

Wench Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Wench revolves around the lives of four Southern slave women who act as mistresses to their masters during the four years of summers when they visit the Tawawa House Resort in the Northern free state of Ohio. Lizzie, Sweet, and Reenie are regulars who have known each other for years, but with the arrival of a new slave, Mawu, as wild as her bright red hair, starts talking about escape, the lives of the four women change forever.

Lizzie, Reenie, Sweet, and Mawu meet at the Tawawa House Resort in Ohio where they "vacation" each summer with their masters. When the slave women first meet Mawu, they are intrigued by her bold personality, her unique appearance, and her absolute fearlessness. Mawu is desperate to run away from her cruel master, Tip, and will stop at nothing to earn her freedom. The prospect of freedom is an exciting one to the other slaves, but they have never thought about running away. The three other slave women enjoy the perks of being mistresses to their masters, including good food, an easier work load, and even education (for some). They know that if they were ever caught trying to run away, or even talking about it, they would be beaten, sold-off to cruel masters, or even killed. Additionally, many of the women have children who also enjoyed an elevated status on their plantations, and they would never want to endanger their children, let alone be separated from them.

But Mawu is different. Her situation is far worse than the other women's and she will stop at nothing to be free from Tip. In the first summer at the Tawawa House, Mawu runs through the woods to a resort for free blacks. There, she meets with some people who give her information, even a map of safe houses of abolitionists who could help her escape to New York. She tries to convince the other mistresses to run away with her, but they are all too afraid to leave their masters. Fearing that Mawu will be caught and killed, she tells her master, Drayle, of Mawu's escape plan, entrusting that he will be discreet with the information, but will somehow stop Mawu from leaving Tip. She is horrified when Tip pulls Mawu out into the courtyard of the resort to beat and sodomize her, until she is unconscious and bleeding, in front of everyone, but particularly in front of the slaves as a warning - if anyone tries to escape, he will do this to them, or worse. This event changes Lizzie's relationship with her friends forever. Although Mawu no longer trusts Lizzie, it is clear that Tip will never beat her determination to reach freedom out of her.

The next summer, Lizzie is shocked to see that Tip has once again brought Mawu to the resort, despite her escape plan from the previous summer. Mawu and the rest of the mistresses are cool and mistrusting of Lizzie, which pains her. She begins sneaking away to spend more time with Glory, the white abolitionist woman, despite the fact that Glory's husband is fearful of being caught with a black woman in his house. When Glory gives Lizzie abolition pamphlets to read aloud to the other slaves, they begin to accept her again, but it is unknown how much they trust her. The summer takes a terrible turn when Sweet, who lost the baby she was carrying the summer before, learns that cholera has struck her home plantation. One by one she receives news that each of



children has died. She loses her mind, and eventually dies. Sweet's death seems to change the mindset of the rest of the slaves, and even Lizzie considers running toward freedom, but she is always drawn back by her love for Drayle. One evening, a fire erupts in Mawu's cabin. The slaves run to put out the blaze and find Mawu, arms burnt into white blisters, crying and repeating the phrase "I tried." No one is sure what she means - did she try to save Tip from the fire and fail? - but then Lizzie realizes that Mawu had tried to kill Tip and failed. During the chaos of trying to put out the fire, Reenie takes Lizzie back to her cabin to clean up her injuries. By morning, they are gone. They have clearly taken their opportunity to run toward freedom. Lizzie doesn't hear anything else about the women until the following summer when Glory takes her to Mawu's hideout in the woods. Mawu has been waiting for Lizzie all these months, refusing to run toward freedom without her. Reenie has made it to New York where she is working as a freed black, but Mawu knew she couldn't leave Lizzie behind. Mawu's dedicated and dangerous love for Lizzie validates something in her mind, but when the time comes, Lizzie still can't leave Drayle. When Mawu tries to run, after all these months of waiting, she is caught by slave catchers on her second night and returned to Tip, presumably to be tortured and possibly even killed.



Part I (1852): Chapters 1 - 5

Part I (1852): Chapters 1 - 5 Summary

The novel opens with six slaves sitting in a circle outside a cabin at the Tawawa House Resort, chewing on flowers, gossiping. The slaves are all regulars, having built up relationships over the years of traveling with their masters: Lizzie, Reenie, and Sweet are all mistresses to their white masters, twins Henry and George, and Philip are all slave men, so entrusted by their masters that they have been brought to the free state of Ohio to help during their masters' vacation. While they sit, braiding each other's hair, a new slave woman with fiery red hair and freckled skin approaches them. Her name is Mawu. The other slaves are smitten with her because of her unique look and invite her to join them. After Mawu sits, George announces that he's heard of a resort nearby for use by freed blacks. None of the women can believe it: freed blacks taking vacation just like the white folk. When she hears this, Mawu's mind is made up - she's going to see this place. The rest of the slaves are shocked, knowing they could never walk away from their cottages. They would surely be beat by their masters or worse. The slaves wonder what kind of relationship Mawu has with her man.

Later, Lizzie meets up with Mawu in the woods to learn how to make Mawu's momma's hare stew. The two women speak covertly about their masters, not wanting to reveal too much about the way they're treated, although it's clear that Lizzie is quite taken with Mawu's wildness, wanting to know everything about her. Mawu accuses Lizzie of loving her master, and Lizzie is too ashamed to answer that yes, she does. The two split the stew and make their ways back home. When Drayle, Lizzie's master arrives home, she tries to execute a careful plan, hoping to ask her questions at just the right moment so she'll catch him when he's at his weakest - still a bit hungry, but satiated from his first bowl of stew. She botches her plan too soon, showing all her emotional cards to her master as she begs him to set their children - the product of their liaisons - free. Drayle is a good man at heart, but views the children he sired with this slave woman to be his property. He has no desire to set them free, and makes that point very clear to Lizzie.

The next morning, the slaves have gathered up enough courage to make their way to the black resort, rumored to be within walking distance of the Tawawa House, on Sunday, their day off. Only Sweet has not been given permission to leave her cottage because she is pregnant. Knowing that they are still in grave danger of punishment if they are caught wandering off the Tawawa House property, the slaves boldly slip into the bordering woods, with Phillip tearing bits of fabric off into ribbons and tying them to the trees to mark their path. As they walk, they are approached by a white woman, Glory, who promises to show them the way. The slaves are untrusting of her, but Lizzie has met her once before: in the woods while she was picking wildflowers for her cottage. Glory offered to show Lizzie where the best flowers grew, and it wasn't a trap.

Although the other slaves want to walk the other way, afraid that Glory is setting them up, Mawu boldly orders the woman to lead the way. They walk for quite some time



before Glory points to a large grey house in the distance. The slaves hide behind trees. Terrified of being caught in slave catcher territory, they watch as a small colored girl runs out from the house and plays in the front yard. Without warning, Mawu races from the cover of the trees and into the resort. Phillip follows at quick clip behind her, trying to pull her back to safety. The rest of the slaves are horrified and must return to their cabins without their friends. Later that day, Mawu is spotted sweeping her cabin as if nothing happened. The slaves meet that night and Mawu describes the house in detail for her friends. With every detail, Lizzie's hopes for her children's lives, should they ever be freed by their father, grows: a piano, a shelf of books, and working for one's own self, not a master. Mawu states that even if the free blacks at the resort wouldn't house a runaway slave - it would be too dangerous at the resort - they would surely know where to send one. Mawu urges the slaves to make a run for it, to escape, but Lizzie would never leave her children. Lizzie is the only one among them that can read and write, and Mawu pressures her to write a letter to Glory asking for her help.

Part I (1852): Chapters 1 - 5 Analysis

The slave women brought to the Tawawa House act as mistresses to their white masters, which is an open secret in the Northern State of Ohio. Although these particular slaves are well-trusted by their masters, and often enjoy a higher status - Lizzie, for example, has never worked in the fields and lives inside the "Big House" in her own private room - they are still slaves and are still treated as such, even in the North. The slaves are hugely mistrusting of white people, first because the social expectations of a slave - humble, meek, and obedient - are deeply engrained in them and also because they don't know which white people can be trusted and which are testing their loyalty or attempting to entrap them. Mawu, however, is the exception to this rule. She is feisty, openly speaks about her plans to escape - if her master even caught a whiff of her escape plans, Mawu would be beaten, sold-off, or even killed - and daringly trusting, particularly of Glory, a white woman. These characteristics show the reader that Mawu has nothing to lose. Although there haven't yet been examples of the inhumane torture that Mawu lives through, it should be clear already that Mawu is a desperate and daring woman who will stop at nothing to be free, whatever the costs. The introduction of Glory shows that there are white people, particularly in the north, who are interested in the abolition of slavery and will help slaves find their freedom, whatever the personal risk for themselves.

It is interesting to note that most of the slave women, particularly these mistresses, have thought about escape but have no intention of leaving their children, fathered by their masters. Mawu, who also has a son by her master, makes the point that as a mother, she will be no good to her son as long as she is a slave. If she were to make it to freedom, she might eventually be able to buy her son's freedom. There is no other way for an enslaved mother to show love to her children than to run. Lizzie doesn't see things this way. She clearly has a different relationship to her master than Mawu does, and she believes that in time, if she is persistent, her man will free their two children. Lizzie's relationship with Drayle is complicated: she is his slave, but when they are up north, he treats her as he would his wife, at least in Lizzie's mind he does. Lizzie has



been Drayle's mistress since she was thirteen-years-old (a very young age, even during these times) and since then, has never had to work in the fields, has been given good food and gifts, has been allowed to raise her own children, has been taught to read, and has been allowed to travel. Many small requests that she has made of Drayle over the years, such as getting medicine for sick slaves, or Sundays off from work so the slaves can attend church services, have been granted. It appears that Drayle does love Lizzie - he treats her well, considering her status - but she is still his slave, his property. Drayle is married to a woman named Fran who has borne him no children, which is another reason why Drayle cares so deeply for Lizzie: she has borne him the son who carries his namesake, Nathaniel, and a daughter who looks white, Rabbit. Lizzie seems to believe that eventually Drayle, who loves his children as much as a man can love his property, will set them free. Whenever she asks, Drayle reminds her how much he loves Lizzie, and how much he protects his children from the life of a slave, which comforts Lizzie enough to live in a constant state of uncertainty about their future.

Drayle is an honest and even caring slave owner, who treats his slaves with as much respect as possible given the circumstances, and rarely, if ever, beats his slaves. Because of this, Lizzie has no recollection of a slave ever trying to escape from Drayle's plantation, which is why she struggles to understand Mawu's desperation to get away. It is unclear why Lizzie feels so drawn to Mawu. Perhaps it is because Mawu's fiery, unpredictable personality is so unlike her own. But Lizzie is entranced by Mawu's spirit and determination. When compared side-by-side, such as in the chapter where the two women are making stew - Lizzie appears naive, extremely vulnerable, and even foolish compared to the world-wise Mawu. This is seen again in the scene in which Mawu runs toward the resort for freed blacks. The resort is important to note because it gives the slaves their first view of freed blacks living a life similar to whites. These freed blacks are on vacation - a completely foreign thought to slaves - doing whatever they please with their own time. Mawu runs toward this place not because she thinks she can run away with them, but because she knows these people, if anyone, will be able to put her in touch with others who might help her escape. Lizzie clearly doesn't understand Mawu's desperate quest for information, and is only worried that her friend will be caught by the slave catchers who roam the woods, which is actually a very real possibility. Mawu doesn't understand why this particular group of slaves has never tried to runaway before. Ohio is a free state. They are slaves given the rare gift of a trip to free land and they need to take advantage of this gift while they still have it.



Part I (1852): Chapters 6 - 11

Part I (1852): Chapters 6 - 11 Summary

This section opens with a description of Mawu's life on Tip's plantation. Tip's wife had died years ago, and it was generally agreed among the slaves that he got meaner with each passing year. Tip didn't believe in hiring an overseer, which meant he did all the monitoring and beating of slaves himself, and he seemed to relish it. He had forcefully taken Mawu many times, and she had birthed four of his children, three of which were sold from under her. The only child she has left is a four-year-old boy with lazy eyes due to a fall. Mawu used whatever arguments she could to convince the other woman to runaway to freedom with her. Mawu has tried many superstitious conjuring and potions to keep Tip away from her, but none have worked. She is desperate to runaway, but knows she needs the other slaves' help, particularly Lizzie's, to contact Glory, the only woman she knows who may be able to help her.

The next day, the slave women receive news that they've been invited to have dinner with their masters in the resort dining hall. A dress saleswoman has been sent over, and the women eagerly choose fancy new dresses to wear to the dinner. Only Reenie seems unamused by the news, and she chooses an ill-fitting dress, completely out of season, that conservatively covers her entire body. The other three women relish in the imagination that they are real ladies, but their excitement fades when they see the probing stares of the resort servants. They eat their dinner with their men in the high, hot attic, far away from the other guests who would likely be offended by the slave's presence in the hall.

While Lizzie and Drayle are dancing, the hotel manager comes in and surveys the room. Something about his look makes Lizzie uncomfortable, and she tries to steer Drayle so his body blocks the manager's view of her. Dinner begins and the women are confused and delighted to be served by freed slaves. The talk between the men drifts into war talk and talk of freed slaves. It is awkward and extremely uncomfortable for the women to hear their masters talking about them as if they are not there. Moments later, the hotel manager returns and beckons for Reenie to join him in the hallway. A fight breaks out when it becomes clear that he wants to sleep with her. Sir, Reenie's master, forces her into the hallway despite her protests. Mawu is the only one to rise from the table in Reenie's defense, but she is slapped back into submission by Sir. Lizzie is horrified and cannot eat another bite of her food.

The next day, while Reenie and Lizzie are cleaning the birds hunted by their masters, Reenie confesses to Lizzie that Sir is her brother, fathered by the same man as her - the plantation owner - but to a white mother. She says that after she had her first daughter, she was waiting for God to "strike his fury in her" but she grew healthy and strong. After that, Reenie knew she wasn't going to take any more chances, and fixed herself so that she couldn't bear any more children. Lizzie is completely shocked by this revelation, but she has heard of incest relationships like this before. Later, she watches as Drayle has



his haircut by the visiting barber and his daughter, freed blacks living in Ohio. The barber is very professional, and he asks Drayle if he would ever consider selling him Philip. Philip is Drayle's most favored slave, and he has no intention of parting ways with him. Although Drayle refuses the barber's offer, Lizzie is proud of him for handling the deal as if he were talking to a white man, not a black one. When she catches up, Mawu tells Lizzie that Philip and the barber's daughter have had a romantic relationship for some time now, and the barber was trying to buy him so the two could get married in freedom. When Lizzie speaks to Drayle about the barber later, she confides in him that some of the slaves, particularly Mawu, are planning to run away. Drayle is outraged and immediately tells Tip about Mawu's plan. Tip pulls Mawu out into the courtyard and whips her with a riding crop. He tears off Mawu's clothes and forces everyone to look at her naked body. When he is sure everyone's eyes are on her, he sodomizes her, thrusting into her until blood trickles down from between her thighs.

Everyone knows that Lizzie was the one to spill the beans about Mawu's plan and none of the slaves will even meet her eye. With nowhere else to turn during her off times, Lizzie makes her way to visit Glory, the white woman, simply to have someone to speak with, however dangerous their conversations might be. She has many questions for Glory, such as why she has no children and whether or not she loves her husband. Glory answers all the questions honestly, but has one question in return: Does Lizzie love Drayle? She answers as best she can, but as she is speaking, Glory's husband enters the room. He says that Lizzie had better leave and that it isn't safe for him to be seen with slaves in his house. Meanwhile, Sweet has gone into labor. Reenie wakes Lizzie in the middle of the night, and Lizzie is pleased to be included despite her betrayal of Mawu. Immediately upon arriving to Sweet's cottage, Lizzie can see that she's in poor shape, but she puts her trust in the fact that Reenie is an excellent midwife. The labor is long and painful, and Mawu thinks they should fetch her master, but Reenie refuses. Despite all their best efforts, Sweet's baby will not come. When it appears that Sweet might die, they call for the white doctor. He arrives and delivers the baby, a "dead thing" as Lizzie calls it. It has nubbed hands and feet and dies the next day.

Part I (1852): Chapters 6 - 11 Analysis

As many readers will have likely guessed, Mawu comes from the most violent and degrading home of all the slave women. She had resigned herself to being treated as an animal, with no one - not even her children - around for her to love. All this changed when she learned that Tip had miraculously chosen her to take to the resort in Ohio on free land. Unlike the other slave women, Mawu does not receive special treatment nor does her children on the plantation. In her mind, she literally has nothing to lose in attempting to escape. Death would be a welcomed relief for her. She tries to convince the other slave women that their masters are just as bad as Tip - Sweet's master works her despite her pregnancy, Reenie's master won't look her in the eye, and Lizzie's master refuses to free the children he claims to love.



The dinner party is an important scene in the novel to show the strong divides between the masters, the slaves they claim to love, and the outside world. Even the freed black woman who sells the slaves their dresses cannot hide her disdain for the women's imaginings that they are real ladies. It appears that the freed blacks covet their position in the north, and look down on favored slaves as much as a plantation slave would. Inside the resort, the couples are seated in the hot alley, with all the lights turned down, as if to conceal the fact that these white men are having dinner with black slaves. Despite their affection for their mistresses, the masters do not treat them with respect. Throughout the dinner, both Sir and Tip repeatedly refer to the women as their property, and even Drayle discusses selling a one-eyed horse, which the reader will later learn is Lizzie's most prized possession. Although Sir's action to send Reenie off with the hotel master is surprising, it is not unexpected, given the historic relationship slave masters had with their "property." As Lizzie watches Reenie being handed off to the manager, she notes that, "She had the look. The look of a woman who is done fighting. The look of a woman months after her children have been sold from her. The look of a slave who has decided it is better not to feel. All three of the women recognized what they saw on her face" (p. 53). The novel does a wonderful job of creating complex relationships between the masters and the slaves. As much as the reader hopes the masters truly love and care for their mistresses, that type of traditional relationship is impossible. The novel will prove that over and over again, and at some point in the novel, each of the slave women will bear Reenie's look.

Many interesting things happen as a result of Sweet's labor. First, Lizzie is allowed back into her group of friends solely for the purpose of helping out with the difficult delivery. Despite the betrayal and anger, these select slaves have no one to rely on but themselves. Indeed, even when the doctor arrives to care for Sweet, it is immediately clear that he believes Sweet is a white woman. The rest of the slaves are too afraid to correct him, fearing that he will leave her to die. As she watches Sweet struggle to deliver, Lizzie thinks back on her own births, both of which drew her emotionally closer to Drayle. With each passing chapter, it becomes clearer and clearer that for Lizzie, the relationship between slave and master has become extremely blurred. Drayle seems to have the power to convince her of anything, and the love she feels for him, and thinks she feels in return, stops her from protecting those who should be held dearest to her heart such as her children and her friends. It is interesting to note that when Lizzie informs Drayle about Sweet's dead baby, he asks if she would like to pray. While Lizzie kneels by the bed, Drayle places his hands on her head, "reverently," the way an elder in a church might lay hands on a sinner. This is an important image for the reader to remember because it again shows the power divide between the slaves and their masters. In this particular moment, it is as if Drayle is God to Lizzie, which highlights the misbalance of power in their relationship. This element will be echoed many times through the novel with Mawu frequently asking if Lizzie thinks Drayle is "god to her." Lizzie's visits with Glory are unusual because she is not one of the slaves who desire to escape, but during her meetings with Glory, it is hinted that Glory and her husband may be apart of the Underground Railroad. This information will be vital to the plot further on in the novel.



Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 12 - 15

Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 12 - 15 Summary

Part Two opens on the night that Drayle first visits Lizzie on the plantation. He came on a terribly hot night to where Lizzie was sleeping in the kitchen and brought her a glass of cold water. The first night he arrived, Lizzie worried that he was setting her up in some kind of trap, but he insisted that he wouldn't leave until she drank every last drop of the water he brought. He came every night, each night inching closer and closer to where she lay on the floor. When he comes to her at night, for the first few weeks, nothing sexual happens, and Lizzie, who is only twelve at the time, thinks back to the young slave she once fancied: Baby, so named for his childish face. The two courted in the way that slaves did, often sneaking off to the shade to kiss, but nothing more ever happened. Soon after, Lizzie was moved into the Big House to work for Fran, so her relationship with Baby ended. Lizzie hopes that her relationship with Drayle will be similar. She wouldn't mind kissing him, but she hopes he won't try to take things any further. Soon after, Drayle starts bringing Lizzie books, teaching her how to read. The first word he teaches her is "she." Whenever Lizzie has the chance, she traces those letters over and over and over: in the flour while she's baking bread, in blood on parchment paper when she pricks her fingers, in the dirt outside the house. Although Lizzie is scared of Drayle's motives in teaching her - lessons which must be kept a secret from everyone, particularly Fran - she seems to understand that Drayle is empowering her with education, or at least bribing her with it. By the time Lizzie is thirteen, Drayle exchanges his lessons for touches. One more word and he gets to lay a hand on her breast. Another and his hand can trace up her thigh. Lizzie is scared, but feels as if the touches are like transactions, or exchanges for Drayle's kindness. Soon the time will come when Drayle no longer asks permission to touch her, but for now, Lizzie feels as if she has a modicum of control.

As the lessons progress, Lizzie stockpiles the books Drayle has given her and hides them throughout the house. One evening, he asks what Lizzie's greatest wish is, and she confides that she would love to meet her blood sister, whom she's heard is living on a plantation nearby. Weeks pass, and Lizzie becomes keenly aware of how her body is changing, and keenly aware of the way Fran's eyes study her. She finds that it has become much more difficult to hide the fact that she can read, because she wants to read everything around her. When harvest season comes, Drayle visits Lizzie in the storeroom less frequently, and she begins to think that she's escaped his desires unharmed. She is strangely attracted to Drayle, not only for his power and seeming kindness to her, but also because she finds herself aroused by his muscular body. She begins making excuses to work in Fran's bedroom where there is a full-length mirror where she can inspect her appearance. She steals one of Fran's hairbrushes and hides it in the storeroom to brush her hair in the evenings. Another slave, Dessie, finds the hairbrush and holds it like vermin. She says, "You don't know what you done brung in this house," which Lizzie doesn't understand at the time (p. 96). Soon after, Drayle takes Lizzie on a secret ride through the woods on his one-eyed horse. He doesn't tell Lizzie



where they're going, but he treats her with such kindness, brushing cobwebs away from her eyes, that she has no fear. They arrive at another plantation, and Drayle calls out for the slave girl named Polly. When the girl arrives, Lizzie immediately recognizes her as her blood sister. Lizzie begins to sweat, with both fear and excitement. "Didn't I tell you I'd do anything for you?" Drayle says (p. 100). The two girls embrace each other for a few moments before it's time to go. Drayle promises that he'll take Lizzie back once in a while to visit with her sister. That night, Lizzie gives Drayle what he's been waiting for. In exchange for her sister, Lizzie gives up her virginity.

That night, Drayle falls asleep in Lizzie's storeroom, on top of her naked body. The two are sharply woken from sleep by Fran, who stands like a demon in the doorway. Drayle orders her back to bed, but before Fran leaves, Lizzie can see the look in her eyes. Immediately, she fears that Fran will sell her. Drayle kisses her and promises that he won't let that happen. Then he asks if Lizzie would please give him a child. Fran is unable to conceive, and wants some children to take his name. Lizzie is shocked. She is only thirteen and not nearly ready to be a mother. While she is thinking, Drayle forces himself inside her. A few days later, Drayle moves Lizzie from the storeroom to her own private bedroom, a move that confounds and angers Fran. As the days pass, Fran begins pinching Lizzie in private, leaving tiny bruises all over the girl's body.

Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 12 - 15 Analysis

In this section, a lot of back story is given, both to Drayle's relationship with Lizzie and his relationship with Fran, his wife. Big Mama was the house slave that had been with Fran's family since before Fran was even born. She worked as a nanny of sorts, taking care of Fran when she was a child. As an adult, Fran married Drayle even though he was not wealthy and Fran came from an upper-crust family. At the time, Drayle was a lowly horse breeder, but Fran fell in love with him. After they were married, Fran's parents moved to Mississippi, leaving the newlyweds their plantation. When Big Mama went blind, Drayle bought Lizzie - who was six-years-old - to act as the old woman's eyes. Many plantation owners would have sold Big Mama off or simply let her die, but the Drayles honored her years of service in their own way, but letting her live out the rest of the days on the plantation with little work. This began Lizzie's life of special treatment. Although she wasn't ordered into the fields as most other slaves were, she paid a different price. Drayle began coming to her at night only weeks after she had her first period, at the age of twelve.

The readers also learn a lot about Lizzie's emotions toward Drayle. In her mind, even as an adult, their relationship progressed respectfully. Although she acknowledges that the time came when Drayle would no longer ask permission to touch her, she believes that Drayle respected her childhood by taking things slowly. When compared to many of the other slave's personal stories, like Reenie's and Mawu's, Lizzie's lost innocence certainly happened more gently. Despite Drayle's patience, however, the reader should never forget that Drayle was sleeping with a child who had no real choice in the matter. It should never be doubted that had Lizzie refused him, Drayle would have forced himself on her. He likely went slowly, yet forcefully, with her to keep his own conscious



clear. Throughout his relationship with Lizzie, Drayle shows a blatant disrespect for Fran, first by moving Lizzie into her own bedroom in the Big House, and then by his stark refusal to cover up the romantic relationship he has with her. Fran does what she can to stay sane, by tormenting and torturing Lizzie, but she knows she will lose in the end. Fran is a well-educated woman, so it is unlikely that she actually blames Lizzie for Drayle's behavior, but it would have been hugely unacceptable for a woman in this era to blame her husband, so she takes out her anger and frustration on Lizzie, which would have been common at this time.

Dessie's statement on page 96 that, "You don't know what you done brung in this house," doesn't make sense when Lizzie first hears it, but it is soon made clear that the thing Lizzie "brung" into the house was her own sexuality. Lizzie was so naïve as a child that she truly believed Drayle might only want to kiss and caress her. When his admiration of her slowed during harvest season, she missed the attention and the gifts, so she took to brushing her hair at night, in a way, trying to seduce him. Because of her age, there was no way Lizzie could have realized that a relationship with Drayle would lead to a life of sexual servitude. He had given Lizzie almost everything a slave could dream of: food, special treatment, family, and education. These things were absolutely and unequivocally bribes for sexual favors, but Lizzie didn't realize this yet. It is interesting to note that Drayle taught Lizzie how to read, which was often considered to be a crime in the South. Most plantation owners rightfully feared that if their slaves knew how to read and write, they would be able to band together, send messages, read newspapers about abolition. An informed slave, in the South, was a dangerous slave. It is not made clear why Drayle chose to teach Lizzie how to read, nor why the first word he taught her was "she" a very empowering word. "She" is a pronoun connoting a woman standing on her own, a direct contrast to Lizzie's position in the novel. One hopes that these education lessons will be foreshadowing for Lizzie's eventual break from Drayle's control. For now, Lizzie uses her new position for the betterment of the other slaves. She convinces Drayle to give them Sundays off for church services, and when a slave is sick, she will often ask Drayle for medicine. In this way, Lizzie is essentially forced into prostitution, for her own sake and for the sake of her fellow slaves.



Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 16 - 19

Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 16 - 19 Summary

Fran calls Lizzie away from Mr. Goodfellow, the one-eyed horse, saying that she wants to introduce her to someone. The man is wearing a crisp black hat, and he smells of tobacco. The man wants to know if Lizzie can cook and whether or not she has any children. Lizzie is such a fine specimen of a slave that he wants to know what the catch is. It is clear now that Fran is trying to sell Lizzie, and that she is trying to make a quick transaction before Drayle can return from the fields to stop her. The man runs his hands along Lizzie's body, squeezing her breasts, before announcing that he'll take her. Lizzie bites her lips until they bleed because she knows she cannot protest. The man wraps a musty blanket around Lizzie's shoulder and leads her, petrified, to his waiting wagon. Lizzie's eyes frantically search for Drayle, the only man who could stop the transaction, and she begins to feel ill when she sees the money exchange between the trader and Fran. She tries to stop it, but Lizzie vomits through her fingers and all over her dress. The trader is outraged, thinking that Fran is trying to sell him a sick slave. He demands that Fran give his money back. Just then, Drayle arrives and orders Lizzie off the cart. When word spreads that Fran tried to sell Lizzie, the rest of the slaves grow anxious, worrying that the trader might come for them next.

After the incident with the trader, Lizzie moves into the slave barracks and does her best to adjust to work in the yard. A few days later, she begins to feel dizzy and is too weak to get out of bed. It becomes quite clear that Lizzie is pregnant. When Drayle hears this, he immediately orders Lizzie back into the Big House. Lizzie is devastated by morning sickness and can barely go a few hours without vomiting. In time, this passes and Lizzie begins to enjoy the changes to her body. She sometimes spends her afternoons with Philip, the horse hand, watching Mr. Goodfellow. When Philip says that he was sorry to have heard that Fran tried to sell Lizzie, she reaches out and rests her fingers on his hand. Philip jerks back and says that he's not for sale. "Ain't that white man good enough for you? Gone back to him" (p. 117). Lizzie is shocked by his judgment of her. The more pregnant Lizzie becomes, the less frequently Drayle comes to visit her. He forces her to perform other sexual acts like oral sex because he is afraid that intercourse will hurt the baby. Still, Lizzie is terrified by her thoughts that Drayle will start sleeping with other slave women, so she does whatever he asks of her, no matter how sick it makes her feel. She gives birth to a boy that winter. Only a few months later, Lizzie is pregnant again, this time she gives birth to a pale skinned girl. She names the children Nate, after his father, and May, but when Big Mama starts calling the girl Rabbit, the nickname sticks.

Drayle finally hires an overseer named Roberts to watch over his slaves in the fields. When Roberts falls out of the overseeing tree and breaks his leg, his wife takes over ordering the slaves around. One slave, Jeremiah, takes personal offence to being ordered around by a white woman and decides to march over the Big House and take his concerns up with Drayle. The next morning, the slaves wake to the realization that



Master Drayle has taken away all their food as punishment for Jeremiah's complaints, and Roberts' wife stays on as the slaves' overseer. Soon after, it's Fran's fortieth birthday and her friend Yancy Butterfield arrives. The two women take turns admiring each other's clothing, and Yancy presents Fran with a gift of green taffeta fabric, much finer than what Drayle could have afforded. Lizzie is entranced both by the fabric and by the Butterfield's carriage, which she imagines driving around in, holding Drayle's hand in the backseat. While Lizzie serves the birthday meal to the white couples, her children sit in the kitchen drinking glasses of milk, ordered to stay away from the dining hall. Before long, however, Lizzie's children have wandered into the dining room to look at the guests, and before Lizzie can stop it, Yancy has scooped Rabbit up onto her lap and is admiring the girl's beauty. Yancy is taken with the children, saying that she would do anything to have some adorable colored children running around her house. Yancy decides that she would like nothing better than to take these cute children into the parlor and feed them sweets. Fran, trying to appease her friend, agrees that it's a lovely idea. That night, Drayle slept with Lizzie while the two children slept curled up with Fran in her bed. Lizzie didn't sleep at all.

Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 16 - 19 Analysis

Fran's decision to sell Lizzie without discussing it with her husband shows the woman's desperation. There are two possible motivations for this action, the first being that she is truly in love with Drayle, despite his flaws, and that she is terrified of losing him. Throughout the novel, Fran is described as fluctuating between listlessness and fierce determination. It would not be a stretch to think that Fran is suffering from depression. She is forty-years-old living on a plantation without many friends around, married to a man who is clearly no longer in love with her, unable to have children, and living without any power over her everyday life. Although Fran comes from a wealthy family, she surrendered all her power to her husband after their marriage, as was typical during the time. Trying to sell Lizzie was a final act of independence, and perhaps a last-ditch effort to save her marriage. On the other hand, it is also likely that Fran tried to sell Lizzie as a way of saving her own pride. Drayle's relationship with Lizzie was so public, it must have made Fran feel like a fool - an affair occurring right under her nose, in her own home. Selling Lizzie would also have hurt Drayle who clearly cares for her, emotional revenge for the ways Drayle has harmed her over the years. Fran was likely smart enough to realize that selling off Lizzie wouldn't stop Drayle's roving behaviors, but at least she would have made a point - her jealousy is not to be reckoned with. In time, Fran will exercise her power and control in another way: with Lizzie's children.

It is interesting to note the ripple effect that trying to sell Lizzie has on the rest of the slaves: the Drayles have been well known for keeping a loyalty to their slaves, and this loyalty is returned by faithful service and even respect. When Fran breaks this trust, the rest of the slaves fear that they could be next. They also think that the Drayles might be having financial difficulty, which could be disastrous for the slaves. If the Drayles are in financial trouble, they could begin selling off their slaves to the highest bidder, and it is not likely that these traders would keep families together, as the Drayles attempted to



do, or that they would treat the slaves with the same kindness Drayle attempted to grace them with.

Lizzie's close relationship with Drayle has other effects on the slaves as well. Jeremiah sees the relationship Lizzie has with Drayle - particularly the fact that Drayle often takes advice or suggestions from Lizzie and misconstrues it as a sign that Drayle is open to suggestions from the rest of his slaves. When he is unhappy with the work conditions, he marches up to Drayle's house to confront him about it. Not only Jeremiah, but the rest of the slaves, have their food rations revoked as punishment. This act is not as cruel as most slave owners would have doled out, but it is a firm reminder to the slaves about their place. They have no voice on the plantation. They are to speak when they are spoken to, or remain silent. Although Drayle is relatively good master, he is certainly not the slaves' friend, and he does not, nor will he ever, entertain their thoughts, suggestions, or beliefs. Not all the slaves view Lizzie's relationship with Drayle as a positive thing. Phillip's reaction to Lizzie's relationship with Drayle is an interesting one. He views Lizzie as a temptress, using her sexuality to get what she wants from people. He has a volatile reaction when Lizzie rests her hand on him, and snaps that he's not for sale, meaning that she can't seduce him to get her way with him. It is interesting to see a fellow slave condemning Lizzie as if she has a choice in her relationship. Perhaps Lizzie seems to enjoy her relationship with Drayle too much for slaves like Philip to truly believe she is forced into her position.



Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 20 - 24

Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 20 - 24 Summary

After Yancy Butterfield's visit, everything changes with Fran. Lizzie is sure that her momentary change of heart would not last, but even long after Yancy is gone, Fran continues to spoil the children. Despite Lizzie's objections, the children sleep with Fran each night in her bed, which frees Drayle to do as he pleases in the evening hours, which means frequent trips to Lizzie's room. It is bittersweet that Lizzie is asked to bathe her children each night dress them in their expensive pajamas, and push them through the door to Fran's bedroom, particularly because she has never been allowed to sleep with her own children. Drayle comes frequently to Lizzie's room and asks her to perform oral sex on him, even though he knows how much she hates it. One evening, Lizzie finally says no. Drayle fires back that there are dozens of women down in the slave barracks who would do this for him if they were promised special treatment in exchange. Lizzie shouts that those women don't have Drayle's children. As soon as she says this, she is terrified. She knows that if Drayle wants to have children with other slaves, there is nothing stopping him. If she isn't careful, she will lose her position as the favored slave, and will lose the bright future she envisions for her children.

Fran continues to spoil the children, frequently taking them on lavish shopping trips, and reading to them each night before they go to bed. Soon, the children begin to feel entitled to this treatment, and realize that they are different from the rest of the slave children. They stop playing with the slave children and even provoke them, knowing they will never fight back. They still spend time with Lizzie, but ask where Mrs. Fran is if they've been away from her for too long. Lizzie fears that this arrangement will come crashing down on the children, and that they will be terribly hurt if Mrs. Fran decides she is no longer interested in them. She also fears that her children are forgetting their roots, and jealously she fears that her children are forgetting that she is their mother. One day, Nate runs out of Fran's room with Rabbit in hot pursuit. The two are fighting over a ribbon Rabbit swears Nate stole from her. When Lizzie discovers that Nate has lied to her, she slaps him on the back of the head. Fran witnesses this interaction and flies into the hallway and viciously slaps Lizzie across the face. "Don't you ever touch my children again, do you hear me?" she shouts.

Two weeks later, the Drayles prepare for a Christmas visit from Fran's sister. She orders every piece of silver in the house polished, every pillow beat, every cobweb cleared. After weeks of work, they discover that Fran's sister will not be visited after all. Two nights before Christmas, however, there is a knock at the door. A coach driver is there with a small boy, Fran's nephew, who will be staying with the family for a few weeks. The boy marches in and snatches a piece of candy from Nate's hand. Lizzie instantly realizes that things have taken a turn for the worse for her children. The very night that Billy arrives, Drayle informs Lizzie that she and the children will have to move down to the slave quarters because Billy needed the extra bedroom. Two days after moving back in with Big Mama, Lizzie learns that her sister, Polly, has been sold without



forwarding information. Lizzie is devastated. Meanwhile, the children still refuse to play with the other slave children, and they become sullen and withdrawn. One hot spring evening, Lizzie awakens to feel a sticky hand between her thighs. At first she thinks it is one of the children using her as a pillow, but the hand is persistent. She fully wakes up and realizes that the hand belongs to Baby. He tries to pry her legs apart, and he punches her in the face. In the distance, Lizzie can hear the rest of the slaves singing outside; they obviously have no idea what's going in her cabin. Baby pins Lizzie's legs open and she knows that there will be no repercussion of his actions: she has no men to stick up for her. Baby insets his finger inside Lizzie and then collapses in a loud thud. Philip has smashed Baby over the head with a skillet.

Immediately after the attack, Lizzie and her children move into Philip's cabin with him. He treats her with respect, always leaving when she needs to change and never asking anything in return for his familial protection. Meanwhile, Fran continues to ignore Lizzie's children, favoring Billy, perhaps because he's family and perhaps because he's a white child. Lizzie sends her children's fine clothes to be sold in town. She has also taken to hitting her children more frequently, not wanting a white man to be the first one to beat them. A few days later, Billy has an accident and falls off the one-eyed horse, Mr. Goodfellow. Fran is hysterical, screaming and blaming Philip. Drayle is visibly shaken by the accident, and Lizzie wants to comfort him but knows it is no longer her place. After the church service later that week, where Lizzie prayed more feverishly than she ever had in her life, Billy was sent back to live with his mother and Drayle stood waiting for Lizzie at Philip's cabin with his arms open wide.

Part II (1842 - 1849): Chapters 20 - 24 Analysis

In this section, Fran exacts her final revenge on Lizzie by stealing her children from her. This action can be seen in one of two ways. First, it could be seen as proper revenge: Lizzie stole Fran's husband, so now Fran is going to steal the people closest to Lizzie, her children. Or, it could be seen as a chain of cause-and-effect. Drayle's relationship with Lizzie has caused Fran to feel lonely. The children offer boundless amounts of love, respect, and affection. Fran does not have any children of her own, so this is also a good way for her to exercise her motherly instincts. It is important to note that Lizzie's children are mixed race and therefore have a lighter skin tone than the rest of the slave children living on quarters. Rabbit is even described as having blonde hair and blue eyes, so it is likely that Lizzie's children were the most "appropriate" children for Fran to imagine as her own. The rest of the children would have been simply too dark skinned to fulfill Fran's fantasies. This theory then directly feeds into Fran's abandonment of the children when Billy arrives.

Billy shares Fran's same blood - he is the son of Fran's sister - and is, obviously, white. Despite the fact that Fran has formed strong bonds with Lizzie's children, Billy is a more "appropriate" child for her to coddle, so Lizzie's children are pushed aside, just as Lizzie feared they would. Fran's relationship with the children was similar to the relationship many modern adults have with pets: Fran ensures that they are well-fed, petted, groomed, and exercised, but her interest in the children comes in short bursts. She



wants them around when she needs to be entertained, but is not interested in acting as a fulltime mom to them. Fran's relationship with the children is especially hurtful to Lizzie because she has never been allowed such intimate time with her own children, and now, when she tries to parent them as a mother would - ie when she tries to punish Nate for lying - Fran intervenes, essentially saying that Lizzie's mothering is no longer needed. This is indicative of the way many slave women were treated. Women were seen as valuable because they could produce more children, more property for their owners, but they were rarely allowed to raise their own children, and many had their children sold from under them, for the master's profit.

Baby's attack on Lizzie is very unexpected. Keen readers will remember that Baby was Lizzie's first boyfriend before she was embraced by Drayle. He was described as a quiet, sweet, chubby-faced teenager, certainly not an angry rapist. It appears in the attack that Baby has no desire to rape Lizzie for his own pleasure, simply that he wants to violate the master's woman. Baby is clearly so oppressed and desperate that the only revenge he can exact against his master, the one who enslaves him, is to show power over the master's woman. This act could also be interpreted as a way of expressing his masculinity over Drayle, particularly if he believes Drayle "stole" Lizzie from him, although it would have been more than ten-years-ago, a long time to hold onto a grudge. During the attack, Lizzie realizes that her favored position in Drayle's house has left her virtually powerless. If this were to happen to another slave, she could appeal to the elders to punish Baby, but many of the elders no longer respect her. Or, she could appeal to her male kin, who would beat Baby as punishment, but again, she has no family. Philip's intervention is surprising then, because he is essentially aligning himself with Lizzie, despite their awkward interaction years before. Philip is a genuinely good man, and when Lizzie and the children move in with him, he treats her with the highest respect. This time living together will set the stage for Lizzie and Philip's close relationship for the duration of the novel.

Perhaps the most interesting change in the novel is between Lizzie and her children. For the first half of the novel, Lizzie does everything she can to protect her children. As Lizzie watches the children growing closer to Fran, their story is juxtaposed next to the story of the cows that gave birth on an especially cold night at Christmastime. The mother cow abandoned her babies instead of keeping them close to her and warm, and both the calves died. Now that the children have felt their first hurt, from Fran's abandonment, her protection takes a more realistic approach. She knows that she needs to prepare her children for the harsh realities of living with white people, so she begins beating her children. She does this to ensure that a white man will not be the first to beat her children. While beating her children, Lizzie hopes to impart that a beating can't hurt them. They must learn to be slaves now.



Part III: (1853): Chapters 25 - 29

Part III: (1853): Chapters 25 - 29 Summary

Once again, Drayle loads his favored slaves, Lizzie and Philip, onto a steamship to take them to Ohio for the summer. The first summer Drayle took her up north, a man - the book does not state if it was a slave, a crewmember, or a master - took advantage of Lizzie while she was tied up with the rest of the cargo, and raped her. Philip watched the whole thing, unable to help her as he was tied up too. When Drayle found out what happened, he immediately untied Lizzie and brought her into his cabin where he let her sleep, on the floor, uninterrupted for the rest of the trip. For the next two summers, Philip and Lizzie were assigned to a handler who ensure their safe delivery to Ohio, and they were forced to travel chained together, with iron clasps around their necks, so tight they left marks in the skin.

When she arrives in Ohio for the third summer, Lizzie is unsure whether Mawu and the rest of the slaves have forgiven her for her betrayal the previous summer. For their part, the women are neither warm nor cold when they see Lizzie, and the summer carries on as if nothing had happened. Still, Lizzie feels a distance and hopes she can win the women back over this summer. On one of their first excursions together, the slave women sneak out to a swimming spring while their masters have gone hunting. All the women except Reenie splash and swim, trying to urge Reenie to join them although they can visibly see that the water makes her nervous. Lizzie feels like something looks different about Reenie this summer, but she can't put her finger on just what. Ignoring her, Mawu and Sweet talk about Sweet's children and how they've grown. Hoping to join them, Lizzie asks Mawu about her son, to which Mawu replies with an empty look, "What son?" Embarrassed, Lizzie looks away in time to see Reenie walking slowly, determinedly, into the water. First it reaches her thighs, then her hips, then her stomach. The three women watch curiously and are shocked when Reenie steps so deep the water rushes over her head. Lizzie throws herself back into the water and together with Mawu's sheer force, pulls Reenie onto the shore. It is then that Lizzie notices that Reenie is missing a finger. "Leave me be, leave me be," Reenie repeats until Mawu orders her to shut up (p. 169). Mawu walks with Reenie back to the cabins while the two other shocked women follow silently behind.

Later, Philip drops by Lizzie's cabin to speak with her. His hair has been greased back and his face is shiny, like he's going to church. He tells her that he's been seeing the barber's daughter, Virginia, again. The barber wants to marry his youngest daughter off, even if it's to a slave, and he's been talking about trying to buy Philip from Drayle again. Philip is desperately in love, and desperate to be a free man, so he's come to ask Lizzie for a favor: will she speak to Drayle about selling him. A jealous Lizzie snaps that Drayle will beat Philip before he ever sells him. The next day, Lizzie discusses Philip's request with Mawu as they secretly make their way to Glory's house. As they talk, Lizzie says she's glad Mawu isn't angry with her anymore, which stops Mawu in her tracks. "Your man," she says. "He God to you?" (p. 180). Lizzie is confused and has no idea what



Mawu means by this. When they reach Glory's house, Mawu bursts out that she needs Glory's help fixing her, she doesn't want to give Tip anymore children.

At the same time, a telegraph arrives at the Tawawa House from Georgia, saying that an epidemic of cholera has spread through Sweet's hometown plantation. For days, Sweet waits for news about her four children, which forces all the other women to remember the tragedy of Sweet's pregnancy the last summer. While the women are sitting by the river one day, they see Sweet approaching them from a distance, carrying a folded black dress in her hands. She made it from mismatched pieces of cloth stolen from around the resort, and asks the women to help her bury it in memory of her oldest daughter, Sarah, who had died. She asks to have the dress buried next to her other baby in the woods, the one with no name. Three days later, there is a knock on Lizzie's back door, and Sweet is there with another dress, this one for her only boy. The next night, Lizzie awakens to find another dress folded tightly on her back steps. With the loss of three children in almost as many days, Sweet has stopped leaving her cabin, and won't even leave her bed. The rest of the women pass by to check on her, searching for signs of her breathing through the window. Three days later, Lizzie finds Sweet in the middle of the room with disheveled hair and lips covered with the white crust of dehydration. She's frantically sewing cloth, any cloth she can find, into a never ending patchwork of textures. The bed is barren of sheets and all the closets are empty of clothes. Sweet begs for more fabric. All the slaves at the resort band together, stealing fabric and delivering it to Sweet, who is sewing a dress for her last child, her third and final daughter. Two days later she reappears with the massive dress, huge and bulky, and asks the women to bury it. "They all dead now. They all gone to meet the Lord. They in a better place. They crossed over" (p. 190).

Part III: (1853): Chapters 25 - 29 Analysis

Although Lizzie is given partial treatment from her master, she is still a slave, and will always be treated as such until she is free. During her travels up north, Lizzie is slung into the ship's hold along with the rest of the white folk's cargo, as property, not as a person. The conditions are so terrible, she is chained to the ship, or to the other slaves, to ensure that she doesn't escape. The chains not only prevent Lizzie from running away from her master - despite the fact that there is nowhere for her to run: the ship is in the middle of the ocean - it also prevents her from running away from danger, as was observed in her rape at sea. Lizzie's reaction to the rape is interesting. Rather than dwell on the unfairness of the situation, she chooses to focus on Drayle's desire to protect her. Once he heard that his slave had been abused, Drayle took Lizzie into his cabin and let her sleep there. Lizzie believes she was treated like a lady since she was allowed inside the whites only cabin, but Drayle still made her sleep on the floor like an animal. Examples like this demonstrate Lizzie's desire to only see the good in people, and also demonstrate her naivety. In moments like this, Lizzie is a direct contrast to Mawu, a more world-wise and fierce slave. This contrast is expressed directly when Mawu asks Lizzie if Drayle is "God to you" (Page 180). At first, Lizzie thinks Mawu is wondering if Drayle is "good" to her, but it isn't until much later in the novel that Lizzie realizes she had heard Mawu correctly, she did ask if Drayle was "God" to her. The



question comes on the back of Philip's request for Lizzie to put in a good word with Drayle about freeing him. Jealously, Lizzie retorts that Drayle would rather beat Philip than set him free, because she fears that if Drayle shows sympathy for Philip, a beloved slave, and frees him, he may never free her children. In Lizzie's mind, it's one or the other: Philip or the children. Mawu's question is meant to force Lizzie to realize that Drayle is not God. He is not the only one with the power to change the course of her children's lives. If Lizzie wants to free her children, she ought to do it herself. Once again, in this interaction, Lizzie is seen as naïve and fool-hearted, while Mawu is portrayed as sharp, sneaky, and determined.

While Lizzie's situation has stayed relatively the same in her year away from the Tawawa House, it is clear that for the other slaves, many things have changed, for the worse. Reenie's attempted suicide in the river shows that she has finally reached her breaking point. The previous summer, the women thought Reenie had lost her will to fight (p. 53) but this summer, she proves that she truly has nothing left to lose. There is a clue to Reenie's mindset when Lizzie hands out stolen candy to the women. Sweet, Lizzie, and Mawu all suck their candy slowly, taking their time with the rare treat, but Reenie chews the candy quickly, swallowing it almost immediately. She says, "You got to enjoy thangs before they is taken away" (p. 175). This statement gives insight into Reenie's living conditions over the past year, as something valuable has obviously been taken away from her. Reenie is also missing a finger this year, which was a common punishment for slaves who broke cardinal rules on their plantations. Similarly, Mawu seems more determined than ever to runaway. She even goes so far as to ask Glory to help "fix" her to prevent her from giving Tip anymore children. Because she refuses to speak about her son, it is clear that either something terrible has happened to him, or she is emotionally removing herself from him so she will not have any emotional hindrances preventing her from running away.



Part III: (1853): Chapters 30 - 33

Part III: (1853): Chapters 30 - 33 Summary

The women do their best to take care of Sweet after the death of her children. She has lost five children in a year, and can no longer take care of herself. The women find her lying naked on her bed, starved of food and water. Mawu takes over, feeding Sweets as if she is an infant, breaking off small pieces of bread, dipping them in water, and slipping them between Sweet's dehydrated lips. Meanwhile, Lizzie uses a small chalkboard and white chalk to teach Reenie how to read and write. The first word she teaches her to write is her own name. A few days later, Sweet's master arranges for the black porter to take the women into town to buy something nice for Sweet in the hopes of cheering her up. Lizzie doesn't trust the porter, a freed black, because he has turned in a fair share of runaway slaves for the reward money. She knows that he'll steal the money for Sweet's gift and buy her a cheap trinket. While in town, Mawu claims that she's heard the Tawawa House is going to close after this season. She also says that she felt that it wasn't right to fix herself after what happened to Sweet. Lizzie spots Philip hanging back from the group, talking to a large, well-dressed black woman. She immediately recognizes the woman as the barber's daughter. She makes up her mind then and there to talk to Drayle about freeing Philip. She does her best to convince Drayle that freeing Philip is the right thing to do, but Drayle isn't easily persuaded. He is impatient and condescending to Lizzie, but she stands firm and even dangerously refuses to have sex with him until she gets her way.

Early the next morning, Mawu comes rushing toward Lizzie while she's hanging the laundry. She only has to say one word, "Sweet," for Lizzie to realize something terrible has happened. Lizzie runs into the woods, to where Sweet's children have been buried, to find her friend lying over their graves, dead. The women prepare a small ceremony for Sweet that night. Even the masters come out with tall white candles to lay Sweet to rest directly in the ground, without a coffin or a cooling tray. The women sing songs and chant prayers. Mawu performs some voodoo preaching which makes everyone very uncomfortable. In the days that follow, Lizzie brings out some abolition pamphlets that were passed on to her by Glory. The slaves all gather together listening for Lizzie to read the pamphlets out loud. Although the slaves don't really understand what the pamphlets say, they are excited to know that people are discussing the end of slavery, and seem willing to fight for it. Around that same time, Philip is caught sneaking off the resort to meet his woman. Immediately, Lizzie is terrified. She knows that back on the plantation, Drayle could have gotten away with scolding Philip, but here, under the glare of the other slave owners, he would be forced into physical action. In the distance, Lizzie can see Philip walking slowly toward her cottage. His feet are bound by chains and it's immediately obvious that he's been badly beaten. The men leading Philip tie him to a tree where he'll be left out to die in the hot sun. Drayle enters the cabin to collect his fishing pole and orders Lizzie to stay away from Philip, no matter how long he's gone. Lizzie is incensed, and when she tries to argue with Drayle, he backhands her, splitting open her lip.



Part III: (1853): Chapters 30 - 33 Analysis

Two major plot points happen in this section of the novel. First, Sweet finally gives into her grief and dies. While this is a sad moment in the lives of the other slaves, they manage to find joy in the loss, knowing that Sweet is finally free from her slavery. Historically, many slaves were devoutly religious, and the idea of death - moving forward into an eternal, free life - was a welcome relief from the hell of slavery. While the slave women are saddened to say goodbye to their dear Sweet, they sing songs around Sweet's grave, and offer prayers to help her pass into her next life. As expected, only Mawu stands out from the crowd, performing voodoo sorcery, which makes everyone very uncomfortable. It should not be a surprise that Sweet is buried without the indulgences of a coffin, or even a cooling board to keep her body from starting its decomposition immediately. Although he claimed to care for Sweet, Sweet's master simply wants Sweet disposed of, without any fuss or expense, so he can get back to his life - although to be fair, this may just be his public persona. He may well have grieved his loss behind closed doors. It would have been extremely socially inappropriate for Sweet's master to grieve her death in front of other white men. Secondly, Philip is finally caught sneaking off Tawawa House property to meet his woman, the barber's daughter. Drayle's reaction to Philip's dishonesty is shocking, as he essentially leaves his slave, the slave he claims to value above all other slaves, out to die in the hot baking sun. Lizzie remembers watching a dog die after lying out in the sun too long, which draws the immediately parallel to the ways slaves were treated as animals by their masters. Drayle's treatment of Philip is genuinely shocking - both to the reader and to Lizzie - because it is generally out of character for him to treat his favored slave with such violence, violence that even spills over into a bloody face for Lizzie. On some level, Drayle is punishing Philip more harshly because he has the eyes of the rest of the slave owners on him, and likely does not want to be perceived as weak, or worse, a slave sympathizer. He comes down hard on both Philip and Lizzie, which, for the first time, leaves Lizzie confused about her feelings for Drayle. He is not the man she thought he was, and certainly not the man she claims to love. The section ends with Drayle spitting out that Lizzie is, "just a woman and, on top of that, nothing but a slave woman" (Page 215).

The last important element to be introduced in this short chapter is the idea of slave catchers. The porter who brought the women into town before Sweet's death - a free black man - is also a known slave catcher. The money for returning runaway slaves is quite good, and it is interesting to see a free black man returning people of his own race to the slavery they have escaped from. This image is juxtaposed with Lizzie's reading of the abolition pamphlets, which generally refer to the northern whites who risk their lives and political careers to help bring the slavery of African-Americans to an end. Examples like these demonstrate the complexity of slavery and abolition, and show that the two sides were not cleanly divided by race. There were some blacks who benefited from slavery, and many whites who fought to abolish it.



Part III: (1853): Chapters 34 - 37

Part III: (1853): Chapters 34 - 37 Summary

None of the slaves dare to come close to Philip tied up the tree. The white women staying on the resort set up a picnic near him and watch him suffer while they eat their lunch. George, who has been ordered to water down the flowers along the water's edge with a hose, manages to douse Philip down when he gets close enough. The next day, the men get smarter and Philip digs holes in the ground to collect water from the hose, which he can suck out from the earth later. Four days has passed since Drayle let Philip tied up the tree. It would have been impossible for Philip to survive without outside help, so the slave women pass their days guessing who has risked their life to help Philip: was it the colored workers from the resort? Glory? Philip's girlfriend? On the fifth day, Drayle and the rest of the white men return from their fishing trip. Lizzie rushes home, overflowing with ideas of how she will convince Drayle to end his punishment of Philip. She hurries to remove Drayle's smelly boots. Before she can speak, Drayle tells her that he's already decided to sell Philip. Lizzie is so overjoyed she leans down and kisses his stinking, sweating toe.

After Philip leaves with the barber, any trace of hostility left between Lizzie and Mawu melts away, as Mawu credits Lizzie for the good thing that happened to Philip. The rest of the slaves are overjoyed with Philip's freedom, and of course, a little bit jealous. Lizzie continues reading the abolition pamphlets to the slaves at night, although she has been seeing less and less of Reenie. One evening, she sneaks off to Reenie's cabin while Sir is away. Reenie looks suspiciously out the door, not wanting to let Lizzie in. Knowing that something strange is happening, Lizzie practically pushes herself through Reenie's door and demands to know what is going on. Nervously, Reenie opens the door to her closet and Lizzie sees a small girl, about ten-years-old, hiding there. Lizzie demands to know whose child this is, and Reenie responds, "She mine and she yours, too. She belongs to all of us" (Page 225).

A few days later, there's a picnic party at the resort, which confirms the rumors that the Tawawa House is set to close as the northerners are tired of the resort being overrun by southerners. At the picnic, a colored child unwraps a small fish to place on the outer edge of the barbecue fire. When the fish is ready, a white child marches up and demands to eat it. The white girl reaches over to pick up the fish when her dress catches fire in the barbecue embers. The child screams as someone grabs a quilt to muffle the flames, and the smell of burnt flesh lingers in the air. The second fire happens that very night. Lizzie awakens to hear a ruckus outside, and sees that Tip and Mawu's cabin has burst into flames. Mawu cowers in the darkness, white sores running the length of her arms, muttering "I tried, I tried". Reenie wraps her arms around Mawu and orders Lizzie to tell anyone who asks that she's taken the injured Mawu to her own cabin for nursing. The next day, word spreads that both Mawu and Reenie are missing. Drayle's attitude changes toward Lizzie and it's clear that he no longer trusts her. Every day, Lizzie can hear the dogs searching for the runaway slaves, and Lizzie hears that



Tip has offered the highest reward in history for the return of his slave. Drayle orders Lizzie to pack up their cabin: they are leaving Tawawa House for good. As they pull away for the last time, Lizzie prays that her friends will reach safety. She is the last one left, with Sweet dead and Reenie and Mawu run away, there is no one to say goodbye to. As her heart sinks she looks back at the resort one last time and sees Glory standing in the road without her bonnet. She raises her hand in something like a wave goodbye.

Part III: (1853): Chapters 34 - 37 Analysis

In the final days of Philip's punishment, Lizzie fears that he will certainly die. She has seen Philip's weakness, his love for the barber's daughter, and knows that without hope, a slave can become desperate. Reenie, the oldest slave of the Tawawa House women, often offers kernels of advice, and her statement that, "Every slave got the survivor in him. You don't got to get beat every now and then to remember how to make it through something" foreshadows her eventual escape from the Tawawa House. The other women, including Lizzie, thought Reenie was too old to risk everything for a new life, but Reenie insists that no slave ever gives up on the dream of freedom. This is an echoing of the freed slave Lizzie met on the train to Ohio during her first trip to the Tawawa House. He was very old, with white hair and shaky voice, but he had somehow earned his freedom papers. He was traveling up north to start over. Lizzie found the old man's story to be very sad - how could he start over at such an old age, without a job and without his family, but for the old man, and likely for the reader, his story was one of inspiration. Even if he lived on a few weeks in freedom, those final days of his life would be spent in freedom, and there is no greater gift on earth for a slave.

There are many reasons why Drayle might have decided to free Philip, the least of which likely had anything to do with Lizzie and her wishes, but in her naivety, Lizzie believes Drayle freed Philip as a way of pleasing her. In truth, Drayle had spent the four day fishing trip discussing Philip with the other slave masters. They reminded him that Philip had a permanent pass to run errands off the Drayle property, and that he would likely use this opportunity to escape. They argued that Philip would never be the same, he would never be as dedicated to his work, and would never respect Drayle the way he had his whole life. He would be resentful, withdrawn, even heartbroken. Reenie's master reminds Drayle of other heartbroken slaves that have killed their masters over far less. Drayle's character is complex because he eventually does do the right thing: he offers to sell Philip, but his motivations for doing so are self-serving. Additionally, he twists the information for Lizzie, presenting it like a gift to her, perpetuating her unhealthy love for Drayle, a love that she genuinely feels is returned. As Drayle proved in the earlier section, he has the capacity to do grievous harm to those he cares for - betraying Fran and abusing Philip - and there is a certain risk to trusting his motivations. Still, he is undoubtedly the most trustworthy and gentle of the slave masters presented in the novel. This complexity of character underscores the societal structure of slavery altogether.

In her final days at the Tawawa House, Reenie begins acting strangely. Lizzie discovers that Reenie has been using her cabin as a room for the underground railroad, helping



slaves escape from the slavery of the south to the freedom of the north. When Lizzie demands to know who the ten-year-old girl is hiding in Reenie's closet, Reenie insists that she belongs to everyone. For Reenie, whose only daughter was sold from under her, every child that she can save is a form of retribution, of payback, for the child she lost. Parallels are drawn between the ten-year-old girl and Mawu and it is possible that Reenie views Mawu as a stand-in for her own daughter, which would explain why the two women decide to runaway together at the end of the section. While Mawu acts impulsively, even violently, Reenie seems to think things through and act as a planner for their escape. Although it is not explicitly stated in the novel, if Reenie is working with the underground railroad, she likely knows of safe houses littered throughout the north, and will use these contacts to aide in her own escape to freedom.



Part IV (1854): Chapters 38 - 41

Part IV (1854): Chapters 38 - 41 Summary

The Tawawa House does not close as everyone had anticipated and Drayle brings Lizzie back for one more summer. This time, Fran joins them. This year, Nate is old enough to work in the fields, and Fran has been pestering Drayle about putting the children to work. This summer, Lizzie is, of course, expected to sleep in the kitchen, not in the cabin with Drayle. When she arrives, the old cook Clarissa greets her with kindness, and comments on Lizzie's size. She prepares a large plate of food for Lizzie, and Lizzie tries to hide the fact that it makes her nauseous. Lizzie has strange dreams about killing Drayle, and feeling that, unlike Mawu, she must succeed in taking her master's life. Soon after arriving at the resort, Lizzie begins seeing reward posters for the return of Reenie.

A few days later, Lizzie meets up with Glory who brings her deep into the woods to find Mawu. Lizzie is surprised that Mawu is still hiding in the same woods, even a year after her escape. She doesn't understand why Mawu wouldn't have continued further up north, setting a distance between herself and the slave catchers that run rampant through these woods. Almost immediately, Lizzie blurts out that she's pregnant again. When she suggests that she should kill it, Mawu's face doesn't change, but Glory nearly chokes on her tea. She begs Lizzie to keep the baby and give it to her when it's born. Mawu isn't concerned about anything except convincing Lizzie to make a break for freedom. She says that she has a man who can make fake papers for Lizzie. Talking about escaping, Lizzie now realizes why Mawu had stayed in Ohio instead of continuing her travels north to Canada. She had been waiting for Lizzie, waiting for the last of their group to make the leap.

Back at the resort, Drayle has gone on a hunting trip, leaving Lizzie alone with Fran. The two women have few others to talk to, so they pass the days making pleasant conversation with each other. Fran talks about all the insecurities she has in her relationship with Drayle, and what she wishes for their future together. A few days later, Lizzie is shocked to hear that a letter has been delivered to her at the resort from Reenie. Lizzie is shocked that a letter has arrived at all, but is also shocked that Reenie now knows how to read and write. She recalls the story of how Reenie lost her finger. Sir chopped it off when he found Reenie hiding a primer underneath her dress. He was one of the many slave owners that severely punished slaves for trying to educate themselves. The letter is written in perfect penmanship, and has a postmark from New York. The letter simply says that Reenie has made it safely to New York and that she works as a maid for a wealthy family that treat her well. There is no return address, and Reenie cannot give any information about how she escaped, but she offers words of hope for Lizzie, telling her that the risk is worth the reward. After reading the letter, Lizzie begins drinking tea the next day in the hopes of terminating her pregnancy. She knows that it would be much more difficult, even impossible, to escape while pregnant. Four days later, Lizzie begins to cramp terribly and pass large bulbous clots of blood.



Drayle arrives and forces Lizzie to have sex with him, despite the fact that she's bleeding heavily and in pain. When she screams out, Drayle holds his hand over her mouth until he finishes, making it difficult for Lizzie to breathe. The next morning, Clarissa comes upstairs to say that Fran has been asking for her. Lizzie feels worse today than yesterday, and says that she cannot possibly work. Fran still insists that she come to the cabin. There, the two women continue their pleasant conversations while Drayle is off with the men. Fran confides in Lizzie that she does not hate her: "Lizzie, envy and hate are two different things. I envied you. But I did not, and I do not hate you" (p. 269).

Part IV (1854): Chapters 38 - 41 Analysis

The final summer at the Tawawa House is an interesting one for Lizzie, and her situation is both unchanged and entirely different. She is still the mistress to Drayle, and despite her best efforts, she still has little to no say about what goes on her own life. This summer, Lizzie is forced back into a subservient position, as Fran has joined Drayle on at the Tawawa House for the first time. Lizzie imagines Fran sleeping in "her" bed, drinking from "her" cups, sleeping with "her" man. Of course none of these things really are Lizzie's, but through the years, she had convinced herself that the Tawawa House was her special place, and her special time with Drayle. With Fran there, Lizzie is forced to realize that she is not as special as she thinks she is. With the other three women, Sweet, Reenie, and Mawu, gone, Lizzie is entirely alone, save for Glory and the unborn baby growing inside her. While in this position, Lizzie looks at her relationship with Drayle in a different light. She has dreams about killing him, knowing that she must choose between killing Drayle and killing the new baby. One evening while Drayle has sex with Lizzie in the woods, she spots a piece of metal on the ground and fantasizes about picking it up and stabbing Drayle to death. In the end, Lizzie decides to kill the fetus, perhaps as a way of getting back at Drayle for refusing to free her children, and perhaps as a way of enacting a new dream: freedom. Lizzie knows that it will be nearly impossible to escape while pregnant, as it can take weeks, even months, to travel to Canada.

Perhaps the most interesting moment in the entire novel is the revelation that Mawu has stayed in the slave-catcher infested woods for an entire year to wait for Lizzie. Mawu seems to have no doubt that Lizzie will runaway with her, and to show her dedication to her friend, she has put herself in grave danger to wait for her. There are nods to Mawu's heathen religion and superstitions perhaps meant to explain how she managed to stay safe during her year in the woods. Reenie has safely escaped to New York, which gives Lizzie hope for the future. It is important to note that Reenie had no children and Mawu has abandoned her son. The only thing truly keeping Lizzie from running off are her dreams for her children's futures. Letting go of these dreams will be the final hurdle in Lizzie's quest for freedom.



Section IV (1854): Chapters 42 - 46

Section IV (1854): Chapters 42 - 46 Summary

Fran continues to hold a vigil over Lizzie's bedside each night in the cabin. Fran even goes so far as to rise when Lizzie wakes, walk to the outdoor pump, and bring her glasses of cold water. Feeling the connection between herself and Fran growing, Lizzie admits to her that she is sick because she's drunk a tea to prompt an abortion. Fran is shocked and threatens to slap Lizzie, and begins to cry. Soon after, Drayle announces that they will be heading back to the plantation and they should start packing up. Although she is still weak, Lizzie decides that she must see Mawu one last time before returning home. Mawu is frantically packing up her cabin when Lizzie arrives, as she has received word that slave catchers are closing in on her. Lizzie delivers Reenie's letter to Mawu, which brings sincere joy to Mawu's face. In exchange, Mawu gives Lizzie a hand-drawn map of all the safe houses she's heard of between here and Canada. She's memorized the map herself and plans to use it starting tonight. Lizzie is overwhelmed with indecision. The next day, Lizzie hears word that Mawu has been caught and returned to Tip. Lizzie cannot help but blame herself.

Later that day, word arrives from Philip. He is waiting by Sweet's grave to help Lizzie run away that very day. Lizzie goes to meet him but decides then and there that she cannot leave her children. She questions whether or not, after all she's been through, she still loves Drayle. When she returns back to the cabin, Drayle is waiting for her. He says that he has great news. He's heard that the Tawawa House is going to be converted into a school for black children, and he's decided to send Nate. Lizzie is overwhelmed with joy, but the joy is short-lived when she discovers that Drayle has no such plans for Rabbit. He accuses Lizzie of never being satisfied. In preparation for their journey home, Drayle has Lizzie tied to the wagon with the rest of his belongings. On the long ride back to the plantation, Lizzie considers the story Mawu told her during their last visit, the story of how she chose her name. The novel concludes with Lizzie firmly believing that she had wasted too much time putting her faith in Drayle. Now it was time to put her faith in herself.

Section IV (1854): Chapters 42 - 46 Analysis

The novel concludes with the story about how Mawu earned her name. An old root doctor told Mawu that her soul had a twin, named Lisa. When Mawu first met Lizzie she thought Lizzie might be her twin soul because of the similarity of their names. Despite Lizzie's betrayal, Mawu continued to believe that Lizzie was her twin soul. In the African legend, there were two goddesses, Mawu and Lisa. These two goddesses were very powerful and helped create the world. This image has a profound effect on Lizzie, who can't comprehend that women could ever be so powerful. The story gives her hope, proving to Lizzie that she is more than just a body: she is a heart and she is a mind.

This knowledge gives her power to tackle the tribulations of living with the Drayles, and gives her hope for the first time in her life that she may be able to make some change.

There are many different interpretations as to why Lizzie chooses not to run away at the end of the novel. The most obvious reason is for the protection of her children. Perhaps Lizzie believed that her children would have a better future - a future with education - if she stayed and accepted her position as a sexual slave. Throughout the novel, Lizzie is portrayed as very naïve, always believing that Drayle will eventually free the children if she is persistent enough. Perhaps she is still so naïve to believe that with Drayle's decision to send Nate to school, she is halfway to her goal of ensuring his freedom. It is interesting to note that Drayle has decided to send Nate to school in Ohio. While Lizzie is initially overwhelmed with joy and gratitude, these positive emotions are short-lived when she discovered that Drayle has no such plans for Rabbit. In this one action, the action of sending Nate to school, the whole of Drayle's relationship with Lizzie and the children is expressed. Clearly Drayle thinks that he is doing Lizzie a favor - giving her what she wants - but of course, he hasn't.

On the other hand, throughout the novel, Lizzie seems to have misconstrued her favored position in the Drayle household as power. Because Lizzie believes she has been instrumental in many different aspects of the slaves' lives - Sunday worship services, medicine for sick slaves, ensuring Philip's freedom - she has romanticized her position as one of actual power, believing that she has an actual, respected voice. At the end of the novel, however, Lizzie may finally have realized that indeed, she is powerless. All the changes she thought she had enacted on the plantation were solely of Drayle's decision. By the end of the novel, Lizzie may have resigned herself to her place of sexual servitude, knowing that she cannot, nor will she ever, exact true change in her own life or the life of her children. The novel is left somewhat open-ended, allowing the reader to interpret Lizzie's actions themselves; a decision that prompted the fierce discussion and analysis that have made this novel a national best-seller.



Characters

Lizzie

Lizzie is the protagonist of the novel. She is a twenty-three-year-old slave woman who belongs to Master Drayle. She first became Drayle's mistress when she was thirteen years old and living in the storeroom of the Big House. Drayle used to visit her at night, bringing her cold water to quell the heat of a southern summer. With each visit, Drayle grew bolder with his physical advances and often bribed Lizzie with gifts to let him go further. Lizzie finally gave into Drayle's advances when he reunited her with her sister who was living on a separate plantation. Through the course of the next ten years, Lizzie gave birth to two children by Drayle, a son, Nathaniel, and a daughter, Rabbit. Lizzie enjoyed many perks living as the mistress to the slave owner, including her own private room in Drayle's home. She was taught to read and write, was given good food, and was never expected to work in the fields as most other slaves were forced to do. Additionally, her children were afforded a much better way of life than the average slave child, as Lizzie never had to worry that her babies would be sold from under her. All these elements complicate Lizzie's relationship with Drayle, and she truly believes that she loves him, even though they could never have a traditional romantic relationship. Lizzie is well liked by the other slaves at Tawawa House until she turns in her friend, Mawu, for attempting to escape. In her naivety, Lizzie believes that she is doing Mawu a favor, saving her from the dangers of escape and possible capture. In truth, because Lizzie lives such a sheltered life for a slave, she cannot comprehend the dehumanization of Mawu, and many other slave women, at the hands of her master.

Although Lizzie loves Drayle, she is most dedicated to her two children, and she vacillates between wanting to run to freedom in the hopes that she could eventually buy her children's freedom, and wanting to stay with them, both to ensure their favored treatment on the plantation now, and in the hopes that if she remains in favor with Drayle, he will eventually free the children himself. Many of Lizzie's actions in the novel are motivated by her own naivety about how terrible slave life can be. Because Drayle is a relatively kind owner who rarely beats his slaves, she doesn't understand the dehumanization of a brutal slave owner. When she first meets Mawu, she is entranced by Mawu's fiery personality, her penchant to take risks, and her determination to reach freedom. By the end of the novel, some of this fierce determination has rubbed off on Lizzie, and although Lizzie doesn't take her opportunities to run away from Drayle, it is clear by the end of the novel that Lizzie realizes she cannot put her faith in a white man - however kind he may be - to better her future or the future of her children. She must put her faith in herself.

Mawu

Mawu is a light-skinned slave woman with pale, freckled skin and wild red hair. When Mawu first arrives at the Tawawa House, the other slaves aren't sure how they feel



about her fiery personality and fierce determination to reach freedom. Mawu comes across as a know-it-all, willing to take any risk to get away from her cruel master, Tip. Mawu first bonds with Lizzie over a pot of hare stew, which Mawu teaches Lizzie to make in the woods. It is clear, even then, that Mawu is concocting a plan to runaway from the Tawawa House since it is in Ohio, a free state. When Lizzie turns Mawu in, thinking she is doing for the woman's protection, Mawu is taken out into the courtyard, in front of the entire vacationing community, to be beaten and sodomized by Tip. It is clear to the reader, if not to Lizzie, why Mawu has nothing left to lose in running away. Mawu has only one child, a son by Tip, who was dropped on his head as a baby and is handicapped. She feels no connection to the child, not because of his defects, but because he was fathered by Tip, a man she sees as the devil. Even so, Mawu believes that no mother will be any good to their children while she is still a slave. She uses this defense as a reason why Lizzie should run away with her. Throughout the novel, Mawu never has a turning point, a point when she realizes that life is different than she first perceived it, but through her voodoo religion, seems to realize that she and Lizzie are kindred spirits, despite the fact that Lizzie betrayed her. When Mawu finally makes a break for freedom, she does so by trying to burn down Tip's cottage with her master still inside. This fire symbolizes the hell Mawu has lived through, and she burns herself badly in the process. Tip does not die as expected - symbolizing that the evil of slavery will not be so easily beaten - but Mawu still manages to escape with Reenie's help. Even though she escapes, Mawu does not run far because she feels she must wait for Lizzie to come with her. She hides out in the Ohio woods for an entire year, waiting for Lizzie to return. When she dies, Lizzie still cannot break away from Drayle, leaving Mawu to continue her journey alone. She is caught on her second night of escape and returned to Tip, presumably to be tortured and eventually killed. Mawu represents the resilient, but damned, spirit of the slave.

Reenie

Reenie is a slave woman who has been the mistress to her brother - fathered by the same white man - for most of her life. Reenie is the eldest of the slave mistresses and she has no children living with her because they have all been sold away. In a way, Reenie is the most desperate of the four mistresses because she has lost all hope of a better life. While staying at the Tawawa House, her master, Sir, forces Reenie to sleep with the hotel manager throughout the summer. In the second summer of the novel, Reenie returns missing a finger - it has been cut off by her master for reading a book - and she attempts to commit suicide by drowning herself in the river. By the end of the novel, Reenie has regained some of her confidence by acting as a part of the Underground Railroad, helping to move slave children to the freedom of the North. After making a snap decision to runaway with Mawu, Reenie makes her way to New York and finds work as a freed slave. She is the only slave in the novel to reach such freedom.



Sweet

Sweet is a young black slave who acts as a mistress to her master during the summers at Tawawa House. Sweet has three children with her master, whom she loves dearly, and who are the main reason why Sweet would never consider running away. At the opening of the novel, Sweet is pregnant with her fourth child, and her master seems to treat her with tenderness. Sweet loses the baby, however, and struggles to cope with her sadness. In the novel's second summer, Sweet receives word that cholera has struck the plantation where her children live, and one by one she receives word that they have died. Sweet quickly descends into madness and eventually dies from her grief.

Philip

Phillip is a slave who works on Drayle's plantation with Lizzie. He is Drayle's favorite and most trusted slave, which earns him the right to travel north to Ohio with Drayle each summer. While up north, Phillip meets and falls in love with a freed black woman. Lizzie begs Drayle to free Phillip so he can marry the woman, but Drayle is too stubborn to lose his favorite piece of property. Eventually, Drayle has a change of heart and sells Phillip to the young woman's father. Phillip then trains to be a barber and enjoys a new life of freedom in the north.

Drayle

Drayle is Lizzie's master and lover. He is a southern slave owner who runs a plantation with such efficiency and relative kindness, that he has never had a slave try to escape. Drayle does not beat his slaves, offers them medicine when they are sick, and even gives them Sundays off to attend church services. Even so, he views his slaves as property and refuses to free them. Drayle is married to a woman named Fran, even though he continues his relationship with Lizzie, fathering children with her. Throughout the novel, it appears that Drayle truly loves Lizzie and his children but he is so constrained by societal expectation that he doesn't see his blood family as people; he sees them as chattel. Although he tries to afford Lizzie and their children a better life - taking Lizzie on vacations and giving her her own room in the Big House, and preparing to send Nate to private school - he never makes the full step toward humanizing them by giving them their freedom.

Fran

Fran is Drayle's wife. Throughout most of the novel she appears to view Lizzie as her competition and treats her cruelly. When she first learns of Drayle's affair with Lizzie, she takes to pinching her in private, leaving tiny bruises across Lizzie's body. Fran is unable to have children of her own, so she "adopts" Lizzie's children as her own, raising them in the Big House, dressing them as dolls, and taking them for extravagant



shopping trips. Soon after, she grows bored of them and sends them back into the slave barracks. By the end of the novel, Fran is a more sympathetic character as she admits to Lizzie that she never hated her and that she was just jealous of the relationship Lizzie had with her husband.

Nathaniel (Nate)

Nathaniel (Nate) is Lizzie's firstborn child with Drayle. He is a precocious child unaccustomed to the life of a slave, which makes Lizzie fear for him. He grows up in relative comfort being the son of the slave master and Lizzie worries that this bubble will burst her and son will not be able to handle life in the fields. At the end of the novel, Drayle surprises Lizzie with the news that he has arranged to send Nate to a private school in the north. It is good news, but Lizzie still hoped Drayle would free their son.

Rabbit

Rabbit is Lizzie's daughter with Drayle. Rabbit is light-skinned with blonde hair and blue eyes. She earned her name after Big Mama saw her bouncing around the garden like a rabbit. Rabbit is an extremely perceptive child and Lizzie has high hopes for her future. She wishes that Drayle would free Rabbit, but by the end of the novel, it is clear that Drayle is only interested in creating a future for his son, the child that carries his namesake.

Baby

Baby is a slave who works on Drayle's plantation. He earned his name from his baby-faced looks, which he kept even in adulthood. Baby was Lizzie's first boyfriend on the plantation, although they never consummated their relationship. During a time when Lizzie was forced to sleep in the slave barracks, Baby attempted to rape her as a way of shaming the master by sleeping with his woman.

Tip

Tip is Mawu's master. He is a cruel man who symbolizes the dehumanization of slaves by their white masters during the 1800s. He rapes and beats many of his slaves, but his favorite slave to torture is Mawu. When he hears that Mawu has plans to escape, he takes her to the courtyard to publicly beat and sodomize her until she passes out in a pool of her own blood. Mawu attempts to kill Tip by burning his cottage down, but he survives. At the end of the novel, Mawu is returned to Tip after attempting to escape, likely to be tortured or even killed.



Sir

Sir is Reenie's master and brother. The two were both sired by the same white man, the slave master. Even as a child, Sir took to beating the slaves and insisting they call him by the title "Sir," a name that stuck. Although it was incestual, Sir chose Reenie as his mistress even though she was also his blood sister. He exerts his control over Reenie by forcing her to sleep with the hotel manager at Tawawa House and by cutting off her finger when he finds her reading from a primer.

Glory

Glory is the white woman living near the Tawawa House who helps the slaves find their way to freedom. It is unclear why Glory, a Quaker woman, is so invested in the abolition of slavery, or why she risks her own safety to protect Lizzie. At the end of the novel, Glory is finally pregnant with her own child and has helped both Reenie and Mawu escape to freedom.



Objects/Places

The Tawawa House

The Tawawa House, located in the free Northern state of Ohio, is a regular reprieve for men looking to getaway from their lives, go hunting, fishing, and have romantic vacations away with their mistresses. For men in the South, visiting the Tawawa House typically means a sexual vacation away with their slave mistresses. Most of the guests at the Tawawa House stay in a main hotel, but the Southern men prefer to rent cottages near the water for privacy. The hotel itself is "a lofty white structure, three stories high, with twenty-four pane windows. Rocking chairs sat in groups of two on a wide porch verandah that ran across the front of the building. Six columns lined the verandah, forming a colonnade" (p. 12).

The Lewis House

The Lewis House is the vacation resort for freed blacks that live in the North. Although it is a resort, it is not nearly as fancy as the Tawawa House. Still, just the idea of a resort for blacks - who don't have to think about work - who have servants of their own to wait on them, excites the slaves at the Tawawa House. Inside the Lewis House is a small library and a piano, two objects that tickle Lizzie's fantasies for her own children's futures. While most of the slaves are happy just to imagine this place, Mawu is determined to visit it. When Mawu runs away from Tip in the final section of the novel, it is safe to assume that she met up with freed blacks at the Lewis House to aid her escape.

Abolitionists

Abolitionists are whites - both in the North and South - as well as freed blacks in the North who actively work to abolish or end slavery. Abolition is considered a dirty word in the South where slavery runs rampant.

The Missouri Compromise

The Missouri Compromise was an agreement passed in 1820 to regulate slave trade in the western states, essentially prohibiting slavery in Missouri. Many of the older slaves in the novel remember when the Missouri Compromise was reached, and hold onto its memory as hope of slavery's possible end.



Mr. Goodfellow

Mr. Goodfellow is the one-eyed horse that Drayle first took Lizzie riding on when he brought her to meet Polly, her long lost sister. Mr. Goodfellow becomes Lizzie's prized "possession" - although he doesn't belong to her - and when she fears Drayle is going to sell him, she takes him out for one last ride, symbolic of the control she wishes to have over her own future. Although Mr. Goodfellow is a good horse and is dear to Lizzie, Drayle has the power to sell the horse as he pleases. This is similar to the power he has to sell Lizzie - whom he claims is special to him - because she, like the horse, is simply a possession.

Primers

Primers are early reading books that show the letters and the sounds they make. Many of the slaves had stolen primers from around their masters' homes to teach themselves how to read. When Reenie was caught hiding a primer under her skirt, Sir chopped off one of her fingers as punishment.

The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad is a string of houses throughout the United States that were used as safe houses for escaped slaves making their way to freedom. The network of houses earned its name because of its secrecy. Providing a safe haven for escaped slaves was illegal, and belonging to the railroad was a highly guarded secret, passed through word-of-mouth from slave to slave.

The Lucky Necklace

The Lucky Necklace is what Mawu gives to Lizzie the day before she attempted to escape to the North. The necklace is constructed out of thin metal, with birds carved around the length of the metal links. Although she doesn't believe in superstition, when Mawu is captured by the slave catchers, Lizzie fears that she has stolen her luck.

Wilberforce University

Wilberforce University is the name of the school for blacks that was built on the property that once was the Tawawa House. This is the school where Drayle has decided to send Nate so long as he returns home often and doesn't attempt to run away.

Strong Herbal Tea

Strong herbal tea is what the slaves use to prompt an abortion when they find themselves pregnant with an unwanted child. Lizzie uses a tea to terminate her final

pregnancy at the end of the novel and other slaves have been rumored to use teas as a way "fixing" themselves against further pregnancies.

Themes

Slaves as Animals

There are many references to the slaves as animals throughout the novel, likely because imagery such as this echoes back to the idea that slaves are property and far less than human. The images of animals are strongest in the first section, but carry throughout the entire novel. When the images first occur, the animals are small: a mosquito, a baby bird, a fish, and then a full-grown chicken. The animals are always dead and frequently bloody as the mosquito smashed to death, the baby bird fallen out of its nest, the fish being de-scaled, and the chicken plucked. These comparisons are set up to express the way society viewed the slaves as insignificant. The constant juxtaposition of the masters sleeping with their slaves with the scenes of the slave women preparing meat all feed into the theme of consumption. The white masters take what they need for their enjoyment, whether they are good cuts of meat for meals or beautiful slave women for sexual satisfaction. There is almost no distinction.

In the second section of the novel, more emphasis is placed on domesticated animals as property. Here, Mr. Goodfellow, the one-eyed horse, becomes a symbol for the role Lizzie plays in Drayle's life. Mr. Goodfellow - an animal that is literally ridden - is one of Drayle's most prized possessions, and an animal that receives preferential treatment on the farm, but that doesn't stop him from threatening to sell the animal when he needs money. Lizzie is often tied up with the farm animals during travels, which further perpetuates the idea that she is treated like a favored pet, not like a human being, and certainly not like a wife.

Motherly Love

The four slaves women of the Tawawa House have very different mothering styles, ranging from Mawu's extreme lack of affection for her son to Lizzie's inability to runaway from slavery because she cannot bear to leave her beloved children behind. Historically, many women refused to runaway from their plantations if it meant that they had to leave their children behind. Similarly, many slave women were "broken" by their masters by having their children sold away from under them. Both of these issues are explored in the novel "Wench." When Sweet's five children die of cholera, the grief is so great that she eventually dies from it. For Reenie, the sadness of losing her only daughter eventually propels her to make a break toward freedom and succeed. For Reenie, the children from her master are symbolic of the devil, and so she abandons her son in an attempt to break away completely from Tip. Perhaps Mawu thinks she is showing her son love by refusing to acknowledge him. The hurt of being abandoned by his mother will emotionally prepare the boy for the long life of pain and shame he is destined to live while on Tip's plantation. Similarly, Lizzie prepares her children for a life of abuse in slavery by beating them regularly. She does not want a white man to be the first one to beat her children, so she bestows that lesson on her children early and regularly.



Perhaps one of the most interesting moments of motherhood comes in section two, when Fran steals Lizzie's children and raises them as her own. Eventually, as Lizzie predicted, Fran grows bored of this game, abandons the children, and attempts to convince Drayle to put them to work in the fields. Lizzie's children have the most privileged life of all the slave children presented in the novel, but still they are forced into servitude, beaten, and abused, perpetuating the idea that nothing, not even a mother's fierce love, can save a child from the pains of slavery.

Sexuality and Slavery

The Tawawa House women have interesting relationships with their masters because while they are visiting the resort, they are generally treated as mistresses and not as slaves. This treatment has caused confusion for some of the women, most notably Sweet and Lizzie. Lizzie believes that she truly loves Drayle and that he truly loves her, which deeply complicates her master and slave relationship and Lizzie's idea of slavery as a whole. In the context of master and slave relationships, there is often a fine line between seduction and slavery. With Lizzie, for example, Drayle seduced her into bed with him, he didn't necessarily force her, although she likely had little say in the matter. Due to this, Lizzie has always felt as if she had a modicum of power in the relationship, perhaps even believing that she seduced Drayle. The reader, however, will likely see that Lizzie had no choice and certainly had no power to resist Drayle's advances. When her sexual relationship with Drayle started, Lizzie was only thirteen and was completely naïve about sex. Her introduction to sexuality would forever cloud and confuse her relationship with Drayle and even lead her to believe that they loved each other. Lizzie's situation is contrasted with Mawu's violent, rape-filled relationship with her master Tip. Although the two relationships are portrayed as very different, they are actually quite similar. There are many times in the novel when Drayle forces Lizzie to perform sexual acts she is not comfortable with or when he forcefully has sex with her. Due to the initial seduction, however, Lizzie can explain away or even forgive Drayle's behavior and does not see herself as a rape victim as Mawu does.

Style

Point of View

The point-of-view of the novel is the first-person and limited omniscience narration told from the perspective of Lizzie. The point of view is quite reliable as Lizzie does not have the education or the motivation to manipulate the audience. This point-of-view is important to the novel as a whole because it creates a strong bond between the reader and the protagonist, which is integral to the success of the story, which focuses on a group of slave women faced with the decision to escape to freedom, or to stay with their masters and continue a life of sexual slavery. One of the most important themes in the novel is Lizzie's emotional growth during her time at the Tawawa House, and if it were not for the specific point-of-view of the novel's narration, the reader would not be privy to her thoughts and emotions which make up a bulk of the narration.

The novel is equally split between exposition and dialogue. The exposition beautifully creates the vivid historic world of American slavery in well-researched detail that brings the history, and the emotionality of the time, to life. The dialogue is vital to the creation of strong relationships between the slave women, and in creating a complex relationship between Lizzie and her master, Drayle. These relationships are the heart of the novel, and the interweaving stories, along with the complex motivations and emotions, are the main reasons for the novel's national success.

Setting

The majority of the novel, Parts One, Three, and Four, are all set on the Tawawa House Resort Grounds. The Tawawa House, located in the free Northern state of Ohio, is a regular reprieve for men looking to getaway from their lives, go hunting, fishing, and have romantic vacations away with their mistresses. For men in the South, visiting the Tawawa House typically means a sexual vacation away with their slave mistresses. Most of the guests at the Tawawa House stay in a main hotel, but the Southern men prefer to rent cottages near the water, for privacy. The hotel itself is "a lofty white structure, three stories high, with twenty-four pane windows. Rocking chairs sat in groups of two on a wide porch verandah that ran across the front of the building. Six columns lined the verandah, forming a colonnade" (Page 12). At the center of all the cottages is a pond, where a wooden water wheel turns slowly. Even though it is located in the free North, the Tawawa House is reserved for whites only, save for the black staff and slaves. Nearby, freed blacks have their own resort, the Lewis House, which the slaves attempt to visit in Part One of the novel. Also nearby is the home of Glory and her husband, Quakers who work for the Underground Railroad, another integral element in the novel.

Part Two of the novel is set on Drayle's plantation in Tennessee. Generally speaking, Drayle runs a friendly plantation, meaning that he doesn't regularly beat his slaves.



Lizzie was brought to the plantation at the age of six, and spent as many years working for the Drayle's in the storeroom. Once Lizzie began sleeping with Drayle, however, she was moved into the main house and given a bedroom of her own. The grounds of Drayle's plantation are immaculately kept, and impressive in size. Since taking over the plantation from Fran's parents, Drayle has made many improvements, such as adding a kitchen and building more slave cabins.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is very conversational and written from the point-of-view of a young, uneducated slave woman. The main narration of the novel is composed with modern structure - meaning that it is not written in the dialect of a Southern slave - but much of the dialogue is written in vernacular, which affects grammar, spelling, and syntax. Therefore, some of the dialogue may be difficult for readers to understand, but it helps create a vivid portrayal of the women and their relationships. This language, in fact, adds a depth to the novel that allows the reader a glimpse into a world that is made believable through the language used by the characters. All of the exposition is told through Lizzie's perspective, which is interesting because she is clearly the most naïve of the slave women. Despite the fact that Lizzie often doesn't understand the ramifications of her actions - turning Mawu in for example - the details of the novel are presented in a way that the reader can often glean information from the events, giving them a deeper understanding of the slave society than even Lizzie has. Although the novel is set 150 years in the past, the history is well researched and the language is accessible, giving all readers access into the world of slavery without much confusion.

Structure

The novel is divided into four sections ranging in time from 1842-1854. Each of the sections comprise of around twelve short chapters ranging in length from two to twenty pages. The first section of the novel is set in 1852 with Lizzie's second visit to the Tawawa House with her master, Drayle. This section functions to introduce the main characters of the novel, and to introduce the main conflict of the novel: the slaves plans to escape to freedom. The second section throws the reader back in time to when Drayle first began his romantic relationship with Lizzie, when she was just thirteen years old. This serves to give the reader a strong background in the relationship to help them further understand the protagonist, Lizzie, and her motivations throughout the story. The third and fourth sections of the novel are set in the years 1853 and 1854 respectively. These sections carry on the main plotlines of the novel, including Lizzie's relationship with Drayle and the ever-present seduction of freedom on the other side of the border. The chapters tend to be short and action-packed, propelling the reader through the story, making it almost impossible to put down as the reader questions what will happen to the slave women in their pursuit of freedom.

Quotes

"It was mainly this, his careful voicing of loving things that kept her in this place of uncertainty about her children" (p. 23).

"Lizzie could see Reenie's face clearly now. She had the look. The look of a woman who is done fighting. The look of woman months after her children have been sold from her. The look of a slave who has decided it is better not to feel. All three of the women recognized what they saw on her face" (p. 53).

"Stories didn't get told unless they had to. Stories were for remembering, and none of the women wanted to tell how they had gotten there" (p. 55).

"They be all right. Just one of them thangs slave children got to go through. Different ways to learn they lessons. Your childrens got to learn theirs thisaway, that's all" (p. 134).

"Every slave got the survivor in him. You don't got to get beat every now and then to remember how to make it through something" (p. 217).

"Would doing something like weigh on her children's spirits? Would they pay for her decisions? Bib Mama always used to say that the sins of the mother and the father rained down on the heads of the children" (p. 247).

"Miss Lizzie, this is just the life you got. Until you do something about it, you got to deal with what the Lord bring you" (p. 268).

"All these years, she realized, she had been putting her faith in Drayle to free her children. Now she had to put her faith in herself" (p. 290).



Topics for Discussion

Describe Lizzie's relationship with Drayle. Do you think Lizzie truly loves Drayle or does her relationship with him fulfill another need in her life? Do you think Drayle truly loved Lizzie? Why or why not? As a modern reader, why does love matter? Be sure to include examples from the text to strengthen your arguments.

Compare and contrast the mothering styles of the four slaves from the Tawawa House. How does mothering affect the mindset of a slave woman, particularly one in a mistress position? Why is Mawu so detached from her son? How does this inform the experiences of a slave during this era? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What do the slave women learn from each other to help their friends survive their experiences as a slave? What do you think is the best piece of advice to come from Lizzie, Reenie, Sweet, and Mawu? How do these pieces of advice fit into the main themes of the novel? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Compare and contrast the roles of Fran and Lizzie in Drayle's life. In what way are these two women the same? In what way are they different? How do these two women's roles display the balance of power in the south during the mid 1800's? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does the role of slavery abolition affect the plot of the novel? Why do you think it took the slaves in the novel so long to truly consider running away while on free soil? What role does Glory play in the novel? Do you think she could have done more to help free the slaves? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the different relationships each of the four mistresses have with their masters. Do any of the masters truly love their slave women? How can you tell? Is it possible for a master and slave to truly love each other with such an imbalance of power? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What does freedom mean to you today in our modern society? How does your definition of freedom compare or contrast to the slave's ideas of freedom in the novel? Is there anywhere in the world where people are still dreaming of "freedom" in the way that Lizzie and the other slaves do and if so, where? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.