

The Wolf and the Dove Study Guide

The Wolf and the Dove by Kathleen Woodiwiss

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Plot Summary

Aislinn's family is attacked by the Normans under the leadership of Ragnor de Marte. The story opens with Aislinn fighting the fact that she has a rope tied about her neck with the other end held by Ragnor. Her mother, Maida, is being forced to serve the conquerors as are two of the family servants. Aislinn remembers the death of her father, Erland, at the hands of this Norman. Erland had gone out to meet them under a flag of truce, but the demands handed him were so outrageous that he rebelled and was killed in the ensuing melee.

That night, Ragnor takes Aislinn upstairs with the intention of raping her. Aislinn lives through the coming months believing that he had raped her, until she learns that Maida put a sleeping draught in Ragnor's drink. He forced Aislinn also to drink so both fall asleep almost as soon as they are in the room. On the second day, Wulfgar - the knight Ragnor answers to on behalf of William - arrives at Darkenwald and is angry that Ragnor handled the conquest in such a way that there were deaths. Wulfgar forces Aislinn to his own room but doesn't rape her, only chains her to the foot of his bed. His fairness is soon evident to Aislinn and to others, and when Ragnor forces the issue, saying that Aislinn is his by right of conquest, she is allowed to choose. She selected Wulfgar, but Ragnor can't let it go. Much later, when Aislinn has come to care for Wulfgar, she stands at his side during William's coronation. Ragnor again puts forth his claim on both Aislinn and Darkenwald, and William decrees that it will be settled with a joust between the two men. Wulfgar wins but Ragnor still isn't satisfied.

Meanwhile, Ragnor has made a conquest of Gwyneth, Wulfgar's sister. Gwyneth is angry when she discovers that Ragnor had Aislinn first. Her jealousy of Aislinn is evident, and she does whatever she can to make Aislinn's life miserable. She has no kindness for anyone and eventually helps Ragnor with information about Wulfgar's daily plans, so that Ragnor, accompanied by a band of thieves, raids Wulfgar's lands without being captured. When Aislinn discovers that Gwyneth is the traitor, she tells Bolsgar, Wulfgar's father, who goes to warn Wulfgar. While the majority of the men are away, Ragnor's men attack, taking Aislinn and her newborn son, Bryce, with them as hostages. Gwyneth also goes, believing that Ragnor cares for her. Along the way, Ragnor grows tired of Bryce's crying, and Aislinn, fearing that Ragnor will kill the child, leaves him with an old crone they encounter along the way. Wulfgar and Bolsgar follow but become separated. Wulfgar battles Ragnor, but it's Gwyneth, mortally wounded herself, who kills Ragnor, apologizing to Aislinn and Wulfgar for her behavior toward them.

Aislinn and Wulfgar return to Darkenwald, fearful for Bryce's life, to discover that things at the manor are well. Aislinn's mother, Maida, has apparently recovered from her hatred of those who killed her husband - a process begun with the birth of her grandchild. Bolsgar - who had lived his life believing Wulfgar was fathered by some other man - is joyful and reveals that he "bought" Bryce from the old crone and that he is certain that Wulfgar is his son and that Bryce is Wulfgar's because of a family birthmark that appears on every other generation.



Chapters 1 through 4

Chapters 1 through 4 Summary

Aislinn's family is attacked by the Normans under the leadership of Ragnor de Marte. The story opens with Aislinn fighting the fact that she has a rope tied about her neck with the other end held by Ragnor. Her mother, Maida, is being forced to serve the conquerors as are two of the family servants. One of those, Hlynn, is soon the subject of an argument and is hauled off upstairs by the winner. Aislinn, powerless, watches the young girl go knowing it is doubtful she will survive the night. Meanwhile, Maida is beaten unconscious and Aislinn, though angry, can do nothing. She thinks back to the events that put her in this position - Ragnor and his men arriving at Darkenwald, the herald reading a list of incredible demands to Aislinn's father, including that the family of the manor be branded as slaves and held to ensure the cooperation of the people, her father's sword lashing out and beheading the herald, and Ragnor's retaliation that included the death of Aislinn's father and several servants. Ragnor and his cousin, Vachel, talk about their duty to Wulfgar and the fact that they've taken the manor in his name. Vachel says that Wulfgar has attracted the attention of many ladies and speculates that it's because he seems indifferent. Ragnor, continuing to look at Aislinn and to drink wine, soon decides to take her for his own. He carries her up the stairs to the master bedroom, where he rapes her. She wakes at her mother's urging that they must hurry if they are to escape before the Normans wake from their drunken slumber, but Aislinn refuses to leave until the dead have had a proper burial. She is outside attempting to drag her father from the yard when Wulfgar arrives. He enters the house, throws Ragnor out, saying that dead men are of no use to him, and answers Ragnor's threat by saying that even though Aislinn's look makes it clear that she wants him dead, he still has duties to perform.

Ragnor tries to make Aislinn leave the chore of burying her father to serve him inside, but she refuses and he finally gives in. When she reaches the shade of a nearby tree, Wulfgar hands her a shovel, saying that there will come a time when she shares his bed, and that she might find she prefers being bedded by a real man rather than a "braying braggart" such as Ragnor. Aislinn believes it to be true and laments the fact that she is no longer the cherished maid but merely a piece of property to be passed among the men. She then overhears Wulfgar berating Ragnor, telling him that he should have approached Aislinn's father with tact, rather than riding in and making demands. Ragnor says that the herald read Wulfgar's words, and that there is no proof that he, Ragnor, did anything wrong. Wulfgar says there is no need for proof because he knows.

Aislinn is outside when several men arrive to bury the dead with Kerwick among them. Aislinn almost rushes to him, but her mother reminds her that the two men seem bent on having her, and her affection for Kerwick would be his death sentence. She refrains from going to him, running inside instead and bumping into Wulfgar who grabs hold of her. She immediately slaps him and most of the men believe he'll retaliate, but he kisses her instead. Ragnor demands that Wulfgar leave her alone, saying that Wulfgar



promised he could choose his reward and that he's chosen Aislinn. Wulfgar says that Ragnor's reward lies dead in the courtyard and then tells Aislinn to choose between them. Aislinn considers that she'll have only cruelty from Ragnor, that Wulfgar will not fight to keep her, that Kerwick is watching, but she can't help him with his pain, and that she felt a spark when Wulfgar kissed her. She selects Wulfgar. Outside, Ragnor pledges to his cousin that he will have Aislinn and kill Wulfgar.

At one point, Wulfgar asks Aislinn about Kerwick, and she says only that they are neighbors and that their families have interacted. Then Kerwick, seeing Wulfgar pull Aislinn to him, rushes at Wulfgar in an attempt to kill him. Maida reveals that Kerwick is betrothed to Wulfgar. Wulfgar doesn't put Kerwick to death, saying that he understands why the man reacted in such a way. Kerwick receives twenty lashes, and Wulfgar tells Aislinn that his punishment is because she didn't reveal their relationship so Wulfgar can be on guard. Aislinn later tells Wulfgar that she fears for her mother's sanity and that she might try to take revenge on Wulfgar, which he takes as a warning. Aislinn hopes this revelation to Wulfgar will save her mother from carrying out some attempt that will cost her mother her life.

Aislinn goes to the bedroom with Wulfgar on the first night, fully expecting that she'll be raped again, but Wulfgar merely shackles her to the bed, saying he knows that she has not buried her dead and won't have any reason to remain if she has the opportunity to escape. Aislinn notes that she curls up on the hard floor, very content with this turn in the situation.

After Kerwick is punished, Wulfgar has all the men sheared. Heads and faces are shorn clean in the way of the Normans, and Aislinn is so hurt by the sight of her fellow Saxons having their hair cut off that she heads to her room planning to also cut her own. Before she can make the first cut, Wulfgar arrives, grabs her hand and tells her that she'll receive a lash for every lock she cuts off. She realizes the full extent of his fury at that moment, says that he's hurting her hand, and he immediately lets go. As Aislinn is tending Kerwick's wounds, Ham says that he will seek revenge for Kerwick's lashing and for Aislinn's father's death. Aislinn says that Kerwick's punishment for attacking Wulfgar could easily have been death, that her father died with honor taking several with him so requires no revenge, and that it's Ragnor who should be punished for taking Aislinn's virginity, rather than Wulfgar. She then warns Ham that it's her place to seek revenge on Ragnor and no one else's. Aislinn then tells Ham to go about his duties so he won't find himself bearing the "stripes of foolishness" that Kerwick wears. Kerwick, now awake, says that he was out to defend her honor. He then rants out his frustrations, telling her that he had agreed to wait until their marriage night to possess her physically and now regrets that decision. He seems very angry that she "chose" Wulfgar, though he doesn't seem to consider the choice she was given. It's evident that Kerwick believes Aislinn should have chosen to die before she betrayed her betrothal vows.

Aislinn wants to talk to Kerwick but realizes that only time can heal his wounds - both those on his back and in his heart. She goes to her room, throws herself on the bed and cries loudly. She doesn't hear Wulfgar enter the room and is angry when she realizes he's heard her storm of emotion, though he tells her that she's held up better than most



women would have. Wulfgar reminds her that she is his slave, owned just as he owns a pair of gloves. She denies this, saying that a slave is someone who has given up all hope and mindlessly obeys. Aislinn says that if the time comes, she will seek another "haven," indicating death. Aislinn asks if any woman has captured Wulfgar's attention, and he says that none have kept his interest, though many have offered themselves to him. Aislinn then asks, "not even your mother," and Wulfgar's response is so abrupt and harsh that she expects that even his mother would find no love from him.

Chapters 1 through 4 Analysis

At one point during the initial meeting of Ragnor and Aislinn, Aislinn speaks to him in French. It's interesting that he feels somewhat inferior to her because she can follow at least some of their conversations, while he understands nothing of hers. Aislinn is glad he doesn't understand as her mother, in a sing-song voice that could have indicated impending madness, calls down curses on the men who killed her husband and invaded her home. When Aislinn and Ham, a young servant boy, bury Aislinn's father, Maida falls on the fresh grave, crying inconsolably and ranting that there must be a priest. Aislinn goes to Wulfgar, submits her request quietly and with a pleading tone and falls to her knees in thanks when he agrees to send for a priest. Wulfgar grabs her by the hair, pulling her to her feet and saying that he respects her more for her hatred.

Maida has always been a healer among her people, but on the day after Wulfgar arrives, she shrieks out her refusal to help. Aislinn notes that her mother is not dressed as normal and that she simply must have time to grieve for her own losses. For some time to come, Maida will continue to mutter to herself, to fall into despair easily and to seem almost out of her mind as she tries to cope with all that's happened. Aislinn, meanwhile, tends a wound on Wulfgar's leg, using hot water to draw out the crusted infection and blood and then applying a salve of goose grease and herbs. When he realizes that she has the knowledge of healing, he begins to send his wounded to her, and she spends a great deal of time at that task and later tends Kerwick's back.

When Wulfgar discovers that Maida is Aislinn's mother, he instructs her to dress in her normal clothing and to stop acting like a common servant. Maida does get dressed, but Ragnor kicks and hits her, saying that she acts as if she's something more important than she is. Maida immediately regresses, crouching on the floor and whimpering. Wulfgar tells Ragnor that he'll get much more from the people if they're treated decently and that seeing their former mistress dressed in rags and fighting the dogs for scraps won't endear him to the people. Ragnor doesn't at all understand the point, and Aislinn notes that her mother has digressed dramatically from Ragnor's maltreatment.

Aislinn considers her feelings toward Wulfgar and doesn't understand how it can be that her body is so willing to respond to this man who is the enemy of her people.



Chapters 5 through 7

Chapters 5 through 7 Summary

Wulfgar, Sweyn and several of their men ride away from Darkenwald toward smoke. When they draw near, they see several bodies, the smoldering remains of buildings and several men fleeing on horseback. Sweyn and Wulfgar chase one group, while the rest of his men pursue the others. Eleven are captured and the remainder killed. When they return to the cottage, an old woman is mourning the death of a young girl, her daughter. Wulfgar gives the old woman a horse, noting that it's not enough to make up for the loss of the daughter and her home. She accepts, wondering about this man - the new lord of Darkenwald.

Back at the castle, Wulfgar tells Aislinn that the thieves have been captured, and she says she had no doubt he would accomplish that. Wulfgar had told her the night before that he expected a warm bath and she shouldn't be slow about it. This night, his bath is ready as is his supper, and Aislinn is napping in a chair. He eats first, then bathes and Aislinn worries that this is the night he will take her to his bed. Instead, he again chains her to the bed, allowing her to sleep on the floor. This continues for several days with Aislinn acting more like a servant - mending Wulfgar's clothes and tending his needs - than a mistress. One night she wakes, cold but unable to reach the fireplace to rekindle the fire. Wulfgar does so, then asks if he can trust that she won't run away. She points out that she really has no where to go and adds that she doesn't like being chained. Wulfgar admits that he wouldn't like being chained either, and after that, Aislinn is given much more freedom. She is even allowed to wander through town and is apparently unwatched, but when Ragnor returns to Darkenwald, she discovers by the quick appearance of Wulfgar's men that she is apparently being observed.

Wulfgar warns Aislinn that Ragnor could be a problem and that she is to remain in their room, which she readily agrees to do. However, that night after dinner she finds Ragnor waiting outside the room with the information that his cousin, Vachel, would serve as lookout and alert them upon Wulfgar's return. He then drags Aislinn into the room. She fights but he tears her dress, and she fears that she can't hold out until Wulfgar's return. Just as the situation is becoming very serious, Wulfgar crashes into the room and orders that Ragnor and Vachel spend the night in a sty, pondering the advisability of trespassing. Aislinn is delighted when he arrives, smiles brightly as the scene finishes unfolding and says that she has now exacted her revenge on Ragnor, and that it was better than she had imagined. Just before they go to sleep, Wulfgar announces that she will begin to wear a dagger in an attempt to discourage further attacks.

A few days later, Kerwick and Maida make plans to run away, and Maida, speaking in English believing Wulfgar unable to understand, begs Aislinn to go with them, while Aislinn pleads with Maida to give up the idea. Maida accuses Aislinn of having given up her freedom because Wulfgar "rides" her well, and Aislinn admits that he hasn't, but she wonders what it would be like. When Maida and Kerwick are preparing to leave, they're



caught and it's then they realize that Wulfgar understands English. Wulfgar chains both Maida and Kerwick with the hounds, leaving instructions that they're all to be released the following morning. When Aislinn turns on Wulfgar, furious that her mother is being degraded, Wulfgar says that she isn't just angry because of her mother's situation but is also angry because her own pride has been damaged. Aislinn throws several things at Wulfgar, and when he holds her with her arms pinned at her sides, she kicks him in the groin, pressing her advantage, though she doesn't know what it is that's caused him so much pain. When Wulfgar says it's time he taught Aislinn a lesson, her rage turns to fear.

They struggle and Aislinn's kirtle slides up, leaving the lower half of her body bare. Wulfgar's "outraged hunger" for her flares, and she knows that the time of waiting is past. Aislinn notes a passionate response but continues to fight him as he has his way with her. When he is spent, she heaps every curse she can imagine upon his head, and he responds that she is "one of the liveliest bits" he's had, causing her to shriek in anger. In the middle of the night, she wakes to his caress again.

The next morning, Aislinn rises early, disentangles herself from Wulfgar without waking him, and sets out for the marshes where she knows of a clear pool where she'll cleanse herself. When Wulfgar wakes to find her gone, he first fears that she has gone with Maida and Kerwick but discovers they remain in their places. He rushes out, picks up her trail through the dewy grass and follows her, picking her up on his horse and carrying her back to the manor without giving her time to dress. There, he dumps her, naked, but gives her his cloak to go inside. Aislinn asks why he searched for her and he says that she is his slave. She points out that she is of little use in field work or cutting wood, and he says she has other uses, and he'll make use of her in that manner.

They return to the manor to find that Ragnor and his men have returned with news that Duke William has not ascended to the throne. Friar Dunley is also present and in front of this man, Ragnor and Wulfgar have an argument over which of the two more likely impregnated Aislinn, who is angry both at their attitudes and at the fact that the Friar is listening. Friar Dunley then says that Wulfgar should pay Aislinn's former betrothed for having her break her vows, but Wulfgar says that would mean that Aislinn's favors are for sale, making her no different than a whore. The Friar then asks Wulfgar if he plans to marry her. Wulfgar says he won't, adding that people call him a bastard and that he won't subject Aislinn to that. The Friar says that Aislinn should then be set free because her former betrothed will still take her, pointing to Kerwick, who is staring at Aislinn. Wulfgar roars that the Friar's duties are to see to the dead, and he is not to meddle in other affairs. It's noted that even Ragnor is silent after this outburst.

Chapters 5 through 7 Analysis

When Ragnor begins making overtures to Aislinn, she quickly says that Wulfgar pleases her in bed. Ragnor says that if Wulfgar is having anything to do with Aislinn, it must be that he's mistaken her for a lad. She objects lightly, says that she does think Wulfgar is handsome and ,he doesn't have time to list all the things about him that attract her.



Wulfgar arrives just as this conversation is going on and doesn't say anything to the contrary of Aislinn's statements, but does tell Ragnor that he should be more careful what he says. Wulfgar goes so far as to say that Ragnor obviously doesn't value his life, or he wouldn't talk to Wulfgar in such a way. Wulfgar and Aislinn go inside and Wulfgar pats Aislinn on the rear. She makes it clear from her expression that she doesn't approve of his liberties but doesn't say anything. Kerwick watches and his own hatred of Wulfgar is evident. Wulfgar, though not speaking a language Kerwick can understand, says that Aislinn has obviously weaved a spell on the young man. He says that he has some advice, if only Kerwick could understand the language to take heed, and that is that women are to be used and left, but never loved, and adds that he learned that lesson during childhood. Wulfgar still doesn't know that Kerwick understands his language. Aislinn has watched Kerwick apparently struggling to understand what he's being told to do and doesn't understand Kerwick's reasoning behind the pretense.

Upstairs, Wulfgar walks in on Aislinn having her bath and says that he believes Ragnor is looking for Hlynn, and Aislinn objects that she needs Hlynn to help with the bath. Wulfgar asks if it's because she doesn't want Ragnor "riding another wench" and Aislinn says that if Wulfgar knew the extent of Ragnor's brutalizing, he would save Hlynn that fate. He responds that he doesn't interfere in such things, then says he wants Aislinn to tell Hlynn to stop cringing. Aislinn says instead that Wulfgar won't hurt her and indicates that he might be able to help, which prompts Hlynn to move closer and to almost seem relaxed, though her faith is in Aislinn's capabilities, not in Wulfgar. Wulfgar agrees, saying that Hlynn will attend Aislinn until the following day when Ragnor is to leave with his men.

When Ragnor has been removed from Aislinn's room, she tells Wulfgar she is grateful. She also says that she realizes his protection comes with a price, and she's equally grateful she hasn't yet been called upon to pay that price. He asks if she would come to any man willingly, and she says only if she were married. He points out that she's said she hates him but she counters, saying that she's known many young girls who were married to men they hated, that none have any say in their marriages. She seems to realize, at least on some level, that her marriage to Wulfgar would be good for her people, though she hasn't fully voiced this thought. The two parry on the point of marriage and Wulfgar denies he will ever marry.

After Aislinn sees Thomas, she gathers food to take him but is intercepted by Kerwick who tears her dress. When Wulfgar sees the torn dress, he immediately assumes it was Thomas. Wulfgar then tricks Kerwick into speaking his language and uses him as an interpreter in talking with Thomas. Wulfgar then tells Kerwick that he has touched what doesn't belong to him, and he is to keep his hands off Aislinn. Kerwick says it will be difficult because he loved her. It's interesting that he uses the past tense in this sentence, seeming to indicate his willingness to give up on Aislinn. Wulfgar seems impressed with Kerwick's admission, not because he loves Aislinn - Wulfgar considers love an emotion for the weak - but because he stands firm saying that he will obey, but Wulfgar must understand the tie that had existed between the two. With that pledge, Wulfgar tells Kerwick that he will no longer be chained with the hounds as he has been



since the lashing but reminds him that his freedom in the future depends on his own actions.

After their time in bed together, Aislinn acknowledges that she hates Wulfgar, loathes him in fact, but admits that he tortures her thoughts, and there will soon come a time she won't be able to get him out of her mind. She considers her options, tries to decide which will gain her more - playing the angel or the witch - but knows that she'll do all she can to bring him to the point that he's plagued by thoughts of her. She then sleeps peacefully until Wulfgar wakes her.



Chapters 8 through 10

Chapters 8 through 10 Summary

Aislinn returns to her room after the blessing of the graves to find Sweyn there with Wulfgar. She turns to leave, but Wulfgar beckons her in, saying to Sweyn that he will feel better knowing that the situation is in Sweyn's hands, but doesn't elaborate. Aislinn searches for her torn kirtle to see if she can mend it but can't find it, and - though she admits it is an unreasonable reaction - begins to cry. Wulfgar snaps at her, saying that she's no better than a trollop who asks for money, but when Aislinn responds that she's only seeking what is rightly her own since she has no way to get more clothes, Wulfgar admits that she's held up well - better than most women in her situation would have done.

They make love then, though Aislinn fights to remain impassive under his touch. He doesn't argue the point but predicts that there will come a time when she begs him for attention. After, Aislinn looks hopefully toward the door, but he says that she must get past her modesty, and there won't be secrets between them. Aislinn was, in fact, shocked that he wanted to make love in the middle of the day, but Wulfgar says that the fact that the sun is shining has nothing to do with desire.

They hear the noise of an approaching party; Wulfgar goes downstairs and Aislinn follows though she is waylaid by Ragnor and pushes him aside. There is a young woman and an old knight in the courtyard and they evidently know Wulfgar. Aislinn will soon learn that it is Wulfgar's half-sister, Gwyneth, and stepfather, Bolsgar. Wulfgar introduces Bolsgar as "Lord," but is quickly corrected with Bolsgar saying that he no longer has his title. Bolsgar soon tells Wulfgar of the death of his mother. It's through this conversation that the details of Wulfgar's childhood are revealed. He'd been the favored son of Bolsgar until Wulfgar's mother, seeing the favoritism, tells Bolsgar that Wulfgar is not his son but refuses to divulge the identity of Wulfgar's father. Bolsgar sends Wulfgar to live with an uncle, saying that he simply had to put the boy away from him. Wulfgar's younger brother was taken under Bolsgar's wing but he was killed at Senlac.

Bolsgar has a bad wound on his leg, so serious that he has to be carried inside. He says that he wasn't wounded in battle but was injured when his horse fell and was unable to get clear. As Aislinn begins to unwrap the leg, Bolsgar tells Wulfgar to take her away, that it's no sight for a young girl, but Aislinn says she's accustomed to tending wounds. She almost retches from the smell, sends Kerwick to get mud from the nearby swamp and requests hot water and bandages. She gathers cobwebs, mixing that with the mud and using the mixture as a paste after she's cleaned the wound, warning Bolsgar not to move the leg unless he wants to have a peg leg, in which case he'll also have funny tracks. The bit of humor makes Bolsgar smile and seems to make him respect her all the more.



Gwyneth is rude as she notes that Aislinn and Wulfgar aren't married, saying that she'd thought Aislinn some actual kin by the way Wulfgar dotes on her. Meanwhile, Ragnor is doing his best to court Gwyneth. Gwyneth observes to Wulfgar that Wulfgar is too lenient with his men, and he sarcastically thanks her for her advice, to which she seriously responds that she is very observant.

As Aislinn checks on Bolsgar one last time before retiring, she asks Kerwick to keep an eye on the man during the night, to be certain that the room does not grow chilled and to call her if Bolsgar's condition seems to worsen. Kerwick asks if he is to send Maida to get her in that case, and Aislinn notes that she - unlike even the most base trollop - has not privacy and that Kerwick himself can summon her. She reminds him that there is now "a door" between them that can never again be opened, but Kerwick says it isn't a door but a man.

As Aislinn and Wulfgar go upstairs, Gwyneth asks what Wulfgar sees in Aislinn and Ragnor lies, saying that he has eyes only for Gwyneth. He then asks her to join him later in the meadow, promising that he will not force anything on her but that he would just enjoy holding her. She accuses him of being overly bold, but he says that he has to leave the following morning, hints that his task is dangerous, and she agrees to meet him. They make love in the meadow and afterward Ragnor notes that the light is on in Wulfgar's bedroom window. His thoughts are on Aislinn, and he compares her body with Gwyneth's. When Gwyneth asks what he is thinking, he responds that she has made him very happy. The following morning, he knocks, then walks into Wulfgar's bedroom, prompting Wulfgar from a sound sleep immediately to a crouching position holding his sword. Ragnor pretends to want to know if Wulfgar has any messages for William, as Ragnor is leaving to join him this day, but Ragnor actually has his eye on Aislinn as she is barely covered. Ragnor says that he was in the meadow the previous evening and heard a wolf, which Wulfgar immediately understands to mean that Ragnor met a woman in the meadow. Wulfgar says that if Ragnor isn't careful, he will single-handedly repopulate the village. Ragnor says that he wonders who will give birth first and suggests that it might be Aislinn. This prompts her to throw a vase at Ragnor and yell for Wulfgar to make him shut up, but Wulfgar says that Ragnor plays games like a child, and the moment Ragnor is no longer playing, he'll be killed. Ragnor leaves and Wulfgar turns to Aislinn, though she says it is already daylight and that he must be about his duties.

Gwyneth asks why the soldiers are hanging around in the manor and is told that Wulfgar hasn't yet come down to give the day's orders. While the men await Wulfgar's appearance, they discuss the fact that Ragnor seemed angry on his departure, indicating that he and Wulfgar had likely had another argument. Then one says that it's probably the continuing battle over Aislinn and another says that he would gladly fight for Aislinn were he in Ragnor's position. It's noted that once a man has bedded Aislinn - as Ragnor has - he'd probably be even more committed to holding onto her. When Gwyneth learns that Ragnor had been with Aislinn, she is crushed. Wulfgar arrives, takes the men to Cregan and leaves Gwyneth alone. She goes upstairs, almost stops in Aislinn's room but goes on to her own, vowing she will vent her wrath on Aislinn.



When Aislinn rises, she tends Bolsgar's wound, finding it much improved. Then Gwyneth asks for a horse so she can go for a ride. Aislinn says there is a mount available and tries to warn Gwyneth that the horse requires a firm hand, but Gwyneth angrily brushes Aislinn away. Gwyneth's fury increases as she rides and the horse, out of control, plunges into a ravine. Gwyneth is angrier still that the animal couldn't see the drop, cares nothing for the fact that the animal is "broken badly," in the words of one of her escorts and finds that her rage has not abated at all. Her scream as she falls alerts Wulfgar, and Gwyneth tells him that the horse's ill temper caused the accident. Wulfgar kills the horse as gently as he can, makes Gwyneth ride to Darkwald on the back of a knight's horse, and arrives to find Aislinn in the doorway soon figuring out what happened. Gwyneth accuses Aislinn of putting her on a dangerous horse to get her out of the way, and Aislinn responds only briefly before walking toward her room. Gwyneth stops her, yelling out that Aislinn is a slave and hasn't been dismissed. She then rants at Wulfgar, that Aislinn is wearing nice clothes while she is in rags, that there's no reason for him to care for her so, and that Gwyneth - Wulfgar's sister - eats scraps at the table, while the slave Aislinn has the place of honor at Wulfgar's side. Bolsgar interrupts, telling Gwyneth to stop but she continues until Wulfgar yells out that she had no right to take the horse without his permission, that she came to him seeking shelter, that he will have Aislinn no matter what Gwyneth says and that she is dismissed. Bolsgar nods in approval; Aislinn goes upstairs and Wulfgar soon follows.

Wulfgar leaves for battle, leaving Sweyn in charge of the happenings at the manor. Aislinn soon grows fond of Bolsgar, calling him a cushion against Gwyneth's harsh reality. Gwyneth becomes increasingly overbearing, doling out food and acting as if she is in charge of the manor. She soon throws away things Maida used for healing, prompting a quarrel between the two and Gwyneth demanding that Maida leave the manor. Aislinn and Maida make their way to a nearby hut, abandoned by the death of the previous tenants, a father and son. Aislinn labors through the day and is aided by Kerwick and Ham, who bring furs and other items, and by Thomas, who brings a fresh mattress and repairs the doors. That night, Gwyneth orders that Aislinn not eat since she missed mealtime, but Aislinn refuses and, getting in a jab, says that she's come to understand why Gwyneth didn't fall victim to some conquering Norman's ardor.

One night, Aislinn is tending a desperately ill child and sends Ham to fetch medicines from her mother. As he returns, Gwyneth intercepts him, demanding that he fetch her sufficient wood for the night. He says that he'll deliver the medicine to Aislinn and then do her bidding, but Gwyneth won't hear of the delay, especially that it's for Aislinn; Gwyneth calls on soldiers to have Ham whipped. Aislinn, wondering what is taking Ham so long, goes looking for him and finds the situation. Gwyneth's rage is increased, thinking of her brother's fondness for Aislinn and that Ragnor might have lain with her and demands that Aislinn be whipped for interfering. The two soldiers, though they had reservations, might have whipped Ham but refuse to whip Aislinn, citing her caring for their own wounds. Gwyneth strikes Aislinn once before Sweyn, summoned by Ham, intervenes. He tells Gwyneth that Wulfgar swore him to protect Aislinn and that means from women as well as men. Then he says that he's taking Aislinn to safety and it's for Gwyneth's good as well as Aislinn's.



Later, Aislinn falls into despair, wondering about her situation. She asks Kerwick's advice, whether she should leave and if her departure might soften Gwyneth toward the serfs, but Kerwick says Aislinn is the only thing between the servants and Gwyneth's wrath. Gwyneth, observing the talk between the two, vows to tell Wulfgar that Aislinn has not been faithful to him in his absence.

Chapters 8 through 10 Analysis

While Aislinn is distraught over the lost kirtle, she tells Wulfgar that she has a question that must be asked, though he tells her to be quiet. She asks if he will marry her if she is with child, and he says he holds firm to his statement to the priest, that he won't marry her under any circumstances. Wulfgar will later tell her that he's always been careful only to bed a woman at an infertile time of the month, that he has no children, though he's had many women, and he made an exception to this careful rule with her, though he doesn't say why. He will continue to tell her that she must not fall in love with him and she - though she doesn't really put a concise thought together as to why - continues to wonder if she might be able to snare him as a husband. Though she is attracted to him, she indicates that her alliance with the lord would put her in a position to help her people. The emotions at this stage and for some time to come are complex and half-formed.

Sweyn has been Wulfgar's faithful friend, and it now seems obvious that what Wulfgar had discussed days earlier with Sweyn is that Sweyn is to remain at the manor while Wulfgar rides out. This man is kind-hearted and accompanied Wulfgar when Bolsgar sent Wulfgar away after learning the truth of Wulfgar's parentage. At one point, Sweyn is struggling to deal with a petty disagreement between two women, each claiming ownership of a comb. Aislinn listens for a few minutes, then suggests to Sweyn that he could perhaps cut their hair like the men, then neither would then need the comb, prompting the two women to give up the argument and Sweyn to laugh, talking about the difficulties of dealing with wenches.

Gwyneth is vocal about her displeasure of Wulfgar's alliance with the Normans, though Wulfgar retorts that it's better to be among the conquerors than the conquered. Wulfgar tells Gwyneth that she would do well to learn from Aislinn how to behave. Gwyneth, upon watching the Norman soldiers eating in the hall at Darkenwald, believes Wulfgar to be foolish for allowing the men to eat all the stores that should last through the winter. It's interesting that Gwyneth seems upset that Wulfgar has a woman, almost as if she is a jealous lover, though Gwyneth is quick to turn to Ragnor. Though Aislinn worries about what Gwyneth and Bolsgar thinks of her illicit relationship with Wulfgar, Aislinn seems to wonder at the girl's lack of caring for her father's wound. Aislinn says that she tended her father's wounds since she was small.

When Wulfgar follows Aislinn to her room after the death of her horse, he notes that his life has been devoid of the gentler things. While it hasn't bothered him, it also hasn't prepared him to face Aislinn's grief, though he says he could handle her rampages. He enters, instinctively holds her as she cries and is unprepared when her lips seek out his.



She has never responded to his advances, only waited patiently for it to be over. Now her lips open to his, and he immediately responds. The next morning, she wakes him with her caresses, and he asks if she's so anxious for him that she must wake him from a sound sleep. She's angry, but more hurt because he seems to taunt her when she exhibits any feelings for him. She wonders if there is any softness in him at all.

He says that he wishes he could take her with him but that it will be a difficult march and that it would be foolish for him to risk her safety, which could be construed as caring. The thought that she might be falling in love with him sends her running from the bed. There follows a brief scuffle with Aislinn refusing to yield to him on the morning he is headed into battle with her countrymen. She then offers to shave him and Wulfgar wonders if he should allow it. He's considered that she has a dagger and she could kill him while he sleeps. He now agrees to allow her to shave him, seemingly as a test of her intentions, but she is gentle and doesn't cut him at all. As he prepares to leave, he reminds her that she is his, and she asks if he perhaps treasures her a bit, but he only says again that she must remember she belongs only to him. He then kisses her again and she responds. It's interesting that the two seem to be playing at keeping their emotions at bay when it's obvious what is building between them.



Chapters 11 through 14

Chapters 11 through 14 Summary

Wulfar continues his work for William, once encountering three knights who refuse to yield. In a battle, Wulfgar wins, strips them of their arms and shields and sends them to William as prisoners. In many places, the English lay down their arms and pledge fealty to William. Then they encounter two men, two women and several young children struggling to get a cart out of the mire. The two men and the older of the boys hold lances in an effort to defend the others, but Wulfgar's men have them greatly outnumbered, and he offers to allow them to pledge their loyalty to William in return for work and a safe haven at Darkenwald. They accept and Wulfgar helps them pull their stuck cart from the mire. There is a man named Gavin who has only one arm, the other was lost in battle and not yet healed. Aislinn tends the wound upon his arrival at Darkenwald. His wife is Milderd and Haylan is his sister-in-law. Gavin's brother, Sanhurst, is also with them. Wulfgar gives Gavin his colors to provide his safe passage through Norman-occupied France and requires that Sanhurst attend him as he continues his journey to secure the countryside for William. Sanhurst will later be too slow to keep Wulfgar from being struck in the head, prompting his demotion to lackey.

On the evening after meeting with Gavin's group, Wulfgar is sitting staring into the fire when Haylan approaches. She says that she hadn't expected kindness from a Norman, citing his generous sharing of meat with them at the evening meal and his tolerance of Miles' outburst. As the two talk, Wulfgar remembers Aislinn and longs to be with her but knows it is likely to be some time before he is free to return to Darkenwald. He and Haylan go together to the woods and are involved in a deep embrace when Wulfgar says Aislinn's name, prompting Haylan's anger. Wulfgar then says, "You bitch, you haunt me even on another's loins." Haylan seems to think he's calling her a "bitch" and leaves in anger. He returns to the camp, thinking of Aislinn. As Wulfgar goes to sleep, Haylan tosses and turns, finally asking Milderd what she thinks of Wulfgar and if he seems likely to beat a peasant who angers him, thinking that she might have done so by rejecting him. Milderd reminds her that Wulfgar is the lord and that they are merely his servants.

The next morning, the two parties prepare to part. Wulfgar gives Milderd a package, asking her to give it privately to Aislinn, who will discover contains a length of yellow cloth for a new gown. He also sends a message that the cloth was purchased honestly, adding that he hopes she is well and that Sweyn is seeing to her needs. As Haylan and Milderd prepare to move toward Darkenwald, Haylan asks if Wulfgar said anything about her; Milderd asks why he might, and Haylan denies that he bedded her. Milderd says that it's Haylan's life but that she believes Wulfgar's interest lies elsewhere.

Aislinn hears horses arriving at Darkenwald but finds that it's Ragnor. As it happens, he has letters to deliver but has arranged to stop at Darkenwald to see Aislinn. Aislinn asks Ragnor if there are no wars that require his attention or if he has time to spend at



Darkenwald. He says that he actually has letters bound for William's ship but wanted to stop in at Darkenwald. Aislinn suggests that he's stopped and could now move on. Then Gwyneth comes downstairs and Ragnor turns his attention to her. There is soon a sparring match between Gwyneth and Aislinn. Aislinn, noting that her gowns hang on Gwyneth, accenting her small breasts and bony hips. Gwyneth says that it's well known that a woman become more plump with each handling of a man, and Aislinn retorts that it's then obvious that no one has touched Gwyneth. Aislinn leaves the room, and Gwyneth notes that Aislinn is mistaken to believe that Wulfgar will return to her after his extended time away.

Gwyneth then rails at Ragnor, telling him that she knows he has also been with Aislinn. He says that he took Aislinn in lust, not love as when he took Gwyneth. She apparently believes the lie and entices him into her bed. Then he says that he can't stay but must be about the Duke's business. Instead of leaving immediately, Ragnor follows Aislinn into the woods, catching up with her near a stream and pushing for her to say that he has a chance to win her affection. He becomes increasingly insistent until he is grabbing at her, but he is interrupted by Sweyn, returning from hunting, who throws his war axe into a tree inches from Ragnor's head. That leaves Sweyn without a weapon for the moment it takes to retrieve the axe. Ragnor might have fought but remembers the sickening sight of that axe burying itself into the head of enemies and says he's leaving, but promises to return.

Ragnor kicks his men awake and is in a surly mood as they make their way to complete their errand. He spends most of the ride to the sea where he is to meet William's ships in angry contemplation. There he meets his uncle Cedric, who berates him for his loose living and for his failure to secure lands for the family, reminding Ragnor that the family outfitted him to participate in William's war, so the family holdings would be expanded. Ragnor angrily retorts that Cedric needn't worry about the land, that he would get what was coming to him. As Ragnor and his men go about their next duty the following day, they encounter a group of men and discover that it's Wulfgar's troops. Wulfgar has actually planned the siege of a small village a short distance ahead in an effort to gain the people's cooperation without bloodshed. He has sent two groups around each side of the property of the Saxon shire, who has not yet pledged loyalty to William. Ragnor sends his men ahead with the letters to deliver, saying that he and Vachel will first talk to Wulfgar, so they can take news of his advance with them. When Ragnor and Vachel are alone, Ragnor convinces Vachel to participate in a scheme to draw out a group of the villagers to attack Wulfgar before he is prepared. Ragnor says that it's a prank, but when it's obvious what will happen, the two don't stop it before it turns into a bloody battle.

Ragnor and Vachel ride near the village, appearing lost and wander around the edges of the woods in the general direction of Wulfgar's men. The villagers send out a small force, hoping to kill the two apparently lone knights. Instead, they clash with Wulfgar's troop, and Wulfgar himself is hit on the head so hard that his helmet is dented and he is knocked out. When he returns to consciousness, Ragnor is there, saying that he saved Wulfgar's life by rushing in when he happened upon the attack; Ragnor shares nothing of his part in setting up the episode.



Wulfgar and his men continue to the village where the people, aware of the large force bearing down on them, gathered their belongings and ran for the woods. They were caught by the Normans and agreed to throw down their arms - mainly spears and pitch forks. Wulfgar notes that they are carrying a few possessions, says he hopes they chose well, has his men take all food from the houses of the village and put it on the church steps, then gather all valuables to be transported by cart to William. He then burns the town with the exception of the graineries and church, telling the people that he wants them to rebuild for William and adding that he knows they now won't have time to make war on the Normans. The people, though angry, know that they have their lives and that they can rebuild.

The snowflakes fall on the Normans as they set fire to the village, and on Aislinn, returning home to Darkenwald. She worries about her mother, citing the woman's festering hatred for the Normans and her fear that William's justice will be swift if Maida manages to do anything with this hatred. Things with Gwyneth grow increasingly difficult for everyone in the household. When Gavin, Milderd and Haylan arrive, Gwyneth - quickly picking up that there was some sort of connection between Haylan and Wulfgar - greets them courteously, a change from her normal actions. She sends Kerwick to clean two cottages and lay in firewood for the two little families, which he does. Bolsgar and Gwyneth have words, with Bolsgar telling Gwyneth to shut up about the relationship between Aislinn and Wulfgar. It's evident that Gwyneth's words hurt Aislinn, and Bolsgar asks Aislinn to walk with him upstairs, that he's pleased to have her company. Gwyneth puts it down to an old man smitten by Aislinn's looks. Bolsgar tells Aislinn that he should talk to Wulfgar about his duty to Aislinn but that he gave up the right to give fatherly advice by sending Wulfgar away. Aislinn thanks him for the gesture but says that it will be worth nothing unless Wulfgar comes to her freely of his own volition.

Later, there is a knock on Aislinn's door and she finds Milderd there. The woman has the package and the message from Wulfgar, which reassures Aislinn. The fact that Wulfgar says that the yellow cloth was bought honestly means a lot to her. As she tells Milderd, Wulfgar has said that he will never buy a woman gifts because he works hard for his money and doesn't give it away. Milderd is delighted to see that the message makes Aislinn happy and goes so far as to say that it seems Aislinn has won the battle, and she hopes she will soon win the war. Because Gwyneth has taken every gown that Aislinn owns except the ragged one she wears for cleaning, Aislinn knows she can't let the yellow cloth be seen. She hides it away in Wulfgar's personal trunk with plans to make it into a gown when she learns that Wulfgar will soon be home.

Wulfgar and his men are camped near Kevonshire for almost a week before receiving word that Wulfgar is to attend the coronation in London on Christmas day. Wulfgar commandeers a merchant's lodgings, angering the merchant to the point that he and his family leave for a week - or two - in the country. As Wulfgar roams around the house, he thinks of Aislinn, that she's been defeated but still stands proud. He can't seem to stop thinking of her. "Yet, somehow I find myself wishing that she ..." The thought goes unfinished but at that same moment, Aislinn is wishing that Wulfgar could pledge his loyalty to her. She knows that she wants him more than she's wanted anything in her life, that she'll give him all the love she has and that he won't regret being with her. The



next day dawns bright and Aislinn spends it - along with the servants - avoiding Gwyneth as much as possible. When riders arrive, Aislinn, Haylan and Gwyneth gather to learn the latest news. It's Gowain, one of Wulfgar's most faithful knights. He says that William is to be crowned on Christmas day, that Wulfgar is well and eventually gets around to the crux of his reason for being in Darkenwald - that he's "come to fetch someone." Gwyneth immediately believes it to be her and says that she'll go but that she must have a new gown if she's to be presented to the king. Gowain, knowing Gwyneth's temper, hesitates, finally saying that he's come to get Aislinn, that Hlynn is to accompany her, and they must leave the following morning. Gowain hurries outside after delivering the message in order to cool his blood, reminding himself that Aislinn belongs to his lord.

Chapters 11 through 14 Analysis

One of the children in Gavin's group is a little boy named Miles. His father was killed by the Normans, but his mother, Haylan, says that it was only a matter of time before some war claimed his life. When it's evident the little band will surrender, Miles steps forward, saying that he'll fight the Normans to avenge his father. His mother fears that the Normans will retaliate, but Wulfgar says that he will need strong men such as this youngster is bound to be. It seems likely that this kindness is the first thing that attracts Haylan's attention to Wulfgar.

When Gwyneth confronts Ragnor with the knowledge of his time with Aislinn, she says that it's her business because she and Ragnor are in love, meaning they must not harbor secrets. Ragnor answers coldly, seeming already to be tired of Gwyneth's nagging insecurity and demanding attitude. It's interesting that even though he is snappish with her, she begs him to go to bed with her, calls him her "lover," and asks him to remain with her in her bed. The moment Aislinn returns from the woods after her encounter with Ragnor, Gwyneth begins accusing her of having gone there to meet Ragnor, calls her a slut and demands to know what happened. She says that Ragnor came from the woods where Aislinn emerged just moments later, and accuses Aislinn of throwing herself at Ragnor. She then says that she knows Ragnor "made love" to Aislinn. Aislinn retaliates, saying that what he did to her had nothing to do with love, that he hurt her and she believes Ragnor and Gwyneth deserve each other.

Aislinn returns from her mother's one day to discover, Gavin, Milderd and Haylan at Darkenwald, and Gwyneth has received them with hospitality - a difference from her usual attitude. Gwyneth soon manages to reveal that Aislinn is not the lady of the manor but is merely Wulfgar's mistress. It's then that Haylan realizes her mistake - that she could have had the exact same hold on Wulfgar had she allowed him to make love to her in the woods that night. She is certain that she has a chance to win Wulfgar's favor and Aislinn's position in the household, though she obviously isn't realizing that Aislinn's official position - according to Gwyneth - is nothing more than a servant. Gwyneth soon takes Haylan under her supervision, explaining to her all the facts of Aislinn's whoring ways with Kerwick, and even attempting to teach Haylan to sew, saying that a lady is known by her stitching. Haylan says that she doesn't know how to sew, but valiantly



tries, though she doesn't meet with Gwyneth's approval. When Haylan says that she can cook, Gwyneth says that there are servants to do that and Aislinn counters, saying that everyone must do his part and questioning what good Haylan will be if she does nothing because Wulfgar seems pleased with Aislinn's work at keeping his clothes repaired.



Chapters 14 and 15

Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

Gowain, Aislinn, Hlynn and the small group of knights accompanying them leave at daylight and arrive in London to find a crush of people. There are Normans pressing down on them, and just as Aislinn is about to be thrown from her own, smaller horse, strong arms catch her. It's Wulfgar and Gowain smiles, saying that he'd been sent to get Aislinn and had delivered her directly to Wulfgar's lap. Wulfgar and his men spend the day dealing with a misunderstanding that results in several fires being set, then get forced into remaining at a party with a group of nobles celebrating William's coronation. During that party, a woman takes a seat on Wulfgar's lap, pulls his face into her bosom and offers to take him elsewhere, but he declines. He arrives home early in the morning and Aislinn is bathing. He has perfumed soaps for her, and she takes a long time choosing, which makes him glad he thought to provide it. He eventually gets into the tub with her, but she smells the scent of the woman from the night's party and is angry. She cries as Wulfgar holds her, begging her to tell him what's wrong, but eventually falling asleep. When he wakes, he asks why she is dressed in the ragged gown, and she says that there were others who needed her gowns more than she, so that she is left with little to wear. She wants to go buy thread so that she can make the yellow velvet into a dress, but Wulfgar refuses to allow her out and about on her own. He leaves the house and a short time later Aislinn's plans to begin cutting out her yellow dress is interrupted by tailors and seamstresses with an array of fabrics. At the end of the day, she has eight new gowns. Wulfgar spends the day drinking and giving her time to complete the sewing session. When Aislinn goes downstairs, the men fall silent, amazed at the difference that proper clothing can do for the lovely woman's appearance. It's Milbourne who gathers his wits first to rise and escort her to the table.

They are enjoying a leisurely meal when the sounds of drunken singing heralds Wulfgar's approach. "In his mind," he gracefully approaches Aislinn and kisses her hand. In reality, he stumbles, grabs at her and kisses somewhere near her elbow. He announces that she is the most beautiful woman to grace a man's bed, prompting Aislinn's annoyance at his crude remark. He then starts upstairs, steps in a basket and works some time getting the "beast" off his foot then falls down the stairs. Aislinn and Gowain get him to the bedroom, where Aislinn helps him to bed before joining him but finds him asleep before she gets there. The next morning, she gives him a potion to help with the hangover, which he throws up, cursing her for the potion, then admits that he quickly feels better. Rather than remaining in bed as it seems he likely would have wanted, he tells her to get up and they'll see London, then corrects it in his own mind that they'll allow London to see Aislinn. They do spend the day looking at the mummers, mimes, tricksters and baubles, and Aislinn soon learns that when she admires something, one of the four knights accompanying her would purchase it, as was the case with a small mirror bought by Beaufonte. Gowain, Melbourne and Wulfgar join Beaufonte in the revelry, enjoying Aislinn's eager enjoyment. When they return to the house for lunch, they find that Wulfgar has been ordered to attend a mass, feast and



presentation of nobles and knights to William. As he is in the bath preparing to go, Aislinn asks how long he'll be gone and says that she'll miss him. He says that he believes it will take a long time, but that she won't miss him because she is to go as well. She argues, saying that she - a Saxon - won't be welcome, but he assures her that she won't be the only Saxon as there will be nobles who pledged loyalty to William and are accepted at court. She then says that people are bound to figure out that she is his mistress. He suggests that they say she is his sister but says they might then be accused of some other crime. Wulfgar ends by saying they'll simply be vague, and he doesn't care what people think. Aislinn realizes that he won't hear of her remaining behind and accompanies him.

They attend a long mass and Wulfgar is amazed at her patience, which lends a peace to him. They are later in court, and when Wulfgar is called away for a moment, Ragnor sits beside her, soon touching her leg under the table, prompting Aislinn to stand and Wulfgar to return. Wulfgar reminds Ragnor that he'd been warned away and their quarrel attracts the attention of William, who asks if his knights are seeking to do each other in. He is introduced to Aislinn, and Ragnor intervenes, saying that Darkenwald and Aislinn should be his by right of conquest. Wulfgar objects and Aislinn tells of her father's intention to surrender and of the incident leading up to his death at Ragnor's hands. William suggests a joust with the winner being the first to unseat the other, warning that neither is to be killed because he needs his knights healthy. The winner is to be granted Darkenwald. Unable to refuse the king's suggestion, they agree. William then says that it would be better for Aislinn to remain under his protection in the meantime and has her things taken from Wulfgar's room to accommodations at court.

Wulfgar misses Aislinn but is invited to dine with the king the following evening. He's excited but arrives to find that Aislinn is seated next to Ragnor, while Wulfgar is at an opposite wing of the table. Ragnor is charming and Aislinn holds her own at conversations with other nobles, many who are seeking her favor. The following night, Aislinn is seated next to Wulfgar with Ragnor in the situation as observer. William talks to Wulfgar that night, saying that Wulfgar seems unsettled. He says that he's had Aislinn with him so long that he finds he misses her when she's away. William says that Wulfgar's actions and attitudes toward Aislinn are such that it's a wonder she will have anything to do with him. William then says that he hopes Wulfgar has "seen to the lady's honor." After their conversation, Aislinn asks what the king wanted, and Wulfgar says only that Ragnor is a fool to think that he will give up Aislinn. She asks what he plans to do and he answers, "Win, of course."

Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

Aislinn wonders at her reactions to Wulfgar. She notes that it seems as if she is "soft clay" in his hands. She considers that there seems to be no difference between her reactions to Wulfgar and those of the trollops who follow men around, seeking their favors. It's this thought, along with the fact that it seems as if he cares little for her other than as a bed partner, that makes her cry. Aislinn has not yet admitted that she loves Wulfgar, and he has not examined his feelings for her at all, but it seems obvious that



he believes gifts are needed to rectify the situation. Wulfgar, in a bar giving her time to finish with the clothing session, considers that he's spent a lot of money but that if it eases Aislinn's feelings for him, it will be worth it. At the house, Aislinn admires the eight new gowns and thinks of Wulfgar's generosity.

As Wulfgar and Aislinn are about to rise her second day in London, he touches her hip and finds the healing scar from the lash Gwyneth gave her. She tells him she fell, but he knows better. She says that it's nothing but a squabble that is now "put to rights," and he wonders at her amazing ability to forgive. He notes that she continues to put a spell on him but seems unwilling to take a closer look at his true feelings.

Aislinn thanks Wulfgar for the gifts then asks if they are truly hers to keep. Knowing that he has likely figured out what happened to her other clothes, she asks what she can do to keep these new clothes from meeting the same fate as her others, and Wulfgar says he will take care of the situation. She says that she fully understands that a slave is not allowed possessions and that she must be the most richly-dressed slave anywhere. She then questions what will happen when someone asks him why he dresses a slave in that way, and he says only Gwyneth would dare voice that thought, then adds that it's his money to do with what he will. Aislinn presses the point, that though there seems to be some higher connection between them, to the eyes of the world she is only his slave. He says that he doesn't care what the world thinks. It seems obvious that Aislinn greatly cares what others think and desires that degree of respectability above all else, even more so at this point than a declaration of love from Wulfgar. Later, Aislinn willingly goes to bed with Wulfgar, but afterward, he stares at the ceiling while she cries, and he wonders what more he can do to make her happy.

As Wulfgar and Ragnor are arguing over Aislinn, Ragnor says that Wulfgar should be grateful to him for having saved his life, indicating the incident at Kevonshire. Wulfgar says that he has learned that two knights lured the villagers out to the attack, that one of the two was Vachel making him certain that Ragnor was the other, and that Ragnor - rather than saving Wulfgar's life - almost got him killed.



Chaptrs 16 through 19

Chaptrs 16 through 19 Summary

The joust occurs, as ordered by William, on the first day of the year, 1067. Wulfgar begins by working with the Hun early that morning. Upon his return, Gowain offers advice on Ragnor's typical methods, but Wulfgar stops him, only to be interrupted by Milbourne, who offers his own advice. Wulfgar has noted that all his men - including Sanhurst - are mooning around the house, lost without Aislinn's presence. As they leave the house for the jousting field, Milbourne teasingly urges Wulfgar not to injure Ragnor too much, saying that without Ragnor Wulfgar would have no one save his knights on which to vent his anger.

As Ragnor and Wulfgar meet on the field, Ragnor asks where Sweyn is, then says that he remembers that Sweyn is "guarding my lands." Wulfgar doesn't respond. The joust begins with neither falling on the first or second runs but Ragnor falling on the third. The two, now on foot but with armor and shield, draw broadswords and begin to battle. Wulfgar puts Ragnor to the ground, turns toward the king, sees fear on Aislinn's face and turns to meet Ragnor's renewed attack, which he quickly puts down, meeting William's approval. Wulfgar kisses Aislinn, and Ragnor vows to Vachel that he'll someday kill Wulfgar. William, saying that court would be dull without Aislinn, has her go with him and tells Wulfgar that he should come that evening to sign the paperwork. He grants Wulfgar full title, tells him to build a strong castle and reminds him not to "foolishly" put Aislinn aside because she would make a good wife. Wulfgar leaves, wondering when the king will release Aislinn from his protection. He wanders around the city for awhile, returning to his quarters to find Aislinn there.

Aislinn seems intent now to make Wulfgar understand her worry. She says that she fears the day he will decide to simply put her aside. He says that he's grown accustomed her, that they are a good fit but doesn't make any pledge to her. He then says that he put his life on the line for her that day and asks what higher price she could demand. She counters by asking how much he paid for his other whores - a copper or a fistful, the cost of one dress or maybe two. She says that it doesn't matter what he pays for her, if she comes to him willingly she will always be a whore. Wulfgar, unable to stand her crying and unable - or unwilling - to do what it would take to make it right for her, leaves the room. When he returns, he takes her and she yields. This time, considering that he has bought her gifts and done battle for her - both acts that he swore he never does - she is more content, realizing that he's changed his mind twice and might yet again. William then releases Wulfgar from court, and Wulfgar gives Aislinn a dapple grey horse, saying that he "owes her one." As they leave London, Aislinn first rides a few paces behind, but Wulfgar soon slows so that she is beside him as a wife would be.

They arrive at Darkenwald and Gwyneth immediately begins to air complaints, saying that she would set to right all that Aislinn has no doubt said about her. When she's done,



Wulfgar responds. He says that Aislinn is of his choosing, that her possessions are her own and that anyone with them from this moment will be considered a thief, and that only he will administer justice. Wulfgar says that Gwyneth had no right to try to punish Ham or anyone else, that he is certain Kerwick - having felt the lash - knows better than to touch Aislinn, that he had no intention for Haylan to hold a position of honor in the hall, but that everyone is to work according to his or her talents, and that Gweneth should remember that she lives there on his generosity. He then says he's been gentle because she is his sister, but he won't be so next time. Gwyneth gathers what dignity she can and leaves the room. Haylan returns to her cooking, and Kerwick laughs at Haylan, saying that she's dressed much too finely in one of Aislinn's nicer gowns, since she is to see to the cooking. When they are alone in their room, Aislinn frolics on the bed, glad to be home, but Wulfgar asks if she bedded Kerwick while he was away. Aislinn angrily leaves and goes to her mother's house, where she drops the bar across the door; Wulfgar splinters the doorway when he arrives and Aislinn doesn't open it. She then says that she will answer his accusation only once, that she didn't bed Kerwick, that it's up to him to decide whether to believe Gwyneth, and that there'd be no need for her to beg that he leave her some dignity if she were whoring with others, leaving herself none. Wulfgar says that she has arrived at a place where she can "do me hurt," and they return to Darkenwald.

In the second month of the year, Aislinn is at her mother's cabin when she feels a bit dizzy, and Maida asks if she has yet felt the baby kick. Aislinn admits that she's known for some time that she is expecting a baby, though she hasn't yet voiced the thought even to herself. Maida has already confided the news to Kerwick and Aislinn knows she must tell Wulfgar and finds time that same day. He is in the stables when she tells him that she has news that might upset him. He denies that she could say anything to upset him, and she says that she's with child. He simply responds that it's to be expected.

Over the coming weeks, Haylan seems to grow bolder, sometimes to the point of stepping between Aislinn and Wulfgar in order to gain his attention. This makes Aislinn angry, and when she notes that Wulfgar is watching Haylan, she becomes certain that Wulfgar grows tired of having a pregnant woman warming his bed.

On the night Wulfgar returns with Aislinn and Maida, he takes Maida home, while Aislinn goes upstairs where Gwyneth enters her room, saying that the slut has returned. Wulfgar overhears some of the conversation and tells Gwyneth to stop, asking who it is that she doesn't hold in contempt and then suggests that it might be Ragnor. She replies that Wulfgar - the bastard child - can know nothing of a gently-born knight. When Gwyneth leaves the room, Aislinn continues to say that she is the slave and that she is intent on serving him, going so far as to fasten the ankle chain and prepares to lie down on the floor, which angers Wulfgar. He finally says that he's going to sleep in the stables with Sweyn and leaves the room.



Chaptrs 16 through 19 Analysis

Though Wulfgar seems often to pay little heed to Aislinn, he does listen. She has told him that Sanhurst - though a large boy - is still young and urges Wulfgar to have patience with him. On the day of the joust, Wulfgar notes that Sanhurst doesn't have kindling in the bedroom for a fire and is late clearing the breakfast dishes, but recalling Aislinn's words, doesn't chastise him.

Maida is gleeful at the knowledge that Aislinn is expecting, but it's an emotion borne of her hatred for the Normans. She says that Aislinn will have a bastard, the son of a bastard, and somehow believes that will be her revenge upon Wulfgar. The thought is never fully explained, and it's left to the reader to decide the full meaning of her thought.

Wulfgar still insists that he won't marry Aislinn, even to give the child a name. There seems to be some doubt in the minds of most as to whether the child is Wulfgar's or Ragnor's, though Aislinn says that she had her monthly cycle since the night she spent in Ragnor's bed. Aislinn simply believes that she'll love the child no matter what and that she wants Wulfgar to be a father to the baby, regardless of the child's parentage. Wulfgar says that he knows of a childless couple who will take the child in, love it and raise it well. He plans to send the baby to that couple. Kerwick expects this and even though he half expects Wulfgar to punish him for saying so, tells Wulfgar that Aislinn will not be separated from her child. As for Aislinn, she never considers that Wulfgar would be planning to send the child away but assumes that he's going to send them both away. With this in mind, she agrees to run away with her mother, takes only the most meager possessions and heads north. Milderd helps them prepare for their journey and informs Wulfgar immediately upon his return from the day's work. Wulfgar sets out after them and brings them home, but not before Aislinn spends a frightening night among the wolves. While she fears being set upon, a large wolf comes near the camp and lies near Aislinn, stirring only when Wulfgar arrives and taking the entire pack with it as it leaves. Aislinn goes so far as to admit to herself that she's relieved to have Wulfgar in charge and to be again under his protection.

Before taking her back to Darkenwald, Wulfgar asks Aislinn why she ran away when she has everything she wants - food, a strong arm for protection and love every night - and has only to ask if there's something more. She says that the food is guarded by a jealous woman, who doles out with a greedy hand what was once Aislinn's own, that she spends more time protecting others than being protected, and that she is the slave of a Norman lord and cannot say whether the baby she carries was conceived in love. She then says that she's forced to watch as a harlot dances for the one who would be Aislinn's protector. Wulfgar denies that he's interested in Haylan, but says that she entertains him and then points out that Aislinn is never as anxious to please him. When she objects, he says that she seems always to have an excuse. Aislinn says that she wishes she were indifferent to him, so it didn't matter. It's not clear whether it's at this point that Wulfgar finally sees that what Aislinn desires most of all is security, but it seems possible that this could be the turning point though Wulfgar doesn't say so.



Chapters 20 through 22

Chapters 20 through 22 Summary

Wulfgar sleeps in the stable, waking the soldiers who sleep there often, with his anger at the situation. Things continue to worsen between Aislinn and Gwyneth with Haylan taking Gwyneth's side and Maida slipping further into insanity with her hatred. Wulfgar and Aislinn continue to argue the point of marriage with Wulfgar stoutly refusing and Aislinn knowing that she is nothing more than a temporary plaything that can be discarded at his will without it. She is soon very depressed and goes about reminding Wulfgar that she is his slave, his servant and helps serve the meal in the evenings, leaving Gwyneth to take the seat vacated by Aislinn. One evening, Bolsgar tells Wulfgar that he should have compassion on Aislinn and either marry her or allow Kerwick to marry her. Bolsgar says that Kerwick is man enough to raise the child as his own, regardless of what may be known about the child. Bolsgar then says that he wishes he had taken that course.

The next morning, Wulfgar wakes Aislinn, tells her that Milderd and Hlynn are preparing a scented bath that is certain to raise her spirits, that she is to dress in the yellow that day, and then leaves the room before Aislinn - angry at his commanding ways - can find something to throw at him. He tells her that they are expecting guests but nothing more. Shortly, one of the knights arrives with a package of quality clothing, which Wulfgar accepts, gives to Kerwick and instructs him to dress. Wulfgar himself is dressed in green, and Aislinn notes that he is very handsome. She is beautiful in the yellow with her hair artfully arranged by Hlynn and Milderd. After some time, the guest arrives. It is Friar Dunley and Wulfgar motions Bolsgar to bring Aislinn to his side as he faces the monk. It's only then that those present realize that Wulfgar is marrying Aislinn. Gwyneth and Haylan are stunned and angry, as is Maida. Everyone else - including Kerwick - is pleased.

After the ceremony, a feast begins, and it's during the revelry that Wulfgar announces that he has need of a sheriff - someone who will see that justice is administered fairly. He says this person will have the authority to take action in Wulfgar's name, even in his absence, and asks Kerwick - who is fluent in both languages being spoken in Darkenwald - to hold the position, which he accepts.

The next morning, all the men who had drank too much the previous night are dealing with hangovers. Gowain says that Milbourne is "ailing" and is still in bed. Wulfgar, saying that his soldiers are worth little that day anyway, declares a day of rest, and he and Aislinn spend the day riding, returning that evening to a leisurely meal. Afterward, Aislinn visits Maida, telling her mother that she (Maida) had given no thought to the consequences of her attempt on Wulfgar's life. Aislinn says that William is on the throne and that if Maida had killed William's friend, Wulfgar, Aislinn would have been "stripped and nailed on the door of Darkenwald," while Maida would have been hanged. She then tells Maida that Wulfgar is her chosen, that she loves him, and that she will not have



Maida's grandson be born without a father. Aislinn wants to then comfort her mother, who nods her understanding of what Aislinn has said, but knows that the harsh words likely carry more weight than kindness. She returns to Darkenwald and to Wulfgar

That spring, Wulfgar begins the building of a new castle, as ordered by William, for the defense of Darkenwald and Cregan. Then news comes that William will visit. William, upon his arrival, immediately evokes Gwyneth's anger by his familiarity with Aislinn, teasing that she had grown since he'd last seen her. She provides ale for a number of William's traveling companions, and some tell her that they are English, held captive by William. They then say that she's wasted no time in bedding the Norman knight. She returns that they are judging without knowing the full story—that her father died at the hands of the Normans, and that she has come to realize that there's no use fighting William, going so far as to say that he might do good things for England, given time. As she returns to the manor, she encounters a lone knight and is upon him before she discovers it's Ragnor, who immediately begs her to come away with him. She says that she and Wulfgar are now married, prompting Ragnor's anger. He swears that he'll have her and that the marriage means nothing. He then goes to Gwyneth's room, takes her fiercely while thinking of Aislinn's perfection, but then takes time to show Gwyneth a little tenderness but is anxious to leave. Wulfgar is relieved to find Ragnor outside and Aislinn safe upon his return from touring the new building site with William.

As summer wears on, Wulfgar's men deal with a period of thievery before things settle into routine. One night, as Aislinn retires early to bed because of fatigue with the advanced pregnancy, Wulfgar tells Bolsgar and Sweyn that marriage is difficult, that he made vows, but he hates the fact that he needs Aislinn but isn't allowed to take her. He then says that at least Aislinn will never wonder who the mother of her child is while Wulfgar may very well raise a "brat" that isn't of his loins, that it could be Ragnor's child or even Kerwick's, for all Wulfgar knows. Sweyn says that if he could turn back the clock, he would never let Wulfgar near Aislinn. Bolsgar grabs Wulfgar by the shirt and would have hit him, but his anger drains away quickly. Then Wulfgar is picking himself up from the floor, and Sweyn is rubbing his knuckles, saying he has no reason not to hit Wulfgar for his slander of Aislinn's good character. Wulfgar, out cold, is carried to his chambers where Sweyn first says Wulfgar drank too much then admits that he hit him. The following day, Wulfgar tells the two men that he is sorry for the things he said against Aislinn and asks for forgiveness, adding some teasing that he fears his old knights are losing their strength, since his face feels as if he's been kissed overly hard. Sweyn says that he worried for Wulfgar's face, and that's the reason he held back the full force of his punch. The men drink an unspoken toast.

When Aislinn's time come, Wulfgar is beset by worry. He fears that the child will have Ragnor's dark looks, rather than his own blondness. He considers that Aislinn or the child - or both - could die. He spends much of the day riding, stopping to look at progress on the castle and notes that most people, anxious for the security the castle will lend them all, willingly go to help on the construction after completing their own day's work. Wulfgar spends some time near Erland's grave, saying that had Ragnor come upon him in the manner he approached Erland, Wulfgar would also fight. He pledges to Erland that he will do his best by the people of the village and prays that



there will be many grandsons roaming over this land. He then hears the cry of a newborn, goes in to find Aislinn well and the child - a redhead like his mother - healthy. Wulfgar, though he wanted the child to be blond so to obviously belong to Wulfgar, is pleased that at least the baby's hair isn't black.

Chapters 20 through 22 Analysis

There is a game during the party following the ceremony in which Wulfgar is blindfolded and Aislinn disguised among the women present, even to the point of slipping a rough cover over her soft gown. Wulfgar touches several other than Aislinn first, dismissing them because of too-large arms or some other difference before finding Aislinn. As he takes her in his arms, the men of the hall warn that his wife is watching this foolishness, but Wulfgar is not swayed and later says that every woman has her own personal scent, and that he merely followed his nose.

After Aislinn goes to her chambers, Maida enters, griping about the length of time Hlynn and Milderd stayed in Aislinn's room. She says that they are friends and only wanted to wish her well on her marriage. Maida is angry, saying that the only revenge she had hoped for was that Aislinn was carrying his bastard son, and that the marriage means that is no longer so. Aislinn tries to reason with her mother, but Maida is not interested in listening. It's interesting that somewhere along the way, Aislinn has become nothing to her mother except a way by which Maida might exact revenge. As Wulfgar is coming to bed with Aislinn, she sees a shadow and cries out, prompting Wulfgar to move just in time to avoid being struck seriously by an axe wielded by Maida. There is a wound, but it is superficial. He considers that Aislinn might have provided Maida the axe, but Aislinn denies it and tells him that she takes her vows seriously. Wulfgar eventually comes to the conclusion that he should simply leave Maida in Aislinn's hands.

The change in Aislinn's actions following the wedding is dramatic. She comes willingly into Wulfgar's arms, secure in her position as his wife rather than simply a plaything of whom he might tire. She teases and initiates kisses and more. At one point during their ride, Wulfgar reaches toward Aislinn, and she whirls on her mount, saying that she will not "brook this ceaseless fondling," and prompting him to chase her. While they sit in a meadow with Aislinn weaving spring flowers into a garland, Wulfgar says he believes she's planned this day since their first meeting, but she says it was only since their first kiss.

Wulfgar soon understands that there are many advantages with his marriage to Aislinn. Not only is she willing and ready to come to him, she is also obviously trusting in her husband - a fact that doesn't escape the notice of the villagers who dare step forward to talk with Wulfgar because of Aislinn's trust. In addition, Aislinn works with Wulfgar, tending the ill when necessary and paving the path between Wulfgar's men and her own people.

When Ragnor encounters Aislinn, he begs her to leave with him, saying that he can disguise her from the king and that his cousin will find some other place to sleep so he



and Aislinn can have the tent to themselves. But when Ragnor is in Gwyneth's bed, she begs him to take her with him. Ragnor says that he can't, that the king would not allow it and that he shares a tent with Vachel so there is no place for her to sleep. It's interesting that he was so anxious to make accommodations possible for Aislinn but not for Gwyneth.



Chapters 23 through 25

Chapters 23 through 25 Summary

They name the child Bryce, and Maida is often seen observing the child. Meanwhile, the preparations of food for the coming winter takes most of the time. The harvests are rich and the larders stuffed with sausages, sweetmeats, honey and more. Haylan is in demand for her knowledge of food storage, and she remains busy, having removed herself from Gwyneth some time before. Miles, Haylan's son, often spends time with Sweyn, learning the ways of the wildlife. One day, he ventures into the swamp to check a trap, slips and falls into the cold river, where he is trapped for hours. Haylan refuses to have Aislinn near, saying that the lady of the manor is a witch and using the fact that she blinded Wulfgar to anyone else as proof. Sweyn, returning from errands of his own to discover the situation, demands that Haylan allow Aislinn to help nurse the boy, now weakening quickly. She spends the night caring for the child until he sleeps peacefully. Days later, Haylan comes to Aislinn, begging her forgiveness for her previous attitude and gaining Aislinn's promise of friendship.

Everyone gathers the following day for a feast to celebrate a successful harvest. There is to be a boar hunt and Wulfgar asks who is responsible for the hounds, but no one speaks up. He calls to Kerwick, citing the number of nights Kerwick was forced to sleep among the hounds and asks if Kerwick is up to the task of being keeper of the hounds. Kerwick points to one, says he believes that one bit him on the thigh, and that he's ready to take on the challenge.

Gwyneth joins the boar hunt, hates the fact that Aislinn's horse is better than her own, and beats her horse, hoping for greater speed and control. When Aislinn remarks that it's a good day, Gwyneth is rude. She says that Aislinn seems always to gain something better for everything she loses. Aislinn, citing the "loss" of Ragnor, says this is true, prompting Gwyneth's cry of anger as she lashes out at Aislinn's horse, making the beast shy into a thicket before throwing Aislinn, who is then almost attacked by a boar before Wulfgar arrives. He kills the beast and takes Aislinn into a secluded copse, where they lay together until the others find them. Aislinn says only that she fell from her horse, not mentioning Gwyneth's role in the incident.

Then word comes from William of the likelihood of impending trouble from Flemish forces, and Wulfgar orders all the food from Cragen be moved within the new castle walls because Cragen is more difficult to defend. While this is going on, the women gather rushes for arrows and others ensure that weaving is constant in order that the town might have ample supplies of everything needed to hold against invaders and to offer support to William. Then smoke is seen from the direction of Cragen, and Wulfgar arrives to find everything destroyed. Friar Dunley says that they even fired the church, that the previous invaders had at least been looking for loot, but these seem bent only on destruction. Wulfgar vows that those responsible will pay. There is one fatality among the raiders, and it's noted that both he and his mount are hungry, meaning the raiders



will find somewhere to lay up so the horses can eat from the rich grasses and the men eat from the game found in the area.

Over the next days, the raiders kill several animals, usually taking little or no meat, and burn everything they come to, sometimes luring Wulfgar and his men in one direction while actually striking another. Gwyneth says one evening that she fears she'll have to take up sword to defend herself while the men are out running around and catching none of the thieves. Bolsgar tells her that she doesn't need a sword, since her tongue cuts so well, prompting Gwyneth to jump to her feet and leave her sewing within Bryce's reach. When Gwyneth discovers that Bryce has her sewing, she snatches it from him, scratching his arm and yelling that she'll teach him to keep his hands from her things. Before she can make good on the threat, Aislinn kicks Gwyneth's feet from beneath her and says that she will tear Gwyneth from end to end if she ever lays a hand on the child. Aislinn says that, "I am a woman full grown," and that she can take Gwyneth's abuse, but that she won't see it turned on Bryce, that regardless of his parentage, he is hers.

Over the coming days, the raiders avoid Wulfgar until it's certain that there's a traitor in their midst. They set a trap, and it's Aislinn who discovers that Gwyneth leaves the manor shortly after Wulfgar, meets briefly with a man at the edge of the woods and returns to the manor. The raiders, led by Ragnor, attempt to set a trap for Wulfgar and his men, but Aislinn sends Bolsgar to warn them and Wulfgar's troops win the battle. They are unable to find either Ragnor or Vachel because the two men are at Darkenwald, taking Aislinn and Bryce hostage. Beaufort and Kerwick fall attempting to defend against Ragnor.

When Wulfgar returns to the hall, Haylan - almost hysterical - says that Gwyneth opened the door to Ragnor and tells of Aislinn's abduction. Kerwick rouses upon Wulfgar's return, apologizes for failing and is given the duty of tending the hall in Wulfgar's absence. Wulfgar and Sweyn plan to travel light, without armor, and are joined by Bolsgar, who says he wants to be certain that Gwyneth is fully punished for her traitorous crimes. Aislinn's group moves quickly, and Ragnor becomes increasingly angry at Bryce's dissatisfaction at being held rather than allowed down for a romp. After awhile, they encounter an old crone, and Ragnor suggests they leave Bryce there, saying that if Wulfgar follows, the child will soon be reclaimed. Aislinn, realizing that she has a better chance to escape unhindered by the child, agrees. She later discovers that Gwyneth, upon handing the child to the crone, convinces the crone that she needs someone young to beg for her and warns her of an evil knight who might seek the child.

Wulfgar soon catches up with the band, and Vachel is left to protect Ragnor's back as he continues with the women. Vachel and the two knights who remain behind are soon dead, though Sweyn's horse is also killed. Wulfgar says that he'll go on and leaves Sweyn with instructions to return to the hall. Ragnor chooses a place to camp, and Wulfgar soon catches up. Wulfgar gives a low, moaning howl - his battle cry. Ragnor pulls Aislinn to her feet, kissing her as Gwyneth watches. Gwyneth begs Ragnor not go into battle with Aislinn's unwilling kiss on his lips because it's bad luck, but he calls her a "she dog" and orders that she "be gone." He says that he's tasted Heaven in Aislinn's embrace and would not now look to her for anything. Gwyneth, rushing to him again,



provokes Ragnor to strike out at her; she strikes her head on a wall of rocks. Ragnor and Wulfgar battle then, and the fight would have continued, but Ragnor suddenly stops, looks down as Aislinn's dagger sticking from his chest, and notes that "the bitch" killed him, referring to Gwyneth. Wulfgar cuts Aislinn from where Ragnor bound her, and Aislinn runs to Gwyneth, who begs forgiveness for her jealousy and spite. Gwyneth then tells Wulfgar that her mother made a deathbed request that Gwyneth has not been able to fulfill, but will now. She says that it wasn't Wulfgar who was the bastard child, but Gwyneth and her younger brother. Gwyneth says her mother couldn't seem to get hold of the lie and set it to rights. Gwyneth also feared the ostracism and couldn't bring herself to tell. With her head in Aislinn's lap, Gwyneth dies.

Wulfgar and Aislinn are unable to return to the old crone but go by way of boat directly to the marshes near Darkenwald with plans to leave the following day to search for Bryce. They find Bolsgar, Sweyn, Maida, Kerwick, Haylan and Milderd all busy about the manor when they arrive. Wulfgar announces that both Ragnor and Gwyneth are dead and that they'll leave at first light in search of an old crone with a withered arm. Bolsgar says the woman will steal you blind and that it took some dealing for him to buy back the "baggage" that Aislinn left behind. He then summons Maida, who reveals the sleeping Bryce in her arms.

Bolsgar then tells Wulfgar that he knows they are truly father and son, and that Bryce is Wulfgar's son. He cites a birthmark on the buttocks that occurs every other year as his proof. Wulfgar relates Gwyneth's tale of their parentage. It's then Maida - now clean and seeming more sane than she had in months - says that she'd never doubted Bryce's parentage. She says that she slipped a sleeping herb into Ragnor's drink on their first night in the hall and that Ragnor forced Aislinn to drink it as well. Maida says that she hid in the room, ready to protect Aislinn if need be, and that Ragnor had fallen almost immediately asleep and that Maida had wakened Aislinn before Ragnor the following morning. She then says that she took Aislinn's torn kirtle away after the first night she slept with Wulfgar, hiding the blood of Aislinn's virginity. Later, Wulfgar and Aislinn have a moment alone and he says that he never thought he would love as he loves her. She teases that it's time he came around, to which he vows never to go hunting for war, but to remain with her in Darkenwald, making it safe for their sons.

Chapters 23 through 25 Analysis

Wulfgar, having had a kiss with Aislinn interrupted, wonders if they will ever have time alone together. He notes that he withheld his passions from her after the birth of the child, but that time has now passed and if Aislinn is not tending the babe or someone who is ill or needs her attention, Wulfgar is being sought out to deal with some issue.

Wulfgar has not fully accepted Bryce but admits that he can't stand the thought of sending the boy away. As Aislinn leaves to tend Miles, she hands Wulfgar the baby with instructions to call Milderd if the child cries. Wulfgar sits with the boy, finally finds a comfortable position where Bryce is happy, and Aislinn arrives the next morning to find the two asleep in the bed together. Later, Aislinn leaves Bryce in Wulfgar's care as she



goes to consult Milderd about the following day's meals. While Wulfgar holds the sleeping boy, he suddenly realizes that there are more things to bond him to Aislinn than the vows they took. He also realizes that it doesn't matter who fathered Bryce because the boy is his son and would be raised as such. When Ragnor arrives in Aislinn's room, she offers to leave Bryce behind, but Ragnor says that Gwyneth says that Wulfgar now tenderly plays with the child, making the boy valuable as a hostage.

After Kerwick is injured, Haylan tends him and it seems that some affection between the two begins to bloom.

As Ragnor prepares to face Wulfgar, he looks at Aislinn with something akin to respect. He wonders what his life might have been with her at his side and thinks back to that first time he saw her and that he couldn't have known how she would lead to his ruin. He acknowledges that unless Vachel was successful in his fight against Wulfgar, their own face-off is inevitable.



Characters

Aislinn

Aislinn soon responds to Wulfgar physically but isn't able to come to him willingly because she feels their love should be sanctified by marriage. Neither admits to their love for some time, though Aislinn is the first to say that she wonders if what she feels could be love. At that point, she is horrified by the thought, continuing to hold the position of little more than a slave in Wulfgar's household. There's no exact moment when the two admit to their love and both seem to come by the understanding gradually.

While their love is at the heart of the story, there are other cases of love blooming in the story, not the least of which is Maida's love for her grandson. Maida's mind is damaged by watching the death of her husband and then suffering ill-treatment at the hands of Ragnor. Aislinn says that it appears Maida's sanity is in danger but later says that she believes it's hatred that spurs Maida's actions. After Bryce is born, Maida stops spending so much time alone in her own cabin. She begins cleaning herself and wearing clean clothes, looking less like a hag and more like the woman who oversaw Darkenwald before the invasion. Maida then begins watching Bryce, though from the outside unless invited in. When she is near the child, she plays with him and there's little doubt that there's a bond growing there that binds Maida to the little boy and to sanity.

Meanwhile, Haylan - who had been intent on gaining Wulfgar's attention - is constantly sniping at Kerwick - Aislinn's former betrothed. Kerwick returns the favor and the two often seem angry with each other. After Kerwick is injured, Haylan tends him, and upon Aislinn's return to Darkenwald, the two seem to have come around to each other, indicating a budding love affair.

Wulfgar

One of William's knights, Wulfgar has lived the majority of his life believing he is a bastard - a lie told by his mother because his father favored him over his brother. As it turns out, Wulfgar's brother was the bastard and his mother was likely seeking favor for that son, prompting her to tell the lie. Wulfgar has a chip on his shoulder about this point but is in all other ways completely fair. When he discovers that Ragnor has killed Aislinn's father and several of the serfs who served him, Wulfgar is livid. He tells Ragnor that had Erland been approached with tact, he would have been won over to surrender without bloodshed. He tells Ragnor that everyone will be needed to make Darkenwald and Cregan productive enough to survive the coming winter and that those killed were slain unnecessarily.

When it comes to women, Wulfgar is unyielding, saying only that he uses them for what he needs from them and then moves on. He says that he has always been very careful that none carry his child but makes an exception with Aislinn, apparently because he



feels differently about her from the beginning, though he doesn't admit as much until much later.

Sweyn

Wulfgar's most trusted knight. Sweyn is left in charge of Darkenwald and to oversee and protect Aislinn when Wulfgar leaves to secure the lands around Darkenwald for William. It's Sweyn who is called when Gwyneth is about to whip Aislinn, and he interrupts, telling Gwyneth that he's been charged with Aislinn's welfare and to keep her safe from everyone, including women, and that he's taking Aislinn where it's safe—this to protect both Aislinn and Gwyneth.

Gwyneth

Wulfgar's half-sister. Gwyneth is bitter, hates everyone and makes life miserable for all those at Darkenwald. When Wulfgar leaves the hall, Gwyneth rules with an iron fist, hating Aislinn all the more when servants and others seek her out over Gwyneth or ask Aislinn whether to follow Gwyneth's orders. Gwyneth carries the secret that their mother lied when she said that Wulfgar was not Bolsgar's son, and that it's actually Gwyneth and the other brother who do not belong to Bolsgar. She dies at the hands of Ragnor, who she believes she loves and begs Aislinn's and Wulfgar's forgiveness just before she dies.

Bolsgar

Wulfgar's father. He is nursed by Aislinn and soon cares for the girl, saying that he wishes he had the right to tell Wulfgar to marry her, but he gave up that place of authority in his son's life when he sent Wulfgar away. It's Bolsgar who retrieves Bryce from the old crone with whom Aislinn left him and who discovers that the boy bears the family birthmark, marking him as Bolsgar's grandson and eliminating the concern over both Bryce's and Wulfgar's parentage.

Maida

Aislinn's mother. Maida is driven almost mad over the death of her husband and their treatment at the hands of the raiders. She hates passionately but seems to come around upon the birth of her grandson, Bryce, and the connection between grandmother and child becomes increasingly important until Maida seems to return to her old self.

Ragnor de Marte

One of the soldiers who arrives at the home of Aislinn on behalf of Wulfgar. Ragnor kills Erland, attempts to rape Aislinn, leads Gwyneth into believing he cares for her and



continues to pursue Aislinn to the point that he kidnaps her and her son, Bryce. Ragnor dies at Gwyneth's hand, but not before he mortally wounds Gwyneth.

Hlynn

A young maid, who is at Darkenwald when it is attacked and is forced to serve ale to the conquerors before two of them fight over her with the winner taking her upstairs. Aislinn later rescues Hlynn from Ragnor, keeping the young woman with her during Ragnor's stays at Darkenwald. Hlynn also accompanies Aislinn to London for William's coronation.

Kerwick

Aislinn's betrothed. She notes that she had rejected many offers of marriage before her father becomes impatient and chooses for her. Kerwick is standing in the great hall when Aislinn is forced to choose between Wulfgar and Ragnor, and though she feels for Kerwick, she knows she can do nothing to help him through his current situation, because she is faced with the need for self-preservation. Kerwick eventually accepts that Aislinn belongs to Wulfgar and attempts to protect her when Ragnor kidnaps her. As the story ends, Kerwick seems enamored of Haylan.

Erland

Aislinn's father. When Ragnor arrives with his men, a herald begins reading a list of demands and Ragnor gives Erland, then sixty-five years old, no chance to negotiation. Enraged, Erland strikes the herald, beheading him, and Ragnor soon kills Erland. As things settle into routine, Wulfgar stands at Erland's grave and pledges to care for Darkenwald and its people, and that Erland will have many grandsons playing on the property.

Friar Dunley

The Friar who comes to Darkenwald to oversee the ceremonies for the dead. It's Friar Dunley who questions Wulfgar's intentions for Aislinn, saying that he should either marry her or set her free so that Kerwick could marry her. Wulfgar denies both options, roaring out that the Friar should see to the consecrating of the dead and leave other matters alone. Dunley eventually performs the marriage ceremony of Wulfgar and Aislinn.

Hilda

A woman who lives near Darkenwald. She is set upon by thieves, who burn some of her property and rape and kill her daughter, killing some other members of her family as well. Hilda is crawling to her daughter when Wulfgar arrives at the scene, splits his men



and follows the two parties of thieves. Both groups are captured or killed, and Wulfgar gives one of the captured horses to Hilda, though he notes it isn't nearly enough to make up for the loss of her daughter. Hilda is taken with the generous gesture, which prompts him to wonder about her new lord. She later takes in Thomas, one of Erland's knights who returns after Wulfgar has taken over Darkenwald.

Milderd

The woman Wulfgar's men meet with her family as they struggle to get their cart unstuck. Wulfgar gives Milderd a gift and message for Aislinn, and the woman becomes Aislinn's friend and confidante, urging Haylan to leave Wulfgar alone.

Haylan

Milderd's sister-in-law. Haylan turns down Wulfgar's advances when he calls Aislinn's name. Upon learning that Aislinn is only Wulfgar's mistress, Haylan sets her sights on him and vows to win his heart, spurred on by Gwyneth who would like to see anyone unseat Aislinn. Haylan apologizes to Aislinn when Aislinn saves the life of Miles, Haylan's young son.



Objects/Places

Darkenwald

Aislinn's home.

Cregan

The village next to Aislinn's manor. Cregan and Darkenwald are given to Wulfgar by King William.

Stamford Bridge

Where Thomas was wounded, making it impossible for him to continue with his troops.

Senlac

Where Wulfgar's younger brother was killed by the Normans.

The Hun

Wulfgar's large warhorse.

Hastings

Where Ragnor takes letters to William's ships and where he meets his uncle, Cedric, who berates him on his actions and his failure to secure lands for his family.

The Marsh

An area near Darkenwald where Aislinn collects mud for Bolsgar's wounded leg.

Kevonshire

Where Ragnor and Vachel ride near the Saxon village, luring the villagers out and prompting the attack on Wulfgar's men. Wulfgar later burns the village, leaving the people some of their possessions and all the food with only the church for shelter.



London

Where William is to be crowned on Christmas day.

The Merchant's House

It's where Wulfgar and his men are staying in London when he summons Aislinn to him.



Themes

Patience

Though Aislinn takes a long time to voice the word "love" in describing her feelings toward Wulfgar, she early on wants to have Wulfgar as her husband rather than just as her lover. While it isn't only love that makes her desire to have Wulfgar as her husband, there's no doubt that she exhibits an incredible patience toward that end. Aislinn responds to Wulfgar's physical overtures, but not fully. She has been raised to believe that what they are doing is wrong, and she believes that she should keep her image unsullied before others. While Aislinn is patient to a degree, she does things to remind Wulfgar of her position as his slave. When he gives her gifts, she thanks him, then says she must be the best-dressed slave in the country. She gives up her seat beside him at the table and serves him. She goes so far as to put the chain back on her ankle one night, as he did the first few nights they were together.

Wulfgar takes much longer to openly admit that he loves Aislinn, but his patience and caring toward her is evident. He admits that he knows how to handle her when she's angry and ranting at him, but not when she quietly cries after they have sex. He also tells her that she shouldn't care what others say about them and that he doesn't care, but eventually takes the step to marry her, apparently simply because he cares about her.

Love

Aislinn soon responds to Wulfgar physically but isn't able to come to him willingly because she feels their love should be sanctified by marriage. Neither admits to their love for some time, though Aislinn is the first to say that she wonders if what she feels could be love. At that point, she is horrified by the thought, continuing to hold the position of a slave in Wulfgar's household. There's no exact moment when the two admit to their love and both seem to come by the understanding gradually.

While their love is at the heart of the story, there are other cases of love blooming in the story, not the least of which is Maida's love for her grandson. Maida's mind is damaged by watching the death of her husband and then suffering the ill-treatment at the hands of Ragnar. Aislinn says that it appears Maida's sanity is in danger but later says that she believes it's hatred that spurs Maida's actions. After Bryce is born, Maida stops spending so much time alone in her own cabin. She begins cleaning herself and wearing clean clothes, looking less like a hag and more like the woman who oversaw Darkenwald before the invasion. Maida then begins watching Bryce, though from outside unless invited in. When she is near the child, she plays with him and there's little doubt that there's a bond growing there that binds Maida to the little boy and to sanity.



Meanwhile, Haylan - who had been intent on gaining Wulfgar's attention - is constantly sniping at Kerwick - Aislinn's former betrothed. Kerwick returns the favor, and the two often seem angry with each other. After Kerwick is injured, Haylan tends him and upon Aislinn's return to Darkenwald, the two seem to have come around to each other, indicating a budding love affair.

Pride

While the love between Aislinn and Wulfgar is at the heart of the story, the relationship between Wulfgar and his father is also important. Bolsgar admits that it was his pride that prompted him to send Wulfgar away after Wulfgar's mother confessed that Wulfgar was not Bolsgar's child. Bolsgar says that he regrets that action and urges Wulfgar not to make the same mistake with Bryce when the child's parentage remains in question. As Gwyneth lies dying, she admits to Wulfgar that her mother - upon her own deathbed - had said that she'd lied about Wulfgar's parentage and that it was actually Gwyneth and their younger brother who were not Bolsgar's children. Gwyneth says she promised her mother that she would tell the truth but that she couldn't stand the thought of being referred to as "bastard," though she often referred to Wulfgar with that name.

Aislinn and Wulfgar are each a study in pride. Even Wulfgar remarks on the fact that Aislinn has been conquered but that her pride remains in tact and she doesn't give in the hysterics and pleading that would have been the case with most women in her position. It's that pride that makes her a favorite in William's court because she has not bowed to her circumstances.



Style

Point of View

The book is written in third person, largely from Aislinn's point of view but varying sometimes to others' points of view, usually Wulfgar or Ragnor. This limited omniscient point of view is really the only option. While it's vital that the reader know of Aislinn's thoughts, Wulfgar's view is important as well. The combination of the points of view is handled well, often with clever transitions. For example, Wulfgar is in London preparing to have his men housed at the home of a merchant for the duration of William's coronation ceremonies. As he looks over the house, he is thinking of Aislinn. He says that he can't stop thinking of her, but goes on to say that "somehow, I find myself wishing that she ..." His thought abruptly ends at that instant and the point of view switches to Aislinn. Her thought is begun in mid-sentence with "... he would pledge that loyalty to me," indicating that Aislinn is thinking about Wulfgar as he is thinking about her. At another point, the snow is falling on a village Wulfgar has just conquered when the perspective changes to Aislinn, who pauses for a moment, turning her face up to the falling snowflakes.

Setting

The story is set in England, beginning in 1066. The background for the story - William's invasion of England and the role of knights as invaders - are real. Details such as William's nickname, the Conqueror, are historically correct, lending credence to the story. Wulfgar is not mentioned in history in connection with William's rise to the throne, which is acceptable in the novel. The fact that the background is true is sufficient.

There are details, such as social customs of the day, that also lend an air of believability. Through these details, the reader may get a better look at the England of this time period. For example, there is a significant class distinction between the nobles and the serfs; in this case, the invading Normans and those who were conquered. For example, Aislinn touts her position as slave on several occasions. When Gwyneth takes all her better clothing, Aislinn says that the clothes were hers, but Gwyneth says that a slave can't own anything. Aislinn then takes a different tack, saying that everything that is hers now belongs to her master - Wulfgar - and that when Gwyneth takes Aislinn's clothing, she is actually stealing from her own brother.

There are some interesting scenes as well, many that offer historical insight into customs and events of the day. For example, Wulfgar and Ragnor are ordered to joust with the winner taking Darkenwald and Aislinn. The nobles gather to watch the event but there are bright banners around the perimeter so that the commoners - the peasants and serfs - cannot see in. It's noted that the event is for the nobles only and not meant for the eyes of those common people.



Language and Meaning

The story is written in easy-to-read English. The story is divided fairly evenly between dialogue and exposition with the author presenting a great deal of the story through this dialogue. The dialogue may prove difficult for some readers. In an apparent effort to keep the story true to the period, the dialogue consists of language that is sometimes not easily grasped. For example, Wulfgar is speaking to his father about the relationship between Wulfgar, Bolsgar and Wulfgar's brother. He says, "My brother? Never, for he became the favored one. You? Deeply, I wouldst think, for you and I were truly father and son. But you in honor to her cast me out, sent me far away to that foppish sot who took the coins you sent and gave me for care but the meanest share."

In addition, there are single words used throughout the manuscript that some readers may find distracting because they are outdated or unfamiliar. Words such as "forsooth," "mail" (referring to a type of armor), and "kirtle" (referring to a piece of clothing) are used throughout the story. There is also a tendency to reverse the normal American English way of speaking. For example, Gwyneth says, "Not a word of warning did she utter," upon her escapade with Aislinn's horse. Modern day speech would have been, "She did not utter a word of warning." As a rule, these differences merely add to the authenticity of the text and most readers will not have an issue with them.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-five chapters of varying lengths. The chapters are only numbered with no real indications to the reader of what is to come. The book is roughly written in chronological order with brief flashbacks to several events. For example, the story opens with a rope around Aislinn's neck, binding her to Ragnor, and Ragnor's men roughly claiming everything in Darkenwald for their own as Aislinn's mother and others serve the men. Then Aislinn sees the blood on Ragnor's mail and his sword and knows that it is her father's blood. She then flashes back to the details of Ragnor's arrival and her father's death.

There is another important detail that is omitted during the telling of the story, only to be revealed at the end. Aislinn is taken to her parents' bedroom by Ragnor and forced into bed. The reader is lead to believe that Ragnor rapes Aislinn but in truth, both fall asleep before the deed is done. It's not until months later that Maida reveals that she had drugged Ragnor planning to escape as the invader slept. However, he'd forced Aislinn to drink from his chalice as well, meaning that they'd both ingested the drug.



Quotes

"Aislinn was stunned by the wild look of him; it was as if he were a hound on a scent. Nay, more than that. A wolf set to wreak vengeance on an ageless enemy." Chapter 2, Page 31

"Her mind tumbled over itself in bewilderment. What manner of man was he that she could hate him so intensely yet at the same time find pleasure in his embrace? Her lips responded to his against her will and her body yielded almost gladly to his greater strength." Chapter 4, Page 74

"I do hope your gowns have not been reduced to the point you have no change for that rag. It is simple to see that if you are put upon again by some lusty male that I will have to draw from my purse a sum to clothe you. You may in a short time, damoiselle, come to cost me more than you're worth." - Wulfgar, Chapter 6, Page 111

"I am lord and master here. Everything you see is mine. Do not trespass needlessly upon my good will. Go tend your graves as I have bid you come but leave the other matters to me." - Wulfgar, Chapter 7, Page 133

"For a brief moment Aislinn's chin trembled, and she turned her back to him to hide this weakness that was utterly strange and foreign to her. Crying for a torn kirtle when all England was laid to waste. But was it for her kirtle she wept or for herself? She, strong, willful and determined, now weakened and brought low by a man who loathed women and just this very moment compared her to the unsavory trollops who trudged the camps of the armies." Chapter 8, Page 135

"Ah, my fine lord, she thought, running the tip of her finger along his lean ribs. You are mine and 'tis only a matter of time I think, before you know it also." Chapter 9, Page 180

"With each day's passing her mother slipped deeper into delusions that demanded revenge on the Normans. If Maida succeeded in her vengeance, William's justice would seek her swiftly. Aislinn knew of no potion that would help in drawing out the festering hatred that twisted her mother's reasoning. She felt deep frustration that she could be of benefit to others, curing their ailments and healing their wounds, yet could do nothing for her only kin." Chapter 13, Page 243

"Where did the difference lie between her and the women he had taken before? She was soft clay in his hands, unable to retain her dignity and pride, without the courage to



withstand his merely advance. Wulfgar held her within his arms and stroked her hair, drawing his fingers through the soft, curling tresses that tumbled over and around them, but as she flung herself from him with a sob he stared at her in surprise." Chapter 14, Page 275

"Be at ease, Wulfgar. I know you well and have every faith in you that you would do anything but see so fine a jewel cast in less than a perfect setting." - King William referring to Wulfgar's treatment of Aislinn, Chapter 15, Page 309

"Even if Ragnor were in truth the sire, Wulfgar would be the father, and she was determined toward that end, whatever came." Chapter 18, Page 340

"Should you succeed and slay a Norman knight to avenge my father, and especially Wulfgar, for he is William's friend, you would only bring the Norman heel hard upon us all. What do you think the Norman's justice is for those who slay his knights while they sleep? Had your blade struck home last eve you would have seen me stripped and nailed to the door of Darkenwald. As for yourself, you would have danced on a rope for all of London to see. You gave this no thought and only dwelt on your own revenge." - Aislinn to her mother, Chapter 21, Page 413

"Leave the sword, my daughter. Take your tongue to them instead. It has far the sharper edge and since it smites your protectors to, it should lay low the worst of our enemies. Who could stand before it? 'Twould surely pierce the stoutest shield and split the holder in twain." - Bolsgar on Gwyneth's comment that she might have to take up a sword to defend herself, Chapter 24, Page 463



Topics for Discussion

How does Aislinn come to be in Ragnor's hands? What happens the first night Ragnor holds Aislinn captive? What does she believe happens? Who changed this course of events?

What is Wulfgar's attitude upon reaching Darkenwald and discovering Ragnor's actions? Why does Ragnor say he has the right to claim Aislinn? Why does Wulfgar object? What is Aislinn forced to do then? How is she treated at Wulfgar's hands? How is this different than Ragnor's treatment?

Who is Gwyneth? Bolsgar? What does Aislinn learn about Wulfgar's parentage? What is eventually revealed about the situation?

What prompts Aislinn's presence in London? What happens when William sees Ragnor and Wulfgar obviously arguing over Aislinn? What is the result of that?

Name at least three people who tell Wulfgar that he should marry Aislinn? Name three who object? What is Maida's basis for objecting to the marriage?

Give at least three examples of Wulfgar's fairness. Why do people begin to trust him? What role does Aislinn play in this?

Who is Bryce? Why is his parentage in question? What happens to put an end to that question? What is Wulfgar's attitude to the child before this? At what point does his attitude change?