and devotion through her promise to keep her father's secret.

In Chapter 23, Jottie's plans for Sol are obvious by the effort she puts into her appearance and her nervousness as she takes Layla to the mill. In addition to noticing how Sol's gaze never leaves Jottie, Layla observes how Jottie is received at the mill and ponders what happened to cause Jottie's privileged childhood to turn into a life of domestic servitude, foreshadowing Layla's research into the Romeyns' past. While Layla interviews the unpleasant Mr. Shank whose arrogance foreshadows his downfall, Jottie's time with Sol proves his continued interest as well as his disdain for Felix. Although Jottie worries about Felix's reaction, she agrees to a date with Sol, insisting that their liaison must be discreet.

Emmett answers Layla's questions about the mill in Chapter 24, and his longing indicates his romantic interest in her. She again shows bravery in her consideration of including the mill's hiring policies in her book. Jottie catches Felix and Layla kissing in the kitchen and quickly sends Willa back to the porch to prevent her witnessing their canoodling. Although Layla is confused because she does not feel they are doing anything wrong, Felix's attention is on his sister, showing his lack of devotion, and while Layla does not fully grasp this, she is offended that he is not as consumed by passion as she is. Later when Jottie thinks about how Felix would feel if he knew she agreed to see Sol, her desire for the safety Sol represents supersedes her loyalty to her brother, especially after memories of Vause and Felix as children force her to remember that Vause never cared for her. Emmett's gifts for Layla again show his interest, but Felix flirtatiously usurps her attention causing Emmett to be sad and Jottie to feel helpless to protect anyone; interestingly, all of Jottie's impulses to protect other characters come



from Felix's actions, showing that she recognizes her brother's shortcomings and tries to counteract them, and this established the truth of Emmett's accusations about Jottie allowing Felix to control her life.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Brennus at Houdyshell's Tack and Saddle tell Willa about Felix?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe Jottie's encounter with Sol at the mill in Chapter 23.

## Discussion Question 3

How does Felix react when Jottie catches him with Layla in Chapter 24, and how does Layla feel about this?

## Vocabulary

abomination, grisly, mealymouthed, ornamental, privilege, sober, serene, metaphor, scrutinized, ludicrously, flailed



# Chapters 25-27

## Summary

In Chapter 25, Layla visits Mrs. Lacey to learn about how her home was used as a military hospital during the war, and when she encounters Willa on her return home, Willa is furious when Layla mentions Felix so she lies that her parents still love one another and are heartbroken over their separation. At home, Felix talks easily with Layla, and though Willa wishes her lie were true, she believes Layla is the terrible one. Sol is eagerly awaiting Jottie at the theater, and they swig whisky from his flask as they enjoy the show, causing Jottie to feel drunk. That night, Felix wakes Jottie to help him tend his bleeding knuckles, and as she chides him for fighting, he mocks her for drinking alone, offering to join her next time. Felix is always closed off, but whenever he opens up, Jottie is always touched to see that he cares for her.

Layla writes to Mr. Tare Russell in Chapter 26 with a request to interview him about Macedonia's history, and when he agrees, he asks her to bring Jottie too. Layla receives a letter from her mother announcing Lance's engagement to Arlene and inviting Layla to their engagement party, and Layla's response encourages her mother to be happy for Lance and requests permission to bring a date to the party. Ursula Chambers also writes to inform Layla that she has acquired a photographer for the book. One afternoon, Jottie instructs Willa and Bird to get dressed so they can pick Felix up in Shepherdstown, and when they find him, he suggests going to dinner at a Bavarian restaurant. The family has a great time together, and Willa feels smug in her father's affection.

When Felix announces at breakfast in Chapter 27 that he is going to see a man about some horses, Layla ponders his meaning, causing Willa to wonder if their guest is a sneak like she is. Retrieving the mail, Willa delivers Layla's letters, including the one from Mr. Russell, and determined to protect Felix's secrets, Willa sneaks into Mr. Russell's basement where she finds several of her father's cases which contain money and chemicals. One case contains a large coat with a photo of Jottie when she was young in the breast pocket. She restores everything to its original place, and although there is still a lot that she does not understand, she is now certain that Felix is a bootlegger.

## Analysis

Layla is somewhat afraid as she sits in Mrs. Lacey's parlor in Chapter 25 because Jottie warned her that Mrs. Lacey is the last of the great ladies. Sharing how her home was used as a military hospital during the Civil War, Mrs. Lacey recalls seeing all the bloody uniforms and admits she never knew which side was winning. Encountering Willa on the street, Layla does not seem to realize the girl dislikes her, but furious at Layla's mention of Felix, Willa lied about her parents' devotion. When Felix joins them and chats easily



with Layla, Willa is annoyed that he is not really the heartbroken hero of her lie, yet she still blames Layla, fearing her father will choose the writer over Willa and her sister. Jottie feels relatively safe in her secret during her date with Sol since she believes Felix is out of town, so she drinks and enjoys herself, foreshadowing their continued relationship. When Felix seeks Jottie's help to tend his wounds that night, she is touched by his concern for what he assumes is her solitary drinking, but when he silences her wish that he would choose a different career, it reinforces her belief that she must provide the girls security on her own.

Chapter 26 begins with a series of Layla's letters. She reaches out to Mr. Tare Russell, foreshadowing her interview, and his request that Jottie accompany foreshadows his intention to stir up mischief. Her response to her mother's letter about Lance's engagement encourages her parents to be happy if he is happy, showing her desire that her brother not be treated as she was for his romantic inclinations. Her interest in Felix is also professed by her request to bring him to the engagement party. Mrs. Chambers' note shows that she distrusts Layla to do her job and foreshadows the photographer's arrival in Macedonia. The Romeyns' trip to Shepherdstown shows how enjoyable Jottie and Willa find Felix's company when he desires it to be enjoyable.

Felix's vague plans raises Layla's suspicions in Chapter 27, causing Willa to fear for her father's secrets. She plans to guard him, feeling superior to Layla who thinks she has the right to know him better just because she's an adult. Fulfilling foreshadowing, Willa creeps into Mr. Tare Russell's basement, but finding empty cases, she thinks her father could at least need protecting since she is doing so much to protect him. She does not understand why she finds chemicals in the basement since Felix would need them for his job if he really sells chemicals, but the coat she finds obviously belongs to Vause because it contains a picture of Jottie in the breast pocket and a note from Felix. Her refusal to take the coveted picture because it is too precious shows her recognition that this is a sign of Vause's devotion to Jottie. She also finds money and worries about restoring everything to its proper place lest Felix discover her investigation. Willa's discoveries in the basement foreshadow her revelation of her findings and the subsequent consequences.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Willa try to thwart Layla's interest in Felix in Chapter 25, and why?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Layla respond to her mother's invitation with the encouragement to accept Lance's engagement?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Willa find in Mr. Tare Russell's basement, and what does it indicate?

## Vocabulary

preserved, endurance, triviality, laden, demurely, conserved, ebullient, patronizing, toil, agonizing, famished, heiress



# Chapters 28-32

## Summary

Chapter 28 opens with Sol holding Jottie's hand during their third movie in two weeks, and she is growing accustomed to this honest man who makes her laugh. She notices that his employees like him and thinks that he has Macedonia in the palm of his hand. When he kisses her in the department store, she worries about Felix finding out and also thinks about her last kiss from Vause, but she banishes them both from her mind because neither of them are honest and she deserves to live happily.

When Jottie and Layla visit Mr. Russell in Chapter 29, he is disappointed by the lack of drama in the encounter between Jottie and Anna May Bowers, the fiancé Felix jilted to marry Sylvia, and as he tells Layla about Macedonia's history, he mentions that his house is haunted. Jottie recalls how Felix used to make it appear that one of the photos in the house bled to inspire this belief. When the ladies leave, Mr. Russell tells Jottie to ask Felix to visit him, and she wonders why he does not give up after so many years of hopeless longing. After Jottie and Layla depart ways, Felix drives up and offers Layla a ride, telling her he sells chemicals to the U.S. Military when she asks about his case. While they enjoy a Coca-Cola, men from the mill greet Felix who appears confounded when Layla mentions that Sol is Jottie's friend, and when she asks if he ever worked at the mill, he admits he was a superintendent but left the job because he preferred chemicals.

In Chapter 30, Jottie worries that Felix has learned about Sol when he suggests going for a ride, but she is still excited to engage in an adventure with her brother. When Felix notes that he heard she went looking for Sol, she objects that she merely ran into him at the mill, and although she denies that they are reunited, she tells Felix that it is wrong for him to continue holding a grudge for a terrible mistake; however, Felix insists Sol saw Vause's death as an opportunity to win Jottie and was jealous of Felix for their friendship. He recounts the party held before Felix and Vause left for basic training, claiming Sol bought booze to get Vause drunk and keep him from Jottie. She insists no one knew about their romance, but Felix insists everyone knew. Jottie wants to forget it all since Vause has been dead for 18 years, yet Felix reminds her that he would still be in jail if Sol's claims had proven true, and he believes Sol was trying to get rid of him too. Even now, people question Felix's involvement with the mill fire, and Sol was able to improve his career at the mill, becoming a manager. Recalling that awful period of time that Sol started, Jottie knows she has to choose her brother's side, and after he assures her that Sol has a girlfriend in Cumberland and has not been pining for her, she writes Sol that she cannot continue seeing him because she cannot pretend that the past does not matter.

In Chapter 31, Willa hears Felix's footsteps as she reads under the porch, so she follows him out to the red oak to talk about her book. When Layla interrupts with questions about Knock-Pie Trail, Willa wishes Layla would get sick and die, and inside,



she fights with Bird about the possibility of their father marrying Layla because she does not know what to do if he is no longer theirs. Instead of Knock-Pie Trail, Felix takes Layla to wade in a stream, helping her undress and laughing when she calls him a cad for looking since he has been called worse. As they swim, he kisses her, tensing when she says that being with him feels like taking her life in her hands, but after she explains that his kisses have a dizzying effect, he indicates that the cure is practice.

Sol begs Jottie not to hang up in Chapter 32, claiming that she is throwing her life away and begging her not to choose Felix, even if she does not choose Sol. Urging her to contact him if she changes her mind, Sol promises to wait for Jottie, but she insists she cannot do this. After he hangs up, she recalls Sol taking the blame for breaking his father's golf club, though Felix and Vause were at fault. Jottie tried to defend Sol, ultimately kicking him in the shin for the continued lie. When Layla invites Jottie to accompany her to the library to continue her research, Jottie declines because she has housework to do. She misses Sol and how he made her believe she is alluring, but recalling that she joined the Daughters of Macedonia, she assures herself that her life is fine.

## Analysis

In Chapter 28, Jottie is beginning to associate Sol with her happiness after three dates in two weeks, but her attraction is based on his honesty and his employees' feelings about him, showing that she primarily values him for the security he represents. This is furthered by the value she places on his department store purchased suit. Her continued worries about Felix discovering her romance shows her fear of her brother's consternation. Her thoughts of Vause demonstrate that she feels guilty like she is betraying him, yet she rallies and banishes these thoughts with the reminder that neither Felix nor Vause are honest men, viewing them in contrast with Sol. Still, she is glad that Sol kisses her without asking because she recognizes that her thoughts would have led her to refuse; this indicates that Jottie does not truly have romantic feelings for Sol, and it foreshadows the end of their romance.

Mr. Tare Russell's mischievous nature is highlighted in Chapter 29 by his desire to cause drama between Jottie and Anne May Bowers. Despite being confronted with Felix's jilted fiancé, Layla remains loyal to her paramour. Tare's story about his house being haunted causes Jottie to recall Felix's role in this belief and leads her to question Tare's loyalty to Felix after so many years. Felix continues to pursue Layla, telling her about selling chemicals and showing his indifference to the concerns of the mill workers, but his concern when Layla mentions that Jottie is friends with Sol foreshadows his decision to confront her about the rumor.

Jottie's suspicions that Felix had learned of her relationship with Sol in Chapter 30 are confirmed when he fulfills foreshadowing by confronting her about the rumors he has heard. Although she initially encourages her brother to forgive Sol, Felix enumerates on the many reasons that he cannot, explaining that Sol accused him of being responsible for Vause's death and also accusing Sol of envying Vause because of his relationship



with Jottie. Thinking softly of Vause, Jottie again reminds herself that he was just pretending and should have left her alone. With reminders of all the pain caused by Sol's accusations as well as Felix's assurances that Sol has been courting other women, Jottie decides to discontinue her relationship with Sol. Her belief that she cannot pretend the past does not matter ties into the theme of history in the novel.

Willa's desire to be closer to her father is obvious in Chapter 31 as she seeks him out, and though she wishes she could tell him that she loves him, she cannot, showing the division Felix has established with his family. Layla's interruption reinforces Willa's hatred, and she fights with Bird because she fears Layla will take Felix away from them; despite the lack of security in her attachment to her father, Willa still feels it is her responsibility to take care of her younger sister who agrees to follow her lead in regards to her view of Layla. As Felix and Layla swim, her playful comments about him being a cad mirror the truth of his intentions, though she does not realize this. Her fear that being with him is taking her life in her hands causes a reaction that foreshadows Felix's self-blame for Vause's death, but he quickly turns the topic to more romantic ones as he kisses Layla, showing that his interest in her is purely physical.

In Chapter 32, Sol professes his attachment to Jottie by begging her to reconsider, and his comments about choosing Felix mirror Emmett's earlier consternation. Jottie's recollection of Sol taking the blame for Vause and Felix's crime as a child contrasts with Felix's earlier charges, but maintaining loyalty to her brother, Jottie refuses to reconsider her decision. Although she misses Sol, Jottie continues to search for a way to provide her nieces with security by joining a ladies' club to gain respectability. Her constant reminders to herself that her life is fine indicates her unhappiness of which she is in denial.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Mr. Russell believe his house is haunted?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe Felix's conversation with Jottie after he finds out she has been seeing Sol in Chapter 30.

## Discussion Question 3

How does Jottie's plan for providing Willa security change in Chapter 32?

## Vocabulary

pensively, salutations, simpering, dwindled, depleted, cornucopia, fodder, accommodate, rapture, derivatives





# Chapters 33-37

## Summary

When the photographer, Miss Echols, arrives in Chapter 33, it is evident that she has no time to waste on Macedonia, and she is disgusted by American Everlasting. Layla is surprised at the lack of activity during lunch, and noticing Officer Hank talking to Sol, she can tell something is wrong. Sol warns Layla that they should leave because the strike has begun, and after she promises not to inform Miss Echols, she is surprised when Sol says that Jottie likes her. He also asks Layla to update Emmett on what is going on, so after Miss Echols leaves, Layla calls Emmett to tell him about the strike. She is stunned that Sol is on the strikers' side, and Emmett tells her that Sol is not an average boss. When Emmett suggests the strike should be included in Layla's book, she tells him, "It's just a fight. It's not history until someone wins" (page 297). Layla is disappointed by Felix's absence at dinner, but when he appears in her window that night to warn her away from the mill, she reports that Sol already advised her against returning. Felix claims Sol is a liar when Layla comments on their falling out, and when he insists she must choose between them, she chooses Felix, earning a kiss before he leaves.

In Chapter 34, Emmett visits his family after ascertaining that the strike has not yet ended, and Jottie's praise of his manners is interrupted by Felix's arrival. Emmett reports that the strikers are picketing quietly, but although Shank had several trespassers arrested, Emmett believes the mill president will wait for the strike to end rather than hiring scabs. Hearing about the strike, Ben writes to Layla with a mandate to abandon her post if her safety is jeopardized, but she responds that she will not leave Macedonia and jokingly writes her approval of the strike.

While Shank tells reporters that he will not allow Communists and foreigners to destroy what he has built in Chapter 35, Jottie receives a visit from Zena whose husband was fired from the mill, and Zena begs Jottie to convince Sol to give him a job. Jottie claims she has no influence on Sol, but having seen them enjoying milkshakes together, Zena insists she does and reports that the unionizers will only negotiate with Sol so the board is considering firing Shank and hiring Sol as the president of the mill. Zena grows embittered when Jottie refuses to intervene, and she mocks the Romeyns, calling Felix a bootlegger and blaming him for the mill fire and Vause's death. When she claims Bird and Willa will be whores like their mother, Jottie turns the hose on Zena and threatens to tell everyone that Zena's husband was fired because she slept with Shank and gave him syphilis if Zena says anything else about the Romeyns. Outraged, Zena insists it is not true, but Jottie asks who everyone will believe.

In Chapter 36, Bird and Willa listen to Jottie's warning to avoid the mill, but they hear stories about the workers being killed. When Willa runs into Jottie in town, she convinces her to take her to see the strike by lamenting the fact that she is missing one of the only things to happen in Macedonia. The strike does not look impressive, but



Shank comes out to yell at Mr. Bryce with the TWOC and objects to the presence of Romeyns at the mill when he notices Emmett. As the workers start yelling for a union, Sol approaches to suggest Jottie go home and to advise the crowd to discuss negotiation. Furious, Shank announces that Sol no longer represents the mill's management and asks to speak to him in his office. At home, Willa asks what happened, and Jottie explains that they lost Sol his job; the next day's paper claims that Shank fired Sol for "colluding with the union" (page 317).

Avoiding the strike because of her promise to Felix in Chapter 37, Layla searches for the Kern House on Zackquill Avenue, and noticing a woman in a purple kimono watching avidly from a window, Layla walks away and is catcalled by a group of men, one of whom follows her and urges her to be friendly. The woman above, Delia, yells at him and invites Layla inside for iced tea. When Layla explains that she is writing the History of Macedonia and looking for the Kerns House to find out if General Imboden stayed there, Delia welcomes her to the Kerns House and admits that Mrs. Kerns was a "lady of the evening" (page 322). Learning that Layla is boarding with the Romeyns, she recalls that Felix and Vause were the devil's own, but she does not believe that Felix killed Vause and burned the mill down.

## Analysis

Foreshadowing is fulfilled in Chapter 33 with the arrival of the photographer, Miss Echols, and again when Sol warns Layla that the mill strike has begun. Layla's low self-esteem is highlighted by her surprise when she learns that Jottie likes her, and Sol's request that she relay the news to Emmett suggests Sol's attempt to get her away from Felix and foreshadows the future romance between Emmett and Layla. Their conversation seems to raise Sol in her estimation, though this is short-lived. Her comment that a fight does not become history until someone wins reinforces the adage that history is written by the victors. Layla's disappointment at Felix's absence during dinner is assuaged by his evening visit when he warns her away from the mill, but he also tells her that Sol is a liar, forcing her to choose his side.

Jottie's attempts to praise Emmett are interrupted in Chapter 34 when Felix arrives; his presence nearly always causes everyone's attention to be focused on him, showing his needy nature. Emmett provides an update on the mill strike, and Ben shows concern for his niece by advising her to leave Macedonia if her safety is jeopardized. Layla's joking response shows her dedication to her project.

In Chapter 35, Shank's interview is in keeping with the arrogance he portrayed in his meeting with Layla. Zena's visit shows the extent of the rumors about Jottie and Sol, while her anger at Jottie's refusal to intervene reveals her desperation. Her accusations against the Romeyn family elicit Jottie's anger, causing her to threaten Zena, and even though the Romeyns' reputation has diminished, she still has faith that her word would be believed.



Rumors about the mill strike lead Willa to convince Jottie to take her in Chapter 36, but warnings about being there indicate the inherent danger in their presence. Sol's loyalty to Jottie is demonstrated by his advice for them to leave, but when Shank fires him for colluding with the union, Jottie feels guilty because she believes he lost his job because of her.

Layla continues her research in Chapter 37, learning about General Imboden's visits to a prostitute, but Delia's comments about Felix and Vause causes Layla concern, foreshadowing her attempts to uncover more about these claims.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What does Layla learn about the mill strike in Chapter 33?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Describe Jottie's encounter with Zena in Chapter 35.

## **Discussion Question 3**

What happens when Willa convinces Jottie to take her to the mill to see the strike?

## **Vocabulary**

contemptuously, distressing, earnestly, extravagant, obliged, imperviousness, perforated, exhilarated, patriotic, mirthlessly



# Chapters 38-42

## Summary

When Layla cannot find her map in Chapter 38 because Willa hid it, Willa escorts her to Mrs. Lansbrough's home where she eavesdrops from the top of the stairs. Mrs. Lansbrough reiterates that Felix and Vause were close friends, and she doubts the story about Vause stealing money from the mill because he was not a thief. She also explains that Felix was not at the mill because he was attending a party at Mr. Tare Russell's house that evening, but she discredits the rumor of romance between Vause and Jottie while observing that Felix did not attend Vause's funeral. As their conversation returns to the town's history, Willa ponders the significance of what she has overheard.

When Jottie meets Sol to apologize for costing him his job in Chapter 39, he insists she must comfort him and kisses her, but he also admits that he expects to receive Shank's job soon enough. Thinking that being with Sol would restore all she has lost, Jottie agrees to start dating him discreetly again, but she declines when he proposes marriage. Jottie recalls her youthful plans to run away with Felix and Vause who refused to leave her, and despite their fathers' prohibitions, Vause and Jottie planned to marry in California. In the present, Jottie blames her refusal on the lack of romance, but she agrees when Sol promises to make it up to her.

Researching the mill fire in Chapter 40, Layla learns that Sol accused Felix of being involved, but the accusations were dismissed. She feels that Shank and Sol stole Felix's position at the mill from him, and unable to understand the disloyalty of Emmett and Jottie being friends with Sol, she vows to stand with Felix and protect him.

In Chapter 41, Willa and Bird excitedly save money to buy Jottie a birthday present, arguing about what to buy until Mae and Minerva convince them to get a locket. That evening, the Romeyns have dinner guests, and the conversation ranges from the strike at the mill to the Romeyn siblings' childhood antics.

After their guests leave in Chapter 42, Felix plans to visit friends, and declining Layla's company, he sends her to bed so he can talk to Jottie. When he asks for some of their money, Jottie nervously warns him not to do something bad, but when she asks him to leave Layla alone since the girl expects him to marry her, Felix accuses Jottie of caring more for Layla than for him. Feeling sad that she has failed again, Jottie reminds Felix that she knows how heartbreak feels, and although she warns him to be careful, she feels a small amount of relief at the thought that she may never see him again.

## Analysis

Willa's sneaky nature is useful in Chapter 38 as she hides Layla's maps to connive a chance for more spying during her visit to Mrs. Lansbrough. Pretending to visit Mrs. Bucklew, Willa eavesdrops on the ladies' conversation about Vause and Felix. Layla



feigns ignorance of Vause to acquire more information, causing Willa to be even more suspicious of their boarder. She wonders what Layla is seeking, noting that sometimes it seems she is in love with Felix, but other times, it appears as though Layla suspects him of something. Although Mrs. Lansbrough does not believe Vause stole the money, she also professes faith in Felix's innocence since he was attending a party at Mr. Tare Russell's house, revealing Felix's alibi and showing how the older man is connected to Felix.

Jottie's guilt over Sol losing his job plays a large role in Chapter 39 as he plays on her guilt to effect a reconciliation even as he admits that he anticipates a promotion in the near future. Again seeing Sol as a means of security, Jottie resumes their romance, but she refuses his marriage proposal. In reality, her refusal is linked to her lingering feelings for Vause as demonstrated by her memory of their plans to elope, and she continues to mourn all the days she must live without him; however, she claims her refusal is based on the lack of romance, causing Sol to promise to make it up to her and foreshadowing his future proposal.

Layla's research into the mill fire in Chapter 40 convinces her of Felix's innocence. Moreover, she again feels like he has been misused, reinforcing her determination to stand by him and protect him since his siblings have been so disloyal by retaining their friendships with Sol whose accusations damaged Felix's reputation and career aspects.

In Chapter 40, Willa and Bird's love for Jottie is demonstrated by the importance they place on choosing the perfect birthday present. Felix's consternation about Willa wearing lipstick shows his love and concern for his daughter through his fear of her growing up. That evening's conversations pertain to various topics of interest, but the most important aspect to observe is Layla's show of solidarity with Felix by placing her hand on his knee as well as Willa's continued disgust and fear of losing her father to Layla.

In Chapter 42, Felix's dismissal of Layla shows that he views her as a child and is not seriously interested in her. Jottie perceives this fact and tries to warn him away by informing him of Layla's expectations. Indifferent to the possibility of injuring the young lady, Felix accuses his sister of not being loyal enough to him. He asks for some money, and the fact that he does not take it all alerts Jottie to the fact that he does not know what will happen, and although she warns him to be careful, she finds a small amount of comfort in the thought of never seeing him again, showing her internal conflict over her loyalty to Felix. Her self-esteem also takes a hit from her failure to dissuade Felix from pursuing Layla, and her reminder that she knows how heartbreak feels is an obvious allusion to Vause's betrayal; Felix's minimal reaction suggests his guilt and foreshadows Willa's future revelations.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Mrs. Lansbrough tell Layla about Felix and Vause in Chapter 38?



## Discussion Question 2

Recount Jottie's memory in Chapter 39.

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Jottie warn Felix away from Layla in Chapter 42, and how does Felix react?

## Vocabulary

plastered, deliberated, nuisance, diplomacy, reconcile, percussion, cataclysm, haggard, inferno, concurred, asphyxiation, alleged, speculated



# Chapters 43-45

## Summary

Attempts to make a birthday cake for Jottie go awry in Chapter 43, so Mae and Minerva plan to treat her to ice cream instead; Jottie loves the locket they bestow upon her. Leaving Bird to play with the Lloyd boys, Willa returns home and is happy to see money under the sugar bowl, indicating Felix is home. When Sol calls to invite Jottie to the horse show in Charles Town, Jottie is touched that he remembers her birthday, and while she suspects he will propose again, she insists she will not think about Vause or Felix when she answers. Willa promises to keep the secret, not confessing that Felix is home, but despite being ordered to take Bird and go stay at Minerva's house for the night, Willa drops Bird off and lies that she is going to see Cousin Irene with Jottie.

Willa stays quiet when she returns home in Chapter 44, and after Felix finds Jottie's letter explaining her absence, he calls to Layla that they have the house to themselves, making Willa feel sick when they kiss. While they go swimming, Willa reads and wonders if her father will choose Layla over Willa and Bird. She hears them giggling in Felix's room when they return.

In Charles Town, Jottie thinks about how wonderful Sol is, but when he proposes, she asks why he is so set on her. Sol admits that he has wanted to marry Jottie since he was 12 years old, but he never told her because she was in love with Vause; Jottie accepts Sol's proposal, but that night, she wakes in a panic, and although she knows she will be happy and loved, she feels like she is betraying Felix. Thoughts of Vause are unbearable, but she cannot tell Sol that she changed her mind.

Waking in Felix's bed, Layla touches his back and feels a scar. He jumps up looking fierce but quickly returns to bed, claiming that he knows what she wants.

In Chapter 45, Willa thinks about how much trouble she is in when Jottie returns. Sol knocks on Jottie's hotel room door early, excited that they are betrothed, and when Jottie says they need to figure out what to do with Bird and Willa, he offers to let the girls live with them. When Jottie calls Minerva to check on her nieces, Henry informs her that Willa is supposed to be with her, causing Jottie to frantically call home. The phone wakes Layla, but Felix does not want to leave the bed. When she comments that they will have years to sleep together, he laughs that Jottie is always right, but he refuses to explain until later, claiming it will be a surprise. When further calls home prove unsuccessful, Jottie phones Emmett who promises to find Willa while Jottie and Sol rush back to Macedonia.

## Analysis

Jottie's domestic skills remain unrefuted in Chapter 43 as attempts to make her birthday cake fail, but her love for her nieces shines through in her reaction to her gifted locket



with their pictures inside. Money in the kitchen again alerts Willa to her father's return, and her snooping continues as she eavesdrops on Jottie's conversation with Sol. Jottie's lack of self-worth shows in her surprise that Sol remembers her birthday, and she justifies agreeing to go to the horse show with him by reminding herself that he lied (was mistaken) once while Felix lies to every woman; as usual, the men in the novel improve upon comparison to Felix. Jottie's decision to refrain from thinking of Felix or Vause when Sol proposes again foreshadows their engagement. Willa's sneakiness continues after Jottie's departure as she contrives to separate Layla and her father, foreshadowing the romance she witnesses and Jottie's panic upon finding Willa missing.

In Chapter 44, Felix responds to Jottie's absence by continuing his pursuit of Layla to Willa's chagrin, and although Willa sees little from her hiding place, the things she overhears is enough to convince her that she is still in danger of losing her father to Layla. When Sol proposes, Jottie's self-worth again plays a role as she questions why he is so determined to marry her, and his response confirms Felix's claims that Sol was jealous of Vause. Jottie's acquiescence to the proposal quickly yields regret as she feels like she is betraying Felix; her inability to even think of Vause shows that she still loves him, despite her many protests. Felix's reaction to Layla touching his scar indicates his secrets, but his physical reaction reiterates his intentions for Layla are not honorable.

Sol's excitement in Chapter 45 is not dampened by Jottie's concern for her nieces, and he demonstrates his devotion by offering to let the girls live with them. Jottie learns that Willa is not with Minerva as she should be, foreshadowing and fulfilling foreshadowing about her panic. Felix's refusal to answer the phone increases Jottie's panic, while his conversation with Layla about how Jottie is always right after Layla talks about their marriage again shows his dishonorable intentions. Emmett's agreement to find Willa combined with Jottie and Sol's frantic rush home foreshadows their imminent confrontation with Felix.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Willa lie to Bird about visiting Cousin Irene with Jottie?

## Discussion Question 2

What major decision does Jottie make while in Charles Town, and how does she feel about it after the fact?

## Discussion Question 3

In Chapter 45, what is Felix talking about when he tells Layla that Jottie is always right?



## Vocabulary

pertaining, skittering, reliable, prospects, thronged, tentatively, reminiscently, rhythmic, importunate, zealously



# Chapters 46-49

## Summary

Willa is disgusted in Chapter 46 as Felix and Layla putter around the kitchen affectionately, but when the conversation turns to her Senator father, Felix says that he has enjoyed Layla slumming it. She claims that she loves Felix, but he insists that she does not know him. Layla stresses that the future is all that matters, and before Willa can interrupt to remind Felix that the past, which includes her and Willa, matters, Jottie enters with Sol and demands to know where Willa is. Claiming Willa is fine but upset that Jottie is with Sol, Felix grabs her arm and reminds her of all he has done for her. Sol insists that Felix did not do Jottie any favors; Felix crawled home when his marriage fell apart and made Jottie his slave, but now Sol is going to marry her. As Emmett enters hurriedly, Felix congratulates Jottie on her engagement and announces that he and Layla are getting married, shushing Sol when he expresses sympathy, and moving to Chicago with the girls. Jottie tells Felix he is being unfair to Layla, but she is happy and cannot understand how Jottie can marry a man whose lies nearly ruined her brother's life. Sol insists that he knows Felix was behind the mill fire because he saw him break in a dozen times, and when Felix claims Sol always hated him, Sol admits that he wanted to be like Vause and Felix. He points out that Vause was not dishonest, and when Jottie agrees that Vause only lied to protect Felix, Felix informs her that Vause was stealing from the mill to run away because he was not really in love with Jottie.

As Jottie and Felix debate the legitimacy on his claim in Chapter 47, Willa knows her father is lying and realizes she must choose between Felix and Jottie when her aunt begins crying. Jumping from her hiding spot, Willa insists that Vause loved Jottie, telling everyone about finding his coat with Jottie's photo in Mr. Tare Russell's basement. Claiming Willa has an overactive imagination, Felix orders her to her room, but Jottie asks what else she found, and when she admits to finding money too, Sol tells Felix they got him. Felix admits he lied about stealing the money and setting the mill on fire, admitting that Vause truly did love Jottie. Jottie is determined that Felix will pay for letting her think Vause wanted to leave her even though it nearly killed her. Still insisting they need to stick together, Felix tells Jottie she does not want to marry Sol, threatening to marry Layla when Jottie claims she will marry Sol. Realizing that Felix does not care about her, Layla refuses to marry a liar, despite his mockery that her mind was easy to change before. Telling Felix that she is done with him, Jottie kicks him out and insists on keeping Willa and Bird, and touching Willa's shoulder without receiving a response, he leaves without glancing at the others.

Willa feels dizzy in Chapter 48, and running after her father, she sees him driving away. Emmett takes her to bed, and although Jottie assures her it will all be fine, Willa laments her failure to protect Felix from Layla and how she destroyed everything. Jottie holds her until she cries herself to sleep. Telling Sol that she will decide herself what is right and wrong from now on, Jottie agrees to marry him but promises to end it if he ever lies to her. Sol wants to discuss what to do about Felix and Mr. Tare Russell, but Jottie



insists he let it go. That evening, Jottie is glad her house is so big because every room except Felix's is filled with family members. Lying in bed and conjuring Vause, Jottie is glad that he cannot be taken from her again. Hearing Layla sobbing uncontrollably, Jottie promises she'll take care of her tomorrow.

In Chapter 49, Layla writes her mother that she cannot come to Lance's party because her book is due in two weeks, and her father proudly responds by sending her a check, causing Layla to admit that the only time her father has ever been proud of her is based on a lie. When Layla says she is an idiot who is only pretending to be a writer, Jottie assures her that this was not her fault; Jottie has never met a woman who could refuse Felix. Jottie helps Layla write her book. Emmett brings a book for Willa, and when he leaves, Layla asks Jottie if he is like Felix.

Although everyone thinks Willa is struck dumb by Felix's actions, Willa stops talking because she is exhausted. She knows her father lied to Jottie because he could not bear her hatred and the loss of the last person he had. Willa believes she should have lied instead of ruining everything and making Felix hate her. She tries to console herself with the knowledge that she saved Jottie but does not believe her aunt will be better off marrying Sol. Jottie often stares off into space, but Willa does not ask if she is contemplating her wonderful new life or missing Vause. She cannot be happy that Layla does not have Felix because Willa lost him too. Each night, Willa dreams that Felix comes home, but by the time she gets downstairs, he is gone every single time.

## Analysis

In Chapter 46, Felix's conversation with Layla proves his interest in her is purely sexual; he mocks her social status, refers to their time together as her "slumming it," and even objects to her profession of love. The concept of history plays a role in Layla's insistence that only the future matters, a claim that makes Willa want to stress the importance of the past, but before she can, Jottie's return fulfills foreshadowing, especially as Felix is indifferent to his daughter's absence and instead focuses on Sol's presence. Felix and Sol argue about Jottie with Felix insisting on his sister's loyalty and Sol accusing Felix of enslaving her. Felix reacts to the news of Jottie's engagement by professing that he will marry Layla, and he attempts to manipulate his sister by threatening to take his daughters away. Sol expresses disdain for Felix by offering his sympathy to Layla, but in her misguided loyalty to Felix, Layla defends him. Sol justifies his accusations against Felix by admitting he saw Felix break into the mill multiple times, and he refutes Felix's claim that he was jealous with the admission that he wanted to be like Felix and Vause. Sol's reminder of Vause's honesty causes Jottie to confess that Vause only lied to protect Felix, but Felix distracts her thoughts by telling her that Vause never really loved her; in fact, he stole the money from the mill so he could leave Macedonia to avoid marrying Jottie. This shows Felix's desperation to conceal his secrets and foreshadows Willa's revelations.

Willa knows that Felix is lying in Chapter 47 because she sees the picture of Jottie in Vause's pocket as evidence of his love, plus she recognizes the lie in her father's voice,



making her wonder how often he has lied for her to recognize the sound. Knowing that she will break into pieces if Felix breaks Jottie, Willa must choose between them, but she admits that she actually chooses herself because any other decision would prevent her from being who she is. Revealing herself, Willa tells Jottie about what she found in Mr. Tare Russell's basement, fulfilling foreshadowing. When Felix blames Willa's imagination, she nearly hates him for making her look foolish, but Jottie encourages her to continue her story; Willa's description of Vause's coat and the money confirms Sol's suspicions, making him triumphant when Felix admits his involvement, but Jottie stands in disbelief of her brother's deception. After confirming his many lies and receiving confirmation that Vause truly loved her, Jottie insists Felix will pay for his sins this time because he was indifferent to the fact that Vause's betrayal nearly killed her. Felix still tries to dissuade Jottie from marrying Sol, but after years of distrusting herself because she was mistaken about Vause, she realizes she should have never trusted Felix. Layla also rejects Felix because of his deceptions, foreshadowing her heartbreak.

Willa's reaction to Felix leaving in Chapter 48 foreshadows her silence, while foreshadowing is fulfilled concerning Layla's heartbreak. Willa feels that she has failed in her mission to protect her father, destroying her life instead. Jottie regains her confidence as she tells Sol she will end things if he ever lies to her, and her refusal to pursue legal repercussions for her brother foreshadows her forgiveness. Emmett is relieved to see Jottie's face return to herself after so many years, emphasizing the burden she has felt because of Vause's presumed betrayal, and now she is glad that Vause is hers again so she can continue loving him without feeling guilty about it. Emmett staying in the hall out of concern for Layla's tears foreshadows his confession of love.

Layla's heartbreak is evident in her actions in Chapter 49, and she resents her father's pride in her dedication to her project since she feels it was based on lies because she avoids Lance's party out of shame of her interactions with Felix. Jottie tries to comfort Layla, and Layla's question as to whether Emmett is like Felix foreshadows their romance. Willa regrets revealing her father's secrets because she understands the reasons for his lies; she wishes she too had lied to prevent losing everything. Attempts to comfort herself with the knowledge that she saved Jottie fail because she does not believe her aunt is better off with Sol since she can tell that Jottie still loves Vause. Although Willa was successful in keeping Felix from Layla, there is little comfort in the thought as her efforts resulted in both of them losing him as demonstrated by her repeated dreams. Willa's sorrow at her father's absence foreshadows her attempts to effect a reconciliation between him and Jottie.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Felix react to the news of Jottie and Sol's engagement?



## Discussion Question 2

In Chapter 47, what secret does Willa reveal, and how do the other characters react to this revelation?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Willa feel about the results of her revelation in Chapter 49?

## Vocabulary

cinched, hesitation, evasively, appraising, slander, implacable, impassively, ferocious, honorable, imperiously



# Chapters 50-53

## Summary

When Layla prepares her complete manuscript in Chapter 50 to send to Mrs. Chambers, Jottie offers to mail it. Living with Layla and Willa is like having ghosts in the house, plus Vause has now been restored to her; her recollections each night make her feel like she is being unfaithful to Sol, and she promises to stop once she is married. While out, Jottie receives several congratulations on her engagement, and on her way home, Sol offers her a ride so she will be the first to know that he has been offered the position of mill president and now has everything he has ever wanted. Ben writes Layla to inform her that everyone was impressed with her successful work on the History of Macedonia and would like to use her for future projects.

When Willa visits her father's room in Chapter 51, she can tell he has been there, and checking Jottie's room, she finds a package and summons her aunt. Jottie immediately recognizes Vause's coat, but when she says it is too late for Felix to erase 18 years, Willa does not understand because she thought the gift would melt Jottie's heart. That night, Hank Nole, a police officer, informs Jottie that he has issued a warrant for Felix for disturbing the peace, warning him out of Macedonia since Felix has always graciously kept his business out of Hank's jurisdiction.

When Parker Davies asks to visit Layla to discuss her book in Chapter 52, she asks the Romeyn sisters to be present since he does not sound thrilled. Mr. Davies insists that some passages must be expunged, accusing Layla of including lies in her book, but Layla stands by her history because she acquired ample evidence of all she wrote. Annoyed at Jottie's defense that people will want to read the interesting book, Mr. Davies insists Layla check her facts, approving the manuscript with this proviso. Layla believes the book will be ready in time for the picnic in September. The Romeyns are highly amused by his irritation, and their laughter only increases when Emmett arrives and observes how frightening they are.

Since Sol is busy with a strike committee meeting in Chapter 53, he sends Jottie a gift of candy through Emmett, and running into Layla, Emmett and she agree that Sol does not understand Jottie very well. When Layla asks about Vause, Emmett admits that everyone else liked him, but Emmett was jealous of Jottie's affection for Vause since she often used him as a decoy for their secret meetings. Layla observes that Jottie and Vause must have had something special and blushes when Emmett says that is what being in love is like. Bird gets stuck in a tree despite Sol's warnings, and though Jottie is pleased that he rescues Bird, she also feels that it is worthless if it is so easy. When Layla receives a letter asking her to write a book about apple farming, she thinks it sounds boring, but Jottie assures her it will be more interesting than she thinks. Layla convinces Jottie to help her with the book because, even though her father has agreed to let Layla come home, she wants to stay with the Romeyns because they make her



feel like she belongs, compared to her own family who treats her like the black sheep. Jottie agrees that Layla is practically family, and that is exactly what Layla wants.

## Analysis

As the novel begins its denouement in Chapter 50, Layla submits her manuscript, but without a project to focus her energies on, she is depressed after her disappointed love for Felix. In contrast, Jottie feels like Vause has been restored to her, and although she kisses Sol each night, the way that she rushes home to recall Vause feels like adultery. Ashamed because Sol is a good man who deserves her love and loyalty, Jottie promises herself that she will stop thinking of Vause once she is married. Also, the honor neighbors bestow upon her by virtue of her engagement are offensive because she did not earn it herself. This foreshadows her decision to discontinue the relationship. His announcement that he received his anticipated promotion to mill president hastens this foreshadowing as it alleviates some of her guilt for getting him fired and also shows a high point in Sol's life as he feels he had gotten all he has ever wanted. The letter from Ben at the chapter's end shows the result of Layla's hard work and her success in her goal to produce a quality History of Macedonia.

As Chapter 51 begins, the interaction between Mae, Minerva, Emmett and Layla indicates Layla's heartbreak, the sisters' change in opinion regarding their boarder, and Emmett's romantic interest in Layla. Willa's visit to her father's room shows how much she misses Felix, and the fact that she can tell something is different indicates how frequently she makes this visit. Her suspicions are confirmed when she finds the gift for Jottie, and although Jottie obviously cherishes the gift, she still cannot forgive her brother; Willa's childlike confusion shows her innocence and foreshadows the reconciliation that she instigates. When Jottie laments that Felix will never change, Willa professes that she does not want him to change, showing her unconditional love that allows her to accept her father for who he is, even after uncovering his faults. This concept is reiterated by the phone call from Hank Nole who insinuates that he does not want to arrest Felix because Felix has always respected his town boundaries; Felix's public misbehaviors indicate how lost and hopeless he feels after being cut off from his family.

Mr. Parker Davies is displeased with Layla's historical rendering of his town in Chapter 52, and his intent to intimidate Layla into submission is obvious from his desire to meet with her alone. Showing their support for Layla which emphasizes how far the relationship has come, the Romeyn sisters insist on being present for Parker's visit. Parker raves about the untruths in the History of Macedonia, claiming it is "tainted by lurid tales and sordid allegations" (page 444), but showing her backbone, Layla insists that she has ample evidence of both General Hamilton's insanity and Reverend Goodacre's philandering. Jottie assists in defending the book, pointing out that it is interesting and that people will want to read it, validating that Layla has achieved her goals in her attempted project. Parker claims that Riddell Fox will also be displeased, but Layla rebuts that Belle Fox is thrilled, so Parker begrudgingly approves the book with the proviso that Layla checks her facts, and his approval means the book should be



read in time for the fall festivities on September 24. Showing her acceptance in their family, Emmett groups Layla in with his sisters when he claims how frightening they seem as they laugh at their victory over Parker, and they all find that even funnier; Jottie is glad that Willa seems interested in the exchange, suggesting that she hopes Willa's silent condition will improve.

Emmett agrees to deliver a gift from Sol to Jottie in Chapter 53, but he and Layla agree that the box of candy is evident of how little Sol actually knows about Jottie. Layla's curiosity about Vause shows her love for Jottie, but her questions about Emmett also foreshadow her romantic interest. Emmett recounts how close he was with Jottie, explaining his constant concern for her, and also admits his jealousy of Vause. The exchange where Emmett identifies Jottie and Vause's relationship as the epitome of love results in Layla blushing and foreshadows their romantic relationship. Although Jottie appreciates many things about Sol, her doubts that an easy relationship is valuable foreshadows her decision to terminate their engagement. As summer ends, Jottie knows that Emmett will visit less often since he has been around every day since Felix left, but the frequency of his visits indicates his interest in Layla and also foreshadows the continued frequency. The success of Layla's book leads to the offer of future projects, but Layla's excitement is contained until she obtains Jottie's reluctantly agreed assistance which leads to a conversation about Layla wanting to stay with the Romeyns, showing her acceptance and how greatly her opinions have changed in a mere few months.

## Discussion Question 1

What gift does Felix bestow upon Jottie in Chapter 51, and how she feel about the gift and the giver?

## Discussion Question 2

What does Mr. Parker Davies think about Layla's manuscript, and how does Layla and the Romeyn sisters defend her History of Macedonia?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Layla ask Jottie to help her with her next assignment? What is the second request she makes, and why?

## Vocabulary

manuscript, subsided, deceitful, loathsome, hypocrite, intrinsic, dilemma, appealed, violation, jurisdiction





# Chapters 54-56 & Epilogue

## Summary

Layla joins Emmett on a trip to the Big Farm in Chapter 54, and during their nearly silent ride, she wonders what he thinks of her, acknowledging to herself that he has every reason to hate her because she is weak and gave herself to Felix, yet sometimes he looks at her like he is waiting for something. When she asks if he thinks she is foolish, Emmett praises Layla for standing up to Felix when so many girls have fallen for him, and he admits that he wanted to kill his brother for the harsh things he said to her. He smiles when Layla expresses concern that Felix may have hurt him. While Emmett tends to farm business, Layla sits on the fence and watches the animals, but the catch in his breath as he helps her down convinces her that it was not her imagination that he feels something for her. When Layla responds to her father's invitation to return home, she explains that she had taken another project and enjoys the freedom that comes with working and supporting herself. Running into his friends, Sol introduces Jottie as his childhood sweetheart, and she is enraged at his dismissal of Vause, realizing that Sol has lied to himself. Jottie allows Willa to stay home from school, but they visit the doctor who assures Jottie that Willa will be fine. Willa joins Jottie for her research on apple farms, but when Willa occasionally finds her aunt crying, she is too tired to ask because she does not want to know the reason.

When Layla touches Emmett's lips in Chapter 55, he warns her away, admitting that he is scared of her because he has been trying not to care for her since the day they met, but he did not succeed so he reaches for her. Promising to keep her safe since he wants to be with her forever, Emmett proposes, and although Layla wants to marry him, she needs to know everything about him first. She asks about his first memory because it made him who he is and she loves him.

During the sesquicentennial celebration in Chapter 56, Willa sticks with Jottie, listening to people praise the History of Macedonia. Having negotiated with the union and ended the strike, Sol nervously makes a speech, and after people ask about Felix and Jottie tells Willa that she cannot expect to know everything if she cannot be bothered to talk, Willa decides to go home. On her way, Felix joins her, expressing concern because he heard she was sick, but when Willa asks him to come home, he reminds her that he cannot. Willa apologizes for sharing his secrets, yet Felix says it is better that Jottie knows. Suggesting they sit on the roof, Felix asks why Willa snooped in Tare's basement in the first place, and she confesses that she is a bootlegger like him and a natural-born sneak; they both agree that it is a curse to be so good at sneaking around. Felix warns Willa not to be like him, and when Willa doubts Jottie will marry Sol since she seems happier with Vause's coat, Felix seems to think that makes sense. When Jottie approaches and Felix prepares to leave, Willa calls to her aunt to join them on the roof, and although Jottie is upset by Felix's presence, she is relieved that Willa is talking. She tells Felix about the warrant, but when she says it is too late, Willa grabs her skirt and explains that Felix did not know what to do when Vause died; he had



already lost everything and lied because he could not stand to lose Jottie too. Agreeing, Felix is surprised Willa figured it out, but he explains that the fire spread too quickly and Vause looked at him in disgust because he did not trust him anymore. Felix insists he would have done anything to save Vause, and while he hid at Tare's house, he believed his friend had escaped. He learned the truth the next day, that he had killed Vause, so he lied to save his relationship with his sister. Willa reminds Jottie that they would all like to go back in time to change things, but they cannot do that. When Jottie asks how Willa can forgive Felix, she says they cannot live on righteousness, and they can only decide whether they will hate each other. Jottie asks if it would be easier to give him up, and Willa says it is too late for that. She falls asleep holding hands with her aunt and her father, and although Felix is gone when Willa wakes, she does not mind because she knows he will be back.

In the Epilogue, Willa recounts that Jottie ends her engagement, but Sol still visits frequently. Felix comes and goes as usual, but he makes less money after breaking his leg so Jottie picks up the slack by secretly helping Layla with her writing assignments. During the war, the farms prosper, keeping Jottie busy, and she travels with Felix after the war; Felix is grateful that his sister does not hate him, and they keep Vause alive by often talking about him since they both loved him so much. After questioning Emmett about his entire life, Layla marries him, and somewhere along the line, Willa forgives her. Emmett is injured in the war, and when Willa and Bird visit to entertain him, they see how happy Layla makes him. On the way home, Willa tells Bird that she no longer hates Layla, and Bird agrees that Layla's days as a harbinger are over.

## Analysis

Emmett and Layla finally spend a significant amount of time together, alone, in Chapter 54 when she accompanies to the Big Farm to repair Wren's speculator, and her pondering about what he thinks of her foreshadows their courtship, even though Layla believes he has every reason to despise her. When Layla questions Emmett for his opinion, Emmett's response foreshadows his confessions as he casts blame on his brother, praises Layla's strength upon learning the truth, and expresses anger at his brother's actions toward her. Layla begins to suspect Emmett's desire for her. This seems to bolster her confidence as she writes to her father expressing pride in her hard work and the freedom it has earned her. Through broadening her education and social perspective, she has learned that loyalty is not about falling in line; it is about stepping out of line for the people one loves, and Layla knows her father will secretly admire her for getting what she wants. This lesson forgives Jottie forgiving Felix. When Sol introduces Jottie as his childhood sweetheart with whom he was recently reunited, Jottie is affected by the lie which disregards Vause's importance in her life, and knowing that he is enjoying to get what was rightfully Vause's since her thoughts only turned to Sol after she was widowed, Jottie realizes that Sol is not so honest since he lies to himself.

Because of Willa's listlessness and silence, Jottie allows her to skip school, but she shows her concern by taking her niece to the doctor who assures her that Willa will be fine. Jottie encourages Willa's recovery by allowing her assistance in research for



Layla's new book, but Willa's indifference to her new reality continues as she refuses to question Jottie's evening tears, showing that her discoveries and revelations have dampened her curiosity. Layla spending weekends researching her new book with Emmett foreshadows their courtship and ultimate union, while Willa's visits to her father's room and belief that nothing will change shows the depression brought on by her disappointment in the results of her revelation of Felix's secrets.

Chapter 55 fulfills foreshadowing related to Emmett and Layla's courtship as he admits that his feelings began to develop the day they met, explaining his jealousy of his brother. They kiss, and Emmett is enthralled, promising to protect Layla and proposing. Her hesitance creates fear of her refusal, but Layla agrees to marry Emmett after she knows everything about him, showing that her liaison with Felix has taught her caution, although she admits that she has already fallen in love with Emmett.

The sesquicentennial celebration commences in Chapter 56, four months after the novel began. Willa's sticking close to Jottie throughout the celebration in such a defeated manner contrasts with the girl at the beginning of the narrative who vowed to exhibit devotion and ferocity. Sol has done well in his new position, and Jottie's praise combines with this to make him very happy. Anna May's question about Felix raises Willa's curiosity, and Jottie attempts to persuade her niece to talk by telling her she cannot discover everything if she does not speak to ask, but she fails with Willa deciding she does not care. Her decision to go home allows an opportunity for Felix to join her, but his lack of anger shows his remorse and his love for his family. Willa relates to her father's lies about Vause, admitting that she wishes she had not revealed his secrets, but he seems to be more relaxed now that his secrets are out; unfortunately, his forgiveness feels like goodbye, especially when he prolongs his visit to sit on the roof. Willa admits that her curiosity about Felix was a result of her desire to know him, and she later proves her success when she shares his reasons with Jottie to his surprise. She also relates to Felix because of their sneakiness, but discouraging her from being like him, Felix elicits Willa's confession that she does not enjoy it, a likely result of the trouble it has caused.

Like Emmett and Layla, Willa has also decided that Sol does not make Jottie happy, foreshadowing Jottie's similar realization. The fact that Felix acts like it is reasonable because it is Vause shows that he loves and misses his best friend too, showing that he and his sister have something in common. When Jottie reluctantly joins them, her effort is obviously for Willa's sake, but as Jottie cannot stand being near Felix and seeks to escape, Willa surprises her aunt and her father when she reveals the reasons for Felix's betrayal, showing how similar they are since she has learned the reality of his fears by losing him. Even knowing his reasons, Jottie is unable to forgive Felix, but feeling that she will be alone at the end of whatever happens, Willa takes a risk and reminds Jottie that they cannot change the past, showing that while history is important, it cannot be altered; people must learn from their pasts and must also forgive if they love each other. Willa's message echoes Layla's earlier emphasis on loyalty requiring stepping out of the line. Although Felix is gone when Willa wakes, she knows that he will be back because she is confident in the success of her message.



Willa's success is shown in the Epilogue as the novel's lingering foreshadowing is fulfilled. Jottie ends her relationship with Sol, so he marries another lady, but when it does not last, he resumes his visits to Jottie in Felix's absence. Willa wonders how it is enough for Sol. At first, Felix does not change, and his breaking his leg indicates violence related to his job which leads him to a quieter life in which he and Jottie live in peace. Their mutual love for Vause also helps them reunite, and their relationship improves immensely. Layla and Emmett eventually get married, and Layla paling upon her recollection of her affair with Felix appeases Willa who ultimately forgives Layla for everything when she sees how happy the woman makes Emmett. Willa is content with her situation which really returns to her life at the beginning of the novel; the only thing that has changed is that the Romeyns' secrets have been revealed, but they all seem much happier for it.

## Discussion Question 1

How does the relationship between Layla and Emmett develop from Chapter 54 through the Epilogue?

## Discussion Question 2

What leads Jottie to decide against marrying Sol?

## Discussion Question 3

In Chapter 56, describe the conversation between Willa, Jottie and Felix. What impact does this have on Jottie and Felix's relationship?

## Vocabulary

apathetically, mistrustfully, maimed, presume, ample, unhinged, incur, germane, guileless, furtive, undulating



# Characters

## Willa Romeyn

Willa Romeyn is the only first-person narrator in the novel and is one of the protagonists. She is the daughter of Felix and Sylvia, but her aunt Jottie raises her. The novel begins with Willa suspecting that she is being lied to, and she determines to institute the Macedonian virtues of ferocity and devotion. When Layla first arrives, Willa desires becoming the boarder's confidante, but she soon begins her own research and snooping as she attempts to uncover her family's secrets.

The summer that she is twelve years old, Willa Romeyn determines to be ferocious and devoted when she begins to suspect she is being lied to. Eager to become the confidante of the Romeyns' boarder, Layla, Willa spies on Layla during her research, learning about Vause Hamilton who stole money from the mill and died in the mill fire but is oddly connected to Jottie. When Willa expresses shame of her family, Jottie begins pondering how to provide her nieces with security. After seeing her father, Felix, emerge from Cooley's Red Apple, Willa begins to suspect him of being a bootlegger, and her continued investigations uncover more about the friendship between Felix, Vause and Jottie. As Felix expresses romantic interest in Layla, Willa grows to hate Layla and determines that she will protect Felix from the writer.

During her snooping, Willa discovers several of her father's cases in Mr. Tare Russell's basement; she finds a lot of money and a coat that obviously belonged to Vause as there is a picture of Jottie in the pocket. When Sol takes Jottie away for her birthday, Willa lies to her family so she can stay home to interfere in Felix's romance with Layla, and when Jottie realizes that Willa is missing, she rushes home. Unable to bear her father's cruelty or her aunt's tears when Felix claims that Vause never loved Jottie, Willa emerges from hiding to inform Jottie that she found Vause's coat in Mr. Russell's basement and the photo of Jottie obviously indicates his love for her; as a result of this revelation, Jottie banishes her brother from her home.

Devastated that she has lost everything, Willa stops speaking. When Willa leaves the sesquicentennial picnic early, Felix accompanies her onto the roof, and at Willa's behest, Jottie joins them. Because Jottie is unable to forgive Felix, Willa explains that he loved Vause too and felt badly about his friend's death, but he lied to Jottie because he was afraid to lose her too. Pointing out that they cannot change the past, Willa observes that they must decide whether to hate each other, and although Felix leaves that night, Willa knows it will be okay. After Jottie and Felix are reconciled, Willa is happy with her family and her life.



## Jottie Romeyn

Jottie Romeyn is Willa's aunt and Felix's sister. Much of the novel is told from her point of view, though she does not act as a narrator. Throughout the narrative, Jottie follows a path of self-discovery as she learns her brother's secrets and begins building her own self-esteem. In her youth, Jottie was in love with Vause Hamilton and planned to marry him, but his involvement in stealing from the mill makes her feel betrayed, causing her to convince herself that she must hate Vause.

Jottie raises Willa, and she accepts Layla Beck as a boarder as the novel begins. When Willa expresses shame of her family, Jottie begins pondering how to provide her nieces with security. Jottie joins a ladies' club to provide respectability to her nieces, but insecure about her own abilities, she secretly begins dating Sol McKubin. Through flashbacks and Willa's snooping, the reader learns that Jottie was in love with Vause Hamilton and planned to marry him before he died in the mill fire 18 years earlier. Jottie helps Layla with her research for her book, but she disapproves when Felix shows an interest in Layla and tries to warn Layla off. On the frequent occasions that Jottie thinks of Vause, she reminds herself that she has a duty to hate him for what he put her family through.

Emmett disapproves of Jottie spending her life tending to Felix's demands, and after several chance encounters with Sol, Jottie escorts Layla to the mill where she agrees to a date with Sol, seeing him as a means of providing security for Willa and Bird. Jottie secretly dates Sol until Felix finds out and reminds her that she owes her brother loyalty, and he hates Sol for accusing Felix of being involved in the mill fire that took Vause's life. When the mill workers strike, Sol is fired for colluding with the union, and Jottie meets with him to apologize for causing him to lose his job. She refuses his proposal, but on her birthday, she sneaks off to a horse show in Charles Town where she agrees to marry Sol. When Jottie realizes that Willa is missing, she rushes home where Felix discovers her engagement to Sol.

Trying to dissuade his sister from the match, Felix informs Jottie that Vause never loved her, causing her to cry. Unable to bear her father's cruelty or her aunt's tears, Willa emerges to inform Jottie that she found Vause's coat in Mr. Russell's basement and the photo of Jottie obviously indicates his love for her. It also proves Felix's involvement in the mill fire, causing Layla to refuse Felix as Jottie banishes him from her home. Willa encourages her aunt to forgive Felix by explaining that he lied because he was afraid to lose her. Eventually, Jottie calls her off engagement with Sol and reconciles with her brother.

## Layla Beck

Layla Beck, one of the novel's protagonists, is the daughter of a Senator who cuts her off because she refuses to marry Nelson. Forced to work for the WPA, Layla is sent to Macedonia, WV to write the town's history, and while boarding with the Romeyn family, she researches the town's history and becomes romantically involved with Felix, despite



Jottie's warnings. After Felix's secrets are revealed, Layla refuses to continue their affair, but she laments the loss of her virtue and feels ashamed. Her History of Macedonia is successful, and Layla is assigned to a new project on which she enlists Jottie's aid. She decides to continue living with Jottie because she feels like she belongs with the Romeyn family. After Emmett tells her all about his life, Layla marries him.

## **Felix Romeyn**

Felix Romeyn is Willa's father and Jottie's brother, and although he claims that he makes his living by selling chemicals, he is actually a bootlegger. He pursues Layla, despite his sister's objections, and he dissuades Jottie from dating Sol who he hates for accusing him of being involved with the mill fire that killed his best friend, Vause. When Willa's revelations confirm Sol's suspicions, Jottie banishes her brother from their home. Felix visits Willa who helps explain to Jottie that he lied because he was afraid to lose his sister after already having lost so much. Eventually, Felix and Jottie are reconciled and learn to live together harmoniously.

## **Sol McKubin**

A manager at American Everlasting, Sol McKubin has always loved Jottie but has not talked to her in years after eliciting Felix's chagrin by accusing him of being involved in the mill fire that killed Vause. Jottie secretly dates Sol and even agrees to marry him, and when he is promoted to mill president, Sol feels like he has everything he has ever wanted. Sol marries another lady after Jottie breaks off their engagement, but after his marriage ends, he frequently visits Jottie when Felix is away.

## **Emmett Romeyn**

Emmett Romeyn is Jottie's baby brother who disapproves of how Felix treats their sister. He promotes the mill strike and admits his jealousy of Vause. After Felix's secrets are revealed, Emmett courts Layla and eventually marries her.

## **Vause Hamilton**

Jottie's beloved and Felix's best friend, Vause Hamilton, died in a mill fire two decades before the narrative begins. He was accused of stealing money which makes Jottie try in vain to hate him for his betrayal. When Willa's revelations clear Vause, Jottie allows herself to love him again.



## **Mr. Parker Davies**

Mr. Parker Davies is a snobby Macedonian who gives Layla a list of the town's prominent families which unfairly excludes the Romeyns. He is displeased with Layla's finished project but agrees to approve it under the caveat that she checks all her facts.

## **Mr. Tare Russell**

Mr. Tare Russell is Felix's alibi for the mill fire, and he allows Felix to hide the stolen money in his basement. When he helps Layla with her research, he also shares stories about his house being haunted.

## **Mrs. Ursula Chambers**

Mrs. Ursula Chambers is in charge of the Macedonian project to which Layla is assigned, and although she is annoyed when Layla is hired, she is pleased with Layla's work.

## **Mae and Minerva Romeyn**

Mae and Minerva Romeyn are Jottie's twin sisters who live with her and help care for their nieces during the week. They spend their weekends separately, with their husbands.

## **Senator Grayson Beck**

Senator Grayson Beck is Layla's father who cuts her off when she refuses to marry Nelson. He is proud of her work on the Macedonian project.

## **Sylvia**

Sylvia is the beautiful mother of Willa and Bird. Divorced from Felix, she lives in sin with a married man and rarely sees her daughters.

## **Ralph Shank**

Ralph Shank is the unpopular mill president who fires Sol during the strike. Sol replaces him in his position at work.





## **Miss Caroline Betts**

Miss Betts is the librarian in Macedonia who assists Layla with her research.

## **Mrs. Bucklew**

Mrs. Bucklew is Willa's older friend for whom Willa secretly buys whiskey.

## **Miss Colleen Echols**

Miss Colleen Echols is the photographer sent to Macedonia to take pictures for Layla's book.

## **Bird Romeyn**

Bird Romeyn is Willa's younger sister.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Macedonian Virtues

After Jottie identifies the Macedonian virtues that the town was named for as ferocity and devotion, Willa is eager to possess these virtues. This idea leads to her attempts to uncover her family's secrets.

## Geraldine's Army

Geraldine's Army shows the significance of military pursuits in Macedonia and also symbolizes Willa's need to belong.

## American Everlasting

American Everlasting is the mill where Mr. Romeyn worked during his children's youths. It supplies most of the town's employment. The fire that killed Vause encompasses most of its past preoccupation, while the strike is a major focus of the present action. The mill symbolizes the town's economic power and also emphasizes the dichotomy of past and present.

## List of Prominent Families

When Mr. Parker Davies gives Layla a list of the town's prominent families which excludes the Romeyns, Willa is ashamed which makes Jottie angry. The list symbolizes the Romeyns' involvement in town gossip and drama.

## Cooley's Red Apple

Willa begins to suspect Felix of being an outlaw after seeing him leave Cooley's Red Apple, a known bootlegging establishment which symbolizes her father's illegal occupation and her research into family secrets.

## Ladies' Clubs

Mrs. Romeyn belonged to the Rose League, and to Jottie, this symbolized respectability and social acceptance. When she decides that she needs to provide her nieces with security, this symbolization leads her to join another ladies' club, the Daughters of Macedonia.



## **The History of Macedonia**

Layla's assignment that sends her to Macedonia, writing the History of Macedonia, spurs the narrative's action. It also facilitates the relationship between Layla and Jottie, and the book's success lead both women to higher self-esteem and a feeling of independence.

## **Mr. Russell's Basement**

Willa's curiosity about her father's secrets lead her to follow Felix to Mr. Tare Russell's basement, and returning later, she finds Vause's coat and money, symbolizing Felix's guilt in the mill fire that killed Vause.

## **Strike**

The strike at the mill causes Emmett's frequent visits and leads to Sol's promotion, reinforcing the importance of the mill.

## **Vause's Coat**

When Willa finds Vause's coat in Mr. Russell's basement, she also finds Jottie's picture in the pocket which proves that Vause loved Jottie. Willa reveals Felix's secrets when she cites this evidence of Vause's love. The fact that Jottie is so happy with the coat indicates her lack of love for Sol and symbolizes the mutual love Jottie shared with Vause.



# Settings

## Macedonia, WV

The town of Macedonia, WV is the main setting of "The Truth According to Us," with the current narrative taking place in 1938 and flashbacks reverting to several decades earlier. Layla is sent to write the town's history, and she boards with the Romeyn family. Her research leads her to rumors, gossip and drama as well as actual history.

## Jottie's Boardinghouse

Layla takes a room in Jottie's boardinghouse when she arrives in Macedonia, and this leads to her involvement with the Romeyn family, especially Felix.

## Library

The library, located in the same building as the jail, is where Layla conducts much of her research with assistance from Miss Caroline Betts.

## Dolly's Ford

Felix takes Layla to Dolly's Ford to assist with her book research, but he spends the trip flirting with and wooing her.

## Cooey's Red Apple

A known bootlegging establishment, Cooey's Red Apple is where Willa sees Felix exit that causes her to question the truth of his occupational claims that he sells chemicals. It leads to her further snooping and reveals that her father is a bootlegger.

## American Everlasting

American Everlasting is the mill where Mr. Romeyn was president until his death. Mr. Shank took over and is not popular with the employees, leading to the strike and cries for a union. When Jottie offers to introduce Layla to Mr. Shank for her research, she runs into Sol, beginning their romantic relationship. The mill is also the scene of the mill fire that took Vause's life.



## **G. Houdyshell Tack & Saddle**

Willa goes to G. Houdyshell Tack & Saddle to buy whisky for Mrs. Bucklew, and here, Brennus confirms that Felix is a bootlegger. Willa feels more of a kinship to her father after realizing that they are both outlaws, and she promises that she will protect his secret.

## **Kern's House**

As part of her research, Layla visits the Kern's House which she learns was a whorehouse frequented by General Imboden. Being in this shady part of town attracts unwanted attention, but Layla is protected by Delia, a "lady of the night," who tells her about the rumor of Felix's involvement in Vause's death.

## **Charles Town**

Jottie sneaks away with Sol to a horse show in Charles Town to celebrate her birthday. Willa hides at home to spy on Felix and Layla, and discovering this, Jottie rushes home out of concern for Willa only to have her secret romance discovered and disparaged by Felix.

## **Mr. Russell's Basement**

Willa follows Felix to Mr. Russell's basement, and later when she returns to protect Felix from Layla, she finds cases of money and Vause's coat with Jottie's photo in the pocket. When Felix tells Jottie that Vause never loved him, Willa reveals his secret to save her aunt's feelings from being hurt. This revelation that Felix was involved in the mill fire that took Vause's life leads to Jottie kicking Felix out of her home.

# Themes and Motifs

## Secrets versus Truth

One of the most prevailing themes in "The Truth According to Us" is centered around the distinction between secrets and the truth. While secrets can be seen as a mere omission, creating a debate as to whether secrets are lies, this narrative most often shows characters hiding their secrets with lies, making the inclusion of the truth a necessity when exploring this theme. The novel opens around the time that Willa first realizes her family is lying to her; although she believes she is Jottie's confidante, she soon finds that she is sadly mistaken. Her desire to learn her family's secrets leads to her attempts to befriend Layla and assist with her research. Irritated by her family's secrets, Willa wishes the Romeyns were like everyone else.

By snooping and eavesdropping, Willa learns about Vause stealing money from the mill and dying in the mill fire, and she also uncovers his affiliation with both Felix and Jottie. Although Jottie frequently reminds herself that she should despise Vause, her thoughts reveal that she still secretly loves him. As Willa digs more into the Romeyns' past, Jottie worries about what people will tell her niece, even though she knows that Willa will eventually learn all of their secrets. By eavesdropping on Layla and Miss Betts, Willa learns that the Romeyns figure into the town's most dramatic episodes, a fact that hints at a major secret. When she begins wondering about her father's job, Emmett tells Willa not to ask questions if she will not like the answers, indicating the secret of Felix being a bootlegger which is reinforced by his exit from Coe's Red Apple. When she begins to suspect that her father is a bootlegger, Willa feels a kinship with him since she is Mrs. Bucklew's bootlegger, and she determines to protect Felix's secret.

While sharing stories about the town's history with Layla, Jottie makes the astute observation that the truth always comes out. Miss Betts expresses faith that the truth will prevail in Layla's History of Macedonia. Questioning a neighbor about Vause, Willa becomes certain that he broke Jottie's heart. When a secret romance begins to develop between Layla and Felix, Jottie tries to warn Layla away from her brother while Willa discreetly works towards ending the affair, lying to Layla that her parents love each other.

Willa also begins to suspect the blossoming romance between Jottie and Sol, and when Jottie begins secretly dating Sol, she is torn between her loyalty to Felix and her desire to protect her nieces. Felix is furious when he learns about his sister's relationship and convinces Jottie to end it. Felix hates Sol for accusing him of stealing the money and setting the mill fire, and he tells Layla that Sol is a liar. When Layla hears rumors of Felix's involvement, she discredits them. Jottie begins secretly seeing Sol again, even sneaking away to Charles Town for her birthday where she agrees to marry Sol.

While sneaking around, Willa discovers money and Vause's coat in Mr. Tare Russell's basement, revealing Felix's secret involvement with the mill fire and his best friend's



death. Willa stays at home during Jottie's trip, and when Jottie learns that Willa is missing, she rushes home where Felix learns about her engagement to Sol. Felix's lies about Vause never loving Jottie cause Willa to reveal what she has discovered, unveiling his decades-old secret of his involvement in the mill fire. Devastated by her brother's lies, Jottie banishes Felix and forbids Sol to ever lie to her. Eventually, Jottie and Felix reconcile with Willa's help, and they live together more peacefully than ever before. With Felix gone, Emmett admits his secret love for Layla, and they are eventually married. Sol's lies about his and Jottie's past lead her to realize he has deceived himself. The secrets revealed in the narrative cause excessive conflict at first, but the truth ultimately allows for resolution and leads to increased contentment for all of the characters.

## Loyalty and Betrayal

With the many secrets dominating this novel, it is not surprising that loyalty and betrayal represent another prominent theme in the narrative. In the first chapter, Willa determines that she wants to demonstrate the Macedonian virtues of ferocity and devotion, but in order to do so, she decides that she must first learn the truth about her family. Although Jottie is loyal to Felix, her devotion to her nieces supersedes this as shown by her decisions being made in Willa and Bird's best interests. Jottie decides to join a ladies' club to provide security for her nieces, and this is ultimately the reason that she secretly begins dating Sol, seeing his stability as a solution to her dilemma.

Despite her brother's faults, Jottie is still loyal to Felix, and she demonstrates this by ending her relationship with Sol when Felix objects because Sol tried to ruin his life by accusing him of being involved with the mill fire. Willa is also devoted to her father, seeking to know his secrets but also determining to protect him from Layla who she believes is trying to steal Felix from his daughters; however, Layla falls in love with Felix who she sees as a devoted father and brother, and feeling that he has been misused, Layla also wants to protect Felix. Sol and Emmett are both loyal to Jottie who they feel has been taken advantage of by Felix, and later in the novel, Willa proves her loyalty to Jottie when she reveals Felix's secrets to protect her aunt's feelings.

The narrative is also riddled with betrayals, the largest being Willa's betrayal of Felix's secrets when she demonstrates her loyalty to Jottie. This also shows Felix's betrayal of Vause through his lies as well as his betraying Jottie by making her think that Vause did not love her. Jottie has felt betrayed by Vause for 18 years, but realizing her beloved's loyalty allows her to decide not to marry Sol. Layla's loyalty to Felix is destroyed when she learns his secrets and realizes that he is a liar who never loved her as she believed, a sort of self-betrayal, but she remains loyal to the Romeyns and eventually marries Emmett whose loyalty to Layla is seen through his anger at his brother's mistreatment. Throughout the novel, Bird is loyal to Willa, following her older sister's guidance in all things, in contrast to Emmett's loyalty to Jottie which leads him to discourage her loyalty to Felix. After Felix admits that he lied to Jottie because he was afraid of losing her loyalty, Willa is able to convince Jottie to forgive him, proving that familial loyalty is more important than the lies, secrets and betrayals.



## Society's Judgments

Throughout "The Truth According to Us," the theme of society's judgments is supported by a variety of motifs including expectations of society, rumors/gossip and the concept of security. Each of the characters feel scrutinized by their neighbors at some point for a multitude of reasons, and this yields a plethora of reactions from each individual.

Layla is sent to Macedonia after failing to marry Nelson in accordance with her father's wishes because she loves Charles, but she is determined to prove that she can make it on her own. Uncle Ben is certain that the residents of Macedonia will be more concerned with her fall from grace than her lack of writing skills. When she first meets the Romeyns, Layla fears they are religious zealots and feels they can see into her sinful soul. Initially, Jottie disapproves of her boarder, but this quickly turns to concern when she observes Felix's interest; this concern is likely for how such an affair would negatively impact her family given her feelings about Layla at this point.

The Romeyns are judged harshly by their neighbors, and this is due in large part to Felix's actions. In addition to his youthful misdeeds, Felix is a known bootlegger, plus he jilted his fiancé to marry Sylvia, the mother of Willa and Bird. When Mrs. Lee expresses disapproval of the Romeyns, Willa is also ashamed of her mother and lies that she is a leper, rather than admit that Sylvia lives in sin with a married man. The Macedonians also criticize the Romeyns due to rumors of Felix's involvement in stealing the money from the mill and setting the fire that caused Vause's death. Although Felix lies about this for nearly two decades, rumors persist with some believing he is guilty while others discredit the gossip. Although Miss Betts tells Layla that the Romeyns figure into some of the town's most dramatic episodes, she refuses to elaborate. The Davieses, Mrs. Lansbrough and Delia are less discreet, sharing rumors and their speculations with Layla during their visits.

When Mr. Parker Davies excludes the Romeyns from his list of prominent families, Willa is ashamed, and in her anger, Jottie begins planning a way to provide security and acceptance for her nieces. She first turns to Felix, begging him to find respectable employment, but when he refuses, she accepts that the burden must fall on her. She considers joining a ladies' club after recollecting her mother's inclusion in such a club, but when Emmett assures her of Sol's continued interest, she pursues that avenue since she sees him as stable and believes that a marriage would accomplish her goals for her nieces.

Willa investigates the rumors about her father's career, and by snooping around, she uncovers more secrets than she bargained for. At Houdyshell's Tack & Saddle, Brennus confirms Willa's suspicions that Felix is a bootlegger. Having failed to dissuade her brother from pursuing Layla, Jottie tries to warn her boarder away from Felix for fear that his actions will further injure the family's reputation and hurt Willa and Bird. Mr. Tare Russell also tries to stir up drama by facilitating an encounter between Jottie and Anna May Bowers, Felix's jilted fiancé, showing that everyone in town is aware of Felix's indiscretions.





Gossip about Jottie's relationship with Sol reaches Felix who persuades her to end the romance, but even after she had ended it, Zena visits her to ask for assistance and makes accusations against the family that results in Jottie threatening to spread rumors about Zena; this shows the importance of public opinion. Throughout the novel, many rumors are proven to be true, such as Felix's involvement with the mill fire, when Willa reveals her discoveries, but she also effects a reconciliation between her father and her aunt. By the end of the narrative, everyone achieves safety and security through various means, including Layla who decides to continue living with Jottie after finishing her project until she ultimately marries Emmett.

## History

History plays a large role in this novel, both in terms of Layla's project, *The History of Macedonia*, as well as in relation to the characters' personal histories which contribute to many of the other motifs and themes present in the book. Although Layla is not content to be in Macedonia at first, it is not long before she begins her research and determines to do justice to the town. Miss Betts, the town librarian, aids Layla with much of her research, but Layla also incorporates information from other sources, including the Davieses, Mrs. Lansbrough, Delia and Jottie, amongst others. The town was founded by General Magnus Hamilton who took the name from the Macedonian virtues of ferocity and devotion.

Mr. Parker Davies begins aiding Layla by providing a list of the town's most prominent families, but the list blatantly excludes the Romeyns. Miss Betts notes that the Romeyn family figure into most of the town's most dramatic episodes, alluding to the mill fire and Vause's death, but she refuses to indulge in gossip by elaborating. The Romeyns' role in Macedonia's history is also revealed through the stories Jottie shares about her siblings' youthful adventures and misdeeds. Jottie also provides much of Layla's research, such as telling Layla about General Hamilton driving a sword through his son's foot.

Layla believes it is her duty to write a truthful history, and planning to give her characters their proper due, she attempts to write an interesting account of Macedonian history, despite the many dreary facts. When she writes about General Hamilton, she includes what she has learned from the Davieses and Jottie. Felix also assists Layla's research by taking her on tours of local historical sites. When Layla ponders why the town council wants the history book written, Felix suggests they want to make Macedonia look respectable, but Layla believes their intent is to show that what they became was inevitable.

Emmett is a history teacher, but his shyness around Layla prevents him from helping her much on her first project. Instead, Jottie provides background on Macedonia's religious institutions and tells Layla about Reverend Goodacre's philandering. Miss Betts warns that many people will be upset by the provocative version of Reverend Goodacre's history since they discredit those rumors, but Layla argues that there would be no history at all if it was limited to stories that can be verified. When she observes that a lack of objectivity makes all history suspect, Miss Betts expresses faith that the



truth will prevail because of Layla's indifference. Mr. Tare Russell also grants Layla an interview, telling her what he knows about the town's history.

After interviewing Mr. Shank, Layla considers including an account of the mill's hiring practices in her book; however, when Emmett suggests she also write about the strike, Layla objects because "It's just a fight. It's not history until someone wins" (page 297). Delia tells Layla about General Imboden visiting prostitutes at the Kerns House and also hints at Felix's involvement in Vause's death.

When Layla completes and submits her manuscript, Mrs. Ursula Chambers is so pleased that she hires Layla for a subsequent project. Although Mr. Parker Davies is upset by Layla's version of history, Layla stands by her account because she has obtained ample evidence. The majority of the town is pleased with Layla's History of Macedonia, showing her success in achieving her goals to do the stories justice and to create an interesting book.

## Self-Discovery

Throughout "The Truth According to Us," many of the characters engage in a path of self-discovery, but most prominent among these journeys are those of the novel's three protagonists: Layla Beck, Willa Romeyn and Jottie Romeyn. Each of these characters learn a lot about themselves throughout the narrative as secrets are revealed and they learn more about other characters. All three ladies find that they have been misled by others, and as they sort out the misconceptions they have been led to accept as truth, they embark on a journey to growth which helps them discover their inner strength and decide to pursue their own happiness.

When the novel begins, Layla is the spoiled, defiant daughter of a Senator, and although she is originally upset about being sent to work on a WPA project in Macedonia, she soon befriends the Romeyn family and delves into her research, determine to excel in the lot she has been handed. Throughout the narrative, Layla works devotedly toward acquiring the necessary research to make her book successful, and she engages in many interviews with townspeople from a variety of classes, incorporating everything she learns to depict the most accurate History of Macedonia possible. Romantically, Layla's adventures in Macedonia begin because her father forces her to fend for herself after she refuses to marry Nelson, insisting she loves Charles who ultimately spurns her affections. Despite Jottie's warnings against her brother, Layla falls in love with Felix and yields her virtue to him, a fact she regrets when his secrets are revealed and she realizes that he is not the man she thought him to be. When Emmett confesses his love and proposes, Layla shows her growth by delaying her acceptance until she knows everything about him; this lesson allows Layla to find a happy union and live peacefully the rest of her days.

Willa is only 12 years old during the narrative, but as the novel begins, the child realizes that she is being told lies and starts to question the truth. By snooping around, she uncovers many secrets about Felix and Jottie. When Willa first confirms that her father



is a bootlegger, she is proud of his outlaw status, feeling a kinship between them since she secretly buys whisky for Mrs. Bucklew, but eventually, the girl decides that her ability to sneak around is not an applaudable virtue. This revelation largely takes place after revealing Felix's secrets causes Jottie to banish him from their home, making Willa feel that she has lost everything. Ultimately, she decides to be straightforward in her conversation with Jottie and Felix, allowing her to effect a reconciliation which teaches her the value of peace.

Jottie's growth is perhaps the most significant of the three protagonists. Since Vause's death, Jottie has distrusted her instincts since she was so obviously mistaken in her faith in the man she loved. Part of her self-inflicted punishment includes yielding to Felix's will and caring for his daughters as if they were her own. When Jottie sees a need to protect Willa and Bird by providing them security that will allow them to feel familial pride, she turns to Felix, but after he disappoints her, she realizes that it is up to her and joins a ladies' club to regain some of the Romeyns' respectability in the community. She also begins secretly dating Sol who she sees as a means of stability, and although it means defying her brother, Jottie agrees to marry Sol. Everything changes when Willa reveals Felix's secrets about the mill fire and Vause's death. After banishing her brother from their home, Jottie allows herself to love Vause again since she now knows that he was as loyal as she originally believed. This effects major change as Emmett is relieved to see that his sister looks like herself for the first time in nearly two decades. Jottie breaks off her engagement after realizing how greatly Sol has deceived himself in regards to their childhood friendship, but she demonstrates increased self-esteem through her willingness to aid Layla on future projects. With Willa's help, Jottie forgives Felix because she decides that there is no point in hating one another, and after they are reconciled, they travel together frequently. They also keep Vause's memory alive by talking about him often. Despite the many heartbreaks that Jottie endures throughout the narrative, she ultimately finds herself, gaining confidence in her abilities and decisions.

# Styles

## Point of View

"The Truth According to Us" is written with two predominant points of view but three varying perspectives. When the narrative is told from Willa's perspective, Willa acts as a limited first person narrator with the reader learning as she does. The limited third person narrator alternates between sharing the perspectives of Jottie and Layla, allowing access to their thoughts only in the scenes focused on their viewpoint. Overall, both narrators are reliable; while neither narrator is particularly forthcoming, they do not misdirect the readers' beliefs with lies, though superfluous characters are often used as a distraction technique.

Each scene focuses solely on the viewpoint of one of three protagonists in the novel, but Willa is the only first person narrator which allows more access to her thoughts and feelings than is provided to Layla's and Jottie's. The use of these viewpoints is vital for allowing the reader to see the motivations behind these three women's actions. The novel consists of a fairly equal distribution of exposition and dialogue, though some chapters rely more heavily on one or the other as a means of either providing additional background information or better characterizing the narrative's characters. This distribution is effective as a technique to provide all of the information necessary for the reader to comprehend the novel by dividing attention between the characters' thoughts, actions and interactions. Although the novel alternates viewpoints between Willa, Jottie and Layla, Willa's role as a first person narrator causes her to dominate as the primary viewpoint, even though the author tends to share Jottie's viewpoint just as often.

## Language and Meaning

The language utilized in this novel is somewhat formal and stiff as the author generally adheres to proper grammatical structure, especially the passages Layla writes for inclusion in her History of Macedonia. The style is reflective of the time period since the novel is set in 1938 and is particularly beneficial to emphasize the educational aspect of Layla's assignment. The language used aids comprehension by making the novel easy to understand, and it is quite effective for characterizing the individuals who play a role in the narrative as well as the time period. It also shows the focus on themes such as gossip, drama, history and secrets.

The novel consists of a fairly equal distribution of exposition and dialogue, though some chapters rely more heavily on one or the other as a means of either providing additional background information or better characterizing the narrative's characters. This distribution is effective as a technique to provide all of the information necessary for the reader to comprehend the novel by dividing attention between the characters' thoughts, actions and interactions. Sometimes, the language hinders the writing style as the



thought flows can be difficult to follow, and the introduction of extraneous information can be distracting; however, an attentive reader will find the novel easy to understand.

## Structure

"The Truth According to Us" consists of 486 pages, divided into 56 chapters and an Epilogue. Ranging from two to fourteen pages in length, the chapters are numbered, rather than titled, as viewpoints, scenes and focuses vary within each chapter. The chapters are generally short, but some are much more detailed than others. The entire narrative transpires in around four months, so each chapter encompasses a short period of time, often only hours or days, but some chapters skim over longer periods with emphasis only on important changes that occur within that time frame.

"The Truth According to Us" explores the secrets and mysteries related to the Romeyn family and hidden in their history. Layla Beck is assigned to write the History of Macedonia around the same time that twelve-year-old Willa Romeyn begins to seek the truth about her father's career and her aunt's refusal to marry. Their paths cross many times as they engage in separate research, allowing them to uncover and reveal secrets hidden for decades, and when brought to light, these secrets change the histories and futures of all involved. The novel is fairly slow-paced, and the introduction of extraneous information and superfluous characters can make it difficult to understand, especially with the frequent flashbacks into the past as it pertains to Jottie, Felix and Vause. Still, Annie Barrows' novel makes for an interesting read, incorporating a cold case into the tragedy and drama of family secrets and a Depression-era romance.



## Quotes

"Later still, I realized that everything began that day. Everything that was to heave itself free of its foundations over the course of the summer began to rattle lightly on the morning of the parade. That was when I first heard of Layla Beck, when I began to wonder about my father, and when I noticed I was being lied to and decided to leave my childhood behind. I have since wondered, of course, how my life - and my father's and my aunt Jottie's too - would have been different if I'd decided to stay at home that morning. This is what's called the enigma of history, and it can drive you out of your mind if you let it.

-- Willa as narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote foreshadows the major changes that transpire in the narrator's life during the summer the novel takes place. Moreover, it emphasizes how these events impact her father's and aunt's lives as well, and it introduces the importance of history as it pertains to this narrative.

They'll get to it. Later, they'll know that the sameness is the important part.

-- Jottie's thoughts (chapter 5 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This quote shows the monotony of Jottie's life and her aversion to change. This contrasts sharply with the changes she makes after learning Felix's secrets.

I wish we were like everybody else. I get real tired of lying.

-- Willa (chapter 7 paragraph 48)

**Importance:** Willa's recognition that the Romeyns are different from their neighbors shows her intelligence, and this statement leads to Jottie's attempts to secure safety for Willa and Bird.

"Tell me, she begged silently. Tell me how it was, with Vause in the Argonne Forrest. Tell me everything. But she couldn't say it out loud. If she said it out loud, Felix's face would tighten again. Remember how he double-crossed us, he would say. Remember how he lied. And then she would have to pretend to despise Vause. She should despise Vause. She did despise Vause. She loathed him.

-- Narrator about Jottie (chapter 9 paragraph 33)

**Importance:** Jottie's thought process shows her continued love for Vause even as she slowly, repetitively reminds herself how she should feel and ultimately convinces herself that she actually does hate him as expected.

"My advice is this: Don't ask questions if you're not going to like the answers... You ask yourself if there's any answer that would endanger something that's precious to you, and if there is, don't ask the question.

-- Emmett (chapter 11 paragraph 26 & 28)



**Importance:** Emmett's advice to Willa foreshadows the truth of his warning; the questions she asks this summer leads to things that jeopardize her peace. When he actually says this, Willa is asking if Felix is a bootlegger, and the evasive response suggests that Felix is an outlaw as Willa is beginning to suspect.

"Why do you think they want a history book?... I think they want history to show that what they are now was inevitable.

-- Layla (chapter 15 paragraph 93 & 97)

**Importance:** Layla's observation of the nature of history shows her intelligence, and Felix's response foreshadows the revelations that occur later in the novel.

"Before she could stop herself, the thought came: If Willa had a father like Sol, she'd be safe forever. And then, even more unthinkable: If I married him, I could make her safe. It was a shocking thought; it was a heady thought. It would mean instant respectability, instant freedom from the past. Instant pudding, she jeered at herself. It's going to be a real trick, marrying someone you haven't talked to in eighteen years. Emmett said he still cares.

-- Narrator/Jottie's thoughts (chapter 18 paragraph 7th to last)

**Importance:** Jottie's desire to protect her nieces leads her to the thought that marrying Sol would ensure their safety, and this foreshadows the romance between them.

"I think that if history were defined as only those stories that could be absolutely verified, we'd have no history at all.

-- Layla (chapter 19 paragraph 43)

**Importance:** Layla's observation indicates the nature of history, emphasizing the importance of this theme in the novel, and it also indicates how many things are left out of history because they cannot be verified; this relates directly to Felix's involvement in Vause's death.

"This very second must being the idea to an end, the point at which her freshly painted stairs, her carefree Willa, her simple platter of cookies, all of it would be forced to return to the primordial dust of her imagination. It was a daydream, nothing more, and she had been a fool to carry it so far. Because Sol had told a terrible lie about Felix, and Felix would never forgive him. And what she owed Felix could only be paid in loyalty.

-- Narrator/Jottie's thoughts (chapter 23 paragraph 9th to last)

**Importance:** Jottie dissuades herself from pursuing Sol because she believes that she must be loyal to Felix. Despite her excuses and justifications, it is obvious that she does not love Sol since love for him never factors into her decisions.

"Go away, Vause. And you, too, Felix. Neither of you is an honest man. Go away and let me live.

-- Narrator/Jottie's thoughts (chapter 28 paragraph 2nd to last)



**Importance:** For the first time, Jottie decides to live her own life without taking Felix's or Vause's feelings into consideration. She also stresses the importance of honesty which is so valuable to her because she feels betrayed by Vause.

"Sure, idolized. Wished he could be just like him. That's why he wanted you, honey. Sorry. It's the truth, though. And that's why he hated me, too. Because I was Vause's best friend. I don't know why you can't see it.

-- Felix about Sol (chapter 30 paragraph 40)

**Importance:** Here, Felix claims that Sol's suspicions about him were founded in jealousy. Although Felix's objections are designed to ensure that he gets what he wants, there is truth in his belief that Sol was jealous of Vause and Felix as seen later in the novel.

"But it's not history yet. It's just a fight. It's not history until someone wins.

-- Layla (chapter 33 paragraph 94)

**Importance:** The observation that it does not become history until someone wins reiterates the concept that "history is written by the victor" and raises the question of what history may say if the losers were able to contribute to it when recorded.

She's younger than you are, and I want to marry you.

-- Sol (chapter 44 paragraph 35)

**Importance:** Sol expresses his desire to marry Jottie despite her age.

"Poor little Layla. You don't know anything about me. You don't know a damn thing.

-- Felix (chapter 46 paragraph 47)

**Importance:** Felix's mockery that Layla does not know anything about him shows a self-deprecating viewpoint, likely caused by his involvement in Vause's death, but it also shows that Jottie was correct about his intentions.

"Honey, he lied. He wasn't in love with you. He told me. He was kind of worried about me being mad, but I couldn't blame him much. I mean, think about it; you know this, Jottie. Vause had been around, and you were just a small-town girl. That's why he had to have that money. He had to get out of here before he got stuck with you.

-- Felix (chapter 46 paragraph last)

**Importance:** To save himself and his relationship with his sister, Felix lies that Vause never cared about her, despite how badly this must hurt her. By this point, the reader knows that Felix is lying and can only empathize with Jottie as Willa does in the next chapter.

"Jottie cried then, like she'd been hit, and I couldn't bear it. I suppose I made a choice between the two of them in that moment. I think I knew even then that I was making a choice, but in a way I was choosing myself, because if I had waited one more second, I





would have stopped being who I was.  
-- Willa as narrator (chapter 47 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Willa's decision to tell Jottie the truth about Vause shows her love for her aunt, but more importantly, she admits that she actually chose herself because she had to be honest, unlike her father.

Honey, I have everything I ever wanted.  
-- Sol (chapter 50 paragraph 4th to last)

**Importance:** Sol's admission that his engagement to Jottie and his position as the president of American Everlasting is all that he has ever wanted proves the truth of Felix's earlier claims about Sol being jealous of Vause.

"That's what being in love is like.  
-- Emmett (chapter 53 paragraph 34)

**Importance:** Emmett's statement to Layla suggests his feelings for her.

"I've learned that history is the autobiography of the historian, that ignoring the past is the act of a fool, and that loyalty does not mean falling into line, but stepping out of it for the people you love.  
-- Layla's letter to her father 9/7/1938 (chapter 54 paragraph 69)

**Importance:** Here, Layla shares with her father what she has learned while writing the History of Macedonia, but it is obvious that this lesson has been taught through her interactions with the Romeyn family.

"I've been trying not to care about you ever since the day I met you... I didn't succeed.  
-- Emmett (chapter 55 paragraph 12 & 14)

**Importance:** Finally, Emmett admits his feelings for Layla, foreshadowing their marriage.

"It'd happened so fast, Jottie, it was only an hour, maybe an hour and a half, and right up until the last two or three minutes I thought it would be all right, we'd be fine. And then it was too late and I couldn't stop anything; I couldn't undo it and I couldn't change it. I killed Vause.  
-- Felix (chapter 56 paragraph 16th to last)

**Importance:** Nearly two decades after the fire, Felix finally admits his involvement in Jottie's death. He laments his inability to change it, swearing that he would do anything to take it back.

"You're right, Jottie, but what good is it? Rightness is nothing. You can't live on it. You might as well eat ashes. This is all we can do; it's all we're allowed. We can't go back. The only thing time leaves for us to decide is whether or not we're going to hate each



other.

-- Willa (chapter 56 paragraph 10th to last)

**Importance:** Willa shows unusual understanding and wisdom for her age when she reminds her aunt that they cannot change the past so they need to decide whether or not to hate each other; her gentle observation leads to a reconciliation between Jottie and Felix.

"The truth of other people is a ceaseless business. You try to fix your ideas about them, and you choke on the clot you've made.

-- Willa as narrator (Epilogue paragraph 6)

**Importance:** As the novel concludes, Willa returns to her opening observations about the difficulty of people and her expectations for them. This statement shows that learning the truth about her family made life more difficult, but ultimately, everyone lives happily once the truth comes out in this narrative.