

Wideacre Study Guide

Wideacre by Philippa Gregory

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Plot Summary

Beatrice, called Miss Beatrice by almost everyone because of her position in the family, believes Wideacre is at the center of the universe. She says that she even considers the arc of the sun to be an appropriate boundary for the vertical boundary of her beloved Wideacre. Beatrice spends her days with her beloved Papa, hears the "heartbeat" of Wideacre and has a natural feel for managing the estate. It is almost casually that her father mentions that Beatrice will someday marry and leave Wideacre to become mistress of her husband's house. Beatrice is appalled, knowing that she could never be happy anywhere else and would die without the feel of Wideacre under her feet. It is some time before she realizes that it is true—that her brother Harry will inherit and that his time away at school has been preparing him for that duty.

Harry returns from school early with sexual pain and pleasure irrevocably mixed in his mind. Meanwhile, Beatrice has begun a relationship with Ralph, a gamekeeper and son of a gypsy. When Harry interrupts a sexual encounter, his reaction of pleasure to the pain Ralph inflicts with a whip puts Harry at the mercy of his sister. Ralph soon comes up with the idea to kill Beatrice's Papa, so Harry will hand over the operation to Ralph and Beatrice and they can milk the estate of its profits, bankrupting Harry and putting themselves in a position to buy the land. Beatrice agrees and changes her mind about her Papa's death too late. Ralph kills him, making it look like a riding accident. Beatrice then sets a "man trap" for Ralph and he loses both his legs, though she intended that he be killed. Ralph becomes a champion of the poor, defending against the wealthy landowners. Beatrice seduces Harry and holds him in her control, even when he marries Celia. Beatrice passes off the first child Harry fathers as an accident of indiscretion and Celia takes the child as her own, inadvertently raising it with the child's natural father—Harry. Beatrice, pregnant with a second child by Harry, agrees to marry Doctor John MacAndrew and tries to pass the child off as his but John knows better.

Meanwhile, Harry and Beatrice's Mama knows that there is something evil in the house but shrinks from what it is. When she walks in on the two coupling, she suffers an episode that puts her to bed. John, drunk from realizing that Beatrice's child is not his own, orders Beatrice to medicate her Mama but Beatrice passes on incorrect directions to Celia and Mama dies with Beatrice saying it was John's drunken incompetence. John spends time in an addiction clinic while Beatrice uses his fortune to buy off the next person to legally inherit Wideacre—a cousin, because Harry has not produced a legal male heir. The people of Wideacre pay as Beatrice tightens the methods and payment to the point that the people starve so that she can pay for making her son and daughter joint heirs. But the people have a champion. Ralph, now called the Culler, returns to Wideacre to exact his revenge. John, Celia and the children escape, knowing the Culler is seeking Beatrice. Harry dies during the escape, the victim of a weak heart and excessive lifestyle. Beatrice meets her fate willingly at the hands of the man who was once her childhood lover.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Beatrice, called Miss Beatrice by almost everyone because of her position in the family, believes Wideacre to be at the center of the universe. She says that she even considers the arc of the sun to be an appropriate boundary for the vertical boundary of her beloved Wideacre. There is God and the angels above the sun, and below, there is Beatrice's father, the Squire. Beatrice is just four when her father takes her for a ride on his big horse for the first time. Elated, fearful and excited, she learns the touch of the reins, first seated in front of her father and with his firm grasp holding her, then on her own little pony. She spends her time learning about Wideacre.

During one of the summers of her youth, Beatrice's mother and nurse are caught up with the need to constantly care for Harry, Beatrice's brother who is prone to illness. It is during this time she meets Ralph in her rose garden. She tells him to get out and he pushes her into the roses, then apologizes and helps her out. She takes his hand and bites him, then runs through a thicket but Ralph follows. After that, the two play together until Harry's illness passes and her mother has time again to see that she is having her lessons and acting as her mother believes she should.

As Beatrice grows, she learns everything there is to know about Wideacre while her brother, Harry, is sent away to school. Beatrice knows every person who works in the village and always knows when a new child is born. Her mother, on the other hand, always seems aloof, even when she is not trying to be, and never quite manages to connect with the people. Beatrice understands how society works as well. She can behave as a young lady is expected to behave and knows that young men of the families inherit the land while young ladies are married off. She simply never believes that will apply to her until the day her father says it is true. On that day, her childhood ends and she understands that Harry's time away has been to prepare him for his time as owner and master of Wideacre while she, Beatrice, is not really her father's favored child and is going to be sent away some day.

Then comes the day when Dr. Yately, headmaster at the exclusive school where Harry attends, arrives at Wideacre. Beatrice soon learns that her mother sent for Dr. Yately and that she wants him to side with her in her quest to have Harry removed from the school to continue his studies at home. Mama says that Harry has been beaten by another boy and has fallen under the boy's spell. She says that Yately identified the other boy as the son of a prominent family and that he agrees with Beatrice's mother, taking Harry out of school would solve the problem without ruffling feathers of this other prominent family. Beatrice will learn that Harry has learned sexually deviant behavior from the boy, prompting Yately's willingness to release Harry.

That night, Beatrice is sitting on her window sill when she sees Ralph. He teases her about courting. The following day, she rides to his house. They kiss and pet for a long



time and Beatrice, upon learning the time and that she must be leaving, insists that he say he loves her. He refuses and asks if she loves him, to which she honestly replies that she does not.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The first time Beatrice rides with her papa, she returns with her knees chapped and bleeding. When her father asks why she had not said anything about the pain, she says that she had wanted to continue the ride. Her father approves and it is his approval Beatrice seeks. She also knows her mother well—the woman's ways and her weaknesses. Once, her mother says that she wants Beatrice to remain at home. Beatrice wants to go into the fields with her father and hesitates, knowing that an outright refusal would not be a good idea. Instead, her father returns to find out what is taking her so long at breakfast and Beatrice—the picture of innocent longing to obey—says that her mother has asked her to remain inside and she wants to know what to do. Her father insists, as she knew he would, that he needs her help and the matter is settled. Once outside, he asks if she had wanted to remain at home, indicating that he would bend to her will but she says that she wants to be outdoors and about Wideacre's business.

While Beatrice's mother says she is convinced that Harry has fallen under the spell of another boy at school and that Harry is in danger there, it seems evident that her mother simply wants Harry at home. Beatrice notes that her mother spends hours with Harry and is heartbroken when Harry leaves for school. While she could be looking out for the best interests of her son, it seems more likely that she simply does not want to be without his company.

Ralph notes that men look at his mother and that she never gives them a return look. He says that he will be like his mother, never the one begging for love but will take his pleasure wherever he wants and then move on. He predicts that Beatrice—with her green eyes—will do the same. It is then that Beatrice realizes that she may not have the power afforded to the son of a family that would allow her to inherit Wideacre, but that she does have another power at her disposal. She notes that her body is "a perfect animal" and that she will not only take her pleasure where she wants, she will also get land. However, it is not just any land she wants. Beatrice wants Wideacre and, she says to herself, she deserves it.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

For three days, Beatrice is forced to help her mother prepare Harry's room for his homecoming before finding time to slip away with Ralph for an afternoon at the Fenny. Summer arrives and they spend many afternoons together, usually after Beatrice has handled whatever chores are given her that day. Beatrice dreads Harry's return, knowing that he is the true heir of Wideacre. However, Harry looks around for her, hugs her and holds her hand as they go inside. Beatrice soon finds herself afraid of Harry's learning. He asks about books and cannot believe she has read so little. She admits that some of the books are about farming, so not all are wasted. However, Harry immediately attaches himself to Beatrice so that she can seldom find time to meet Ralph.

One day, Beatrice and Ralph meet by chance along the road and Harry arrives. It is when Harry does not even seem to see Ralph that Beatrice realizes that there is a chasm between her world and Ralph's, a gulf that cannot ever be spanned. Harry and Beatrice ride off together but she feigns a headache and returns to Ralph's little cottage where they slip into the abandoned mill room as they have done before. Beatrice is naked and they are just beginning to make love when the door is flung open and Harry walks in. Ralph pulls up his pants and Harry begins to flail at him with his riding crop. The blows are half-hearted and Ralph grabs the crop, striking back. Harry immediately falls to the floor, buries his face in Ralph's bare feet, and begs to be hit again. Beatrice suddenly understands that Harry will not tell on her, why he was sent home from school, and that his time in school left its mark. Ralph continues to hit Harry until he gives a shuddering sigh and cries at Ralph's feet.

Harry stops following Beatrice around all the time and begins following Ralph. He extols Ralph's virtues to Papa, saying that he should be given more money upon temporarily taking on the full duties of the game keeper and that he should be given the Tyack cottage which is bigger. Beatrice objects, saying that Ralph and his mother, Meg, have managed in the little cottage well, that the rent there is cheap and that the Tyacke cottage brings in a much higher rent. Harry argues that Ralph is a valuable asset and that he might move elsewhere unless treated well. Papa promises to consider the move and Beatrice expects Harry to be triumphant, but there is no malice in him, only a newfound confidence that Beatrice believes comes from Ralph. She suddenly knows that all the arguments Harry has put forth on Ralph's behalf are Ralph's words. She also knows that Ralph wants Wideacre for his own and that Harry will never be able to stand against Ralph's determination.

Beatrice later encounters Ralph setting a "man trap." The huge jaws will snap closed when a man steps on the spring, and Ralph says that it is possible that a man live through it but just as possible that he bleed to death and die. Ralph says that Harry is learning the land, that he does not have the same feel for it as Beatrice and Papa, but



that he will do well with the right bailiff, indicating his intention to put himself in that position when the time comes. Then Ralph reminds Beatrice that there will come a time when she will be sent away and says that he has a plan to take Wideacre. He says that as Harry's bailiff, he can skim off rents and other profits, putting the money safely aside. Beatrice, working to help with the estate accounts, can do the same. Together, they can bankrupt Harry, using the proceeds from their own endeavors to buy Wideacre where they can live as husband and wife. Beatrice says it could work, except that her father remains healthy and could even produce another male heir yet. Ralph says that accidents happen all the time, and that her father could easily meet with an accident, and that it could even happen tomorrow. Beatrice, filled with the fear of being sent away to live somewhere else, says that she believes the plan could work, and Ralph says it could only work right now, while Harry remains malleable enough for them to manage the Wideacre affairs.

Beatrice goes to bed without really thinking how quickly "tomorrow" would arrive. She wakes the next morning before anyone is about and knows that she will go to Ralph's to put a stop to the plan. She waits for the maids to open the back door, which is always bolted, knowing that to leave it open would prompt questions about her early morning whereabouts. When she next wakes, it is after eight o'clock. She runs to Ralph's house where Meg says he is gone and she does not know where. Beatrice runs home then, hoping to find her father still at his breakfast or waiting for the mail. She plans that she and Harry will stay with him the entire day so that nothing can happen, and that she will tell Ralph to call it off as soon as she sees him. However, Papa is already gone. She considers going out to search, but has no idea which way to look. She hopes that Ralph will simply not carry out the plan, but that afternoon they bring home the body of her father. The side of his head has been crushed in and his face holds the look of horror that indicates to Beatrice that his final moments were a nightmare. His horse is found nearby, its saddle sideways and giving the impression that the girth—not tight enough—had caused the accident.

Beatrice knows that Harry will inherit Wideacre and says that even if he dies, the land will pass to the closest living male heir—never to Beatrice. Even with this thought, she knows that she will punish Ralph for taking her Papa and goes to him with that thought. They make love and he teases her, saying that when they are married he will sleep between linen sheets every night and that Beatrice, the dutiful wife, will bring him coffee each morning. She asks if he believes that he will be accepted among the landed gentry and he says that he will have earned his place. She says that it is "odd work" that earns him that position and he says that he takes the blame alone, that he told no one of their plan, that he was careful that no one see the murder and that she not be implicated.

Beatrice considers her reasons for the action she has set in motion. She knows that if they had been talking about any other land that Ralph wanted for himself, she would have understood. However, they were talking about her own beloved Wideacre, and "no damned gypsy's brat would ever rule there." She again considers the difference in them, he the son of a gypsy and a father who ran away, she the daughter of landed gentry. He asks if she regrets anything and she says that all that is done has been done for Wideacre. Beatrice leaves him then and he returns to the cottage. She waits by the



path, carefully counts off three hundred seconds, then begins to scream for Ralph. He charges out of the cottage and down the path, then there is the evident sound of snapping bone and silence. Beatrice slumps to the ground for long seconds, then pulls herself up and slips to the path where Ralph is slumped over the man trap, both legs squeezed in the huge teeth and blood pouring. She collapses again in front of him, then leaves him "to die like vermin."

She slips home, releases the owl that Ralph gave her for a birthday present and remembers how, on that day, he had said he wanted to give her something no one else could. The bird is a fledgling and she does not know if it can even fly, but she tosses it from her window, noting that in this new cruel world everything must look out for itself. The bird flutters just before hitting the ground and sails off. Beatrice discovers that she has a handful of leaves and soil, clutched in her hand since the moment she collapsed at Ralph's dying body. She sleeps with it under her pillow and carefully wraps it in curling paper the following day, keeping it though she cannot say why. It is only now that she considers what a high price she has paid in order to remain on the land and says that she would gladly face the alternative—the prospect of being exiled in a few years—for the present with her father and lover still making her days happy.

She then settles in to wait for news of Ralph's death but the days pass and it is not until five days later that she learns that Ralph has not been reported dead, but missing. Harry relays that the cottage was covered in blood and that someone later remembers seeing Meg with a handcart with something that looked like a body inside. The villager, believing they had been mistaken, only report the incident after Ralph is missing for several days. Beatrice knows that Meg—who everyone calls "fey"—returned home to immediately know what happened to her son. Instead of taking him to the Hall for care, she had taken him away from Wideacre where he would recover and return for revenge.

Beatrice is beset by nightmares which everyone puts down to her grief for Papa. Mama sends for the apothecary and a London surgeon who provide sleeping draughts that make the nightmares more intense. It is months before Beatrice gets past the fear to even go outside. One day, Harry and Beatrice talk of the need for a new gamekeeper to replace Ralph and the talk turns to the day Harry arrived to find Beatrice and Ralph in the throes of passion. Beatrice says that Ralph had forced her, that she was afraid, that she is still yet a virgin because Ralph had not bothered her after Harry's interruption, and weaves the tale so fully that Harry himself believes he played the role of a hero. They embrace and Beatrice admits to a "flicker of desire." She then turns and Harry's hand slides to the "warm swelling curve of my breast" and he does not move it.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Beatrice knows all about the mating of animals, having overseen many of these operations on Wideacre. She seems to know something of the happenings between men and women, apparently from her mother, though her mother's version is distorted, explaining the happenings between a man and woman of an arranged marriage when there is no love. She says that the act in that case is to be painful and humiliating, as is



the childbirth that is hoped to follow. Beatrice admits that it is probably so when the union is arranged and the woman knows that the plans of two families hang on her ability to conceive and produce an heir. She says that information has little to do with the event when the two are young lovers, as she and Ralph are.

Upon the return of Papa's body, Beatrice is horrified by what she has done and immediately begins working at exonerating herself from blame. She says that she had agreed, but had not known what she was really agreeing to. She says that even if she did agree, it was Ralph who carried out the deed. Then she says that Ralph had made a major mistake, because he had forgotten the chasm that divided their worlds, that she was nobility and he was a worker, one of "our people." Upon the reading of the will, Harry inherits Wideacre, her mother is provided the dowager house and Beatrice a dowry. Then Papa leaves a personal message to Harry to care for the land and for "my beloved daughter," Beatrice. It takes only a little more for Beatrice to come to the decision that Ralph has to pay for the murder. She considers turning him in but fears he will tell of her role in it. Everyone knows of her feelings toward Wideacre and she fears someone will believe Ralph's accusations. Seeming to disregard her own part in the action, Beatrice vows to get even with Ralph. It is interesting that when she is talking to him, she asks if anyone else knows of the murder. Ralph says he was careful and that he is prepared to stand alone for the crime, "in this world or the next." Beatrice immediately feels better, saying that the guilt sloughs off "like a snake's skin." She seems willing to accept his words as complete exoneration of her guilt.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Beatrice's pain and nightmares lessen and one night she has a dream that she encounters Ralph by the river. They make love but when he raises up above her, it is Harry. Beatrice says that dreaming of Harry is "natural and right" because they are constantly together in their work on Wideacre. One day, Beatrice is kept home when the Haverings are expected for a visit. Beatrice chafes at the afternoon inside, knowing that Harry will not be overseeing the reapers. Celia Havering asks Beatrice if she would care to go for a ride and Beatrice seizes the opportunity. They ride to where Harry is working. Beatrice notes that Celia is obviously taken with his good looks, realizing why Celia wanted to go for a ride. Harry is allowing the reapers to range far from each other, meaning there are wide swatches not being cut which—by the rules of the harvest—available to those villagers who glean behind the reapers. Beatrice moves to the field, pushing the men closer together and telling them that she does not intend to leave them enough free wheat for the year. Harry says he tried but that they kept drifting apart.

Harry obviously flirts with Celia, saying that he is "a worthless fellow" and it is not until later that Beatrice wonders if she erred in taking control from Harry in front of a guest. Before Celia can contradict Harry's statement, Beatrice says that she is worthless and gives him additional instructions on the rest of the day's work.

Beatrice soon learns that her Mama and Lady Havering have decided that Harry and Celia would be a good match, Celia bringing lands adjacent to Wideacre as part of her dowry. Mama says now that Beatrice loved her Papa as no little girl should, with a consuming attention that allowed no interference. She says that she sees Beatrice now showing that same attention to Harry and that she knows it is because Harry has possession of Wideacre. Mama says that with Celia in the house, Beatrice can "get out more." Then Mama says that she can feel something that hints of danger and that she believes putting Celia between Harry and Beatrice to be a necessary move. Beatrice says that it is grief over the death of Papa continuing to haunt them all. Mama then says that she loves both her children and Beatrice notes with a start that it is true.

Harry is popular in Wideacre, even when many look to Beatrice for answers and leadership. Then it is time for the harvest which is highly successful. Harry and Beatrice are very aware of each other as they meet at the ending of the harvest. There is a meal and a dance following the final harvesting chores, and Harry and Beatrice ride home much later. There is no groom available and Harry helps Beatrice down from her horse. She remembers his infatuation with Ralph and wants Harry to have that level of infatuation for her. She says that she knows Harry also desires her, though the long autumn and winter pass while the two remain at arm's length from each other.

Then the weather turns bitter and there is a heavy snow before the sheep are brought to the lower Downs and into the lambing sheds. Beatrice works with the shepherds daily,



digging sheep out of drifts. The shepherds curse at Beatrice but she laughs and they have to admit that she works as long and as hard as any of them, only with the advantage of being seated on a horse while they walk and that she ends her day with a hot bath while they move on to other chores demanding their attention. Each evening, Beatrice is so tired that she can spend only a short time with Mama after dinner before falling into bed to sleep. Her dreams are of Harry but she tells herself that she is actually longing for Ralph but finds the thought of him so repulsive that she changes him to Harry.

When Harry returns, Beatrice dresses carefully for dinner. When Mama leaves the room, Beatrice jabs a needle in her thumb as she attempts to sew and Harry kisses it. The embrace soon becomes a passionate kiss though Harry objects that it was a "brotherly kiss," leaving the room with that lie between them. Beatrice says that there is nothing that can divert them from this path, though she admits it is because Harry has Wideacre, the one thing Beatrice wants. When Celia confides in Beatrice that she worries about their relationship because Harry can be so demanding, Beatrice sees her opportunity to come between the two and promises to talk to Harry. Beatrice has also come to understand that Celia teases Harry with her closeness but denies him the sexual release he seeks—another way for her to come between the two.

Celia has Harry's attention and Beatrice seldom has a moment with him because Mama watches them so closely. Mama is desperately allergic to cats and when one slips inside one day, Beatrice opens the door of her Mama's room. The cat, seeming to know what is expected, goes inside and when Beatrice returns to free the animal, it is sleeping on her Mama's pillow. When Mama next enters the room, she becomes ill and Beatrice and Harry have several days alone together. It is during this time that Beatrice and Harry dine and spend the evening together, as master and mistress of Wideacre, and Beatrice is no longer trembling at his touch because she feels the rightness of the situation.

One day during Mama's illness, Harry and Beatrice ride together and talk of Celia. Beatrice says that it is a shame Harry's intended is "so cool." She says that she and Harry are alike in that they are passionate. They end up in an embrace with Beatrice saying that a young lady can feel desire when she loves, then crying out that Harry is her love. Harry, knowing what is on her mind, says it is a sin but Beatrice says it is right and that a worse sin is to be married to a cold woman. Harry says that he can love Beatrice, but says again that it is a sin. She then slaps him and jabs her riding whip into his thigh. The abuse is what is needed to drive Harry's passion past his limit. After the act, he says that he had longed for her since he rescued her from Ralph and she notes that his eyes are closed so he cannot see her smile. They join again, this time more slowly, and have a picnic of the food Beatrice brought along afterward.

They make plans to renovate a suite on the west wing so that Beatrice and Harry can come together without being found. They plan to tell Mama that the change is so that Beatrice will have a place more suitable for overseeing the estate accounts. Beatrice, realizing that Harry longs for her yet again, pushes him back and tells him to think not of what is right, but only of what he wants in this minute. She says that he decides quickly. At dinner that night, the two of them presiding over the table, Harry asks whether his



wedding should be canceled and Beatrice, secure in the knowledge that he feels it necessary to ask her, says that he should go forward, that Celia will do the duty by providing an heir and Beatrice will provide Harry with pleasure.

When Mama is up and around again, she drops the news that Harry and Celia are going on a honeymoon tour and Beatrice knows that she cannot allow them that much time alone because Celia might win Harry's affection and she, Beatrice who had now felt Harry's loving, would be forgotten. Harry declines to be with her that day, going to visit Celia instead, leaving Beatrice to worry with the knowledge that Harry did not love her as she loved him. Harry arrives back from Celia's after Mama is in bed but Beatrice does not soften toward him at all. When she hears Harry stop in the hall outside her door, she knows that he is longing for her but does not call to him. The next morning, Mama teases him about the darkness around his eyes, asking if it is Celia's fault or Lord Havering's port and Harry says he needs a run in the Downs, seeming relieved when Beatrice agrees to accompany him. That day, they lay together again after Harry begs her not to teach him of her love then withhold it, and Beatrice knows she has won.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Beatrice says that she and Harry would have spent less time together had there been other young people in the neighborhood, but they—as the landed gentry—do not socialize with the people of Wideacre and there are few nearby families with young people to provide companionship for the siblings of Wideacre. Beatrice will later realize that what occurred with Ralph was much different than with Harry because Ralph was of Wideacre—Harry would be equally himself no matter where he lives.

One day, Beatrice is in her mother's room when she sees Ralph in the looking glass. He is lounging on the bed and Beatrice cannot see his legs. She gasps and tries to tear her eyes away from the glass to look at him. When she finally does, he is not there. She prays that she is not going mad, now that so much of her life is again coming together. Her Mama walks in and asks Beatrice if she is alright. Mama says that even though she gave birth to Beatrice, she often does not have any idea what she is thinking. When Mama talks of a "match" for Harry, Beatrice is shaken. Again, she knows that it is normal for a young man to be married in order to produce an heir, but had not given any thought to the fact that it must happen to her family.

Beatrice knows that even now she has a very tenuous hold on Wideacre and that is all that matters to her. She realizes that Harry—no longer the schoolboy come home to the estate—is rising in the eyes of the people of Wideacre while she—the one who has been beside her father at the helm since she could ride—will be replaced. It is Beatrice who can manage the people and feels the needs of the land. It is Harry who owns it. Beatrice admits that she does not hate Harry but does hate all the men who have made it impossible for a woman to own land. While Beatrice is jealous of the fact that Harry owns the land, she admits that seeing him learning about Wideacre makes her happy. Even when she notes that Harry is "playing peasant," which is the worst possible way for a landlord to act, Beatrice is happy with him.



Celia has been raised by her mother and step-father, who has gambled and whored away money as quickly as it can be collected. He is never at home and has left Celia and her mother to run the house, going so far as to have them care for all the younger children, including those from his previous marriage. Celia seems not to mind her unmarried state at twenty-one, though she has had offers. When she demurred, her mother did not insist, probably because Celia was needed at home to care for the younger children. Celia is quiet and undemanding and it is actually these qualities that will eventually endear her to Harry.

After brother and sister are joined, Harry asks how they can be together. Beatrice admits that she has not thought past her need for Harry, not to the point of how they could have time together later. It is Harry who continues to say that it is wrong and that the sin of it is not removed just because they feel it is right. Beatrice, in typical fashion, continues to believe that her part in any of the sins is negligible. For example, a maid comes forward who says that she left a door open and that a cat may have wandered in, prompting Mama's bout of illness. Though Beatrice knows of her own part in the incident, she does not admit to it. However, even though she knows that the young maid who feels guilt over having made a mistake is not entirely to blame, Beatrice agrees that the young woman should be punished severely. She is dismissed from the house without being paid what she is owed and without a reference—terms that Beatrice agrees are warranted despite her own role in the incident.

Harry's need for pain is a perversion Beatrice will exploit. Now she tells him that he did hurt her and describes those hurts. At the end of her statement, he is breathing harder and Beatrice reacts to his reaction. In bed that night, Beatrice notes that her life is like the life cycle of Wideacre—that the land is broke in the spring and plants and animals culled when necessary. She says that she has done the breaking and ordered the culling and is now ready for planting, and that she is safe on the land where she belongs.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

It is while Beatrice and Mama are visiting Havering Hall that Beatrice first hears of a one-legged man leading the bread riots as the poor angrily demand food for their starving families. It is during this visit that Celia admits that having a wedding trip had been her idea when Harry had been so sweetly gentle, but now his physical demands on her have made her regret that suggestion. It is Celia who says that the trip would be much more agreeable if only someone could come with them, and suggests Beatrice, who promises that she will. She brings up the subject during dinner, saying what a wonderful person Celia is, how sweet and gentle, and what a good wife she will make for Harry—all designed to make Harry realize what an undesirable wife she will be. Celia then begs for Beatrice to go along on the trip. Mama says first that Harry and Celia need time get to know each other and then that Harry and Beatrice need time apart. Beatrice presses the issue, asking her mother what she is saying, knowing that Mama will not voice her concerns. Mama then says she is silly to worry and Beatrice confirms the story Mama wants to believe by saying their lives will be much more complete and happy when Celia is living with them.

Beatrice sees possible hurdles to her future. If Harry and Celia should fall in love, she would lose her place in Harry's life. If Celia produces a son, Beatrice's security could also be in danger. Beatrice has elicited a promise from Celia to be best friends, and to always share concerns. It is likely this that prompts Celia to admit that she is frightened of the wedding night and it is Beatrice's suggestion that she might be more prepared at the end of their journey, several nights after the wedding, but she worries that someone will gossip about Harry if they do not spend the nights together. To gain Harry's approval, Beatrice tells him that they should pretend it is their wedding, that she and Harry are saying the vows rather than Celia, and that they will share the wedding night. Harry agrees.

Before the wedding day arrives, Beatrice is visiting Celia to try on her bridesmaid's dress when Celia's mother tells of bread riots in Tunbridge Wells led by a one-legged man that Beatrice is certain must be Ralph. She faints and fears someone will figure out her secret but they come to the conclusion that she has the same reaction to cats as her Mama. Beatrice begins using laudanum prescribed by Doctor McAndrews in order to sleep through her nightmares of Ralph. It is Doctor McAndrews who hits on the source of Beatrice's trouble, though without knowing he did so. He says that he believes she has a fear of something and that she must confront that. When she asks for another bottle, he finally agrees but tells her the laudanum is not something she should depend on for a long-term cure.

As Harry's wedding nears, Mama mentions Beatrice's situation and teasingly suggests that she might soon need to arrange for Beatrice's marriage, though Beatrice says she could never leave Wideacre and will be content to remain at home to play aunt to all the



"little Celia and baby Harrys." It is on the wedding day that Beatrice learns of Doctor McAndrew's heritage—that his family is very wealthy with money from a shipping line. The Doctor says that he has watched Beatrice out on her horse and laughed with joy at her obvious pleasure, to which she admits that she is still in mourning and should not have been out at all, but cannot bear to be cooped up inside. As Celia, Beatrice and Harry are leaving in their coach, Beatrice catches the eye of Doctor McAndrew who mouths the words, "Come back soon." Beatrice notes that she feels warm as they leave on "our honeymoon."

That night, Beatrice and Harry stay together and Beatrice admits that it is more exciting because she and Harry are deceiving Celia. The trip by sea is a nightmare for Beatrice and Harry who are both seasick. When they land at Cherbourg, Harry quickly bounces back while Beatrice continues to be sick daily. It is several days before she admits the fact that she is now with child. Beatrice considers telling Harry but says she does not want to say something she cannot take back. If she were on Wideacre and it had occurred before the death of her father, she would have gone to Ralph's mother, Meg, for guidance on the roots that would eliminate the problem. Beatrice continues to keep her face serene in Harry's presence and is quiet when he is not around. When they arrive in Bordeaux, Beatrice is past the shock and looking for an answer. She knows that miscarriages happen and with this in mind, chooses a wild-looking horse from the stables. She is thrown in the first minutes on the beast's back and rushes home to wait, but the bleeding does not come and she knows that she is "stuck with this growing weed."

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Beatrice says that Havering Hall is bigger than the hall at Wideacre, but that the entire estate—including the gardens—are in a state of disrepair because Lord Havering uses the land's profits for gambling rather than upkeep and improvements. Celia knows it could be turned around with good management and says both she and Harry expect good returns from the land of Celia's dowry.

Beatrice sees only her desire for Wideacre. There even comes a point where she admits that Celia truly is an angel, but then says that everyone has been set upon some path and has a role to play. Beatrice, in her mind, is destined to play Lucifer throughout her life and she truly seems to see it as her destiny - not something she has control over. It seems that Beatrice believes she just has to do whatever it takes to gain Wideacre for her own, and that there are no options for her along the way. There is a night when Harry has a letter to Celia in his hands and Beatrice sees that it is addressed to "my angel." Harry asks her, while holding this letter, if he should come to her room. She says that it is on the tip of her tongue to say no, and that the first refusal would have been most difficult but could have been the first step in putting those "two evil days" behind them. By this, she seems to admit that what they are doing is wrong, though she is continued to insist that it is not. While Beatrice continues to say that it is all about Wideacre and securing her place there, there is little doubt that she is also anxious for the touch of a man. It has been noted that there are few young people



around. Had there been someone else as daring as Ralph in the village who would have pushed past the boundaries of caste to reach her, she might have responded. Likewise, had there been someone else of her own social standing who would have been forceful with her, she might not have turned to Harry, regardless of her desire for Wideacre. It is up to the reader to determine the driving motives behind her actions and decisions. It is also interesting that Beatrice says there are no secrets on Wideacre, that it is a small community and everyone knows everyone's business, yet she seems to believe that she and Harry can keep their relationship secret.

There is a big difference between Celia and Beatrice and their impact on those they meet. Beatrice notes that Celia's skin is milky white while she has been in the sun without protection so often that she has a dusting of freckles on her face—undesirable in this time. She also admits that she provokes desire in men while Celia provokes feelings of love.

Though Beatrice is not having second thoughts about the current course of her life, it is on the first night of the honeymoon trip that she admits the fundamental differences between Ralph and Harry—that Harry could be trained as one would train a puppy and that Ralph was much stronger willed. She says that she feels certain she would eventually feel disdain for Harry. Then they set sail and when the weather turns rough, everyone is confined below decks. Beatrice is soon beset by seasickness and it is not until she is recovering that she realizes that Celia—not sick at all—has patiently and tenderly tended both Beatrice and Harry. While Beatrice is angry that Harry and Celia have had this time to connect and that Harry finally emerges from his cabin holding Celia's hand in his own, she admits that she would not have traded places because she does not want to tend the sick, even for the reward Celia has gained in Harry's tender touch. Beatrice realizes that Harry has been incredibly ill and forgives him his need to lean on Celia, remembering that it will be Beatrice he turns to in his moment of passion. Celia often asks, "shall I come" when Harry and Beatrice go out and they soon learn that it is her way of asking whether they want her company, and that she is not offended if they do not. Beatrice says that Celia is the perfect wife for Harry—undemanding, uncaring that he seems often not in his own bed at night and anxious to please her husband by arranging his rooms, caring for his clothing and ordering meals. However, Beatrice also knows that Celia is anxious to take care of Harry and is unwaveringly loyal to him. Harry knows this side of Celia as well and Beatrice worries that this loyalty will win Harry to her side. On the night Harry finally goes to Celia's bed, he goes to Beatrice a short time later, his own nightshirt still stained with Celia's blood. Despite the fact that Celia had previously confided every fear in Beatrice, she does not say a word about that night—another sign of her loyalty to her husband.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Harry writes that mama had not expected the estate to require so much attention, a fact Beatrice had known but not been able to do anything about in her haste to be certain Harry and Celia were not alone. She then walks a tightrope of lies, making it evident that Celia's health is too poor for them to travel but not so bad as to warrant that someone come for them. Then it is too late for a winter crossing, then Celia's time is so near that they dare not travel. Beatrice, upon learning the child is a girl, pushes it to Celia and refuses to have anything to do with the child, ordering that the "brat" be taken away. Celia takes the child away, accepting at face value that Beatrice does not want to bond with the baby she will not be raising as her own and totally missing the fact that Beatrice had counted on the child being a boy who would inherit Wideacre. Beatrice admits that she had wanted only an heir while Celia wanted a baby to love. Celia names the little girl Julia. When there is no wet nurse and the child refuses to take any nourishment, Celia insists that Beatrice feed her. Beatrice is amazed by this new side of the mousy sister-in-law who is suddenly transformed to protective mother and agrees to feed the child until another wet nurse can be arranged.

In a short amount of time, Celia arranges for passage home. The trip is less traumatic for Beatrice this time with more opportunities to be in the open air. The wet nurse is ill and Celia tends the woman and a constantly crying infant who is not getting enough to eat from the sick nurse. Beatrice says that any thought she might have had regarding a longing for motherhood was squashed with the sight of Celia's tired appearance. When they arrive at port, Harry thanks Beatrice for bringing his wife and daughter home while Beatrice longs only for the feel of Harry's body. While Harry's reception may have been cool, the people are grateful that they were no longer forced to deal with the Squire but are again under the care of Beatrice—the one who loves and understands Wideacre.

Beatrice oversees the completion of her rooms on the west wing, using much of the cast off furniture of Harry's old room and keeping some of her Papa's things, including the rent table—a large round table that swivels with drawers all around. Each drawer has a letter of the alphabet and the papers dealing with each Wideacre tenant is filed in the drawer lettered with his name. The fact of Julia's presence means Beatrice has more reason for these separate rooms since Julia's presence acts as a distraction.

One day, John comes for tea and he and Beatrice talk horses with John touting his new Arabian. They end up in a race with an "open ended" bet for the winner and though Beatrice sets a tough course, John wins. As is his due, he is allowed to choose anything as his prize and he says that he wants her glove with the opportunity to propose marriage to her later. Beatrice knows that she will say no but allows the courtship to continue because she enjoys John's company and she admires his intelligence.



As they all become happy in the current situation, Beatrice believes that as long as she has Harry at her side ruling Wideacre, she has no need to dominate him as a love. Then Celia moves Harry's things into her room and Beatrice knows that Harry's loyalty is transferring to his wife and that when the time comes, he will agree that Beatrice should marry.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

As Celia blooms with this child to care for, Beatrice is depressed, longing for the boy she imagined she was going to produce. When they arrive at port, Harry is waiting along with Mama. Celia is busy with the baby and the many baby things she has to transport ashore and Beatrice feels no compunction at pushing ahead and greeting Harry first. Though he gives her a hug, he moves past her, pushing her firmly aside as he reaches for Celia, kissing her and holding her tenderly, and then talking baby talk to Julia. Mama's reaction is the same, only this time she is enamored with Julia before speaking to either Beatrice or Celia. The moment their eyes meet, Beatrice is certain her Mama knows the truth—that Beatrice is the mother of this child, still smelling of the birth from the slight flow of blood that continues and the milk that has not completely dried up while Celia is virginally pure. However, Mama does not want to know and does not confront her fearful knowledge herself, let alone voice it to anyone else.

One day Beatrice walks outside where Julia is in her crib, picks up a toy Julia has dropped and winds up with the child holding her hand. The nurse is upset, saying that Julia is now too wound up to sleep and Beatrice offers to take them for a ride. At Wideacre, the women all touch the child and Beatrice talks to Julia about the land, the people and that her responsibility as an adult will be to care for Wideacre. They arrive home at the same time as Celia who says Beatrice is never to take Julia out without permission. She then says that Julia does not belong on the land as Beatrice has, that she will go away to school, eventually marry and leave the land, remembering only that Wideacre was a wonderful childhood home. Beatrice never lets Celia catch her looking at Julia again but does watch the little girl, noting that she is demanding and very much like Beatrice as a child. Celia even stands up to Mama, refusing to have Julia swaddled and earning John's approval of the decision, effectively overriding Mama's objections.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

As Beatrice worries about the growing relationship between Harry and Celia, Harry breaks the news that John has asked for permission to marry her. Beatrice goes to the room above her rooms on the west wing and creates a room specifically for her sexual encounters with Harry. There are pegs on the walls to which he can be tied and old saddle horses where Beatrice splays her brother out to feel the bite of her whip. While he is fully aroused, she slides down on him, ensuring that he is beyond the point of control. Then she rises off him and "slapped his rigid manhood with an open palm," sending Harry into screams of pain as he ejaculates. The next day he comes to her office. Playing on his needs, she tells him that he is disgusting and then that she will never be apart from him because he would die without her to give him pleasure. After she makes demands, she tells him that he may come to the room upstairs at midnight.

Beatrice and John one day drive to the sea where John tells of his near-addiction to alcohol and where Beatrice discovers that she cannot quite tell him that she will not marry him. They encounter a pirate who says that he works for the man known as the Culler, who she knows is Ralph, and that they—as smugglers—want to hide shipments on Wideacre land. This has been a practice in the past but Beatrice, faced with the possibility of Ralph being on Wideacre land, refuses her permission but will not tell John of the reason.

When hunting season opens, Beatrice is fearless on her horse because she is hoping for a fall that will dislodge another pregnancy. It does not happen and she finds her way to an old woman who gives her a medicine to end the pregnancy. It does not work and Beatrice is faced with another horrible round of the flux after another dose of poison or—as the old witch says—a rusty knife to cut away the unwanted babe. Beatrice goes to Celia, pointing out that she has slept with Harry for more than two months with no sign of pregnancy yet and offers to carry another child for her, but Celia adamantly refuses, saying that Beatrice is very generous but that she cannot put another lie between herself and her husband. John visits and she tells him that she has just come to realize that she is at Wideacre as a visitor. He comforts her and they wind up making love with Beatrice agreeing to marry him. Despite Mama's pleas for a major affair, they opt for a small wedding with only a brief trip away and John agreeing to live at Wideacre with Beatrice.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

John understands that Beatrice does not want to leave Wideacre but tells her that there are many places that would be equally beautiful and that he is in a position to buy something for her to make her own home. It is under the easy courtship of John that Beatrice learns about herself. She had thought that she went willingly to Harry but now



realizes that she is more of a slave to him than he will ever be to her, and that she cannot stand the thought of being without him for it would mean she is without the security of Wideacre.

After a reasonable length of time, Beatrice tells John of the pregnancy. He wants to visit his father and she urges him to go before the child is born, saying that having traveled with Julia as an infant she will not be willing to travel with a baby for a couple of years. John leaves reluctantly and Beatrice goes on with the estate matters, pretending the pregnancy is not as far along as it really is. On the day her water breaks, she climbs to take several large books from a high shelf in her office, then turns over a chair and lies beside it, screaming as if she's fallen. Her mother, realizing that the baby is coming several weeks early, tries to prepare Beatrice for bad news but the child is born healthy. The midwife, Ms. Merry, knows the child is not early and Beatrice offers her a bribe but Ms. Merry declines and promises to keep the secret, saying that by delivering Beatrice's child she will now have plenty of business. Mama also knows and Beatrice says only that many on Wideacre are already pregnant when they marry.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

John rushes back from Scotland, travel weary and dirty, just a week after Richard is born. He unwraps the baby, looks him over carefully and declares that he is not early as Beatrice has claimed. John knows that the child cannot be his. John asks if she were carrying on with someone else while they were courting and Beatrice, through a series of lies and omissions, says that it was the smuggler and that she was forced. John tells her to give him some time and, realizing that she loves him as her equal, Beatrice hopes it will be so. John goes to the library and falls asleep, having drunk too much on top of being so travel weary. Celia and Mama each go to bed early and Harry begins making demands on Beatrice. She declines but he finally insists and she thinks of it only as paying her dues. They are coupling in front of the fireplace when Mama walks in to get the novel she was reading. Seeing the act, she collapses. Beatrice and Harry hurriedly dress and Harry takes Mama upstairs while Beatrice goes to John. He pulls himself from the hangover to say that she has had a bad shock and to prescribe four drops of laudanum every four hours. He is specific in the order and returns to sleep off the drink. Much later, Harry will innocently say that he wonders what set off Mama's attack and asks if John might know, to which Beatrice—who realizes his need to play at innocence—says John has no idea what caused it.

Beatrice stays with her Mama until nearly time for another dose of the medicine when Celia comes to check on her, saying that Harry is still asleep. Beatrice says that John was very specific that Mama was to have the entire bottle of medicine at a specific time and Celia does as Beatrice says. A short time later, Beatrice is awakened as Celia reports Mama's death. When John is awakened, he says that four drops every four hours would not have been too much. Beatrice says that is not what he told her and that she merely repeated his directions to Celia, thereby laying the blame for Mama's death at John's incompetence while drunk.

After the funeral, the will is read and the few possessions of their Mama divided as she wanted. It is during this time that Doctor Pearce, the village vicar, talks of the rumors about Beatrice. She has been called on to walk among the crops in order to ensure good yields with no problems. She says that it began the first season she was out on the lands alone without her Papa—those seasons providing high yields. Pearce says that with Beatrice's magic and Harry's science, it is no wonder Wideacre is such a prosperous estate. Beatrice knows that the talk of her beauty and her power on the land has prompted Harry's longing and that night they meet again upstairs—easy to manage since John has returned to his drinking.

After the sex, Beatrice tells Harry that Celia is barren—that the doctor said so after Julia's birth. She reminds him that there is an entail attached to the land—a provision that unless Harry produces a male heir who can inherit, a distant cousin will have Wideacre upon Harry's death. Beatrice points out that if that happens, Julia will not have



the opportunity to grow up on Wideacre. They begin to plan how to raise the money to buy out the entail. With eliminating the wages they usually pay for labor and using gang labor instead, planting additional fields of wheat and using John's inheritance, Beatrice believes it could be done. Beatrice then says that Julia and Richard should inherit together.

John and Celia turn together more often and Beatrice says that she hates him for that—even though she does not want him for herself. John continues to drink and Beatrice supplies it for him though Celia begs that there be no drink available to John. Beatrice agrees but then invites friends for dinner, using their presence as an excuse to provide liquor with the meal and afterwards. There are additional guests over the coming days and John continues to drink. Finally, Celia insists that the cellar be locked and she be given all the keys, which Beatrice does.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

As Beatrice prepares for her Mama's funeral—the second she has held in her quest to hold Wideacre for herself—she almost goes to John on several occasions. She says that she has come to love him and that she wants him at her side. At the same time, she knows that John's intelligence attracted her and now has the power to destroy her. If John talks to Celia and the two put their information together, they might learn the truth of Julia and Richard's parentage. Beatrice knows she cannot stand the public scandal that would follow and so she does nothing to ease John's pain as he fears that he might have caused her Mama's death.

It is during Mama's funeral that Beatrice smells fire and learns that the Culler is nearby, burning the farm of a wealthy landowner who has made no provisions for the starving poor. As they talk about this Culler, Beatrice knows that it is Ralph and that he will eventually be coming for her.

Meanwhile, John seems to have come to understand the depth of the relationship between Beatrice and Harry. As Harry warms his "plump butt" before the fire, John moves as far away as he can, not able to stand the nearness of the evil. Beatrice will later say that it is an evil that stinks and that others can smell the stench even when they cannot—or will not—put a name to the evil deed.

When Beatrice broaches the subject of the entail, Harry does not think it is a huge problem. He says that Julia will be provided for financially and that she could buy something else. Beatrice has to instill in him the idea that Julia would hate him for not allowing her to have Wideacre—a situation that is not likely to be true at all—before Harry agrees.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

The morning after Celia's objections, Beatrice notes that things are much as they have always been. The meal that night—with no wine, sherry or port—is strained and uncomfortable and Beatrice, who usually draws the others into conversation, is sulkily silent. After drinks, Beatrice tells Harry that there is a claim against them for water rights and that she wants him to look at a map with her. They go to the office and Beatrice tells Harry he must get control of Celia, but he says that she is adamant and that he cannot bring himself either to yell at her or hit her. Beatrice says that if John were to go away to a doctor, things could return to normal, and suggests that Harry talk to Celia about it. Harry does not return, but Celia does come to Beatrice's office.

Beatrice says that she truly wants John to be well again but fears that she has not forgiven him for her mama's death. Then Beatrice says that she wants things to return to normal for them all and points out that by keeping liquor locked away, she is making things uncomfortable for Harry—who might find himself other places to dine where he could have a glass of wine and where he might find young girls willing to dance with him. With Celia imagining these things of her husband, Beatrice suggests the possibility of a doctor taking John into his home to resolve the addiction. Beatrice later orders that a bottle she has had hidden away be taken to John and when he tells Celia of Beatrice's act, Beatrice says that he is delirious and begs Celia to help ensure that John gets treatment from Dr. Rose, a Bristol specialist who houses a few patients at a time in an effort to cure addictions.

John stays sober all morning on the day of the visit, agrees that he should go with Doctor Rose and Doctor Hillary and is signing the papers as Beatrice re-enters the room. She is a moment too soon and John, confident a moment before, takes time to realize that he is about to sign a power of attorney and that he is to be committed, meaning he cannot leave when he chooses. Doctor Hillary catches John as he tries to run, puts him in a straight jacket, doses him with laudanum and puts him in the carriage. Celia is enraged, begging Beatrice to stop the process. John accuses Celia of betraying him. Celia then implores Harry to stop the process but Harry says it is Beatrice's decision as John's wife. As John is leaving, he tells Celia that Beatrice plans to make Wideacre belong to the children and that she must save them. Harry later asks Beatrice if she plans to use John's fortune for the entail and she says that she hopes he will be home within the month so that he can make the decision.

Mr. Llewellyn arrives soon after John departs. He is there to consider lending money against Wideacre, money that will be used to pay legal fees associated with the purchase of the entail. As Christmas arrives, the decision is made that there is to be no party at the Hall because the family remains in mourning. Doctor Pearce suggests that Miss Green will prepare food for a small party in the village but Beatrice provides additional food. At the party, Beatrice, Harry and Celia are met with cold stares and



soon learn that Giles—the old man who had talked to Papa on the day Beatrice learned she was not to inherit Wideacre—has died. Knowing that he has no way to support himself without the winter jobs that are no longer being offered at Wideacre, he has taken rat poison. The villagers know why and that he is to be denied burial in the churchyard. Beatrice and Harry watch, appalled, as the children and their parents tear into the Christmas dinner, everyone cramming as much as they can into their mouths and pockets.

As part of their agreement with Mr. Llewellyn, the estate is to fence in some ground that has been used as commons to be planted in wheat. The people have been accustomed to using this land for gardens, hunting and gathering firewood. Beatrice now has the fencing but hesitates to have it installed, telling Harry that there might be trouble and it can be better handled when the weather is milder. As the times grow harder for the people, it is Celia who sends soup out to starving families and opens her purse to buy a blanket for a cold child, earning the love and respect of the people Beatrice had always known as her own. Celia confronts Beatrice who, depending on Celia's lack of knowledge of farming and finances, makes it seem that Wideacre is struggling and that Celia only believes things are well because Beatrice does not question the household bills, meaning the lives of the family are not impacted.

The day Beatrice sets aside for fencing in some two hundred acres of the Common, she meets with the Parish Roundsman, John Brien, who says there are many men eager for work. She arrives the day the work is to begin to discover the entire village has turned out with old George Tyacke acting as spokesman. He says that if she fences in the Common, the heart of Wideacre will be broken. Beatrice hardens her heart and orders work to begin. The following day, John Brien is at her office, saying the men have thus far refused to work. Beatrice goes to the village where she waits until the villagers join her in the tradition of Squires and villagers for generations. She says that the fence will go up and that if they do not work at the task she will go to Chichester for workers. They reluctantly begin but the next day, Brien says that some of the fences have been torn down. Beatrice says she believes it was John Tyacke, Ned Hunter and Sam Fosterly—three village boys who were always together and always looking for a prank.

Beatrice orders that it be ignored and repeats that order several times over the coming day until the fencing is neatly piled and burned. When Beatrice next returns from Chichester, she is followed by a wagonload of fencing and a small troop of military men sent to restore order. That night, they catch two of the boys with John Tyacke turning to run a different direction, stopping as he encounters Beatrice and continuing on toward the Fenny. She does not tell which way he has gone, realizing that he will be ridden down like a dog. The next day, old George Tyacke tells Beatrice that he wishes to confess and though Beatrice realizes that he is trying to save the young men, Harry takes him off to Chichester where he is hanged. Sam dies of fever and Ned dies less than a year later in a convict camp in Australia. Beatrice imagines that he could only long for his home at Wideacre, knowing that one who is Wideacre born and bred can be happy no where else.



Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Celia says that "there seems to be something poisoning the whole house," a phrase that makes Beatrice stop in shock because it sounds so much like Mama. She notes that it is almost as if people who are near can smell the stench of the sin hanging on Beatrice and Harry but cannot quite put words to what it is.

While Beatrice is trying to secure Wideacre for her son and daughter, she and Harry are considering every possible means of increasing the yield of crops and income in order to pay for the project. While Harry points out a particular field that can be turned for wheat or some other change that can be made for profit, Beatrice unwillingly agrees. She seems dedicated to the eventual outcome but dreads each change, mostly because it is changing the Wideacre that she loves so completely. Around her, farmers are changing their methods so that people are forced off the land and hungry. She reassures herself that Richard will make amends when he and Julia are ruling the land together, though it will be many, many years before that happens.

Beatrice notes that Mr. Llewellyn's attitude changes toward her as he realizes what she is doing to the land and to her people. Beatrice, secure in her own world of plenty, does not realize how quickly the people of Wideacre are suffering without the wages typically paid for winter jobs. She and Harry discuss the scene at the Christmas dinner and Beatrice says that Harry simply has not noticed before how noisy and pushy the people are. Harry, wanting to believe that they have not pushed the people of Wideacre to the brink of starvation, agrees that he has just forgotten. It is interesting that it has typically been Beatrice who worries about the land and wants it to be safe. She once talked to baby Julia, explaining that it is because of Wideacre people that they have a home, but now seems to have forgotten all that herself.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Beatrice learns that John will soon be able to come home but tells Dr. Rose that Celia is now ill and asks that John remain in his care for a short time more. The entail is complete with arrangements for the first child born to either Julia or Richard—boy or girl—to inherit. John's fortune pays for the entail and Beatrice borrows more from Mr. Llewellyn to pay legal fees, keeping the true cost from Harry.

Once the entail has been paid and Julia and Richard established as joint heirs, Harry and Beatrice try to decide how to tell Celia and John. Beatrice and Celia retire to the parlor after dinner that night. Beatrice says that Harry now knows Celia is barren and that he has come up with the idea of settling the estate on the pair. Celia flatly says no. She says that Julia and Richard will be forced to live and work together as partners and that is not what she wants for Julia. Celia says that she wants Julia to know that Wideacre was her childhood home but to someday marry and have a home of her own with her husband, not be relegated to a home with others where she will share her husband always. Celia then says that she knows there is something wrong with the relationship between Beatrice and Harry, and Beatrice knows that her Mama might have been too timid to put a name to that evil but that Celia is another matter. When Celia learns that John's fortune has already been paid out as "Richard's part" toward securing the inheritance, she is even more angry and storms from the house, ordering a carriage. Beatrice leans out the window and orders the driver, Ben, to wait, knowing that he will wait because she gave him a job and she pays his salary. However, Beatrice arrives at the front door to see the carriage pulling onto the main road. It is only then that she remembers that Ben's last name is Tyacke and that he is the son of Gaffer Tyacke who was just hanged.

John and Celia arrive on the fourth day. Harry, spurred into a frenzy by Beatrice's words, grabs Celia upon her arrival and drags her into their bedroom. John joins Beatrice in the parlor, says that he now knows that both children are the product of incest, that if he is forced to stand trial for her mother's murder she will be forced to tell what prompted her mother's attack, that he had planned to kill her but now knows that death is coming for her without his help, and that his only purpose in life now is to save the children and Celia. Beatrice admits that death is coming but says the poor people of the village call him "Culler" and she has called him "Ralph."

Beatrice arrives late for dinner and finds Celia in the chair at the foot of the table—the chair reserved for the Lady of Wideacre which Beatrice had held since the death of Mama. Beatrice can guess what happened upstairs based on the bruise on Celia's cheek that Harry struck her once, apologized profusely and that Celia forgave him, meaning he is now in her debt for that favor. Beatrice retires early, assuring Harry that Celia can remain in the "damned chair." Once in her own room, Lucy helps Beatrice



undress and when she is gone Beatrice locks the door and forces a chair under the knob so that no one can gain entry.

Beatrice takes Richard for a ride one day and he swallows a bell from his rattle, almost dying before John saves his life. The next morning, Lucy says there is no one available to light Beatrice's fire, that all the servants have gone to the funeral of Beatrice Fosdyke, who had been betrothed to Ned Hunter and had left Wideacre after the boy's death. Lucy says that since the girl hanged herself after having picked up human and dog filth for a time before becoming a prostitute in Portsmouth where her father found her selling herself at a tavern. As she is a suicide, she cannot be buried in the churchyard and will instead be buried next to Giles—an area they are now calling Miss Beatrice's corner. May arrives and the Acre is a sad place with no one inclined to the typical spring festivities and games. On her birthday, she receives a length of silk from Celia, a brooch from Harry and a bottle of laudanum from John. There are gifts from the Acre—a single flint individually wrapped from each house on the estate. Then there is the basket from Ralph with a tinderbox inside that Beatrice knows means that he plans to burn her house. She takes to her bed for weeks, John supplying her laudanum whenever she asks and Celia often staying in her room to sew. One day Celia mentions a couple of specific wheat fields and that Harry has not been able to visit another, prompting Beatrice to get out of bed to oversee the harvest. As she prepares to ride out, John tells her that Death is near and that she will soon lose Wideacre because the creditors—including those Harry knows nothing about - will soon be making demands and that there's nothing Beatrice will be able to do except sell off her land.

Beatrice meets with a London wheat buyer, Mr. Gilby, though Celia has begged Harry to share the obvious wealth of the harvest with the people of Wideacre. Beatrice admits that Mr. Gilby's offer is less than she had hoped but more than she would get if she sold locally. Besides, there are loan payments due and no money to make the payments, so she has no choice. Before he leaves, Mr. Gilby says that he would be interested in buying Wideacre if the time comes to sell. Beatrice says that time will never come. He also talks of the risks of transporting the gain, saying that the bands of hungry families are a danger. While there have been no riots on Wideacre, Beatrice is suddenly afraid of what might happen, especially in light of the certainty that Ralph is nearby.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

One day Beatrice realizes that she no longer hears the heartbeat of Wideacre but with the settling of the legalities, begins to thaw. One day she walks outdoors and sees three of the Hodgett children fishing in the Fenny. They scream and run from Beatrice and it is then she realizes that her part in the arrests and deaths of the men during the fencing of the Common means that she is now a frightening thing used to scare children into good behavior. Beatrice admits that each step she took in her quest to make Wideacre her own was a small step, easily taken and with no idea of where it would all eventually lead. However she now sees that there has been a horrible price to pay for arriving at this position. Even Beatrice does not realize how high the price really is or what she will eventually be forced to pay. There is one point where she is so anxious about the



actions being taken that she cannot wait to be with Richard. She says that she needs to feel him in her arms, to reassure herself that it has been worth the sacrifices she has made in order that he should be Squire.

Beatrice has talked at length about love and what it does to a person. It was Ralph who first told her that it was best to be the one loved rather than the one in love, that being in love made you weak. Beatrice comes to know that it is true and she often plays on the loves of others, using some fondness as a weakness to exploit so that she may get her own way. Even though she dotes on Richard, she says that he is not her whole life as Julia is Celia's whole life.

Then comes the day when Beatrice takes Richard for a ride in the buggy. He is waving his silver rattle around and then swallows one of the bells, choking on it until he is gasping for breath and turning blue. Beatrice rushes to the Acre where John is visiting the vicarage and shoves Richard into his arms. John's motions are sure as he cuts Richard's throat, opening the airway, then uses a crochet hook to retrieve the bell. Celia praises him and Beatrice will later acknowledge that the praise and the fact that Beatrice ran to him in a time of crisis will completely restore his reputation as a doctor—something she had thought would never happen. Then Ms. Merry asks Beatrice if she had thought Richard to be past saving. Beatrice, unthinking, says that she had thought she had lost him—"the next Squire of Wideacre"—and that all her efforts to guarantee his place as Squire would have been for nothing. It is John who speaks first, saying incredulously that Beatrice had thought her son to be dead and all she could think of was his role on Wideacre. Beatrice says that Julia and Richard are to inherit together and that she has planned so much for the two of them. Celia tries to smooth it over, saying that Beatrice has had a shock, but everyone can see this conniving, scheming side of Beatrice and Beatrice says she does not care. That night, there is a bottle of laudanum at Beatrice's bedside—reminiscent of the nights there was a bottle of liquor for John.



Chapters 19 and 20, and Epilogue

Chapters 19 and 20, and Epilogue Summary

Word of Beatrice's determination to sell the wheat in London spreads and she notes that the people of the village have their fingers across their thumbs in a one-handed cross—a common sign to ward off witches. She does not comment but it affects her deeply. There is no respite at home either. The pile of bills due remind her that she is facing bankruptcy and is real danger of losing Wideacre. She spends every day on the land, watching the harvest and refusing that the people working pick up so much as a pocketful of wheat—a tradition that has been honored for generations. Now she says it is theft and will be punished. She says there will be gleaners for the Hall to go over the field first and then the people may pick up anything that remains.

John tells her that death is coming and Beatrice knows in her heart that he is right. She feels it in herself and in the heavy land. There is a storm threatening as the final fields are harvested. The air is heavy so that no one can breath but the rain holds off. As is tradition on the final day of the harvest, an old woman is weaving a wheat doll that will be seated at the top of the final shook. In years past, the doll has often represented Beatrice, decorated with a small bit of ribbon. Once it was Harry with a head of wheat putting on the appearance of an erection. This year, Beatrice waits to see what the wheat doll will be, dreading to see the result. When it is done, it is a pair, coupling as Beatrice and Harry had been the night Mama found them. Beatrice throws it to the ground, reminds them that there is to be a feast that day and that everyone will be respectful to her and her family or will be without a home before nightfall.

Beatrice had put the feast in motion, telling Celia that she is to arrange it and then forgetting to tell her that it will not happen. They attend, all four of them in the carriage, to see that the people of Wideacre are no longer so hungry that they grab and gobble the food. Instead, they are quietly polite, eating only a little because their shrunken bellies can stand no more and being certain that the old ones and young ones have filled their pockets and that all are carrying away all they can squirrel away. Beatrice, Harry, Celia and John return to the carriage and a rock explodes through the window, showering them in glass. At home, Celia demands that changes be made immediately so that the people of Wideacre are cared for. Beatrice tells them—though John already knew—that Wideacre is on the verge of ruin and that all the profits will barely save the land. Then there is a huge bolt of lightening that makes the garden look like daylight and Beatrice sees the two dogs that so faithfully followed Ralph during his years as gamekeeper on Wideacre. They are staring in the window as well-trained dogs that have been told to stay by a master who is still very nearby. John realizes what is happening and rushes to order the carriage be brought back around. Celia demands to know if the Culler is Julia's father, sending Harry into a round of screams about the fact that he is Julia's father and prompting Beatrice—always ready to lie if she might find benefit in a lie—to say that he is. Celia, John and Harry take both children and flee and Beatrice says that finally she can just rest, that the future is in Ralph's hands and that



there's nothing now for her to do. She is alone in the house when the mob arrives and she leaves the house to approach Ralph, sitting comfortably astride the horse though without legs to hold his seat. He reaches down to her and the lightning strikes as her world goes black.

Chapters 19 and 20, and Epilogue Analysis

One afternoon, Miller Green tells her that he will be ruined unless she holds some of the wheat back for local use. Beatrice says only that she cannot. As he rides away, she realizes that there will be no happiness in the Green household that day. It is one of the few times she remembers her connection with these people, but she hardens herself against doing anything to help them. Through many of the arguments that the people of the Acre are starving, Beatrice says that they should have been more responsible than to have had big families with no way to provide for them. She conveniently overlooks in this argument that she could not keep from becoming pregnant herself and could not rid herself of the children once she was. It is John who says that they give the villagers no way to avoid pregnancies and then refuse to help the families that result. It is interesting that in this case John defends the families of the Acre—a stand that has traditionally been taken by Beatrice.

One night Beatrice arrives home to find that Celia, John and Harry are dressed for going out. She looks at them and smiles, saying that she could never match their handsome finery in a short period of time and so will remain at home. Secretly she hates that she is working so hard—a change from her normal desire to be on the land no matter what. With these changes at Wideacre, Beatrice's joy in the land is no longer present—she is now simply a laborer like everyone else. She continues to reassure herself that she is the "despised bailiff now but will be the beloved mistress again as soon as the land is clear of debts and the people again prosper.

The epilogue offers a look at the sequel, "The Favored Child." Harry dies during that escape from Wideacre and the mobs burn the house so that there is nothing left but ruin. John and Celia take over the dower house and Richard and Julia are brought up there. The two children, playing as children of Wideacre are bound to do, know the woods and often play in the old garden house near the ruins of the Hall. Though it is only ruins, Julia looks at it and know that it is beautiful.



Characters

Beatrice Lacy

The daughter of the Squire of Wideacre. Beatrice can hear the "heartbeat" of Wideacre and knows the land as no young lady ought. While Harry is away at school, her Papa takes her with him as he cares diligently for their land and Beatrice learns all the things necessary for caring for the estate and its people. She is still young when her father reminds her that she is going away someday. Until that point, she knows that young ladies of the family marry and move into their husband's lives, but had not really thought it would apply to her. With that knowledge, her childhood ends.

She connects with Ralph, son of a gypsy who works as gamekeeper on Wideacre and the two become lovers. When Harry returns from school, Beatrice finds that he is now Papa's constant companion as he is groomed to be Squire of Wideacre. She plots with Ralph to take Wideacre for their own, with the first step of that plan the "accidental" death of her Papa, which Ralph carries out. However, Beatrice cannot abide the pain of having lost her father whom she now knows loved her dearly and her own plot to take Ralph's life in retaliation fails. She lives much of the coming years dreading his return for revenge but then, attracted to Harry herself and knowing of his weakness with regard to sex, Beatrice entices her brother into her bed, a situation that is repeated again and again over the coming years. Though Harry marries Celia, she continues to be the object of Harry's obsession and the only woman in his life, even wrangling an invitation to join the two on their honeymoon.

It is during this trip that she discovers that she is with child and she and Celia devise a plan to pass the child off as Celia's and Harry's. Doctor John MacAndrew then courts Beatrice and finding that she is again pregnant with Harry's child, Beatrice agrees to marry John believing that he will not know the difference of a few weeks, but he does. Beatrice uses the MacAndrew fortune to buy the entail from the next rightful heir—a cousin, because Harry has not produced a male heir—and struggles to pay the debts against Wideacre. She loses the love of her people until there is a riot over the situation—led by her former lover, Ralph. She dies in his arms, but has successfully arranged for her two children to inherit Wideacre.

Harry Lacy

The son who will become Squire of Wideacre, Harry is away at school while Beatrice learns about Wideacre. Beatrice looks on Harry's absence as an exile but it is actually his chance to gain the knowledge he will need to make the estate prosper. Harry learns more from school and it is there that he becomes obsessed with pain associated with sex. Beatrice and Ralph set out to exploit this passion and initially plan to ruin Harry to buy Wideacre. When this plan falls through, Beatrice sets out to make her place on the estate secure and seduces Harry to make this happen. She soon loses her desire for



Harry, but continues to "pay her dues" for remaining at his side as the person at the reins of Wideacre. Harry unknowingly fathers a child by Beatrice and Celia passes the child off as her own. Harry then fathers another, Richard, who is raised as the son of John MacAndrew.

Harry's weaknesses make him a prime target for Beatrice and he willingly absents himself from any duties except those he enjoys. Beatrice, though she complains that she is the only one who carries her weight, allows Harry to do so and would likely have continued to allow it as long as they had lived together on Wideacre. Harry dies as he, John, Celia and the children make their escape from the mob seeking vengeance on Beatrice.

Celia Havering Lacy

Celia is a mousy little thing, quietly accepting the fact that she is the stepdaughter in a household poorly run by a manager who is seldom home. In her own home, Celia's obedience is exploited as she is called on to be nursemaid for her younger half- and step-siblings. She continues to be accepting as Harry's bride, allowing first Mama and then Beatrice to hold the place of honor at the foot of the dining table and to make decisions for her. While the change is gradual, it begins the moment Celia becomes mother to Beatrice's child, Julia. When Beatrice refuses to nurse the child, Celia agrees. When a wet nurse is unavailable, Celia insists and Beatrice is suddenly wary of this new strength. Celia, like Mama, senses the evil between Beatrice and Harry, though she cannot put her finger on the cause. When it is obvious that Beatrice is to be the victim of the people of Acre, led by the man they call Culler, Celia takes both children away to safety.

John MacAndrews

John is a doctor, born in Scotland and wealthy is his own right. He falls in love with Beatrice and she eventually admits that she feels something for him as well, though her agreeing to marry him is based on the fact that she is already pregnant with her second child by Harry. John seems to not realize that Beatrice is not a virgin as they make love for the first time, but he is not fooled by the child—supposedly several weeks premature. He once confided in Beatrice that he feared he could easily become addicted to alcohol and Beatrice plays on that, providing him alcohol until he is thoroughly in its grip. Though John knows he did not make a mistake with the dosing instructions he leaves for Beatrice's Mama, she accuses him of that error and it is some time before he is back in the good graces of the people of Wideacre. Through it all, he comes to realize that Beatrice and Harry are more than siblings and that both Julia and Richard are the spawn of that relationship. At the moment he realizes that the people of Wideacre, led by Ralph, are coming for Beatrice, he does what Beatrice had come to know he would do—takes Celia and the children away from the danger. Though there is nothing to indicate he had anything to do with Harry's death, it seems convenient that Harry's heart failed during this escape.



Papa

Beatrice's father. Beatrice spends many hours with Papa, learning about Wideacre, and she believes that she will always be at home on the estate. Then Papa says she will someday have to leave, that she will marry and Harry will inherit. Beatrice says that knowledge marked the end of her childhood. Once Harry returns, Beatrice admits that Papa—once content with Beatrice for companionship—now prefers that Harry be on the land with him and urges Beatrice to turn her attention to learning how to manage a household. With the anger at being pushed aside burning in her, Beatrice agrees with Ralph that her Papa's death would clear the way for her eventual ownership of Wideacre. Papa is brought back to the Hall the following day, dead with a look of horror frozen on his face. It is believed that his saddle slipped, dropping him onto the wall. In truth, Ralph killed him by crushing his head in with a rock.

Mama

Beatrice's mother, Mama did not choose Papa for her husband and the two are not well suited. Beatrice notes that her mother might have been a different person had she married someone else. Mama knows that there is something evil between Beatrice and Harry and senses that Julia is Beatrice's child, not Celia's. However, as is typical for Mama, she shies from the truth rather than face it. When she is confronted with Beatrice and Harry coupling on the floor of the study, she has an episode with her heart. Beatrice, leaving Celia to care for Mama during the night, relays incorrect medicating directions and Celia inadvertently causes Mama's death, a mistake Beatrice lays on John.

Ralph

Son of a gypsy and an absent father, Ralph works as a gamekeeper at Wideacre. One summer, he and Beatrice connect—he the son of a slattern mother who could care less what he does and Beatrice the daughter of a mother too caught up in the illness of a son she adores. Both are left to roam as they please during that summer. As young adults, they meet again and the connection is instant. They are soon lovers and it is Ralph who wants more than anything to rise from his position among the poor. He suggests killing the Squire—Beatrice's father—leaving Harry to rule and Beatrice and Ralph to cheat Harry out of Wideacre. Ralph does kill Beatrice's father but Beatrice cannot forgive him the crime. She sets a man trap, calls to Ralph and leaves him for dead. However, he does not die and she soon hears of a one-legged man who leads the peasants during the riots against the wealthy. Beatrice knows as the harvest is complete and the people of Wideacre grow more angry at their situation that Ralph will come. He does, appearing at her window and beckoning her to her death.

The author is never completely clear on whether Ralph loses both of his legs or only one. While there are some indications that he has neither leg, the reports circulating



about him mention a "one legged man." During his final scene at Wideacre, it's mentioned that he holds the seat on his horse despite his condition.

Richard MacAndrew

Richard is the son of Beatrice and Harry though he is presented as the son of John MacAndrew. It is her desire to install Richard as the Squire of Wideacre that prompts Beatrice to mortgage the land and put impossible restrictions on the people.

Julia Lacy

The daughter of Harry and Beatrice Lacy who is raised as the child of Harry and Celia. When Beatrice discovers that she is pregnant with Harry's child, she goes to Celia who agrees to take the child as her own. Celia does come to love Julia fully and cares for her as a mother would. Julia will be raised in the dower house with her mother, her uncle John and her cousin Richard, on the Wideacre estate.

George Tyacke

It is George Tyacke's grandson who tears down fences on the Common as Beatrice orders them put up. When Beatrice has soldiers come to stop the destruction, three young boys—including George's grandson—are caught in the act. The Tyacke boy gets away but the other two are jailed. Fearing that they will be hanged and that the search will continue for his grandson, George Tyacke comes to Beatrice, claiming that he instigated the destruction and that he was there. Beatrice, knowing George was not involved, objects but Harry snatches onto the confession and turns the old man in to the authorities. He is hanged and it is this that escalates the downward spiral of events.



Objects/Places

Wideacre

The beloved land belonging to the Laceys and the estate Beatrice longs for.

The Fenny

The river that runs through Wideacre.

Chichester

The nearby town where Papa buys Beatrice's pony and where Mama goes to buy all the things to redecorate Harry's room upon his arrival from school. It is also where most business is conducted and shopping is done.

Havering Hall

Where Celia's mother and stepfather live.

Tunbridge Wells

Where bread riots occur with rioters led by a one-legged man that Beatrice is certain must be Ralph.

The Golden Fleece

An inn at Portsmouth where Beatrice, Harry and Celia spend the first night of Harry and Celia's honeymoon trip and where Beatrice and Harry spend their first night together as lovers without feeling the need to slip immediately back to their own rooms.

Cherbourg

Where Harry, Celia and Beatrice land on their trip. It is just outside Cherbourg that Beatrice faces the fact that she is with child.

Scotland

Where John is from and where he is visiting his father when Richard is born.



Bristol

Where Doctor Rose runs a clinic for addictions.

Miss Beatrice's Corner

The section outside the cemetery where suicides are buried.

The Dower House

Where Celia lives with John and the two children after Wideacre Hall is burned and Beatrice and Harry die.



Themes

Desire for Ownership of Wideacre

While there are many things going on in the lives of the characters, there is no doubt that Beatrice's desire to own Wideacre outright is the overriding theme of this story. It is important to realize that Beatrice does not want to own land for herself—she wants only Wideacre. She grows up believing that she will live at Wideacre forever. She feels the "heartbeat" of the land, can tell at a glance when crops are healthy or in need of some particular aid, and works the land as hard as any owner. Beatrice goes to great lengths to gain Wideacre for herself. She agrees with Ralph's plan to kill her Papa so that the way would be cleared for the two of them to take Wideacre from Harry. Beatrice does not go through with that plan but enters into an incestuous relationship with her own brother so that she will be secure in her position on the land. When it is clear that she cannot have Wideacre for herself, she puts herself, her family and the people of the Acre through extreme hardships in order to secure the land for her son and daughter.

Ralph also wants to own Wideacre, but the difference is that Ralph simply wants to own land—any ownership would have been acceptable. The same is true of Mr. Gilby, the London grain buyer who offers Beatrice a "good price." Gilby likes the idea of country living but is not particular whether he do so at Wideacre or on some other estate.

Lust

The lust of Beatrice, Harry and Ralph are at the heart of his story, though their personal desires all take second place to Beatrice's desire to own Wideacre. Ralph seems the first to exhibit his lust openly, daring to stand at Beatrice's window and talk to her of a young man's desire for courting and that he knows young girls have the same desires. Beatrice almost tells on him but changes her mind, not wanting him to get into trouble. While Ralph's longing for her is in its early stages, Beatrice is ready to accept that. After their first sexual encounter, Beatrice demands that Ralph say he loves her. He declines and counters with his own question as to whether she loves him. She admits that she does not and he says that he will never be the one in love because that person is weak. Beatrice takes this lesson to heart and uses it again and again. Whenever she needs to exploit someone she looks immediately for signs of love.

Harry's lust is somewhat different, having been taught at school by other young boys. Harry himself seems never to be able to experience lust without the addition of pain. This weakness makes him an easy target for Beatrice but it is also noteworthy that Harry cannot seem to bring himself to put Celia in that same position. While he is willing to take his lust out on Beatrice and to seek to have her fill his lustful desires, he says that it is impossible for him to hit Celia and the one time that he does—evidenced by a bruise on her cheek—his guilt allows Celia to gain his devotion and he even stands up for her against Beatrice.



Devotion to People

Beatrice learns early that the people of the Acre are her people. Beatrice says that Harry never sees them as individual people but only as workers unworthy of his time and attention. Beatrice does not see that and never stops believing in her duty to her people though there comes a time when her need to provide an inheritance for her son and daughter overrides her feeling of duty to the people. Even then, she reassures herself that once the debts are paid and the land again free of mortgages, she—or her son Richard—will make it right with the people who have endured the hardships of these imposed lean times.

By contrast, Harry never understands this devotion to the people of Acre, but he does see the results of the hardships being imposed upon them. He is petulant when the men do not want to sing as they did during a previous harvest when things on Wideacre were good for the people. Now, in their time of want, Harry sees little other than how it impacts him personally.

Celia and John are different, yet come to be supporters of the people of the Acre. John, as a local doctor, has often provided his services free of charge to those who have little. Once he is accused of having caused the death of Beatrice's Mama, he is less accepted as a doctor but continues to work with Celia as she strives to help the people through the hard times that fall on Wideacre under Beatrice's scheming. Celia ignores the people early on. She seems to see little outside her own world and her eyes focus mostly on Harry and her own problems. When suffering comes to the Acre, Celia puts aside her selfishness. She admits that she had seen little and done less for those around her and it is interesting that it takes the people's desperate need to pull her into their lives. After that, she spends none of her allowance on herself, instead buying food and blankets for the poor of the village—an action duplicated by John.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in third person from Beatrice Lacy MacAndrew's point of view. The perspective is limited with additional details and information being offered through stories and memories. For example, Beatrice tells of a particular field that is not currently being used as being the site of a great battle in which her ancestors won the land that is currently Wideacre. Through this method, historical details are offered, though the story is self-contained in the current happenings with no real need for historical information. Those things that happen outside Beatrice's line of vision are related through an array of methods, typically conversation. Letters from Doctor Rose—the physician treating John MacAndrews for his alcohol addiction—are used to impart knowledge of his condition. That knowledge is necessary for the reader because John's imminent return means that he is a threat to Beatrice's plans.

Setting

The book is set in Sussex, England, likely well before the 1900s though the time frame comes only from clues included in the story. There are horses and buggies but no mechanized farm equipment. All cutting is done by hand and the use of carts is prevalent. There are no provisions for women to inherit land or to hold assets and women are completely under the rule of their husbands or fathers. Beatrice holds a unique position on the estate, having been saved from the life of a proper young lady by her Papa who taught her all there was to know about the estate.

Language and Meaning

The story is written in straight-forward language and most readers will find the writing easy to read and comprehend. There are some words specific to the time frame that may be unknown to some readers. Laudanum, landau, panniers and other words related to medicine, transportation and fashion are common throughout the novel. For the most part, these are not used overly much and meaning can usually be discerned through the placement and use in the text.

The book is heavily devoted to sexual encounters with many of those occurring between Beatrice and her brother, Harry. While the scenes are not typically described in graphic detail, there is information such as the paunchy look Harry acquires over the years of indulgence as Squire and his shuddering surrender as Beatrice whips him—first tied to hooks in the wall and later prone over the sawhorses used in saddle making. These details—combined with Beatrice's constant remarks about Harry's pudgy rear as he warms himself near the fire, her Mama's sense that something evil exists between her son and daughter, and the same concern echoed by Celia—can be disconcerting. Some readers may find this information compelling them toward the final chapter while other



readers may be disgusted by the thought to the point that they are not interested in continuing. While the sexual encounters certainly play an overriding importance in the novel, the story is actually about a girl who desires ownership so desperately that she will do anything she believes will make that goal more attainable. For some readers, however, the sexual details may simply be overpowering.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty chapters of varying length, most of them at least twenty pages. The novel is lengthy—just short of six hundred, fifty pages. While the story is well written and flows well in chronological order, the sheer length may become tiresome to some readers. The story is told through a combination of exposition and conversation. The dialogue is believable but may lean slightly toward modern language rather than being true to the speech patterns and tendencies of the time. Despite this discrepancy, the use of dialogue works well and effectively draws the reader into the story.

Chapters are merely numbered with no clues offered as to the coming events. There is an epilogue that hints at the life of Julia and Richard after the death of Beatrice. This is likely the author's way of teasing the reader into wanting to read the sequel, "The Favored Child."

Quotes

"When I was a small child, collecting petals in the rose garden or loitering at the back of the house in the stable yard, it seemed that Wideacre was the very centre of the world with the sun defining our boundaries in the east at dawn, till it sank over our hills in the west in the red and pink evening. The great arch it traced in the sky over Wideacre seemed to be a suitable boundary for our vertical influence. Behind the sun were god and the angels: beneath it, and far more significantly, ruled the Squire, my father," Chapter One, p. 1.

"Papa had not ceased to love me. I knew that. But I had lost his attention. He had broken the thread of constant companionship which had held me ever since he took my pony on a leading rein and which had kept my mare to his horse' shoulder ever after. Now there was another horse riding beside my Papa - the future Squire," Beatrice upon Harry's return, Chapter Three, p. 57.

"Generations of men had built defenses against women like me, against all women. They had ensured we would never know the power and the pleasure of owning the earth beneath our feet and growing the food that went on our tables. They had built a great chain of male control, male power and beastly male violence, between men and my need for the land," Chapter Four, p. 79.

"I realized that she was watching me intently and that my face was unguarded before her. I had thought of her for so long as an unimportant pawn on the great chessboard of our fields that it came as a shock to recall she had been watching me for all my life, watching me closely even now. She knew me as no other person could," Beatrice about Mama, Chapter Five, p. 110.

"In Harry's absence my power on the land shed its concealment, and everyone from the poorest tinker or shanty dweller to the leaders of the country society could see that I ruled the land," Chapter Five, p. 121.

"He rode away from me as if he cared nothing for me. He rode away as if love and passion meant nothing. He rode away because he was a fool. I had put my heart in the keeping of a fool," Chapter Six, p. 163.

"Mama had neither wits sharp enough nor instincts sure enough to filter truth from lies. In any case, if the truth of my relationship with Harry had stared her in the face, she would have died rather than see it," Chapter Seven, p. 177.



"But when the old midwife rubbed oils into my swelling belly, and Celia hung dried flowers and herbs over the door, and tossed special dust on the fire, I found myself heartily impatient with these superstitions. I would have preferred Doctor MacAndrew to look at me in that clear honest way and tell me straight if it was to be an easy labour or not. In his absence, I had to rest on the belief that the stupidest women I know have packs of brats, so surely I could manage just one," Chapter Nine, p. 237.

"All this is mine and it will, one day, be yours. Other people may think they own it, but they do not. It is mine, and I endow you with it. And here starts a new battle to make sure you own it, my son, in full. For you are the heir, you are the son of the Squire and the son of the Squire's sister, and so you own it doubly," Chapter Twelve, p. 349.

"There are few marriages in the parish church that take place without a good round belly on the bride. For what is the point of a wife who cannot be shown to be fertile? The other was is the Quality way, but you end up with the bad bargain Harry got—a barren wife and no hope of issue," Chapter Thirteen, p. 351.

"Even if I had felt nothing else for John I should have punished him for turning his eyes to Celia. Whether I wanted him or not was irrelevant. I did not want my husband loving anyone else," Chapter Fourteen, p. 412.

"Celia was talking just as Mama had done. They both had a sense of the corruption between Harry and me. It was as if our sin were some rotting thing which stank until anyone close to us could smell it, but not know what it was," Chapter Fifteen, p. 437.

"Out in the woods was Miss Beatrice, dressed in black like the witch she was, guarding the land she now said was hers, and that no one else should have. And little children had better play on the lane, or Miss Beatrice would be after them. And little children had better say their prayers or Miss Beatrice would come for them in the night. And little children had better make themselves scarce for fear that her shadow, her witch's shadow, would fall on them," Chapter Seventeen, p. 517.

"Instead they shamelessly folded great doorstep slices of bread and meat and cheese and stuffed woggles of food into every pocket and handy corner of their clothes. They took food like squirrels preparing for a hard winter—in enormous amounts. But even then they did not grab." Chapter Nineteen, p. 629.

"It had taken less than a year to turn the thriving, jolly, noisy, courting, wedding, bedding



village of Acre into a graveyard for the walking dead with hollow eyes and sad faces," Chapter Nineteen, p. 631.

"Wideacre Hall faces due south. It is a ruin now, and no one goes there. No one except little Richard MacAndrew and Julia Lacey, who like to play in the broken summer-house. Sometimes Julia looks up at the ruin with her wide child's eyes. And she smiles as if it were very lovely to her," Epilogue, p. 648.



Topics for Discussion

What is Beatrice's role on the estate? Why does she not adhere to the typical role of a young lady of quality? Had Beatrice been sent away to school or raised more traditionally by her Mama, do you think she would have had a different life?

What happens to Harry while he is away at school that changes his life? How does Beatrice come to exploit that? Harry interrupts a sexual encounter between Beatrice and Ralph. What does she later tell him about that encounter? Why does Harry believe it?

What is Beatrice's first reaction when she learns that Harry is to marry? What does she eventually decide about that? List at least three times she takes some action designed to keep Celia and Harry from becoming the close married couple they seem to desire to be.

How does Beatrice meet John MacAndrew? What does she learn about his financial standing? Why does she marry him?

Describe the events surrounding the two times Beatrice gives birth. What does Celia believe to be the truth about Julia's father? Why does she think this?

Describe Beatrice's relationship with the people of Wideacre? How does this change over time? Why does it change?

Beatrice believes that her Mama knows the truth of Beatrice's relationship with Harry. What does Beatrice say about the reason her Mama does not confront them with it? How is this similar to their arrival home with Julia? What has to happen for Mama to come to accept the truth about her children?

How does Beatrice ensure the silence of the midwife regarding Richard's parentage? What happens at the end of the final harvest Beatrice oversees that makes her realize the villagers know about this relationship? How do they know?