

Thirty Girls Study Guide

Thirty Girls by Susan Minot

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Plot Summary

Susan Minot's "Thirty Girls" is a heart-breaking account of 30 girls from a private school in Uganda who are abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army to increase Kony's family. One of these children is 15-year-old Esther Akello who shares the story of her time with the rebels as she deals with the emotional repercussions of her experienced after her escape. A second narrative follows the journey of Jane Woods, an American journalist who travels to Africa in order to tell the girls' story with hopes of inspiring others to help. "Thirty Girls" is a fascinating historical fiction novel that explores the worst - and the best - of mankind.

In October 1996, rebels from the LRA abduct 139 girls from St. Mary's College in Aboke, Uganda. Headmistress Sister Giulia tracks the group, negotiating to retrieve 109 girls and leaving 30 of her students with the rebels. Esther Akello is one of these girls, and although she has escaped from the rebels and is living at the Kiryandongo Rehabilitation Center when the narrative begins, she recounts her experiences during captivity, sharing how it has impacted her. She is silent and withdrawn from the other children at the center, and her guilt over the things she was forced to witness and participate in lead her to believe that she does not deserve another chance at life.

Esther recalls her fear during the abduction and the rough treatment she and the other girls received at the hands of the rebels, although her husband, Greg Lotti, was kinder than most. Time was spent doing chores, and although escape was never far from their minds, the children were afraid to attempt it because the others would be punished if they succeeded, and if they failed, the penalty was death. Esther is plagued by memories of being forced to help beat Susanna to death and by her failed attempt to help Mary who was swept away by the river. When Kony asks to meet the St. Mary's girls, he chooses Agnes as his bedmate, adding Esther when she speaks out to protect her friend, believing the trauma is better endured together. Later, Esther tells Kony about Chunga's betrayal to elicit a blessing for Agnes, but Agnes is forced to accompany the rebels on a mission and dies because she is too weak. After giving birth to a stillborn baby, Esther finally finds a chance to escape, and for three days, she is uncertain whether she will live or die. She finally reaches Kiryandongo where her memories haunt her and she feels like her heart is suffocating. Although Esther sometimes feels that things will be fine, she disagrees with this thought and condemns herself to a hopeless future more often.

American journalist Jane Wood hears about the girls when Grace Dollo visits New York to promote her group, We Are Concerned, and Jane travels to Africa with the intent of spreading awareness and helping the abducted children. She is accompanied to Uganda by Lana, Don, a photographer named Pierre, and Harry with whom Jane falls in love. During the many interviews she conducts, Jane feels a great deal of empathy for the abducted girls, and at St. Mary's, she is touched by the peace of the place turned to the tragedy of abduction.



Grace encourages Jane to talk to Esther, and the two protagonists' paths finally intersect at Kiryandongo. Although Esther has refused to discuss her experiences thus far, she takes a chance at change by sharing her story with Jane who comforts her by pointing out that she does not do bad things now that she has control of her own life. After Jane leaves, Esther cries and starts to feel peace, playing with the other children and eventually looking forward to her future. Once their journey concludes, Harry ends his relationship with Jane, but he is shot that night and suffers brain damage, so his parents take him off life support. Mourning Harry, Jane stays in Kenya to write the girls' story and prolongs her stay after deciding she must use her life to do good things. Esther is happy when Louise finally escapes from the rebels, and she visits her friend at Kiryandongo to offer comfort. The escaped girls still pray for Helen, the last St. Mary's girl still with the rebels, but Esther finds peace and falls in love with life.



Part I, Chapter 1

Summary

Part I: "They Took All Of Us" begins with Chapter 1/Thirty Girls in which Sister Giulia goes to bed with a normal amount of worry on the night the girls are taken. The banging first appears in her dreams, but as soon as she wakes, she knows the rebels have arrived, and her suspicion is confirmed when the watchman knocks on her door to alert her. Gathering in the hallway, the nuns wonder what they can do as they pray that the doors of the dormitory hold. As the nuns hide in the garden, listening to the banging, Sister Rosario laments their decision not to move the girls when the soldiers standing guard left for a holiday celebration. The banging is replaced by tinkling glass and shouting

When the noise fades, Sister Giulia can wait no longer to check on her girls; she accompanies George to the dormitory where she finds devastation and only two girls who huddle in the bushes, objecting they are not safe because the rebels took them all, tying the girls together and leading them away. While Sister Rosario counts how many girls are missing, Sister Giulia dresses and, accompanied by the math teacher, Thomas Bosco, sets out to retrieve the girls, ready to die if necessary. Following pieces of clothes and muted pointing from frightened villagers, the pair heads after the rebels, worrying about the smaller girls who cannot swim as they wade the marsh. Sister Giulia is relieved to find Irene who escaped, and she sends the girl back to the village. Finding one of the girl's identification cards fills Sister Giulia with renewed energy, and although she is relieved when she finds the rebels and the girls, she prays for guidance. She is taken to Captain Mariano Lagira and tells him she came for her girls. He seems amenable, joining her in prayer, but he informs her that the decision belongs to his leader, Kony.

The sound of helicopters attacking causes everyone to hide, and several girls are shot by the Uganda army patrol. Orders are given to move quickly, and as Sister Giulia leads the bound girls away, she wonders if the rebels will kill her. Captain Lagira explains that they take the girls because Kony wants a big family, talking about his religion until they reach an area filled with huts where the nun again asks for the girls to be returned. The rebels have taken 139 girls, half of the school, and Lagira offers to return 109 of them, keeping just 30. Sister Giulia wants them all returned, but Lagira says she must write to Kony. She complies, though she is certain Kony will never see her note. She is forced to provide the names of the 30 girls she must leave behind lest she get none of them back.

Sister Giulia urges the girls to be good amongst their pleas that she not leave them. Lagira insists they have not hurt the girls, and bidding them goodbye, Sister Giulia charges Judith with caring for the other girls. Agnes tries to join the group that is permitted to leave, but Sister Giulia retrieves her and elicits a promise that she will not flee again or she will endanger the others. Forcing herself to leave with the larger group, the nun ignores Helena's question about whether she will return for the rest of them.



Sister Giulia leads the 109 girls to freedom, and at the school, parents wait for their children. Some are happy to see their daughters returned, but Sister Giulia is not ready to face the other girls' parents and wonders if she will ever be able to face anyone again.

Analysis

The first part of this novel consists of only one chapter, told from the limited perspective of a third person narrative focused on sharing Sister Giulia's point of view. This chapter recounts the horror of the rebels' attack and abduction, as well as the nun's attempt to retrieve her students. Although the school is usually guarded by soldiers, they are away on this particular evening, providing an opportunity for the rebels to abduct the students at St. Mary's. The nuns flee to the gardens after hearing the sounds of intrusion, lamenting their inability to protect their students, and this scene shows the tragic conversion of a peaceful place of learning to a scene of terror and devastation.

Once the rebels depart, Sister Giulia demonstrates great bravery as she tracks the rebels in hopes of retrieving her students, despite the peril it poses to her own well-being. The genuineness of her concern is apparent as each obstacle on her journey causes her to fear for the girls' safety. She is relieved when she finds Irene who has escaped, and promising that she will rescue the others, she sends Irene to safety in a nearby village; she believes that saving one girl is a new way of God looking out for her, showing her continued faith. When Sister Giulia finally comes upon the rebels, she is uncertain how to proceed, and praying to God, she summons courage as she informs Captain Lagira that she has come to retrieve the girls, offering money for their release.

The girls' early conditioning by the rebels is demonstrated by their inability to meet their headmistress's eyes. When Sister Giulia requests the return of her students, Lagira insists that Kony, the leader of the LRA, must make that decision, but their conversation is interrupted by helicopters firing, causing everyone to duck for cover. Judith, the head girl at St. Mary's, throws herself on Sister Giulia to protect her, and although the nun first thinks the raid is intended to rescue her girls, she soon learns it is just a routine sweep. The rebels tend to the wounded, and it confuses their captives to be beaten and then handed bandages.

As they move swiftly, Sister Giulia walks with Captain Lagira who explains that they take the girls because Kony wants a big family. They discuss their religions, and despite the vast differences, the nun feels it best to pursue this odd friendship as she fears the rebels may kill her. Arriving at their destination, Sister Giulia repeats her request for the girls' return, noting that the rebels abducted half of her students, but Lagira offers to return 109 girls with the rebels keeping 30 girls. The nun offers herself in exchange for all the girls; Lagira insists only Kony can make that decision, and although he allows her to write to his leader, Sister Giulia knows that Kony will never see her note. Rather than rescue none of the girls, the nun agrees to the rebel's terms, tearfully encouraging the girls who remain to behave.



Agnes tries to sneak away with the larger group, but Sister Giulia forces her to stay lest she endanger everyone. Sister Giulia leads the 109 rescued girls back to the school where she receives thanks from their parents, but she is unable to face the parents of the girls she failed to rescue because she is disappointed that she could not save them all. Her question as to when she will be able to face anyone again foreshadows her lack of presence throughout the majority of the novel.

Chapter 1 introduces two of the novel's major themes; first, the abduction of the girls and the violence seen by the Uganda army patrol and the rebels reveal the horrors of the world in which the novel is set. Secondly, Sister Giulia's attempt to rescue the girls demonstrates the theme in which characters attempt to fix the world's problems, showing how some of the characters are deeply concerned with the fortunes and misfortunes of others. This theme demonstrates a kinder side to humanity which sharply contrasts with the violence seen in other passages.

Discussion Question 1

How does Sister Giulia react to the abduction at St. Mary's? What does her quick reaction suggest?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the interaction between Sister Giulia and Captain Mariano Lagira.

Discussion Question 3

How does Sister Giulia feel about her compromise with the rebels?

Vocabulary

foreboding, commandeered, silhouetted, preposterous, bougainvillea, ominous, wimple, affronted, luminous



Part II, Chapter 2

Summary

Part II: Launch begins with an explanation that she has no idea where she is, and unable to care what the other girls talk about, she thinks she will never be close to anyone again.

In Chapter 2/Landing, Jane feels different as she steps off the plane in Kenya, as though she is ready for new things. When she first meets Harry in Lana's driveway, Jane is unnerved by his stony look, and he surprises her when he kisses her cheek.

As they watch the sun set from the top of Ngong Hills, Jane informs Harry that she is going to Uganda to write about the children kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army, though the topic is far from her normal subjects of desire and death. Lana and Pierre, a photographer, will accompany her, but when she confesses that Lana is still searching for a driver, Harry expresses faith that Jane will figure it out since she looks like the type of person who does.

As their departure gets pushed from Tuesday to Friday and then again to Sunday, Jane enjoys the company of Lana's visitors who collect to socialize over dinner in the evenings. Waking in the garden to find Harry next to her, Jane agrees to accompany him on a flying adventure for a couple days before she leaves for Uganda, and during the drive, she tells him a bit about her ex-husband who died from an overdose. Jane is mesmerized by the wildlife as they enter the safari camp and head to the private house where they will stay.

Parking at the house, Jane follows Harry up a footpath, and watching him fly from the top on his paraglider, she feels weightless. Following Harry's instructions to return to the house at nightfall, Jane finds two men and a woman, and she helps Annabel, their hostess, prepare dinner to celebrate Julia's birthday. After much drinking, Jane and Harry help strangers push a car stuck in the mud, and when they fall to the ground and kiss, Jane feels more alive than she ever has before.

Analysis

The second part of the novel contains three chapters, beginning with Chapter 2 which introduces Jane Wood, one of the protagonists, as she arrives in Kenya. Immediately, she observes differences from home, and she stays with Lana who she met on a film set in London last year. Upon reaching Lana's cottage, she meets Harry and is unnerved by his stony look which makes her feel the need to explain herself, but he surprises her when he kisses her cheek, foreshadowing their intimacy.

That evening, they drive up to Ngong Hills to watch the sunset where Jane tells her new acquaintances that she has come to Africa to write about the Ugandan children



kidnapped by the LRA which is very different from her normal subjects of desire and death; Harry astutely points out that this venture should not be far from the topic of death. When Jane feels a bit homesick, she thinks it odd since she wants to be as far from home as possible. Lana and Pierre, a photographer, have already agreed to accompany Jane to Uganda, but Harry's interest in her trip foreshadows the expansion of their group.

Their departure gets delayed several times, allowing time for Jane to accompany Harry on a paragliding adventure, and on their journey, they get to know each other better, again foreshadowing their intimate relationship. At this point, Harry admits to being in love with Rosalie who he cannot pursue since she has a boyfriend, and Jane briefly mentions her ex-husband who recently died from an overdose, though she refrains from elaborating until she knows Harry better. While she is in Harry's passenger seat, Jane feels wild and free which is an uncommon sensation, and she is not concerned about reaching their destination.

As they trek up the hill where Harry begins his flight, Jane also feels weightless because she has a knack for channeling others' experiences, and this introduces the theme of empathy and foreshadows Jane's ability to imagine herself in the position of those she interviews. They stay the night with Annabel and her other guests, and fueled by liquor, foreshadowing is fulfilled when Harry kisses Jane, causing her to feel alive. Harry is something new that Jane knows little about, "yet at this moment found it seemed to offer her everything" (47).

This chapter also serves to reinforce many of the novel's major themes and motifs. The prevalence of violence is seen in Jane's visit to the war zone which demonstrates the overwhelming amount of danger in the region, and Jane demonstrates her empathy when she relates to Harry while he paraglides, but her infatuation soon grows to such a point that she neglects her research; this theme is also reinforced by her feeling of disconnection from her life in America. Jane exercises control when she decides to go to Kenya, but she soon realizes that she has no control over the fates of the children she is trying to save. Jane's present is also impacted by memories of her past in which her ex-husband recently died, even as she looks forward to a future relationship with Harry.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jane travel to Kenya? What does she hope to accomplish through her journeys?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the environment at Lana's cottage. How is this different from what Jane is used to?



Discussion Question 3

Who is Harry, and how does his interactions with Jane foreshadow their relationship?

Vocabulary

lackadaisical, expansion, transit, embraced, verandas, savannah, odalisque, escarpment, constellation, hyraxes, populace



Part II, Chapter 3

Summary

As Esther sits among the other girls and listens to their peaceful voices in Chapter 3/Esther, she thinks that she will never feel close to anyone again. Her mind is uneasy because she has become used to her thoughts being interrupted since being away, yet she vaguely recalls the time before when her thoughts were whole. She observes the others drawing, but she prefers to observe nature as she sits at Kiryandongo Rehabilitation Center where she and the other children who have escaped the rebels are housed and given counseling. They are all united by the same thing that separates them from everyone else.

Since her return, Esther tries to forget what happened there and focus on the rest of her life as she is not yet 16 years old, but her quiet life before was not much to speak of, so rather than tell her shameful story, she seeks peace within herself. Esther Akello is an abducted child who returned two weeks ago, and unaccustomed to peace, she is not glad to have regained her freedom. She does not play with the others because she hates everyone, but she is eager to resume her education. She tries to focus on other things than what she has determined not to remember.

After her escape, Esther was taken to a government building where Aunt Karen informed her that her mother died three weeks earlier. She is forced to stay at Kiryandongo for treatment, and when her family visits, her father cannot even look at her. In contrast, her sister, Sarah, cannot stop watching her, and Esther knows that Sarah is wondering if she has been ruined. Hearing about her mother's fight with cancer, Esther is glad she missed it, and although she is relieved when her family leaves, she also misses them.

All of the children at the center are troubled, and while the counselors assure them that they will come out of it and be themselves again, Esther believes she will always be coming out of it because the person inside her is bad and does not deserve another chance at life; however, she tries to argue that she is good, yet the stronger voice insists she would be better off dead, and at times, her spirit feels so heavy that she does not think she can continue carrying it. When Nurse Nancy asks if the girls are angry at Kony, some are angry because he stole their life and left them a bleak future, but Kony means nothing to Esther.

When a counselor informs the girls that journalists want to visit to hear their stories, Esther thinks no good can come of talking about what happened, but others are willing to talk because the journalists want to spread their story and help those still remaining with the rebels. Esther observes that the world looks the same, but she feels different since her return. The counselors encourage them to find forgiveness, but that is hard to do since she often fears death, and when the fear fades, it is replaced by a hard blankness that feels no better.



Analysis

Chapter 3 introduces Esther Akello, the novel's primary protagonist. The chapters that focus on Esther's point of view are written from her first-person perspective as a young girl who had escaped the LRA. It is apparent that Esther has been very greatly affected by her time with the rebels, and the first thing she notes is her belief that she will never be close to anyone again.

Although the children at the rehabilitation center have been instructed to draw the things they want to forget as a way of removing them from their minds, Esther draws a tree instead, but she does not finish it. She observes that the yard is not fully fenced in and is not a prison, but the children still are not permitted to leave. She describes some of the other children and their sleeping arrangements, separated by gender, and she observes that all of the children at the center are united by the same thing that divides them from everyone else.

Esther recalls her peaceful life before her abduction as she tries to forget her time with the rebels and look forward to the future since she is not yet 16 years old, but she is unwilling to share her shameful story, instead seeking peace through forgetting the past. It has only been two weeks since her escape, and she had not yet grown used to peace; Esther is free, but she is not glad. When she returned, the nurses examined her, but they do not give blood tests unless they are requested because no one wants to scare the girls by mentioning HIV.

Esther received a visit from family soon after her return, and she observes how differently each of them treat her now; she also mourns for her mother who died of cancer three weeks earlier. Esther's father will not even look at her, but she does not know if he is thinking about his dead wife or what his daughter has gone through. She recounts the romantic tale of how her parents met, and her love is apparent, despite her many conflicting feelings.

As a foil to Esther's father, her sister cannot stop staring at her, proving her claim that visitors either stare or will not make eye contact. Esther is relieved when her family leaves, but she misses them also. Everyone at the rehabilitation center is troubled, and although the counselors insist they will come out of it, Esther feels she will be coming out of it forever. She is conflicted between believing she deserves a future and thinking she would be better off dead. Her lack of emotion is seen in her indifference to Kony as well as her belief that no good can come of talking to the journalists who plan to visit. Esther is obviously struggling with her return to the real world after spending so much time as the rebels' captive, and the place she begins foreshadows how far she will come emotionally.

In her first appearance, Esther's thoughts and feelings develop several themes. The theme of violence is furthered by her memories of the horrors she has seen and the guilt for the things she has done which makes her pray that she will not become a monster. Although she seeks internal peace, her thoughts are not whole at Kiryandongo, showing her emotional detachment as she feels indifferent towards Kony



and is overwhelmed by a blankness within. When she is first captured, Esther reveals both emotional detachment and strong emotions as her anger turns to complacency. Esther wants to improve the world, yet she is unable to accept her past, feeling she is a bad person because of the things she was forced to do while captive.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Esther's mind uneasy at Kiryandongo?

Discussion Question 2

What tragedy does Esther discover and have to deal with after her escape, and how does she process this?

Discussion Question 3

How does Esther feel about the rebels and the world in general after her escape, and how does this impact her relationships with those around her?

Vocabulary

disrupted, perspective, thatched, bouffant, ventilation, rehabilitation, persecuted, hovering



Part II, Chapter 4

Summary

In Chapter 4/Taking Off, Harry and Jane stumble inside, dry off and make love, despite her reservations about being older than him, and she immediately realizes that he is important to her life, though she does not yet know why. On the drive back to Nairobi, Harry tells Jane about Rosalie, a girl he likes who has a boyfriend. Jane feels transformed and more alive than ever when Harry touches her, and she believes that she is finding herself; however, she also wants more than just the moment they shared and wishes she was young enough to make him as delirious as he makes her.

The next morning, Lana informs Jane that Don has offered to take them to Uganda, and later, Harry makes the same offer. Their departure is delayed again when Lana throws another dinner party, but Jane cannot enjoy herself since Harry is absent, visiting his parents. On Monday morning, they finally depart Nairobi with Harry driving, Jane beside him, and Lana, Don and Pierre in the backseat. They spend the first few days of their journey visiting Beryl, Lana's vivacious sister, who wishes she could accompany them to Uganda to learn about the rebels and the abducted children.

Spending this time with Harry, Jane admires his self-possession and feels a growing separation from the importance of life back at home in America. Jane enjoys Beryl's dinner party, spurning the attention of a guest, but she often has to remind herself of the reasons for her journey when she feels neglected by Harry. When she accompanies Harry to a good flying place, she meets three children which causes her to realize how little she can envision their lives, and she later thinks about how the children who need the most protection are often the hardest to save. They return to Beryl's in time for dinner, and in bed that night, Jane wants to wake Harry to satisfy her yearning, but she refuses to let him know how much she needs him. When they leave in the morning, the truck stalls, and then a tire blows.

Analysis

Chapter 4 returns to Jane and Harry as their kiss becomes more intimate and ultimately results in them sleeping together, thus fulfilling foreshadowing related to their romantic relationship. Jane's infatuation is instantaneous with her feeling transformed by his touch; although she came to Africa to disappear, she feels more alive than ever in Harry's arms.

Even thoughts of home seem less important when she is with him. Her early feelings foreshadow the impact that this romance has on her mindset throughout the narrative, but from the very beginning, the age difference causes her anxiety as she wishes she were young enough to elicit the same feelings in him as he does her. Jane's traveling party grows as Don, who is obviously infatuated with Lana, offers the use of his car and



Harry volunteers to drive. The fact that Harry has also slept with Lana indicates her sexual freedom and foreshadows her taking other lovers during their adventures.

Their journey is delayed yet again by a dinner party, and unable to enjoy the company in Harry's absence, Jane is stricken by how little these people hold to an agenda. When they finally depart, they drive only a short distance before stopping to visit Beryl, Lana's sister, setting the pace for their journey which is filled with many superfluous social activities despite the gravity of its intent. Lana is eager to show her brother-in-law's artwork to her friends, yet the actual person remains elusive.

Jane admires Harry's self-possession, yet she already feels neglected by him quite often, foreshadowing the dissolution of their relationship because of her neediness. Between observing Beryl with her children and meeting children when she accompanies Harry to his flying place, Jane's thoughts are preoccupied with the idea of motherhood. She also touches on the theme of empathy and emotional detachment as she thinks of how little she can envision these children's lives, showing an inability to remove herself from her version of normality.

As they head back to Beryl's house, Harry ignores a screaming woman, saying it is not their business, but he stops to check on a body in the road; these actions contrast and foreshadow his mixed feelings about involvement in others' problems. Jane's refusal to let Harry know how much she needs him is indicative of her inability to communicate directly, and this also foreshadows their eventual breakup. Jane quickly becomes infatuated with Harry, neglecting her work to focus on their relationship. Jane's lack of control is evidenced by her inability to dictate when their group leaves.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Rosalie, and how does Jane feel towards Harry after he tells her about Rosalie?

Discussion Question 2

Who accompanies Jane on her journey, and why?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Jane and the others' visit to Beryl. How does this make Jane feel about her life?

Vocabulary

spellbound, pliable, threshold, dissolve, deflated, credentials, hoarding, extremity, vaccinating, embossed, empathetic



Part III, Chapters 5-6

Summary

Part III: First Days begins with feelings of new intention and invisibility as well as an odd belief that these will lead to home. Chapter 5/The You File talks of turning new in a new place and no longer feeling that one belongs. You feel homesick but out of place when you imagine yourself at home. With strangers in a foreign place far from home, you have no control, yet you find a surprising feeling of being home in this new place, though you didn't know such a world could exist. You do not feel you can go on, yet you do.

Praying not to become a monster, you feel beneath other people so you avoid them; it is easier to need no one. You fear someone being hurt because of you, but your life is not your own as you belong to others. These things must be shared so they can be stopped, but you cannot share your thoughts for fear of being exposed, and you wonder if you will ever be free. When you wake in the morning, you wonder where you are before remembering you are in this other life.

As Jane and her companions travel through the Molo farmlands in Chapter 6/Recreational Visits, they discuss the whereabouts of their families, causing Jane to recall her sister's complaints about never knowing where she is. Crossing into Uganda, the truck is filled with reverent silence. When they stop at a Chinese restaurant in Jinja, Jane's fortune cookie predicts, "You will find yourself wherever you go" (page 113).

Seeking lodging, they come across an Australian man, Brian, who allows them to stay with him, and the next morning, Brian and his friends take Jane's group swimming in the Nile, causing her to think that just 300 miles north of the river, children are being abducted, raped and trained to kill. They continue on to Kampala where they stay with the MacAlistair brothers, and while Jane attempts to prepare research for their trip, she is distracted by thoughts and questions about her relationship with Harry. Harry accompanies Jane to explore the Entebbe airstrip where her self-doubts lead to tension between them, and while Jane thinks about the future, Harry's focus is on the present.

On Friday afternoon, Rodney MacAlistair drives Jane and Pierre into Kampala where they see soldiers squashing a riot, and passing a row of humanitarian organizations' buildings, Rodney rants about their ineffectiveness. Stopping at World Vision, Jane talks to Bobby Kiwanuka who tells her that returned children come here for counseling to deal with their guilt, but they have no hope for the future. At UNICEF, Rahma Puar reminds Jane that Uganda is a dangerous war zone and cautions her against travelling at night.

At that evening's barbeque, Jane meets Helga who worked for a professor at Kampala University, and Helga advises her to ask the children about their escape since few of them get over their captivity; she also indicates that there is little hope for the children



who escape from the rebels. While Harry is paragliding on Sunday, Jane ponders how important he has become to her in such a short time.

During their last night with the MacAlistairs, they dine at an Indian restaurant where they meet a doctor who provides an introduction to Carlo Marciano at the Lacor hospital. Jane and her group set off for a warzone the next day.

Analysis

Part III contains three chapters and is introduced with a brief description of a new intention and a belief that it will lead home. Chapter 5 is the first of several chapters entitled "The You File" which appear to be narrated by Esther or another escapee and explores the feelings related to being abducted. This chapter emphasizes being far from home and isolation.

The narrator admits that life is the same everywhere but makes the caveat that nowhere is like here. She feels she has grown up too quickly and regrets losing control of her own life. She also fears becoming a monster, and all of these feelings parallel Esther's expressions throughout the narrative as she struggles to accept her past and regain control of her future. The question of whether she will ever be free is mirrored even after her escape as she attempts to move forward with her newfound freedom.

Although Chapter 5 is short, it touches on several important themes in the novel. Esther prays that she will not become a monster, yet she demonstrates a lack of control when the rebels force her to participate in monstrous deeds, such as beating Susanna to death. This shows a conflict in her emotions and serves as a foil. Flashbacks to the past show that she could not envision the future, and from a point in the future, she also regrets the decisions she made with the rebels, even though refusing their orders may have meant death.

Chapter 6 returns to Jane and is aptly titled "Recreational Visits" as the lackadaisical pace of their journey continues. In Jinja, the group acquires lodging with Australian visitors who entertain them with rafting on the river; this peaceful scene serves as a foil to later scenes, and this foil is emphasized by Jane's thoughts of the horrors taking place just 300 miles north.

In Kampala, the group's efforts continue as before, and although Jane makes attempts at research, thoughts of Harry overshadow these efforts, even when they visit the airstrip. Her doubts lead to tension between them, again foreshadowing their breakup, and the basis for this tension is best shown by Harry's focus on the present while Jane is constantly concerned about the future, borrowing troubles that have not yet occurred. The violence of the area is demonstrated in Kampala when they see a riot being stopped.

At World Vision, Jane is astonished by Bobby's cheerful demeanor, but she justifies it by thinking it must be necessary in such a hopeless job. Still, his lack of hope for these children's futures is depressing and foreshadows many others' thoughts on this topic.



Rahma at UNICEF is unenthusiastic and even rude as Jane questions her about the situation, but she warns Jane and her friends of the dangers they'll face in Uganda's war zone. Helga also expresses little hope for the abducted children's futures, and the doctor's recommendation that Jane talk to Carlo Marciano foreshadows that visit in Lacor. The chapter ends with the group heading into the warzone, foreshadowing the trouble and dangers they will encounter during the rest of their journey.

Discussion Question 1

In the beginning of Chapter 5, what feelings are described, and why are these emotions felt?

Discussion Question 2

How does Jane feel about the enjoyable time spent with the Australians in Chapter 6? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Which organizations does Jane visit in Chapter 6, and how does she feel about the people with whom she discusses the situation with the rebels?

Vocabulary

intention, deliberately, mesmerized, accustomed, mayhem, intimidating, pensively, meringues, emaciated, practicality



Part III, Chapter 7

Summary

In Chapter 7/Independence Day, Agnes climbs into bed with Esther at St. Mary's, but despite hearing stories about the rebels, the girls feel safe since they have not seen any rebels. Waking, they hear banging, shouting and windows breaking; their efforts to hide prove futile as the rebels beat the girls who scream, tying them together and leading them across the courtyard, leaving destruction at the school.

As they are led down the road, the girls do not know where they are being taken or if they will live or die. Those who try to escape are retrieved, and after one girl succeeds in escaping, the rebels threaten to kill all of the remaining girls if it happens again. When Esther assures her friend that they will be fine, Agnes wants to believe her but is unsure.

Shortly after stopping, the girls are filled with worry and hope when they see Sister Giulia and Bosco approaching, and the girls' fates are decided when they are lined up again and separated. Her face lined with bad news, the nun urges the girls to be strong and promises not to forget them, yet she does not respond when Helen asks if she will return for them; Sister Giulia leaves with most of the girls, abandoning 30 of them to the rebels.

That night, Esther is angry as she ponders how she got to this point where her life is no longer her own, and though she tries to forget those first days, they remain a vivid memory. Continuing through the brush with supplies stolen from the school on their backs, the girls are forbidden to talk. When they arrive at a village where other abducted children are kept, the girls are taken to a clearing where the rebels beat a girl who tried to escape, forcing the others to join in upon penalty of death for refusing.

After that day, Esther is a new person, and although she initially feels it is the worst thing that could happen, it is not long before she gives up on determining how much worse life with the rebels can be. Some girls despair and wish for death, while others remain hopeful that they will return to their parents one day.

Because St. Mary's attracted media attention, the rebels are angry at the girls for causing so much trouble. In addition to being denied food, the girls are made to stand topless in a field all day, and their shirts are not returned for three more days. Officers choose wives from amongst their captives, and chosen by Greg Lotti, Esther tries not to think about Philip, the boy she loves, or the fact that she is no longer suitable for marriage; still, she is luckier than others since Lotti beats her only once and even claims to love her because she resembles his dead wife.

During Esther's first week at Kiryandongo, she receives a visit from Grace Dollo, Louise's mother who is famous for forming We Are Concerned, a group of parents



hoping to get their kids back from the rebels. When Grace asks about Louise, Esther recounts seeing her the day of her escape and how Louise was too sick with her pregnant to attempt the escape. Thanking Esther, Grace tells her that the "closest thing to seeing her is seeing you" (page 164).

Analysis

Chapter 7 chronologically reverts to the beginning of the narrative as Esther recalls her abduction. Although rumors of the rebels' proximity had reached the students at St. Mary's, the girls feel safe since they have not seen any members of the LRA, but Esther's ominous remark that they would not feel safe again foreshadows the events of that night. The rebels raid the school and abduct the children; when a small girl tries to escape, a rebel takes her into the trees, and Esther's refusal to think about what he does to the girl suggests the atrocities she witnesses and also shows the start of her emotional detachment brought on by the trauma of her abduction.

The girls do not know if they will live or die as they are taken, demonstrating the loss of control they now have over their own lives, reinforcing one of the novel's main themes which is focused on how little say these characters, especially the females, have over their own lives. After one girl escapes, the rebels threaten to kill the rest if any other repeat the attempt, and this serves to gain the girls' complicity. Sister Giulia's arrival fills the girls with momentary hope, but Esther sees bad news in the headmistress's expression, and although the nun promises to remember the 30 girls she leaves behind, the girls feel abandoned and lose much hope.

The rebels quickly teach the girls how they are expected to behave by abusing those who do not conform. Further conditioning is seen when they arrive at camp where they are forced to participate in beating Susanna, a girl from Gulu who tried to escape, to death. This example of violence in the novel also demonstrates Esther's desire to fix things. Esther immediately feels like a different person and wonders if she should have refused to participate in the beating, even though she could not have saved the girl and the penalty for refusal was death. Esther often dreams of Susanna and others she had mistreated during her time with the rebels, and although she begs for their forgiveness, it is denied; this foreshadows Esther's inability to forgive herself.

The captured girls experience a variety of emotions, and while Esther is calm during her captivity, she is filled with anger after her escape, and she admits that her hatred feels good. Because the St. Mary's girls gain media attention, the rebels punish them for causing trouble, and the rebels choose wives from among the girls. Despite the fact that Esther's husband is relatively kind, she despises him for taking her future away by making her unsuitable for a future marriage, but some of her friends are less fortunate in their pairings, becoming wives to demanding, abusive rebels. Esther's marriage reveals her lack of control while also showing the importance of the future as she worries what her marriage to a rebel will do to future prospects.



At the end of the chapter, Esther mentions meeting Grace Dollo and alludes to *We Are Concerned* which foreshadows the explanation of Jane's involvement with the situation in Uganda. Grace's relationship as Louise's mother also foreshadows the importance of Louise's role in the novel. When things are bad with the rebels, Esther focuses on her past to distract herself from the lack of control in her life, showing a detachment from reality as she seeks to escape her emotions.

Discussion Question 1

How is Esther's description of the abduction different from the account in Chapter 1?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Susanna, what is Esther's affiliation with her, and how does Esther feel about it?

Discussion Question 3

Why are the rebels mad at the St. Mary's girls, and how do they react to this anger?

Vocabulary

camouflage, reflected, sorghum, platform, emerged, visible, unsettling, abduction, containment, endanger, compound



Part IV, Chapters 8-9

Summary

Part IV: To The North begins with Chapter 8/On Location in which Jane and her friends cross the bridge into the north where the roads worsen and fewer people walk on the paths. In Lira, they meet Grace Dollo who Jane first encountered in New York when Grace's talk about the abducted children made Jane want to help. Grace takes the group to meet other parents who fear for their children's safety and worry about hating the grandchildren their children have been forced to birth.

Pere Ben tells of a trip to Sudan where they were taken to a deserted compound, and returning the next day, they found it filled with children; the girl who spoke to them was killed after they left, and he will never forget that day. In contrast, Jane's problems seem trivial, but despite the horrors she has heard, she feels content when Harry holds her at the hotel that evening. In the morning, Jane picks Grace up to go to St. Mary's, but first, she is invited inside to meet Grace's husband, Milton, and their other children.

At 6AM on the day that the rebels took the girls, Grace and Milton were awakened by a knock at the door, and rushing to the school, Grace could tell from everyone's faces that she had nothing for which to hope.

In Chapter 9/In the Bush, Esther's old life seems like a movie as she quickly learns about pain, hunger and exhaustion. The rebels claim that the girls' parents no longer want them, but they belong to Kony's family now. The girls spend their days doing chores and gathering food, and they are indoctrinated with the rebels' rules; some kids even believe the rules and join the LRA. The children at Kiryandongo are still cruel because the rebels taught them habits of cruelty and hate.

In the bush, Esther felt herself becoming hardened so she forced herself to remember the good things from her former life. She recalls her love for Philip who broke her heart when he left her for another girl, but he eventually returned to Esther, claiming she was the one. While she was in the bush, Esther often dreamed she was at home, but her home disappeared as soon as she woke.

Analysis

The fourth section of the novel contains just two chapters, beginning with Chapter 8 in which Jane notices that the roads worsen and travelers become less frequent as her group crosses into the north, nearing the danger zone, reinforcing the theme of violence and war as the reader witnesses the atrocities and horrors to which the characters are subjected as their lives are in danger daily. Jane's thoughts reveal her connection to Grace Dollo, explaining how she learned about the abducted children; this interaction left Jane feeling calm and directed as it had been a long since she felt so penetrated.



Grace's fear of hating possible grandchildren raises one of many concerns that the parents of the abducted children experience, and several parents share horror stories with Jane, leaving her feeling drained and as though she had no right to complain about anything that may happen in her life since it could never be as bad as what they have been forced to endure. Grace's recollection of the day of abduction reiterates the theme of hopelessness that pervades this novel, and this contrasts with the woman's actions as she creates *We Are Concerned* to enact change.

Chapter 9 returns to Esther's viewpoint as life with the rebels worsens, and the rebels force the girls to consider the possibility that their parents will not want them back, further isolating them and destroying any lingering hope that they can return to their former lives. This is also a form of emotional violence that destroys any control the children believe they may still have over their own lives.

The abducted children become indoctrinated by the cruelty they see and experience, but Esther tries to remember the good parts of her life to avoid falling into this pattern, focusing on the past instead of the present. The mention of Philip foreshadows his appearance in the narrative, while Esther's dreams of being home vanish when she wakes, reinforcing the hopelessness that she feels. Again, Esther yields to her imagination rather than accept the lack of control she now has over her own life.

Discussion Question 1

Who does Jane meet in Lira? Describe their encounter and its meaning.

Discussion Question 2

How do the girls' stories make Jane feel about her own life, and why?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Esther's life in the bush. How does this impact her life at Kiryandongo?

Vocabulary

density, acacia, infused, unfazed, mesmerized, penetrated, undercutting, mortified, thwarted, united, endure, lattice, terrain



Part V, Chapter 10

Summary

Part V: It Is Possible opens with Chapter 10/At St. Mary's with Grace telling Jane about attacks and abductions in Atipe as they travel to Aboke. Driving through the church gates, their group receives greetings in English, Italian and Swahili. Sister Fiamma notes that the rebels are nearby today, looking for food and people, but Jane's attention is partially diverted by Sister Giulia's silence.

Recalling the night of the abduction, the nuns admit that they do not fear another attack since they have soldiers stationed at the school now. Although Sister Giulia originally believed that talking about the abduction would endanger the girls, she has since decided that they must speak and that they will not stop sharing their story. The nuns tell about a trip to meet the rebels in Sudan when they were forbidden to land because it was too sunny.

After lunch, Pierre sets up his camera, and the nuns present three girls: Sharon who spent a year with the rebels, and Beatrice and Theresa who escaped after a month. Keeping still as they recall the night they were abducted, the girls tell how they hid under the beds and how escape was only possible at night, but some girls managed to escape while others were recaptured.

As the girls grow more relaxed, Jane listens attentively as a voice at the back of her mind ponders why this happened to them but not her, and she is amazed that these girls feel they are fortunate because their families took them back. By the end of the interview, the girls are laughing and playing, while their interviewers are pale and shattered after hearing about the tragedies they have endured.

Feeling overwhelmed by what she has heard and needing to be alone, Jane excuses herself to see the classrooms, and contemplating the peaceful school turned into a hellish scene of abduction, she ponders why the news does not report these events and realizes no one wants to see them. Retrieving Jane, Harry tells her to stop thinking because it is time to get out of here, but she wonders how she will ever leave this place.

No one speaks during the drive back to Lira, and as Jane says goodbye to Grace since they are heading to the rehabilitation centers in Gulu in the morning, Grace urges her to talk to Esther Akello at Kiryandongo. Knowing that her first impressions will vanish, no matter how vivid, if not written down immediately, Jane writes in the courtyard, but when Harry joins her, he insists it is more important to stop the atrocity than to know all the details.

Jane feels that people will be moved to do something if they know what is going on, yet Harry points out that no one cares that this has gone on for 15 years because these children have no economic value. Jane continues writing after Harry goes to bed, and



when she joins him, she pictures the girls and thinks she will never forget them before immediately wondering how long it will take before she does forget them.

Analysis

The fifth part of "Thirty Girls" contains just two chapters, beginning with Jane's visit to St. Mary's with Grace in Chapter 10. As they travel, Grace talks about recent abductions, demonstrating the normality of this atrocity. When they see people hanging from the side of a bus, Grace mentions that a woman was shot while riding a matatus last Christmas, and when children reach into the windows as their car crosses a bridge, they back off when Grace tells them to behave, showing respect.

At the school, Grace introduces Jane to the nuns who she has known for a long time since she also went to school at St. Mary's before the LRA was formed, referring to a more peaceful time. The nuns assure their visitors that the rebels are not nearby today, but Jane is distracted by the silence of Sister Giulia who soon explains that they first feared talking would endanger the girls, but now they will not stop; by talking about the abducted girls, the nuns show that she has kept her promise to remember them. She tells about a visit to Sudan to meet the rebels, but their pilot could not land because it was too sunny, an indication that the rebels never truly intended to meet with the nuns.

As three of the girls tell Jane about their abduction, Pierre films them, and the girls seemed entranced by the magic of film's promise of permanence. The girls start their story morosely, growing more relaxed as they proceed, and listening attentively, Jane realizes she cannot imagine their lives, again lamenting her lack of children. Sharon confesses that her arm became paralyzed after she was kidnapped.

The fact that the girls feel fortunate that their parents took them back reveals that not all of the abducted children are as lucky which foreshadows Esther's future fear that her mother would not let her go home after she escaped the rebels. By the end of the girls' story, they are playful, having released some of their emotions in the retelling, but in contrast, their visitors are shattered.

Jane has to excuse herself to collect her thoughts, and touring the school serves to show the contrast between its peaceful environment and the hellishness of the rebels' invasion. She mourns that their story is untold because no one wants to hear such tragic news, reinforcing her desire to share the girls' story. After Harry retrieves Jane, they leave, and Grace's recommendation that Jane talk to Esther foreshadows the intersection of the two protagonists' paths.

Later, Jane talks to Harry about the importance of spreading the story so that people will be moved to help, but while he knows that it is important to do this, talking to the girls fills his head with bad images which he wants to block out. After he goes to bed, Jane's belief that she will never forget the girls is immediately followed by the contrasting thought that it is just a matter of time before she forgets them. Jane and Harry wake to



gunshots indicative of the war zone, but the day's trauma brings them together as Harry summons Jane to his bed.

Chapter 10 contains many instances that further the novel's themes. Violence and war are demonstrated by the horrible stories Jane hears about the rebels killing a young girl who talked to some of the St. Mary's parents when she talks to Sharon, Beatrice and Theresa who escaped the rebels. The chapter contrasts Jane's empathy for the girls with the girls' emotional detachment from the past, while her desire to help the abducted children also contrasts with the abducted children's parents who fear hating their grandchildren. This chapter also discusses the desire of two characters to fix things with Grace forming We Are Concerned while Harry expressing the desire to stop the atrocity, while Jane feels powerless to fix anything. Jane's lack of control is similar to the lack of control of the St. Mary's girls during the traumatic experiences they relate from their pasts while with the rebels.

Discussion Question 1

What do the nuns at St. Mary's tell Jane about the girls' abduction, and how does she feel about their recollections?

Discussion Question 2

Who are Sharon, Beatrice and Theresa, and how does Jane react to their stories?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Jane and Harry's feelings after their visit to St. Mary's. What does this indicate about their romantic relationship and compatibility?

Vocabulary

careened, admiration, matatus, wimples, primitive, permanence, dappled, hoisted, engulfing, tranquility, conjured



Part V, Chapter 11

Summary

In Chapter 11/Was God in Sudan?, Esther recalls that it took days to walk to Sudan, sleeping on leaves and waking to memories of her former life. One day, they pass through her grandmother's village, and Esther is relieved that they do not stop. While she is washing clothes using a bush as her mother did, a rebel chides her, claiming her mother will no longer want her, but now she belongs to Kony's family, and he will always forgive her.

Because Kony wants to meet the St. Mary's girls, they are taken to his compound where he asks why they are so special that the Pope is talking about them. Insisting that the girls are treated well, Kony tells them they have been brought here because it is God's will for these sinners to be cleansed. Admiring Agnes, Kony orders her to be brought to him that night, and when Esther claims they were sisters in another life, he says she will come to him too.

Esther is not afraid when she is summoned to Kony because of her desire to protect Agnes. After Kony enumerates on how lucky they are to be chosen to bear his children, the girls exchange a glance of reassurance before zoning out to ignore what is happening to their bodies. After the girls are trained with guns and Esther proves herself to be a good shot, she is taken on raids which she hopes will provide an opportunity to escape. When she is taken on a raid to Gwere, her grandmother's village, she finds burnt huts and prays for her family's safety; she is relieved when she later learns that they escaped.

Pondering why God allows such bad things to happen in Sudan, Esther finds it difficult to believe He is good after seeing such awful things. Needing something to do, she still prays, but it does not help. Then, she thinks of something else she can do: Chunga is a mean rebel who took another's wife and gave her AIDS, and he often speaks out against Kony. She pesters a rebel to gain an audience with Kony and tells him about Chunga's betrayal, requesting that he bless Agnes in return. Although Chunga is executed, Kony does not visit to bless Agnes specifically, but he blesses her and others when he visits their camp.

Although Agnes grows sicker, the rebels insist she accompany them to Uganda, and seeing it as her friend's chance to escape, Esther promises to follow soon, though she fears that Agnes will not make it. Before long, Esther's pregnancy begins to show, and wondering if she will hate the baby, she assures it of her presence. Although Esther's hope to be sent home proves vain, she is permitted to sleep alone during her pregnancy.



Analysis

As the narrative returns to Esther's viewpoint in Chapter 11, the title of the chapter signifies her flagging faith. It takes days for the 50 children and 20 rebels to walk to Sudan, but the girls do not get used to the long journey. They sleep on leaves, dreaming of the past and waking to remember they are in this new life. Esther is glad they pass through her grandmother's village instead of stopping, but she cries at the thought of her home. This fear reiterates the novel's theme of war and violence which reveals the struggles Esther is forced into after being taken from her life.

When a rebel chides her for the way she washes clothes in the riverbed and Esther explains this is her mother's method, foreshadowing is fulfilled when he suggests her mother will not want her back, saying she is no longer Esther's mother because the girl now belongs to Kony's family. Esther never thought she would worry about her mother not wanting her, but the rebels constantly find new ways to hurt their captives. The rebel praises Kony as handsome and wonderful, and when the girls are summoned before Kony, she is surprised to find that he is the same rebel she spoke to at the riverbed. The girls are questioned about why they are so special that the Pope talks about them, creating fear since being special is a bad thing to the rebels.

Insisting that the girls are treated well, Kony tells them that it is God's will for them to be brought here to be cleansed of their sins, a concept that fuels Esther's doubts related to divinity. Kony informs the girls that they must remember his message because they are to be his ministers, but when he asks for Agnes to be brought to him that night, Esther speaks up to protect her friend, volunteering to be subjected to the same treatment.

Esther's willingness to sacrifice herself to Kony's bed shows empathy for her friend and a desire to fix things, two of the major themes in the narrative, as well as exploring the theme of control as Esther takes control in a situation when Agnes has none. That night, she is not afraid since her sacrifice is for her friend's benefit, and ironically, he does not see luck the same as being special when he informs them that they are lucky to be chosen for a chance to bare his children. Agnes and Esther exchange glances to assure each other of their presence before succumbing to Kony's desires. Although the girls often hear animals rummaging in the bush, Esther notes that there are more animals in Kony's compound, alluding to the rough treatment they are subjected to at the hands of the rebels.

Since Esther proves to be accurate with a gun, she is taken on raids with the rebels which she hopes will provide an opportunity for escape, but finding burnt huts in her grandmother's village, she questions if God looks into Sudan; thinking that He allows such horrible things to happen makes her ponder if God is really good, yet she still prays because she must do something, even though her prayers go unanswered. Finally, she thinks of something else she can do for Agnes who has become ill - she arranges a meeting with Kony to inform him of the betrayal of one of his officers, a cruel man named Chunga, in exchange for Kony offering his blessing to Agnes. This serves as examples of the themes of empathy, a desire to fix things and shows Esther taking



control. Although Esther holds little faith in Kony's blessing, Agnes believes in it. Agnes' illness foreshadows her death.

When Kony comments on Esther's pregnancy, she wonders how he knows since she is not showing, and while his knowledge suggests his insight, his deceitful nature is shown when he executes Chunga for his betrayal but does not uphold his agreement with Esther to bless Agnes. Agnes receives his blessing with others when Kony visits their camp, but Esther worries about her friend when the rebels insist Agnes accompany them to Uganda. Esther suggests Agnes will have an opportunity to escape, but her fears again foreshadow her friend's death.

When Esther becomes certain that she is pregnant, she wonders if she will hate her child, revealing yet another unfortunate possible consequence of the rebels' abduction and touching on the theme of detachment. The comfort she takes in the sound of the rain makes her realize she has learned nothing, again emphasizing the traumatic experience of her abduction.

Discussion Question 1

Because of the way Esther washes clothes, what new fear do the rebels instill in her? How does this impact her?

Discussion Question 2

What does Esther say to Kony when the St. Mary's girls are taken to his compound, and what is the result?

Discussion Question 3

What does Esther tell Kony about Chunga, and why?

Vocabulary

accustomed, shriveled, flinch, rebels, prediction, preposterous



Part VI, Chapter 12

Summary

Part VI: Refuge opens with Chapter 12/Hospitality in Lacor, and after Jane and her traveling companions reach Gulu, they visit Dr. Carlo Marciano who invites them to stay with him. He tells them about coming to Gulu in 1956 with his wife, Medka, and starting the hospital which sometimes serves as a refugee camp. Ten years ago, Medka was infected with AIDS during an operation and hid her illness so she could continue practicing medicine until she died five years later.

After their host goes to bed, Jane follows Harry to the garden, and when he laments their fights and admits that he prefers to be alone since he is lonely either way, she is overwhelmed with the desire to keep him close. In bed, Jane thinks of Harry and the St. Mary's girls, coming to the conclusion that the world is messed up and she is powerless to fix it.

Waking early, Pierre and Jane film the crowd departing from the safety of the hospital walls where they sleep, and they meet Jonathan, a young boy who escorts them to his village of Rusalem to meet his mother. He shows the visitors how they cook and admits that they eat dirt when there is no food. Three years ago, his father was killed in a rebel attack, and his three brothers were abducted, but he hears that they are still alive. Pierre leaves money hidden in their home, and Jane gifts Jonathan's mother with the bracelet Harry bought her in Massai.

Later, they are given a tour of the hospital, and when Harry sits beside Jane as she writes in the courtyard, she feels that balance is restore to her world. When she confesses to giving her bracelet away, Harry says he will not buy her another, and his face indicates that she cannot be trusted to measure the worth of things.

Analysis

Three chapters are contained within Part 6, beginning with Chapter 12 where Jane and her travelling companions reach Gulu, a peaceful town where children play, and it seems like a dream in contrast to the things Jane has seen and heard. They seek out Dr. Carlo Marciano who agrees to provide them with rooms, though he insists that the group be separated by gender.

The kind doctor shares his story, telling them about his wife and her dedication to the medical profession which reinforces the theme of characters' desire to fix the world's evils. He informs them that the hospital is sometimes used as a refugee camp, foreshadowing Jane's encounter with a young man who sleeps at the hospital for safety from the rebels.



After Dr. Marciano goes to bed, Harry visits the garden, and when Jane joins him, he comments on the fact that they've traveled so far to fight. Noting that there are other ways for people to be together besides sex, Harry expresses a lack of surprise that there are so many wars since people cannot get along.

When he admits that he prefers to be alone since he is lonely either way, Jane is overwhelmed with a desire to keep him close, but this conversation foreshadows the demise of their romantic relationship. Although she expected the romance to end, Jane still feels sad about it as she watches people vacate nearby villages to sleep behind the safety of the hospital walls. Focusing on the girls to distract herself from the situation with Harry, Jane feels helpless to fix the world's problems, but she feels peaceful when she thinks of Harry, allowing her to drift off to sleep.

In the morning, Pierre and Jane film the villagers leaving the safety of the hospital, and a young boy invites them to his village to meet his mother. Jane's encounter with Jonathan indicates the violence in the novel and reveals Jane's empathetic nature; it also serves as an example of the theme of the past, present and future as Jonathan recalls his family's sad past even as he remains hopeful that his brothers will return home in the future. Hearing their family's sad story, Jane is moved to give the mother the bracelet Harry gave her, and when Harry later finds out about it, the look he gives her indicates that she cannot be trusted to recognize the value of things. This exchange further foreshadows the end of their relationship.

Discussion Question 1

Recount Dr. Marciano's story about Medka. How does Medka's story reinforce the novel's themes?

Discussion Question 2

How does Jane feel thinking about the St. Mary's girls?

Discussion Question 3

Why do Jane and Pierre go to Rusalem, what do they learn, and how does this impact Jane's story?

Vocabulary

idled, gnarled, fatigued, superfluous, aligned, vacate, vertigo, ominous, dignity, threshold, dismissively



Part VI, Chapters 13 & 14

Summary

Chapter 13/The You File asks who says you choose your life. You go away and are steered by new things, some kind and others cruel. Not everything people say is true, and meeting yourself before sleeping, you feel like a child again in the powerless world around you. Some days, you think it will be fine, but other days, it is too much for anyone to bear; still, people bear it, and someone is always worse off.

In Chapter 14/What Comes Back to Me, Esther feels like there is a hole in her life after she returns. Going into labor, the pains make her fear death, and although the nurse tries to turn her son, the baby is stillborn; she thinks that at least he will be one less person to join the rebels, but her feelings do not appear to her.

In Sudan, Philip arrives amongst the rebels, but when he passes her by as if he does not know her, Esther feels a new suffering she never imagined. When she sees him again, he delusionally talks about his mother and a baby, and Esther later learns that he was hit in the head with a fragment during a battle.

A week after Agnes leaves, they find her face down in the dirt, and Esther wants to cry for the first time in a long time. The rebels test the safety of the river by making the captives cross first, and though Esther tries to help eleven-year-old Mary who cannot swim, the river sweeps the girl away. After escaping, Esther is permitted to visit her family one night, but she feels distant from them.

In the bush, escape was never far from her mind, and when the day finally arrived that Lotti was away, she hid in the bathroom for a while before fleeing. For three days, she did not know if she would live or die, but she enjoyed her freedom. She helps a young girl find water for her sick baby before continuing on, and her life changes forever on October 9 when she is reunited with mankind. Esther runs into a man who walked with her because he realized she was just a girl.

When Esther thinks of the things she saw and did with the rebels, she wants to beat herself with stones. In the rehabilitation center, she waits for something she cannot name; life is before her but not close enough to touch, and her heart is suffocating.

Analysis

Chapter 13 is another installment of "The You File" where the narrator, presumably Esther, contemplates the lack of control she has over her own life. She identifies people as cruel and dishonest which obviously alludes to experiences remembered at the hands of the rebels.



The narrator feels like a powerless child, and although there are times she feels she cannot bare it, others are worse off; this concept echoes Jane's intermittent thoughts about how she cannot imagine the lives of the people she interviews. This chapter reinforces themes of empathy and a lack of control as the narrator deals with the effects of violence.

When Esther goes into labor in Chapter 14, the pain of the baby's positioning makes her fear death, and while she lives through the delivery, her child is stillborn. Esther's detachment from the child is revealed by her comment that her feelings do not appear to her and her only thought is that this will be one less person to join the rebels, indicating that she sees her child as a potential enemy rather than someone to be loved and protected due to the circumstances surrounding its conception. One of the girls, Doris, initially annoys Esther because she claims they were abducted because of their sinful ways, but Esther is less agitated when she realizes that Doris is in love with Ricky, the rebel who facilitated Esther's talk with Kony.

Proving his belief that his purpose is to purge the girls of their sins, Kony often wakes them in the middle of the night to pray. Esther is shocked when she sees her beloved Philip among the rebels, and when he passes by as though he does not know her, she experiences an unimaginable suffering; however, the only other time she sees him, he rambles on delusionally, causing her to discover that a battle wound left his brain scrambled.

When Agnes' body is found a week after her departure, Esther wants to cry for the first time in a long while, and although she knows that everyone dies, she admits that death becomes more concrete when it takes someone she loves. Esther is ashamed of how hard her heart has become when she does not pity a drunken man that the rebels mock and torment; this foreshadows her regret over the horrors she takes part in during her time in captivity.

Esther also recalls Mary being swept away by the river, and although she tried to help the girl, her feelings are absent when the girl is carried away. She hopes that this is lucky for Mary as a means of escape, but Mary's inability to swim combined with the fact that Esther never sees her again makes her death a near certainty. After escaping from the rebels, Esther feels like there is a hole in her life as though this life is separate from her reality, and on the night she is allowed to visit her family's home, she wishes for her mother, observing that her father views her differently since her abduction.

Finally recounting her escape, Esther recalls a day when her husband, Lotti, was away which she used to hide in the bathroom until she saw a chance to run. She tried in vain to convince Louise to join her. For three days, Esther is uncertain if she will live or die, yet her enjoyment of her freedom indicates that death would be preferable to a return to captivity. The stigma associated with the captured children is demonstrated by the girl who fears Esther, but despite being in danger herself, Esther helps the girl with her child, demonstrating that her actions are good when they are self-guided. The stigma is further illustrated by Esther's amazement at the man who recognizes her as a child and



helps her, and her disgust at herself is fueled largely by the rebels' atrocities that she did not protest, again refuting her belief that she is an evil person.

Although Esther can see her real life, she cannot touch it because her heart is burdened by this belief, and this foreshadows her finally being able to reach out and latch onto her future after meeting Jane. Major themes in the novel play a large role in this chapter. Violence is seen in Philip's injury and Mary's disappearance as well as Esther's contemplations on man's cruelty. Esther reveals her empathy by trying to help Mary, though she is indifferent to her failure. She also helps the young girl with a sick baby, and both of these passages also reinforce Esther's desire to fix things. The theme of past, present and future is explored through Esther's inability to reconnect with her family and her belief that she does not deserve a second chance at life, while her escape shows an attempt to regain control of her own life.

Discussion Question 1

What do "you" learn in Chapter 13, and how does this relate to Esther's story thus far?

Discussion Question 2

What does Esther learn about Philip in Chapter 14, and how does she feel about it?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Esther's escape from the rebels. What did she learn about people during her escape?

Vocabulary

expands, tipu, resurrection, enduring, plantains, kanga, genuflecting, gratitude, suffocating



Part VII, Chapters 15 & 16

Summary

Part VII: Gulu begins with Chapter 15/Love with Harry as Jane and Pierre walk through the streets of Gulu, and with the loveliness of sleeping next to Harry casting a spell on the day, Jane wants to be close enough to him that he shares the secret he holds inside. When Harry tells her that he was teased as a child for being small, she is happy that he shares this with her, and she reassures him with her body that night.

In the morning, Jane makes an appointment for the next day and returns to the hotel to find Don drinking alone because Lana has taken another lover. When Jane rejects his offer of sex, Don accuses her of not knowing who she is.

Arriving at the rehabilitation center the next day, Jane and her friends find a funeral taking place. Jane meets with Barbara who informs her that the children often experience difficulty having fun after the trauma they have been subjected to. Three counselors deal with the withdrawn and aggressive youths, but 10,000 kids have escaped from the rebels over the past decade.

Receiving a tour of the facilities, Jane learns that there are more boys at the center than girls; although the rebels abduct more girls, the boys have more opportunities to escape. She meets Yolanda who was married to a rebel, but after she escaped and was recaptured, her husband refused her because she had been raped. Nine-year-old Victor's parents will not allow him to return home until he stays the required time at the center. Thomas served as Kony's soldier for three years, and he shares stories about the spirits that talk to Kony as well as the prediction that the Americans will join the rebels after trying and failing to defeat them; Kony claims that peace will come to Uganda one day, causing 500 people to die of happiness.

Jane's group bickers over dinner, and when Harry tells her they will not make it the next morning, she is helpless to defend against his claim.

In Chapter 16/Stone Trees, Esther is drawn to Simon who also recently lost his mother. When the girls are invited to greet captured rebels to try reconciliation, Janet is able to forgive her rebel husband because she remains unchanged by her time in captivity, and while Esther could try to find kindness inside herself, she refuses to try. Playing with Janet's son, Esther is struck by his happiness, and she begins to think things may be alright, but then she recalls Agnes and all she has lost.

When mothers of St. Mary's girls visit to hear from recent escapees, Esther tells them that the girls are kept together in Sudan, but she finds it difficult to share some things. At Nurse Nancy's urging, Esther tells Abigail's mother that her daughter was captured and killed when she tried to escape; she does not admit that Abigail was reckless after being raped because she preferred death to life with the rebels. When Nurse Nancy tells her it



will be okay, Esther thinks that they always say that and wonders when they will admit that it is not okay.

Analysis

The novel's seventh part contains two chapters, beginning with Chapter 15 which returns to Jane's activities in Gulu. While Pierre photographs people in the town, Jane's thoughts focus on Harry as she wonders what she is doing here. Pierre astutely observes that Jane has a wild spirit and wants to be free. Wanting to be close to Harry, Jane joins him in bed, again emphasizing the physical part of their relationship after he has indicated that is not the only way to be close to someone. Harry's focus on the emotional aspect of a relationship is demonstrated by his questions about Jane's family, and her response that some people are better off without their families shows the contrast in their viewpoints.

That night, Jane wakes from a bad dream and rushes from the room, unable to look Harry in the eyes. After making several appointments, she returns to the hotel to find Don drinking alone after finding Lana engaged in coitus with a soldier, and when Jane refuses Don's offer of sex, he claims that she does not know herself which contrasts with what Harry and Pierre have previously said about her.

At the rehabilitation center, the staff is emotionally distraught at a funeral, and explaining that it requires resilience to counsel the 10,000 children who have been brought here, the counselor still cries because this boy was the first to die in her care. During the tour, Jane learns that there are more boys than girls at the center because, despite an equal number of boys and girls being abducted, the boys have more opportunity to escape; this lauds the courage of the girls who have managed to escape when the odds were working against them.

As Jane interviews several of the children, she has a rare feeling that she is exactly where she is meant to be. A boy who served as a rebel soldier for three years explains Kony's self-vindication of his actions which he justifies with the belief that he is holy and speaks to spirits. These conversations reinforce the theme of violence and war in "Thirty Girls," demonstrating the evils of the world as this horrible man feels vindicated in his horrendous actions. When they leave, Jane is not eager to feel the inevitable guilt that will follow the visit. The group's bickering and Harry's statement that they will not make it foreshadows the dissolution of their group after their trip as well as Harry and Jane's break-up.

In Chapter 16, Esther finds common bonds with Simon, yet her guilt and grief prevent her from befriending him despite his efforts. She feels pulls to him and likes it at times but does not at others. The counselors encourage the girls to try for reconciliation, and some, like Janet, believe they are still blessed because they are not changed by their time with the rebels; Janet forgives her rebel husband, but Esther is unwilling to try.



Struck by the happiness of Janet's son, Esther's positivity lasts only a moment before she thinks of Agnes and remembers all that is gone. Although she does not want to dance, the beat takes her, temporarily erasing her thoughts. When parents visit for news of their children, the escaped girls hold certain things back, and one example is how Esther tells Abigail's mother that Abigail was captured and killed when she tried to escape; she does not share that Abigail was reckless because she preferred death to captivity. In addition to demonstrating the impact of violence, this interaction serves to show Esther's empathy for others. Esther grows tired of everyone telling her that it is okay, and she wonders when they will admit that it is not okay.

Discussion Question 1

At the rehabilitation center in Gulu, what does Jane learn about the abducted children and escapees? How this make her feel?

Discussion Question 2

What does Thomas tell Jane about Kony in Chapter 15? What does this reveal about the rebels' goals?

Discussion Question 3

What does Esther tell Abigail's mother in Chapter 16? What does she withhold, and why?

Vocabulary

implying, mockery, mercifully, solemnly, wafting, fugue, sensation, propositioning, elapsing, aggressive, impotent



Part VIII, Chapters 17 & 18

Summary

Part VIII: Air Pocket opens with Chapter 17/The You File as you wake shattered in the morning after your dreams battered you all night. Although you plead for help and even pray to God, something stays with you and may never leave. When a voice wonders who you are and where you've been, you are not sure, but you truthfully answer that you are here.

In Chapter 18/Dusty Ground, the lack of camaraderie amongst Jane's group as they head toward Kiryandongo causes them to agree to a short visit so they can reach Kampala by that night. Esther watches as the journalists finally arrive, and after their tour of the facility, Jane is brought to speak to the girls. She first talks to fifteen-year-old Paulette whose baby by a rebel is due in a month, and when Esther tells Jane that Paulette is frightened of the camera, Jane is glad to discover the girl Grace told her to find; however, she is disappointed to learn that Esther refuses to talk about the experiences she wants to forget.

Deciding to take a chance at changing, Esther agrees to talk and recounts her story, speaking softly as if she discovers new things in the retelling. Jane thinks that no one could be unmoved by the girl's story even as she is disgusted with herself for intruding upon Esther's private distress. As she talks about Mary, Esther thinks Jane turns away because she realizes what a bad person she is, but Jane merely cannot bear Esther's sorrow.

Hugging Esther, Jane assures her that she was surviving and is brave, a concept Esther has never considered. Jane knows that she is crossing a journalistic line by getting involved, but she no longer feels neutral about the situation. Giving Esther a dragonfly necklace, Jane tells her that dragonflies represent strength and courage which are traits that Esther shares. The visitors watch as the girls dance, and when Lana joins in, Jane sees all of the girls smiling for the first time.

As Jane leaves, the director of the center urges her to "tell them how it is in Africa" (page 308). Driving away, Jane wonders when the girls will leave her, and recognizing that they will retreat to the back of her mind after she writes their story, she already feels guilty for abandoning them.

Analysis

The two chapters of part eight begins with the penultimate installation of "The You File" as dreams batter and shatter the narrator who pleads for help in vain. She does not know where she has been, but she knows that she is here now.



Chapter 18 returns to Jane's group as they leave Gulu. The lack of camaraderie causes them to move more hastily than they have thus far on their journey, and Harry and Jane's break-up is foreshadowed by the coolness she feels when she touches him. As they near Kiryandongo, Jane sees children sitting on the walls. This chapter is unique as the viewpoint switches to Esther part of the way through as she notes the journalists finally arrive and wonders who will talk to them. After touring the facility, Jane first talks to Paulette who is frightened of Pierre's camera, and when Esther explains this, Jane is excited to meet the girl Grace told her to seek.

As the two protagonists' paths finally intersect, Jane is disappointed to learn that Esther refuses to talk about her experiences with the rebels because she wants to forget, but Esther unexpectedly agrees to share her story, taking a chance at change. Jane listens reverently as Esther begins speaking softly, as if she is discovering things in the retelling, and Esther admits that there are times she asks herself if she was really there now that she is here. Although Esther tells her story without self-consciousness or the desire to impress, Jane is impressed and thinks that no one could hear the girl's story without being moved.

When Jane looks away after Esther reveals some of the terrible things she has seen and done, Esther believes that the lady is appalled, but Jane is actually disgusted with herself for intruding on Esther's grief. Unlike others, Jane does not try to tell Esther that it is not her fault or that it will all be okay; instead, she merely points out that Esther does not do bad things now that she has a choice, and the difference of this approach foreshadows its effect on Esther.

No longer feeling objective, Jane hugs and comforts Esther before gifting her with a dragonfly necklace in honor of her bravery. As Esther watches the visitors leave, she recalls Mary's head bobbing in the water, but Jane's last glance shows Esther walking with another girl. Harry drives recklessly as they leave Kiryandongo, but Jane feels the fear for safety distantly as she is overwhelmed by all she has seen and heard.

This chapter is filled with events that reinforce the narrative's major themes: Jane's attempts to comfort Esther show empathy and her desire to fix things. Don and Pierre attempt to help right the world's wrongs in the form of a monetary donation, while Lana brings joy to the children by dancing with them. Jane cannot control Esther's feelings, yet she points out that the girl only did bad things when she did not have control of her actions and chooses to do good now that she is in control of her own life. Esther takes comfort from her conversation with Jane, and by accepting and discussing her past, she is finally able to look forward to her future.

Discussion Question 1

How are the abducted children impacted, according to Chapter 17?



Discussion Question 2

Why is Jane happy to meet Esther, and how does Esther respond?

Discussion Question 3

How do Jane and Esther feel after meeting? How does their talk impact each of their feelings about the situation?

Vocabulary

rapids, humiliation, propeller, reluctant, methodical, contradict, hypnotized, transfixed, transparent



Part IX, Chapters 19 & 20

Summary

In Part IX: Spiral, Chapter 19/Where I Went, Esther feels full after the journalists leave, so she goes outside and thinks about her conversation with Jane. She cries because there is no longer enough space inside her for her tears, and as her heart breaks at the thought of the Gulu girl she helped kill, she wonders when it will stop; it feels as though it could kill her, and she even wishes it would.

Esther wakes some time later and is surprised to experience a new, peaceful feeling. At dinner, she enjoys listening to people talk, and after that day, she knows that crying is the first step to feeling better since she feels a change come over her after her tears fell. One morning, she watched the boys kicking a ball in the field, and when it nears her, she feels like someone different, someone happy.

With Simon encouraging her, she kicks the ball and joins the boys' game. In the morning, they find Carol is missing and locate her drowned body in the marsh; the other children know she could not bear to live because her parents would not allow her to come home, and although they understand, Esther lets the part of her that wants to die leave with Carol because she wants to live. Much time passes without word from Jane, so Esther does not know if the story had been shared, but beginning to think about the future, she thinks she may want to be a teacher.

In Chapter 20/Don't Go, Jane had nothing to say when Harry ends things between them the day before he plans to leave on a flying expedition, but she stays at his parents' house to work on her story, thinking it will be good to have something else to focus on. Needing a new perspective, she imagines encountering him in the future as friends and telling him how she found a new part of herself while she was with him.

When Murray comes to the door to inform Harry of a confrontation at the gate, Harry goes to investigate, and as Jane listens from inside the house, she hears a gunshot and screams, waking Harry's parents who call the police. They rush outside to find Harry bleeding, and they take him to the hospital as his mother begs him to stay with her. Many friends gather in support, and they learn that Harry's brain is no longer working, though he is still alive and on life support.

Everyone recounts what happened, but the story does not make sense as the men had no reason to shoot Harry since they were not inside the property. When Rosalie arrives, Jane is mortified at her jealousy given the situation. Visitors are allowed to say goodbye to Harry, but Jane has no words and is filled with fury at this tragedy. Having decided to take Harry off life support, his mother instructs everyone to leave, and outside, Jane wants to tell Rosalie that Harry loved her but will not do so in front of the other woman's boyfriend.



Harry's funeral is held at the top of Ngongs, near where Jane first met him, and finding an opportunity to tell Rosalie of Harry's love, her jealousy evaporates when she sees the joy on Rosalie's face. Returning to the place they first met, Jane thinks of her memories of Harry and sadly realizes that all future thoughts of him will come from reflection.

Analysis

Part 9 of the novel contains two chapters, beginning with Chapter 19 which shows Esther's emotional state after granting an interview to Jane. Struck with grief from her memories, she finally cries and allows her heart to break; she wonders when it will stop and even wishes to die from the pain, but after a nap, she wakes with an unusual feeling of peace, and at dinner, she enjoys the sound of others talking. Afterwards, Esther feels a change come over her and realizes that crying is the first step to feeling better. By confronting her traumatic experiences instead of ignoring them, Esther finally finds some semblance of peace which makes her recall Jane and the other visitors as friends.

Watching the boys kick a ball in the field, Esther feels drawn to run alongside them, but she hesitates because the last time she ran was when she was escaping. When the ball nears her and she puts her foot on it, Esther feels like someone else, someone happy, and with Simon's encouragement, she joins the game. Carol is found dead the next day, and although Esther understands her friend's desire to die, the tragedy rekindles her desire to live, causing her to consider the possibility of a future in which she becomes a teacher. Her acceptance of the past is also seen in her drawing of Mary and the river, the source of so much guilt.

In this chapter, Esther takes control of her life by confronting her past and looking forward to her future which touches on the themes of control and the past, present and future. Although she expresses empathy for Carol's plight, Esther no longer feels detached from her emotions as she seeks to fix her way of thinking about her past actions while under the rebels' control.

Chapter 20 begins with the fulfillment of foreshadowing as Harry breaks up with Jane. The rest of their group has gone their separate ways as soon as they returned to Nairobi due to the tension between them all. Although she tries to act as if she is okay, Jane is distraught over the break-up which is out of her control, and her attempts to comfort herself with the thought that she is alive only reminds her that her reasons to live are related to Harry.

Thinking of how she found a new part of herself with Harry, Jane decides to wait until sometime in the future when what she will say will have proven itself over time, reassuring herself that the important things last and can wait and exerting some control over her emotions. These feelings foreshadow disaster.



Over dinner, Harry's stories about his youth are interrupted by a knock at the door, and his instruction for Jane to lock up while he investigates signifies danger. Yelling and a gunshot causes Jane to cry out, waking Harry's parents and foreshadowing his injury. This foreshadowing is immediately fulfilled when Jane and Harry's parents find that he has been shot and rush him to the hospital which also reinforces the theme of violence and war in the novel.

After the doctor announces that Harry is brain-dead, Jane wonders if he will ever return home, and these two issues foreshadow his death. Jane is devastated that this happened here when they just returned from a warzone, but Andy reminds her that the whole area is a war zone. When Jane tells him about the break-up, Andy tells her that Harry truly liked her but said she always had too many people around. Harry's popularity is evident by the multitude of people who visit him in the hospital, and Jane cries during her final visit, unable to say anything because the lifeless person before her does not seem like the vibrant young man she has known.

Fulfilling foreshadowing, Harry's mother announces her decision to take him off life support. Symbolically, Harry is cremated at the top of Ngongs, near the place where he first met Jane. Jane leaves the others to spend time where she first met Harry, and although she is saddened by the realization that future thoughts of Harry will come from memories, she is comforted that she can sense him beside her when those memories invade her mind. This tragedy foreshadows major changes that Jane decides to make in her life.

Discussion Question 1

How does Esther feel after crying in Chapter 19? How does this impact her life as a whole?

Discussion Question 2

What changes for Esther after she cries? What does she realize?

Discussion Question 3

What happens to Harry in Chapter 20, and how does Jane feel about it?

Vocabulary

inert, unceremoniously, sauntered, acknowledging, braced, reassurance, perspective, pathetic, disorienting, confrontational



Part X, Chapters 21-23

Summary

Part X: Flight begins with Chapter 21/Perhaps It Is Better Not to Know Some Things in which Esther feels real gladness when she learns that Louise has escaped the rebels over a year after Esther leaves Kiryandongo. Aunt Karen accompanies her to visit Louise, and when Louise does not smile or speak as they hug, Esther assures her that it takes a while to become accustomed to being back.

Louise is well known because of Grace's efforts, and excited to be near someone who is famous, Aunt Karen pursues this topic, indicating that some do not agree with all of Grace's decisions. Though Louise obviously wants to avoid this topic, Aunt Karen proceeds to talk about Grace's secret meeting with Kony's second-in-command who offered to return her daughter if she agreed to stop speaking out against the LRA.

Thinking of all the other abducted children, Grace insists they must all be returned because they are one and she cannot rescue one without the others. Although she claims to understand her mother's decision, Louise walks away for a bit, and knowing that she cannot explain that Louise will have enough someday, Esther promises to stay near her. Since then, much time passes and Helen is the only girl from St. Mary's who has not returned, but Esther and the other still think about and pray for her every day.

In Chapter 22/Where I Didn't Go, Harry is always dead and unmoved by emotions when Jane sees him in her dreams, but then in one dream, he is alive again and tells her it was all a mistake, causing her to dissolve into tears. Jane stays in Kenya because she dreads returning to her normality which is unfamiliar with Harry and the things she has seen.

Subletting Pierre's apartment, she attends Lana's dinner parties and works on her absorbing story, but as usual after a loss, she also wonders about life and death. When Beryl visits Lana, Jane is amazed by their generosity and bravery which causes her to question who she is and what good she does. Focusing on her story, Jane believes it will carry her when she questions what she is doing with her life. To her surprise, the story does not leave her when she finishes it, becoming richer instead of fading and taking on the weight of memory.

Although it seems impossible to believe that Harry is dead for a long time, she must accept that she cannot bring him back, and she reassures herself with the thought that she will have him forever; yet, thoughts of him only remind her of his absence, so the only thing to do with her loss is bear it. Jane decides that she must do good things and live her own life, and although there is little that she can change, she cannot stop questioning it.



In Chapter 23/The You File, you dream that all the people you've known, both dead and alive, attend a party in a field where all are equal. A man looks at you with interest, and you wake with an indescribable feeling as your worries lift and you could die from being so in love with life.

Analysis

Three chapters are contained within the novel's final part with Chapter 21 returning to Esther's viewpoint a year after she leaves Kiryandongo when Louise finally escapes. She had tried to return to St. Mary's but found it difficult to study, so she has temporarily returned to her father's house until she finds a new boarding school. Esther is happy that Aunt Karen accompanies her to the rehabilitation center to check on Louise. She sometimes receives news about Simon who returned to his people in Nebbi, and thinking of the journalists, she was very sorry to hear about the murder in Kenya, demonstrating her empathy.

When Esther hugs Louise, her friend does not speak or smile, and speaking from experience, Esther assures her that it takes time to get used to being back. Louise's face makes Esther recall her feelings right after her escape, and although that horrible past still remains, it no longer takes up residence in the front of her mind. The fact that Christine returned to Kiryandongo after attempting nursing school serves as proof of the difficulty of returning to a normal life.

Because of her mother's efforts, Louise is well known, and Aunt Karen's questions soon make Esther realize her excitement to be near a celebrity. Esther is appalled when her aunt persists in questioning Louise about Grace's decision to refuse her daughter's return without her peers, and although Louise claims to understand, she is obviously stricken by her mother's decision to sacrifice her for the greater good. This is further proven by Louise's inability to look at her mother when Grace arrives to retrieve her, but Grace's maternal love is also called into question by her focus on discussing her efforts rather than tending to her daughter.

Understanding that only time can heal Louise's internal wounds demonstrates Esther's newfound understanding gained from the use of the past, present and future theme. Esther's comment that only one girl remains with the rebels indicates that the story and the horrors have not ended, even though they are mostly over for the St. Mary's girls other than the emotional baggage remaining.

Chapter 22 returns to Jane who continues to mourn for Harry, and unable to return to her normal life in America, she relocates to Kenya where she begins to question who she is as a person. Struck by all of the things she has seen and heard, Jane feels connected to good deeds through Harry and falls on the belief that this will carry her through the times when she questions what she is doing with her life.

Contrary to her expectations, the story does not leave Jane after she writes it, perhaps because it is so real. Rather than fading, her trip becomes heavier and takes on the



weight of memory. Although it seems impossible to believe that Harry is gone, Jane knows that she must accept his death and comforts herself with the reminder that she will always have her memories of him. Since all she can do is bare her loss, she focuses on doing good after realizing that life both has and does not have meaning. Though she knows that there are few things she can change, she must consider the possibilities.

Themes discussed in this chapter include violence, a desire to fix things, control vs. a lack of control, and the past, present and future. Harry's death, despite having left the war zone, shows the violence associated with war, and with his death, Jane's attention centers on the girls about whom she has written her story, allowing her to demonstrate her empathy and to focus on her desire to fix things. Though she has no control over Harry's death, Jane uses the experience to focus on what she can control: what she does with her life. Accepting that she cannot change the past, she focuses instead on the future.

The final chapter is the last installation of "The You File," and here, Esther's dream reveals that she has finally forgiven herself. She accepts the past, waking with an indescribable feeling as the worries lift. Instead of wishing to die from grief, she now feels that she could die from being so in love with life, indicating that she has finally healed. By coming to terms with the past, Esther takes control of her future, reinforcing both of these themes as the novel culminates.

Discussion Question 1

What does Aunt Karen tell Louise about her mom in Chapter 21, and how does Louise react?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jane stay in Kenya, and what does she do? How does Jane feel about the girls after she finishes writing their story?

Discussion Question 3

In Chapter 23, what positive events transpire in the dream, and how do "you" feel upon working?

Vocabulary

accompanied, unreasonable, behalf, debate, subletting, absorbed, gravitating, ironclad, voluptuous, simplicity



Characters

Esther Akello

Esther Akello is one of the novel's main characters and protagonists. As one of the abducted children from St. Mary's who Sister Giulia is unable to rescue, Esther shares her story from the point of view of a first-person narrator. When the narrative begins, 16-year-old Esther has already escaped from the rebels and is staying at Kiryandongo Rehabilitation Center, and although she tries to forget the past, she is uneasy and seeks peace within herself.

Although Esther laments that her mother died from cancer while she was with the rebels, she is not angry at Kony, insisting that he means nothing to her. She feels guilty for the things she witnessed and did while with the rebels, and she hates the fact that her life was not her own during captivity. Esther was forced to marry Greg Lotti, a rebel who was kinder than most and beat her only once. Most of Esther's time was spent doing chores and gathering food while she was with the rebels.

Throughout the narrative, Esther recounts her experiences during captivity, sharing how it has impacted her. She is silent and withdrawn from the other children at the center, and her guilt over the things she was forced to witness and participate in lead her to believe that she does not deserve another chance at life.

During the abduction, Esther and the other girls were terrified, and although she admits that her rebel husband was kinder than most, Esther reflects on the rough treatment that she and her friends received at the hands of the rebels. The living conditions in the bush were abysmal, but escape's beckoning call was negated by the danger of death if they failed to escape and the fear that those left behind would be punished if they were successful.

Esther is tormented by the memories of the actions the rebels forced her to partake in, yet she showed empathy when volunteering to join Agnes in Kony's bed. She later informs Kony of Chunga's betrayal in hopes of saving Agnes, and Esther is distraught when her friend dies. After giving birth to a stillborn baby, Esther escapes from the rebels and reaches Kiryandongo where thoughts of her past spent with the rebels continue to torture her, despite her struggles to move past the memories.

The two protagonists' paths finally intersect at Kiryandongo where Esther finally opens up about the time she spent with the rebels, sharing her story with Jane who comforts her. Finding validation, sympathy and acceptance in Jane's reaction, Esther is finally able to mourn her past which gives her the peace she needs to look forward to her future. In turn, Esther tries to comfort Louise when her friend escapes to Kiryandongo, and wishing the same for her friend and all other children abducted by the rebels, Esther falls in love with life once again.



Jane Wood

One of the novel's main characters and protagonists, Jane Wood is an American journalist who travels to Africa to research and write about the LRA abducting children. Her story is told from the point of view of a third-person, limited narrator who focuses on Jane's perspective.

Jane is a lonely woman in her late thirties whose ex-husband recently died of an overdose. She begins a romantic relationship with Harry shortly after they meet, and during their travels, much of her attention is focused on her fear of losing him because he is significantly younger than her. Jane interviews many people who have been impacted by the abductions as she travels from Kenya to Uganda with Lana, Harry, Don and Pierre.

After hearing about the abducted children when Grace Dollo visits New York, Jane decides to travel to Africa to write their story in hopes of raising awareness of their plight where she is accompanied on her journey by Lana, Harry, Pierre and Don. Jane conducts many interviews as she prepares her story, but she is often distracted by her developing relationship with Harry. She is often struck by the lack of hope expressed for the abducted children by leaders in the humanitarian organizations attempting to save them.

At Kiryandongo, Jane finally meets Esther who shares her experiences with the rebels, and no longer capable of neutrality in regards to the situation, Jane comforts the girl by pointing out the differences in her actions when she was in the rebels' captivity compared to after she regains control of her life.

After their journey concludes, Jane is distraught when Harry terminates their romantic relationship, but his death affects her even more severely, causing her to focus on things within her control such as doing good. She begins this newfound path by focusing on the stories she has heard and writing her story about the abducted children.

Harry O'Day

Harry is Jane's love interest who is in his early twenties. His passion is paragliding, and Jane enjoys watching him fly. Despite the age difference, there is an immediate attraction between Jane and Harry, but Jane spends a significant amount of time worrying about what he is thinking and feeling because she is certain their relationship will end.

Jane admires Harry's sense of self-possession, and she feels content in his arms, despite the dangers they face on their journey. Shortly after ending things with Jane, Harry is shot, and after the doctors pronounce him brain-dead, his parents take him off life support. Jane mourns Harry's death.



Lana Eberhardt

Lana is Jane's hostess in Nairobi who accompanies her on her research trip to Uganda. The two women met a year earlier, on a film set in London that Lana was decorating. Lana hosts many dinner parties at her cottage, and she has a very generous nature. She is also quite promiscuous, creating tension between some of her lovers, especially Don who is jealous of any other man that gains Lana's attention.

Kony

Kony is the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army, and he orders the rebels to kidnap children in Uganda because he wants a large family. He takes Agnes and Esther to bed, and later, he agrees to bless Agnes in exchange for Esther's information about the traitorous Chunga. Kony believes he communicates with spirits, and he believes that 500 people will die of happiness when peace returns to Uganda.

Sister Giulia

Sister Giulia is the headmistress of St. Mary's who tracks the rebels after her students are abducted. When she is able to retrieve 109 girls but forced to leave 30 behind, she feels she will never be able to face anyone again.

Captain Mariano Lagira

Captain Mariano Lagira is the leader of the rebels who abduct the St. Mary's girls. A deeply religious man, he returns 109 students to Sister Giulia.

Don

Don is Lana's friend and lover from Los Angeles who volunteers his car for the research trip to Uganda. Don gets jealous of Lana's other bed partners.

Pierre

Pierre is the photographer who accompanies Jane on her research trip to Uganda.

Simon

Simon is a boy at Kiryandongo who Esther is drawn to. Eventually, they become friends and keep in touch after each of them goes home.



Thomas Bosco

Thomas Bosco is the math teacher at St. Mary's who accompanies Sister Giulia when she tracks the rebels to retrieve their students.

Mary

Mary is Greg Lotti's 11-year-old wife who cannot swim, so Esther tries to help her cross the river, but Mary is swept away and never seen again.

Aunt Karen

Aunt Karen is Esther's aunt who informs Esther of her mother's death. She accompanies Esther to Kiryandongo to visit Louise because he is eager to be near someone famous, but Aunt Karen's questions about Grace make Louise uncomfortable which angers Esther.

Louise

Louise is Esther's friend, Grace's daughter, and one of the St. Mary's girls who was abducted. She escapes from the rebels a year after Esther leaves Kiryandongo.

Greg Lotti

Greg Lotti is Esther's rebel husband who she describes as kinder than most since he only beats her once.

Beryl

Beryl is Lana's sister who hosts Jane's group. Seeing Beryl with her children makes Jane regret her lack of motherhood.

Susanna

Susanna is the girl from Gulu who Esther and the others are forced to beat to death upon penalty of death.

Grace Dollo

Grace Dollo is Louise's mother and the founder of We Are Concerned. She travels the world to spread awareness, and Jane becomes interested in the situation in Uganda



after meeting Grace in New York. Grace encourages Jane to interview Esther when she goes to Kiryandongo.

Nurse Nancy

Nurse Nancy tends to the girls at Kiryandongo.

Christine

Christine is a counselor at Kiryandongo.



Symbols and Symbolism

Lord's Resistance Army

The Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, is a group of rebels who abduct children in Uganda to join their leader Kony's "family." Their name indicates their belief that their work is holy and justified, but in the novel, they symbolize evil and cruelty.

Jane's Bracelet

Harry buys Jane a bracelet in Massai to symbolize their time together, but when Jane gives it to a poor woman near Lacor, this shows Harry that Jane does not recognize the value of things.

Paragliding

Paragliding is Harry's favorite pastime which symbolizes his freedom and affinity for being alone.

World Vision

When Jane visits the World Vision office, she is appalled by Bobby's cheerful tone as he tells her the escaped children have little hope for a future. Coming from someone who is supposedly trying to help, this symbolizes the hopelessness of and for the abducted children.

We Are Concerned

Grace forms We Are Concerned to promote the cause of the abducted girls, and gaining international attention, this symbolizes the parents' hope of saving their children from the rebels.

Bush

The abducted children live in the bush with the rebels, and this symbolizes the danger of their situation.

Harry

To Jane, Harry symbolizes freedom and self-revelation.



Louise

After her escape, Louise represents how far Esther has come emotionally.

Susanna

Susanna is the girl from Gulu that Esther helped beat to death at the rebels' orders, and she symbolizes the bad things Esther did during her time with the rebels which is why she thinks she is a bad person.

Jane's Story

The fact that Jane's story about the abducted children does not immediately leave her like other stories she has written symbolizes her empathy and ability to feel others' experiences.

Dragonfly Necklace

Jane gives Esther a dragonfly necklace as a symbol of the girl's strength and courage.

St. Mary's

The peace of St. Mary's serves as a foil to the horrors of war and Esther's abduction.



Settings

St. Mary's

St. Mary's of Aboke is where the narrative begins in Chapter 1 as the rebels abduct the students from their dorms. Later in the novel, Jane visits St. Mary's to conduct interviews.

Nairobi, Kenya

Nairobi, Kenya is where Lana lives and where Jane first arrives and meets Harry, Don and Pierre. Jane spends quite a bit of time in Nairobi as her journey is delayed in favor of dinner parties.

Uganda

Uganda is where the Lord's Resistance Army is stationed and where they abduct children. Jane and her group travel to this war zone in order to her to conduct research for her story.

Lira

Lira is the town Esther is from.

Kiryandongo Rehabilitation Center

Kiryandongo Rehabilitation Center is where Esther and other escaped children after housed after their escape. Here, counselors try to help them deal with their grief, guilt and hopelessness.

Jinja

Jinja is where Jane and company spend a few days having fun with the MacAlistair brothers.

Kony's Compound

Esther and the other St. Mary's girls are summoned to Kony's compound to find out why they are so special since the Pope has taken interest in their situation. Kony chooses Agnes as a bedmate, causing Esther to speak up so that she is taken to Kony that night also.



Gulu

Gulu is a peaceful town, and it is where Susanna is from.

Ngong Hills

Ngong Hills is in Nairobi, and this is where Jane first talks to Harry at one of Lana's parties. This is also where Harry's funeral is held.



Themes and Motifs

Violence

Given the setting of the novel and the situation on which it focuses, it is not surprising to find that violence is a predominating theme in “Thirty Girls.” The novel begins with a display of violence as the Lord’s Resistance Army invades St. Mary’s and abducts all of the girls, and when Sister Giulia tracks the rebels with the intent of retrieving her students, she wonders if the rebels will kill her; both she and Bosco are prepared to die if necessary in order to achieve their goals. While the nun is negotiating, helicopters from the Uganda army patrol spray bullets, wounding some of the girls who are confused when the rebels tend their wounds.

After her escape, Esther is haunted by the horrors she has seen and in which she was forced to participate while with the rebels. She feels guilty for the things they made her do and prays that she will not become a monster. When Esther recalls the terror she felt on the night of her abduction, she admits that she did not know whether she would live or die, and those who tried to escape were slaughtered as a lesson to the others. The girls are focused to join the rebels in beating Susanna to death when she is caught trying to escape, and this haunts Esther.

The St. Mary’s girls are punished for causing trouble when their story gains international attention, yet the rebels constantly insist that the girls are treated well in their care; the rebels claim that God instructed them to take the girls to cleanse them of their sins. Adding insult to injury, the rebels convince many of the children that their parents no longer want them. When the rebels lead the girls through her grandmother’s village, Esther is devastated to see the burnt huts, but she is relieved when she later learns that her family escaped. Esther often contemplates on the cruelty of humanity, but she is grief-stricken to learn that the brains of her beloved Philip were addled when he was shot in a battle. Even her attempt to help Mary ends badly with the girl being swept away by the river. Esther is uncomfortable when she has to tell Abigail’s mother about her death while trying to escape, but she intentionally neglects mentioning that Abigail was reckless after being raped because she preferred death to her current existence.

Jane’s visit to Africa begins peacefully with dinner parties and new friendships, but as she begins her journey, she often thinks of how close she is to the warzone and how different her life is from those she talks to. Her interviews with members of humanitarian organizations reinforce the danger she is facing and also serves to warn her of the lack of hope anyone holds for the abducted children’s futures. Jane is horrified by the stories she hears, such as the rebels killing a young girl who talked to the parents of some of the St. Mary’s abductees.

At St. Mary’s, Jane talks to Sharon who spent a year with the rebels as well as Beatrice and Theresa who escaped after a month. In Rusalem, Jane and Pierre learn that Jonathan’s father was killed by rebels and his brothers were abducted; the danger



present in the area is demonstrated by the number of villagers who spend their nights at the hospital in Lacor where walls prevent the rebels' attacks.

At the rehabilitation center in Gulu, Jane and her companions encounter a funeral, and they learn about many of the children's experiences. She meets Yolanda who was married to a rebel, but after she escaped and was recaptured, her husband refused her because she had been raped. Nine-year-old Victor's parents will not allow him to return home until he stays the required time at the center. Thomas served as Kony's soldier for three years, and he shares stories about the spirits that talk to Kony as well as the prediction that the Americans will join the rebels after trying and failing to defeat them; Kony claims that peace will come to Uganda one day, causing 500 people to die of happiness.

When Jane and Esther finally meet, Jane offers the girl comfort which allows Esther to begin healing, but after leaving the warzone and returning to Nairobi, Harry is shot during an inconsequential conflict. His death makes Jane question the violence in the region since Nairobi is supposedly more peaceful, but she is informed that the entire continent is a warzone. The violence that pervades "Thirty Girls" is offset by the positive aspects of human nature to some degree, but overall, the novel is plagued with war crimes and hateful behavior.

Empathy and Emotional Detachment

Emotions play an important role in this novel as the characters reveal a contradictory demonstration of empathy versus emotional detachment. While Jane's empathy mostly serves as a foil to Esther's emotional detachment, there are also instances where each protagonist exhibits the characteristics of the other in terms of how they deal with their feelings throughout the narrative.

From an early point in the novel, Jane shows her ability to live vicariously through others, such as when she feels like she is soaring while watching Harry paraglide. She quickly becomes infatuated with Harry, feeling that he is somehow important to her and focusing much of her attention on their romance, often neglecting her research. Shortly after arriving in Kenya, Jane feels disconnected to her life in America, and later thoughts of her past yield no desire to return home. As she begins her research, she is often distracted by thoughts of Harry, yet she also notices that the children who need the most protection are the hardest to save and is struck by how little she can envision their lives.

At World Vision, Bobby Kiwanuka tells Jane that the children who escape from the rebels have little hope for the future, and Helga reiterates this thought later in the same chapter. Jane is also struck by Rahma Puar's seeming indifference; all three of these characters reveal an emotional detachment, but Jane suspects this is necessary for them to perform their jobs effectively. Jane also learns that few of these children fully recover from the trauma of their captivity. The first example of Jane's empathetic nature takes place before the narrative begins; when she meets Grace in New York and learns



about the abducted children, Jane wants to help. Conflicting emotions is also revealed by the parents of the abducted children who worry about hating their grandchildren.

At St. Mary's, Jane is devastated by the stories she hears, but the girls who experienced these tragedies resume playing, showing emotional detachment from their pasts. Harry wants to stop this atrocity, and Jane hopes that she will never forget the girls, though she feels it is inevitable. Jane is moved by Jonathan's story, and she often laments her inability to fix the messed up world in which she lives. Jane does not forget the children after writing their story because she is no longer objective - by the end of the novel, she has become emotionally invested in the situation in Uganda. Jane mourns Harry's death, but she determines to become a better person after all she has seen and heard.

The first appearance of Esther's voice shows emotional detachment as she admits she believes she will never be close to anyone again. At Kiryandongo, her thoughts are not whole, but she seeks internal peace; however, her refusal to discuss her experiences prohibits her from gaining peace. She mourns her mother's death even as she rejoices in her regained freedom, but she feels indifferent towards Kony and refuses to seek forgiveness for the rebels.

When Esther does not fear death, she feels an overwhelming blankness instead. Esther is furious the first night of her captivity because she has lost control of her own life, but her anger turns to complacency as she waits for an opportunity to escape. While some of the abducted children remain hopeless, others despair over their situation as they learn about pain, hunger and exhaustion. They are taught cruelty and to fear that their parents will not want their return. When Esther feels her heart hardening, she tries to think of good things from life before her abduction, such as her beloved Philip. She shows her capacity for love by sacrificing herself to Kony's bed to lessen the trauma for Agnes, and she speaks out against Chunga in exchange for Kony's blessing when Agnes falls ill.

Esther is devastated when her friend dies. Esther questions God's goodness and justice after all she sees, and she also questions her own integrity after the things she is forced to do. When she is pregnant, Esther fears that she will hate her child, and she feels indifferently after giving birth to a stillborn. Although she tries to help Mary cross the river, she is indifferent when the girl is swept away.

After telling Jane about her experiences, Esther believes Jane turns away because she is a bad person, but Jane is merely sorry to intrude on the girl's private suffering. By talking about her experiences, Esther confronts her past, and after crying, she begins to feel a sense of peace. While she understands why Carol commits suicide, Esther finds a renewed desire to live and ultimately falls in love with life again.

Desire to Fix Things

In "Thirty Girls," both of the protagonists often focus on their desire to fix the bad things they have observed in the world, and this motif is closely linked to the theme of



empathy. Other characters also desire to correct the world's trauma such as Sister Giulia when she attempts to rescue her students. Grace founds We Are Concerned to save the girls, and the other parents also make attempts to negotiate with the rebels for the return of their children.

Medka's concern is shown by her decision to continue practicing medicine even after being diagnosed with AIDS, and Harry wants to stop the atrocity rather than learning all of the details. Pierre and Don show their concern by making donations to some of the humanitarian organizations established to help the children, and Lana brings the girls joy by dancing with them.

Jane's decision to travel to Africa is inspired by her desire to help the abducted children after meeting Grace in New York, and it does not take long for her to realize and lament that the children who need the most protection are the hardest to save. While swimming in the Nile with her friends, she thinks of the horrors taking place just 300 miles north where children are beaten, raped, killed, and taught to kill.

During her research efforts, Jane is appalled by the lack of hope expressed by workers at the humanitarian organizations she visits, and she risks her safety by entering the war zone in hopes of making a difference. As Jane interviews some of the abducted children, she feels powerless to fix the messed up world, yet her experiences prevent her from being objective. Unable to bear Esther's sorrow, she comforts the girl and gives her a dragonfly necklace in honor of her courage. After Harry's death, Jane decides that she must focus on doing good things with her life.

Esther also wants to improve the world. After escaping from the rebels, her journey to inner peace proves difficult because she cannot accept her past, and she feels she is a bad person because of the things she was forced to do while in captivity. Still, even at the lowest points of her life, Esther tried to improve the world in which she lived. She comforted Agnes when they were abducted, and when she felt her heart hardening, she thought of good things from her past before the rebels. She regrets participating in Susanna's death and wishes she had refused, even though the penalty would have been her death.

When Kony chooses Agnes as a bedmate, Esther sacrifices her own body to better comfort her friend by enduring the atrocity together. She speaks out against Chunga for Agnes' benefit, and she attempts to help Mary cross the river. During her escape, she helped a girl tend to her sick baby.

Despite all this evidence of her goodness, Esther feels powerless to change things, and she blames herself for all the bad she was forced to do without giving herself credit for the good she attempted. At Kiryandongo, she talks to parents about their abducted children, but she protects them from the worst truths. After talking to Jane, Esther finally confronts and accepts her past, and as she begins to look forward to the future, she shows her desire to help others by considering the possibility of becoming a teacher.



Control and Lack of Control

Because this narrative focuses largely on the LRA's abduction of children in Uganda, an important theme that is utilized to demonstrate the horrors of the situation is the idea of control and a lack of control over one's own life. Jane controls her decision to travel to Kenya in hopes of helping the abducted children, but she has little control over when they depart. It does not take her long to realize how difficult it is to save these children, and her doubts related to her relationship with Harry stem from her lack of control as it pertains to his feelings.

Although Jane chooses to write a story about the abducted children, she cannot control their lives and often laments their experiences, pondering why they must be subjected to so much suffering when she is not; their tragic existence makes her troubles seem trivial in comparison. While she cannot control what has happened, she seeks to control her interactions with the children by offering them comfort and giving them a voice through her story. She hates that she is unable to help Esther, but their conversation ruins her neutrality.

Jane cannot control Harry breaking up with her, so she focuses on developing a friendship with him, but after she cannot prevent his death, she learns that she must focus on what she can control: her own life and what she can do with it. Jane decides to spend her life doing good things.

There are many examples of abducted children who cannot control their fates, but as one of the novel's protagonists, Esther serves as the main example. After they are abducted, the St. Mary's girls have no control over who is returned to the school and who is forced to stay with the rebels, and the first night, Esther mourns her loss of control over her life. Although she prays that she will not become a monster, she is forced to participate in monstrous deeds, such as helping beat Susanna to death.

The girls are punished for gaining the Pope's attention, and when Esther cannot stop Kony from choosing Agnes as a bedmate, she manipulates him into choosing her also so that she can comfort her friend. Many of the abducted children learn cruelty from the rebels, but when Esther feels this happening, she focuses on good memories to circumvent it. She often questions God's goodness, pondering why he does not exercise control over humanity to end their suffering.

Esther tries to take control by telling Kony of Chunga's betrayal to save Agnes, but her efforts prove futile, causing her to feel powerless. This feeling is enhanced by her inability to help Mary cross the river. During her escape, Esther's fate was uncertain, and at Kiryandongo, she is prohibited from returning home. She refuses to try to forgive the rebels, but eventually, Esther decides to take control of her life back when she shares her experiences with Jane. Jane helps Esther understand that the bad things she did were done when she did not have control of her actions; she was merely trying to survive. Although confronting her past causes her grief, it also allows her to heal and begin looking forward to a future in which she can make her own decisions.



Past, Present and Future

Throughout "Thirty Girls," the motif of the past, present and the future fuels much of the action as the characters compare and contrast their experiences and feelings during different time periods. Jane travels to Kenya in hopes of improving the futures of the abducted children, and shortly after her arrival, she feels ready for new things. Her ex-husband has recently died of an overdose, but her developing romantic relationship with Harry allows her to look to the future, even as she fears that it will not last.

As Harry and Jane talk about their pasts, she feels increasingly separated from her life in America. Jane is moved by all she hears and sees, but she fears forgetting the girls after writing her story; luckily, her conversation with Esther ruins her objectivity. After Harry's death, Jane is tormented by the knowledge that future interactions with him will come only from memories, but knowing that she must accept his death, she focuses on doing good in her future.

The parents of the St. Mary's girls share their traumatic experiences with Jane, and when they look to the future, they worry how they will feel about their grandchildren. Helga and Bobby Kiwanuka both tell Jane that the abducted children have little hope for the future. Although the nuns originally feared that talking about the abduction would endanger the girls, they determine that they must share the story to spread awareness if there is any chance of a better future. Jonathan describes a past with a father and three brothers, and although he is the only man in his family in the present, he hopes for a future where his brothers will escape from the rebels.

Esther's narrative jumps around in time constantly, beginning after her escape and containing a multitude of flashbacks to her past both before the abduction and during her captivity. During her time with the rebels, Esther could not envision a future, but when things were particularly difficult, she focused on the good things in her life from before being abducted.

After her escape, the world looks different to her, and her family treats her differently; Esther does not believe that she deserves another chance at life because of the things the rebels forced her to do. As she recalls her captivity, she compares her emotions, often showing an indifference spurred by her lack of control. She regrets the decisions she made, even though she was simply surviving. Esther laments beating Susanna, and when she was forced to marry Greg Lotti, she worried what that might mean for future marriage prospects. She often dreamed of her time at home when she was in the bush, and she recalled those memories to prevent herself from being cruel like other abducted children.

During her escape, Esther did not care about the future, though she rejoiced in her freedom, because she felt guilty over the things she had seen and done. Thoughts of the past prevent her from being happy until she finally takes a chance at changing by talking to Jane. By confronting her past, Esther gains peace and is able to look forward to the future. She tries to help Louise understand this process but knows it will take

time. Esther ultimately falls in love with life and rejoices in the thought of her future after coming to terms with the past that she could not control.

Styles

Point of View

In "Thirty Girls," the point of view is divided fairly equally between two different narrators with each one focusing on the perspective of one of the novel's protagonists. The exception to this is the first chapter which is told from the viewpoint of Sister Giulia and utilizes a limited third person point of view. Similarly, the passages told from Jane's perspective use a limited third person narrator, while Esther recounts her own story through a first-person, limited point of view. The point of view can be described as limited since the narrator is only privy to the thoughts, feelings and dreams of the character whose perspective is shared, in addition to the actions that character takes and witnesses. The narrator does not report on the inner workings of other characters in each scene.

The point of view in the narrative mostly alternates from chapter to chapter, but there are a few chapters that switch perspectives midway between Jane and Esther. The most notable of these is Chapter 18 when the protagonists' paths finally intersect, and here, the narrator has access to the inner thoughts of both characters, often comparing one's reaction to the other's perception of that reaction. The use of these points of view is important as it provides a contrast for the reader; although both characters suffer, their level of suffering is very different, and even Jane recognizes the triviality of her problems in comparison to that of Esther and the other abducted children. The distribution of dialogue and exposition within the narrative is fairly equal, providing the reader with access to the characters' thoughts and feelings as well as examples of their interactions with other characters which helps to underline key character traits, such as Esther's bravery. The novel is predominantly told from the perspectives of Jane and Esther, but Chapter 1 provides the exclusive detour into Sister Giulia's viewpoint which allows the author to set the stage for the narrative as it proceeds.

Language and Meaning

The language utilized in this novel is mostly casual and formal, though proper grammar and sentence structure is implemented for the most part. The conversational tone of the language promotes comprehension by allowing readers to empathize with the main characters. The style of writing also aids reader comprehension by creating an unlikely kinship and affinity between Jane and Esther who are two very different women with extremely distinct and dissimilar experiences.

In addition to making the characters more realistic and easier to identify with, the language used in "Thirty Girls" serves to characterize the protagonists' experiences by investigating the troubles they have seen, especially as it pertains to the tragedy, trauma and heartbreak surrounding the rebels' abduction of children in Uganda. The distribution of dialogue and exposition within the narrative is fairly equal, providing the



reader with access to the characters' thoughts and feelings as well as examples of their interactions with other characters which helps to underline key character traits, such as Esther's bravery. By effectively describing and demonstrating the characters' emotions, the language is easily understood, plus it is effective in helping readers understand the complexity of situations in the narrative as well as the inherent dangers associated with these actions.

Structure

"Thirty Girls" consists of 366 pages and 23 chapters which are divided into ten sections, each containing between one and three chapters. While the first section contains only one chapter, the second and third sections each consist of three chapters. The next two sections contain two chapters each with the sixth section expanding to include three chapters. Sections 7, 8 and 9 are each comprised of two chapters before the novel concludes with the final three chapters that encompass section 10. Ranging from one to forty pages in length, the chapters are titled to allude to the content contained within them, and the sections are also titled to emphasize the underlying connection between the included chapters. While some chapters are extremely short and others are quite long, all of the novel's chapters are very detailed, often bordering on superfluity. Although the narrative often describes short periods of time in the present, the flashbacks often explore extended periods of time, particularly as it relates to Esther's memories of her time with the rebels.

Susan Minot's "Thirty Girls" is a heart-breaking account of 30 girls from a private school in Uganda who are abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army to increase Kony's family. One of these children is 15-year-old Esther Akello who shares the story of her time with the rebels as she deals with the emotional repercussions of her experienced after her escape. A second narrative follows the journey of Jane Woods, an American journalist who travels to Africa in order to tell the girls' story with hopes of inspiring others to help. "Thirty Girls" is a fascinating historical fiction novel that explores the worst - and the best - of mankind. While the novel is slow-paced and generally easy to read, it can be difficult to prioritize the pertinent information over some of the more extraneous and descriptive passages. Flashbacks are prevalent in the novel as Esther recounts her previous experiences while in the rebels' captivity. Overall, the novel is entertaining and enjoyable, though the topics addressed are heartrending.



Quotes

We should have moved them. I knew it.
-- Sister Rosario (1/Thirty Girls paragraph 22)

Importance: This quote provides a sense of foreboding which signifies the difficulty of the times.

She didn't need to fly to feel she was floating. She had a knack for channeling other people's experiences. You left yourself behind and there was relief.
-- Narrator about Jane (2/Landing paragraph 14)

Importance: This quote foreshadows Jane's ability to empathize with the girls and how she will feel after hearing about their experiences.

My mind is uneasy. Since being away, I am used to my thoughts being disrupted. They have cracks in them. I remember in a soft way, as in the distance, how it was to be whole. Nothing. It was like nothing. You just had wholeness, you did not feel it. I would not have known it was there if I had not become as I am now. It has offered me a perspective. It is interesting how one can understand a way that one was only after one is another way.
-- Esther as narrator (3/Esther paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote shows how Esther and the other girls are emotionally impacted by the time they were in captivity with the rebels.

You could outrun yourself for a while, but it didn't last. Your self always caught up.
-- Jane's Thoughts (6/Recreational Visits paragraph 89)

Importance: This quote shows Jane's kinship with the abducted and escaped girls who cannot escape their pasts.

I remember that night having a safe feeling I was not to have again.
-- Esther as narrator (7/Independence Day paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote shows how being abducted caused Esther to lose feelings of safety.

How did we get here? Your life is your own one moment then suddenly it changes and belongs to someone else. In the past, I have felt as if my life belonged to someone else but that was for love. I felt my life leave me and belong to his life. I liked that belonging; I chose it. Later however I learned it might not be so good to belong that way either.
-- Esther's Thoughts (7/Independence Day paragraph 52)

Importance: This quote shows Esther's thoughts the first night of her abduction as she realizes how greatly her life has changed.



It is amazing what people endure." (Pierre) "They don't have a choice." (Harry)
-- Pierre and Harry (8/On Location paragraph 100 & 101)

Importance: This exchange shows Pierre expressing amazement at what people endure, and Harry reminding Pierre that these people have no choice.

Why did this happen to them and not me?
-- Jane's Thoughts (10/At St. Mary's paragraph 46)

Importance: This quote shows Jane's empathy for abducted children and also acknowledges that she can't really understand because she didn't experience the same things.

With the rebels I thought there was not more to be ripped in me, but there was. There always is more if you are living. That my mother would not want me was a new worry I had not imagined I would ever have.
-- Esther as Narrator (11/Was God in Sudan? paragraph 21)

Importance: This quote demonstrates the horrors of life with the rebels.

Each of us will all die one day. Some of us before others. The first time you meet death, it is a surprise. Up to that moment you have not believed it possible. You know it is there, but do not know it close-up until it takes away forever someone you love.
-- Esther as narrator (14/What Comes Back to Me paragraph 35)

Importance: This quote shows Esther learning to accept death and also reveals the difficulty of it.

This is what people say. I wonder when anyone might say, It is not okay.
-- Esther as narrator (16/Stone Trees paragraph 2nd to last)

Importance: This quote emphasizes Esther's distrust of claims that things will be fine as well as her desire to hear the truth.

I would not speak as they were always telling us to do. I was thinking, Why say these things when I want to forget them? I do not want these stories to be my life forever. I want another life. So I did not answer.
-- Esther as narrator (18/Dusty Ground paragraph 48)

Importance: In this quote, Esther's desire not to share her story precedes her decision to change.

When would they leave her? When would she stop thinking of them? She would write about the children and eventually they would retreat to a place in the back of her mind. She would need to stop thinking about them and eventually would. They would stop being foremost in her mind, as they were now. She was already ashamed of abandoning them, but there it was. Recognizing it did not make her any less helpless



before it.

-- Narrator (18/Dusty Ground paragraph 6th from last)

Importance: In this quote, the narrator explores Jane's inner turmoil after meeting the abducted girls, and this foreshadows how it will haunt her.

Carol knew her parents were not taking her back. She did not want to live more. Are we surprised? No. We understand. Some of me goes with her now she is dead. I let Carol take that part away, the part that would want to die. Instead I would want to live.

-- Esther as narrator (19/Where I Went paragraph 24 & 25)

Importance: This quote shows how parents' refusal to allow their children to return home cause their children to want to die; Esther eventually denies this desire and embraces life.

One could manage most anything with the right perspective.

-- Narrator (20/Don't Go paragraph 37)

Importance: This quote reiterates Esther's earlier message about the need to have the right perspective.

Louise's face reminded me that I am not as I was when I first returned. That other life remains in me, but it is not up in the front.

-- Esther as narrator (21/Perhaps It Is Better Not to Know Some Things paragraph 21)

Importance: In this quote, Esther acknowledges how far she's come emotionally since her escape from the LRA.

The girls, they are one. I cannot take one without the others.

-- Grace (21/Perhaps It Is Better Not to Know Some Things paragraph 95)

Importance: In this quote, Grace verbalizes that the girls are one and refuses to rescue her own daughter only without the others.

People said that it had to be all in you, that you couldn't depend on other people to make you better, but that wasn't true. It was only through people that you learned how to be better.

-- Narrator (22/Where I Didn't Go paragraph 11)

Importance: This quote emphasizes the importance of relying on others to feel better as evidenced throughout the novel.

All worry seems to lift from the surface of the world and what you see before you is so dazzling in its simplicity and beauty you think you could die you are so in love with life.

-- Narrator (23/The You File paragraph 5)

Importance: This ending quote demonstrates that Esther eventually learns to live her

life after escaping from the LRA, and she looks forward to the future as she falls in love with the possibilities it holds.