# Beloved

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TONI MORRISON

Toni Morrison is an African-American writer and professor. Growing up in Ohio, she developed a love for literature and storytelling. She studied English at Howard University and Cornell University, before teaching English at various universities and working as an editor. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970. She continued to write and gradually garnered national attention before publishing *Beloved* in 1987. *Beloved* was hugely successful, winning the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and is regularly included in the discussion of the best novel written after World War II. In 1993, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her writings often focus on the experiences of black women in the United States. She is currently a professor at Princeton University.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Beloved* is related to events surrounding the Civil War, especially the Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed southern slave owners to travel north and reclaim any slaves that had escaped from their ownership. Moreover, the entire novel is inspired by the true story of Margaret Garner, a slave who escaped with her family across the Ohio River in 1856. Slave catchers found her and she killed her two-year-old daughter, rather than seeing her daughter become a slave. Garner was then taken back into slavery.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While it does not engage with any other literary works directly, *Beloved* may be understood in relation to other famous American narratives of slavery, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. *Beloved* is unique among such works in that it was written so recently and explores not only the horrors of slavery, but also its painful and enduring legacy.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Beloved*
- **When Written:** Early 1980s
- **Where Written:** Albany, NY
- **When Published:** 1987
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Historical novel
- **Setting:** The outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio in the years just before (1855) and directly following (1873) the Civil War; flashbacks to the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky
- **Climax:** The revelation of Sethe's attempt to kill her children (and successful murder of her baby) to keep them out of slavery; the women of the neighborhood surrounding 124 and sing outside the house, driving Beloved away.
- **Antagonist:** There is no clear antagonist, but at various moments the novel's characters struggle against slavery and racism, Schoolteacher, Beloved, and the past.
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient, with first-person passages from various points of view

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Good Book.** *Beloved* is full of allusions to the Bible. From the four horsemen who come to take Sethe back to slavery (reminiscent of the four horsemen of the apocalypse), to Baby Suggs' miraculous feast (which recalls Jesus' miracle of feeding thousands with five loaves of bread and two fish), many episodes in the novel gain significance and seriousness through allusions to Biblical stories.

**Memorial.** Toni Morrison once remarked that there was no memorial, such as simply a bench by a road, to honor the memory of all of those brought to the United States as slaves. For her, *Beloved* functioned as this kind of commemoration. In response, the Toni Morrison Society has installed benches in sites around the U.S. (and the world) as just such memorials.

## PLOT SUMMARY

On the edge of Cincinnati, in 1873 just after the end of the Civil War, there is a house numbered 124 that is haunted by the presence of a dead child. A former slave named Sethe has lived in the house, with its ghost, for 18 years. Sethe lives at 124 with her daughter Denver. Her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, died eight years previously after languishing for years with exhaustion and seeming overwhelming sadness. And her two sons, Howard and Buglar, ran away from the haunted home just before Baby Suggs' death.

Paul D, a former slave who used to work on the same plantation, called Sweet Home, as Sethe, arrives at 124 and moves in, making a kind of family with Denver and Sethe. Paul D awakens painful memories for Sethe and Denver is jealous of the attention and affection that Sethe gives to him. But just as Denver is getting used to the new familial arrangement, a strange woman appears at the house. She calls herself Beloved and says that she doesn't know who she is or where she is from.

Beloved asks Sethe many questions about her past and

somehow seems to know about things only Sethe knew, such as about a pair of earrings Sethe received as a gift from the wife of her former master. Denver loves having Beloved around the house and eagerly tells her about the miracle of her own birth: Sethe escaped from Sweet Home while pregnant with Denver and almost died of hunger and exhaustion while trying to make it to Ohio. But a white woman named Amy Denver found Sethe, cared for her, and helped her get to the **Ohio River**, where she gave birth to Denver. Sethe named Denver after the kind white woman.

Paul D recalls his experience working on a chain gang. He and the other slaves eventually escaped together and had their chains cut by a group of Cherokee. Paul D wandered north and stayed with a kind woman in Delaware for some time, but he was unable to settle. He felt an urge to wander and did so for years before coming to 124.

Missing Baby Suggs, Sethe takes Beloved and Denver to the clearing in the woods where Baby Suggs used to have spiritual gatherings before she fell into her exhausted state. Sethe wishes that Baby Suggs were there to rub her neck and suddenly she feels other-worldly fingers massaging her neck. But then the fingers begin to choke her until they finally let go. Denver thinks that Beloved is somehow behind the choking, but Beloved denies it.

Beloved gradually and mysterious forces Paul D out of the house by making him restless, so that he ends up sleeping outside in the cold house. When he is sleeping outside in the cold house one night, she persuades him to sleep with her and stirs up his painful memories. Beloved tells Denver that she wants Paul D out of 124.

The novel moves back in time to follow Baby Suggs as she waits for Sethe and her son Halle (Sethe's husband). Sethe has snuck her children out of Sweet Home and sent them ahead to 124, and she and Halle are supposed to escape together and come to the house. Halle never arrives, but Sethe does, and Baby Suggs is happy to have at least Sethe and her children reunited. She hosts a grand celebration for the neighboring community and her meager stores of food miraculously furnish a huge feast for ninety people. After the celebration, she feels uneasy, and realizes that she has offended the community with an excessive display of joy and pride. She senses that something bad is coming as a consequence.

Soon after the celebration, four horsemen come to 124: Schoolteacher (who became the owner of Sweet Home after the kinder original master died), his nephew, a slave catcher, and a sheriff. They have come to take Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home to work as slaves. The offended community does not warn Sethe or Baby Suggs, and when Sethe sees Schoolteacher coming, she gathers her children and runs to a shed. When the four horsemen find her, she has killed one child with a saw and is ready to kill her other children. Schoolteacher decides that she is crazy and not worth bringing back to work. The sheriff takes Sethe off to jail.

Back in the present, a former slave named Stamp Paid (who helped Sethe escape to 124 eighteen years ago) tells Paul D about Sethe's killing her own child. Paul D confronts Sethe about it, and then leaves 124. Feeling guilty for causing Paul D to leave Sethe, Stamp Paid goes to 124 to talk to Sethe. But she does not come to the door. Stamp Paid hears strange voices from the house and sees Beloved through a window.

Within the house, Beloved causes Sethe to remember more and more of her painful past. The novel follows Sethe's stream of consciousness as Sethe maintains that her killing her child was an act of love. Sethe believes that Beloved is the returned spirit of her dead child. The novel then follows the thoughts of Denver and Beloved. In a series of vivid but fragmented recollections, Beloved remembers being taken on a ship from Africa to the United States, the "middle passage" of the Atlantic slave trade.

Sethe begins to get weaker and weaker, falling under the sway of Beloved, whose every whim Sethe obeys. Denver ventures out of the house in search of work, to try to get food and provide for the household. She goes to the house of the Bodwins, who once helped Baby Suggs settle at 124, and tells their maid Janey about Beloved and the situation at 124. The community rallies together to supply food to 124.

As news spreads of Beloved's strange presence at 124, a group of women join together to rescue Sethe and Denver from her. They gather around 124 and break into song, in a kind of exorcism. Mr. Bodwin approaches the house and Sethe mistakes him for Schoolteacher. Crazed, she tries to attack him but is restrained by Denver and other women. Beloved disappears.

After Beloved's departure, 124 seems to become a normal household. Sethe has mostly lost her mind, but Denver is working and learning, hoping one day to attend college. Paul D returns to 124 and promises to always care for Sethe. The inhabitants of 124 and the surrounding community gradually forget about Beloved entirely, even those who saw and talked to her.

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Sethe** – The main character of the novel, Sethe is an enslaved woman who first smuggles her two older boys to freedom and then escapes with her own baby girl children to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1855. A determined and strong character, she flees Sweet Home while pregnant with Denver and, once in Cincinnati, works to run the household of 124. Prior to the beginning of the novel, Sethe killed her own child when her former master, Schoolteacher, came to take her and her children back to work as slaves. In 1873, Sethe tries to make a

new life with Paul D and then with Beloved, but is eventually overcome by Beloved and her painful past. By the end of the novel, she seems to have lost her mind, but also seems to have escaped Beloved's haunting of her.

**Denver** – Denver is Sethe's youngest child. She is quiet and independent, but also craves attention and love from Sethe and Beloved. She loves to hear Sethe tell her about her miraculous birth. Toward the end of the novel, she gathers enough courage to venture outside of 124 by herself and get help for Sethe. As the novel ends, she seems to have a potentially promising future and to have been saved from the past that controlled Sethe's life.

**Baby Suggs** – Baby Suggs is Halle's mother, Sethe's mother-in-law, and Denver's grandmother. Halle buys her freedom before the events of the novel and, after establishing a life at 124 in Cincinnati, she becomes something of a preacher or holy person in the surrounding community, holding gatherings in the Clearing in the forest. But after Sethe kills her child, Baby Suggs becomes exhausted and withdrawn, caring only about seeing bits of color, and slowly dies.

**Paul D** – Paul D was a slave at Sweet Home along with Halle, Sixo, and two other Pauls (Paul A and Paul F). He suffered greatly under Schoolteacher and also as a prisoner on a chain gang in Georgia. After the Civil War, Paul D spent years wandering around, unable to feel at home anywhere. This changes when he arrives at 124 and tries to settle down with Sethe, but he is forced out of the household by Beloved. He tries to repress his painful memories by keeping them in what he calls the **tobacco tin** where his heart once was, but Sethe and Beloved force him to confront his troubled past. Ultimately, he returns to care for Sethe, even after she seems to have lost her mind.

**Beloved** – It is never clear exactly who or what Beloved is. One day, she climbs out of the **Ohio River** with no memory of where she is from or who she is. She says she comes from "the other side" and has been looking for Sethe. She is, in some sense, the spirit of Sethe's murdered child. But, as Denver recognizes at the end of the novel, she is also more. She can perhaps be understood as an embodiment of the seduction and danger of the past, as she causes Paul D and Sethe to remember and narrate their own personal stories and eventually become overwhelmed by them. She also seems to give voice to the pain and suffering of all slaves, as she is able to recall, somehow, the middle passage from Africa to the United States. Ella and the other women who come to rescue Sethe perceive her as a "devil child" and drive her away from 124 with song.

**Stamp Paid** – Stamp Paid is a former slave who works on the Underground Railroad and helps bring Sethe to 124 by ferrying her across the **Ohio River**. Late in the novel, he tells Paul D about Sethe's murdering her child, which causes Paul D to leave 124. Stamp Paid feels guilty for his part in Paul D's abandonment of Sethe, and works to make amends.

**Amy Denver** – Amy Denver is a white woman, who flees from her indentured servitude in an attempt to get to Boston and purchase some velvet. She encounters Sethe when Sethe is almost dying of exhaustion, pregnant, and running from Sweet Home. Amy cares for Sethe and helps get her to the **Ohio River** and freedom. She also helps Sethe give birth to Denver, who Sethe names after her.

**Schoolteacher** – Schoolteacher comes with his nephews to manage Sweet Home after the death of Mr. Garner. He is extremely cruel. Not only does he beat and abuse his slaves, but he also takes notes on them and measures and studies them like animals. He seems, literally, to see them as animals.

**Mr. and Mrs. Garner** – The original owners of Sweet Home, the Garners are relatively kind slave owners compared to Schoolteacher (and indeed most slave owners). They allow Halle to buy Baby Suggs' freedom, for example, and boast of their male slaves as Sweet Home men. Nonetheless, they are still slave owners and treat their slaves as inferiors.

**Ella** – Ella is a black woman who was locked up by a white father and son, who abused her. She is a friend of Sethe, but abandons Sethe after she kills her child. At the end of the novel, though, she organizes the group of women who come to rescue Sethe from Beloved.

**Halle** – A male slave at Sweet Home, Halle is Sethe's husband and the father of her children. After seeing Schoolteacher's nephews hold down Sethe and take her breast milk, he goes mad. The last anyone sees of him is Paul D seeing him at a butter churn, smearing butter all over his face in insanity.

**Howard and Buglar** – Howard and Buglar are Sethe's sons. When Schoolteacher comes to recapture Sethe and her children, she tries to kill them along with her baby daughter, but is able only to kill the daughter. By the beginning of the novel, they have run away from 124 and are absent for the entire story.

**Sixo** – Sixo is one of the slaves at Sweet Home. He is remembered for walking more than thirty miles to see a woman. He steals a pig and eats it, and then tells Schoolteacher that since he was eating it in order to do more work, it wasn't really stealing. Schoolteacher punishes him for defiance. After his failed escape attempt from Sweet Home, he is deemed crazy and burned alive. He laughs as he dies, since he knows that the Thirty-Mile Woman escaped even if he did not, and that she is bearing his child.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mr. and Miss Bodwin** – Mr. Bodwin and his sister are two white abolitionists, who help Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Denver, as well as other freed and escaped slaves.

**Lady Jones** – Lady Jones is a mixed-race woman who is a

schoolteacher in the local community. She teaches a young Denver and then, late in the novel, helps Denver by getting the community to donate food to 124.

**Janey** – Janey is the Bodwins' maid. She helps Denver find work at the end of the novel, and spreads the word around town about Beloved, eventually leading to the women coming to exorcise Beloved from 124.

**The Thirty-Mile Woman** – The Thirty-Mile Woman is the woman who Sixo walks thirty miles just to see. She is with Sixo when he tries to escape from Sweet Home and, while he is captured, she gets away. She is pregnant with Sixo's child.

## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

### SLAVERY

Through the memories and experiences of a wide variety of characters, ***Beloved*** presents unflinchingly the unthinkable cruelty of slavery. In particular, the novel explores how slavery dehumanizes slaves, treating them alternately as property and as animals. To a slave-owner like Schoolteacher, African-American slaves are less than human: he thinks of them only in terms of how much money they are worth, and talks of "mating" them as if they are animals. Paul D's experience of having an iron bit in his mouth quite literally reduces him to the status of an animal. And Schoolteacher's nephews at one point hold Sethe down and steal her breast milk, treating her like a cow.

Even seemingly "kind" slave-owners like Mr. and Mrs. Garner abuse their slaves and treat them as lesser beings. Slavery also breaks up family units: Sethe can hardly remember her own mother and, for slaves, this is the norm rather than an exception, as children are routinely sold off to work far away from their families. Another important aspect of slavery in the novel is the fact that its effects are felt even after individuals find freedom. After Sethe and her family flee Sweet Home, slavery haunts them in numerous ways, whether through painful memories, literal scars, or their former owner himself, who finds Sethe and attempts to bring her and her children back to Sweet Home. Slavery is an institution so awful that Sethe kills her own baby, and attempts to kill all her children, to save them from being dragged back into it. Through the haunting figure of Beloved, and the memories that so many of the characters try and fail to hide from, *Beloved* shows how the institutionalized practice of slavery has lasting consequences—physical, psychological, and societal—even after it ends.

### MOTHERHOOD

At its core, ***Beloved*** is a novel about a mother and her children, centered around the relationship between Sethe and the unnamed daughter she kills, as well as the strange re-birth of that daughter in the form of Beloved. When Sethe miraculously escapes Sweet Home, it is only because of the determination she has to reach her children, nurse her baby, and deliver Denver safely. Similarly, Halle works extra time in order to buy the freedom of his own mother, Baby Suggs, before seeking his own freedom. The strength of mother-child bonds are further illustrated by the close relationship between Denver and Sethe, upon which Paul D intrudes.

But, within the novel, the strength of motherhood is constantly pitted against the horrors of slavery. In a number of ways, slavery simply does not allow for motherhood. On a basic level, the practice of slavery separates children from their mothers, as exemplified by Sethe's faint recollections of her own mother. Since it is so likely for a slave-woman to be separated from her children, the institution of slavery discourages and prevents mothers from forming strong emotional attachments to their children. As Paul D observes of Sethe and Denver, "to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love." The scene in which Sethe is held down and robbed of her own breast milk shows, on a cruelly literal level, Sethe being robbed of her very bodily capability to be a nurturing mother. The conflict between motherhood and slavery is perhaps clearest in the central act of the novel: Sethe's killing her own daughter. The act can be read two ways: on the one hand, it represents an act of the deepest motherly love: Sethe saving her children from having to endure slavery, believing that death is better. But on the other hand, it can also be interpreted as Sethe refusing to be a mother under slavery. Slavery would not allow her to be a real mother to her children, so she would rather not be a mother at all.

### STORYTELLING, MEMORY, AND THE PAST

The past does not simply go away in *Beloved*, but continues to exert influence in the present in a number of ways. The most obvious example of this is the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter. Though literally buried, the baby continues to be present in 124 as a kind of ghost or poltergeist. But beyond this instance of the supernatural, Sethe teaches Denver that "Some things just stay," and that nothing ever really dies. Sweet Home, for example, although firmly in Sethe's past, continues to haunt her through painful memories and the reappearance of Schoolteacher and even Paul D. As the novel continually moves between present narration and past

memory, its very form also denies any simple separation between past and present. Sethe's term for this kind of powerful memory is "rememory", a word that she uses to describe memories that affect not only the person who remembers the past, but others as well.

One of the ways in which memories live on is through storytelling. The novel explores the value but also the danger of storytelling. Storytelling keeps memories alive and Sethe's telling Denver about her family and her miraculous birth gives Denver some sense of personal history and heritage. As stories spread between Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D, and Denver, personal memories give rise to a kind of collective oral tradition about the past, and offer former slaves the ability to tell their own story and define themselves, as opposed to constantly being defined by slave-owners, such as Schoolteacher (who takes notes for his own writings about his slaves). But storytelling also awakens painful memories, especially for Sethe and Paul D. Bringing up past pain can prevent characters from moving on. The end of the novel suggests that, after Beloved's disappearance, people had to forget about her in order to go on living, as it repeats, "It was not a story to pass on." But nonetheless, Toni Morrison's novel *does* pass on the story of Beloved, suggesting that there still is some value in our learning about this painful story of the past, that as a nation we should not (and cannot) forget about the history of slavery.

One of the ways that communities find expression in ***Beloved*** is through song. Baby Suggs' sermons are centered around song and dance, while the group of women that forces Beloved from the house does so by singing. Paul D and his fellow chain gang prisoners get through their labor by singing. A chorus of singing people provides the perfect example of the strength of operating as a community. The combined effect of a singing group is greater than that of all its individuals singing alone. Similarly, in order to endure slavery and its lasting effects, characters in ***Beloved*** rely on each other for strength.

## COMMUNITY

As the practice of slavery breaks up family units, ***Beloved*** provides numerous examples of slaves and ex-slaves creating and relying upon strong communities beyond the immediate family. Baby Suggs' congregation that gathers in the woods illustrates this, as neighboring African-Americans come together as a community. They come together again toward the end of the novel, as different families provide food for Sethe and Denver when they are in need and a large group of women come to 124 to exorcize, in a manner of speaking, Beloved from the house.

Even in the depths of slavery, when Paul D is on the chain gang, he and the other prisoners escape by cooperating as a team. And it is only through the communal network of the Underground Railroad that Sethe and many other slaves are able to find their way to freedom and establish new lives in the north. At the same time, the novel's most tragic act—Sethe's killing of her baby—is partially caused by a failure of community. The community's resentment about the joyousness and opulence of the feast that Baby Suggs puts together—which the community interprets as being prideful—leads to the community's failure to warn Baby Suggs or Sethe of Schoolteacher's approach, and thus Sethe is unable to hide and instead is forced to act quickly and radically.

## HOME

*Beloved* is split into three major sections, and each of these sections begins not with any description of a character, but with a short sentence describing Sethe's house: "124 was spiteful." Then, "124 was loud." And finally, "124 was quiet." As 124 is haunted, it seems to have a mind of its own and is almost a character of the novel in its own right. The house is extremely important to Baby Suggs and Sethe as a matter of pride. After escaping slavery, they are proud to finally have a home of their own (the ironically named Sweet Home was neither sweet nor a home for its slave inhabitants).

But the idea of a home is important in ***Beloved*** beyond the walls of 124. As a child, Denver finds a kind of home in a growth of boxwood shrubs, a place that feels her own. Paul D spends practically the whole novel searching for a home. He is unable to settle down anywhere and, after much wandering, finally arrives at 124 but gradually moves out of the home into the outdoor cold house before leaving to sleep in the church basement. Slavery has robbed Paul D, like many others, of a home so that, even after he finds freedom, he can never find a place where he feels he truly belongs. These characters' attempts to find a home can be seen as a consequence of the original dislocation of African-American slaves from their African home, the horrible voyage known as the middle passage that is vividly recalled by Beloved.

# SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

## THE OHIO RIVER

As the border that demarcates the free territory of Ohio from the nearby southern slave states, the Ohio River is of great significance. For slaves such as Sethe, the river represents the promise of freedom. Given the wealth of Biblical allusions in the novel, the river may also be understood as a version of the Jordan River from the Bible, which the Israelites cross to enter the Promised Land. As Beloved comes out of the river and describes herself as coming from "the other side", the Ohio River also comes to symbolize the border

between this world and the next (indeed, for free ex-slaves, crossing back into slave territory would be a kind of death). Stamp Paid's occupation as a ferryman on the river for the Underground Railroad furthers this association, as he resembles Charon from Greek mythology (who ferried souls across the river Styx into the underworld).

## SETHE'S SCAR

Sethe's scar on her back is an emblem and reminder of the physical cruelty of slavery. But the scar eerily resembles a beautiful tree. This can be seen as symbolizing the deceitfully pleasant and beautiful appearances of picturesque plantations like Sweet Home, which were rooted in ugly violence. But, also, it can serve as an example of a strange beauty coming from a horrible experience. In this way, the scar can even become an analogue for Morrison's novel itself, an artistic creation arising out of the tragedy of slavery, whose beautiful writing asks the reader to confront the relationship between beauty and human suffering.

## PAUL D'S TOBACCO TIN

Paul D says that instead of a heart, he has a tobacco tin in his chest, where he keeps all of his painful memories and emotions. This image symbolizes his need to repress memories and hold back emotions, just as Sethe and other slaves have had to do in order to survive. Otherwise, attempting to confront the horrible realities of slavery can completely overwhelm a person, as happens to Halle and other slaves who go mad. This kind of repression is thus necessary for Paul D's basic, physical survival as a slave and a prisoner on the chain gang. But it cannot last forever: as the novel progresses, Paul D's tobacco tin is pried open, and his past memories catch up with him.

# QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Beloved* published in 2004.

## Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom.

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 3

**Explanation and Analysis**

The novel's opening lines describe the house in which Sethe and Denver live. We are presented first with its name and second with a description of its malicious nature.

These sentences create several levels of distance between the text and the reader. First, beginning with a number rather than a word is disorienting, and presents the story in a sterile and abstract environment. Second, instead of describing a character or natural setting, the text opts to hone in on a building. Third, that building is detailed with emotional language that would seem more fitting for a human. In addition to establishing the importance of this physical space as a sort of pseudo-character, Morrison also disrupts the ordinary conventions we expect from a novel's opening.

Furthermore, the image of "baby's venom" foreshadows how the haunted quality of 124 will be tied to Sethe's killing of her child. A delayed sense of malice seems to have set into the physical space, filling it with the "venom" of the baby's murder. In this way, Morrison shows the events of the past to be deeply enmeshed in the happenings of the present—and in particular in its physical space.

"How come everybody run off from Sweet Home can't stop talking about it? Look like if it was so sweet you would have stayed."

[...]

Paul D laughed. "True, true. [Denver's] right, Sethe. It wasn't sweet and it sure wasn't home." He shook his head.

"But it's where we were," said Sethe. "All together. Comes back whether we want it to or not."

**Related Characters:** Denver, Paul D, Sethe (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 16

**Explanation and Analysis**

Denver is perturbed by Paul D's arrival and his conversations with Sethe. She interrogates them about their discussion of Sweet Home, to which they respond that the place continues to exert powerful control over their lives.

This exchange establishes the fraught relationship these characters have to the plantation from which they have escaped. Although the location signifies cruel memories, it is also part of Sethe's personal history, as well as the communal history created among all the slaves who worked there. Her simple constructions—"it's where we were" and

"all together"—make the incontestable argument that the plantation functioned much like a home does. It played the same narrative and psychological role for these characters, whether they want it to or not, and thus it returns consistently in their interactions and lives.

As an outsider, Denver is unable to make sense of this pattern. Her distanced viewpoint allows her to notice, for instance, the irony in the plantation's name itself. She thus stands for the role of a second generation of ex-slaves, as well as for the contemporary reader, who might be confused about why the plantation serves to connect Sethe and Paul D. Morrison thus points to a disjoint between these two generational perspectives: one that feels a continued link to the plantation and one that cannot make sense of that very link.

## Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ [...] in all of Baby's life, as well as Sethe's own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children.

**Related Characters:** Baby Suggs, Sethe

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 27-28

**Explanation and Analysis**

Sethe ruminates on her life and the lives of other slaves back at Sweet Home. She explains here that those lives have generally been lived at the whims of other people: white slave owners.

That people "were moved around like checkers" shows how in slavery, humans were treated like pieces in a game—objects to be manipulated rather than given real care or dignity. The following series of verbs are presented in similarly passive constructions: "been hanged, got rented out [...]" that place the subjects in roles lacking actual control. It presents their lives as subject to external forces rather than constituted by personal agency. When Sethe links this passivity to the paternity of Baby Suggs' children, she implies that the men Baby Suggs loved were all taken away from her as part of that checkers game "called the nastiness of life."

Her realization that children function as "pieces" in this game is particularly disheartening. Baby Suggs presumably assumed that children would be given a separate and safe dispensation away from these manipulative tactics, but in fact they are treated equally ruthlessly. This theme of a perverted childhood and motherhood will reverberate throughout *Beloved*: Morrison underlines how the cruelty and dehumanization of slavery was applied regardless of one's innocence or weakness.

❝ Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory.... Places, places are still there.

**Related Characters:** Sethe (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 43

**Explanation and Analysis**

Denver is moved by the sight of a praying Sethe's white dress, and she thinks of the story of her birth. When she asks Sethe what she was doing, Sethe reflects on the endurance of both memory and actual places.

Sethe makes two important distinctions on the permanence of certain aspects of life. The first is between things that "go" and things that "stay": Certain events or people, she implies, are transitory while others maintain a permanent presence in her life. In making this distinction, she responds to Denver's earlier skepticism on her and Paul D's interest in Sweet Home, asserting that the past continues to play a significant role in the present. Selecting the term "rememory" instead of "memory" underlines its repetitive quality, demonstrating that a particularly strong memory *recreates* events in the present instead of merely observing them from a distance.

At this point, both the reader and Denver would presume that Sethe is speaking of memory—that memory allows things to "just stay." But Sethe directly disarms this point, rejecting that "it was my rememory" and instead asserting the continued endurance of "places." She thus affirms that what stays can be corporeal and physical instead of just psychological—a point that can be applied to her scarred body, to the building 124, and of course to the character of Beloved herself.

❝ As for Denver, the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered.

**Related Characters:** Denver, Sethe

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 51

**Explanation and Analysis**

Sethe ponders a potential future with Paul D, but notes that Denver must be her first priority. She worries about how her slave past may affect Denver's future.

This passage inverts a traditional linear time-scale, for it positions "the past" to be "waiting" for Denver as if it is in fact in her future. Sethe has already spoken of the way the past can play a continued role in the present, but here she takes the claim one step further—observing that it can also affect the future. As a result, the past takes on qualities of aggression, even violence—things from which a child must be kept. That protecting Denver from these memories "was all that mattered" shows Sethe's singularity of purpose: even as Paul D might allow her to engage with the present and future, her focus remains entirely on keeping the past from her child. (Ironically, this obsession makes Sethe herself deeply imbedded in the past.) Morrison thus shows how memory provides not only a continued struggle for an individual person, but also affects the ability of communities and new generations to live independent of previous atrocities.

## Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Odd clusters and strays of Negroes wandered the back roads and cowpaths from Schenectady to Jackson.... Some of them were running from family that could not support them, some to family; some were running from dead crops, dead kin, life threats, and took-over land. Boys younger than Buglar and Howard; configurations and blends of families of women and children, while elsewhere, solitary, hunted and hunting for, were men, men, men.

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 63

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Paul D meets Beloved, he decides not to interrogate her about her past. He contemplates the various ways that ex-slaves traveled to escape their plantations.

Here Paul D presents the ways that this population moved through the United States. Instead of portraying a coherent migration, he uses language that connotes haphazard movement: "odd clusters and strays" as the subject, "wandered" as the verb. He then subdivides this general movement into a series of separate ones—a set of "some" groups that fled from and toward various destinations. The makeup of the populations, he notes, was similarly varied: the phrase "configurations and blends" emphasizes the lack of a singular identity.

Morrison unseats, through these images, the preconception that ex-slaves moved in a single, coherent fashion. They were not, she implies, composed of traditional family units or made of a homogenous population (because most family units had been broken up or destroyed by slavery itself, and slave owners tried to keep slaves from forming any kind of real community). Considering this complexity, it may seem surprising that Paul D does not ask Beloved of her past. And here we also see a commentary on personal history: Its complexity can provide grounds to ignore the past, to not dig too deeply for fear of what may be found.

## Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe... because every mention of her past life hurt.... But, as she began telling about the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it. Perhaps it was Beloved's distance from the events itself, or her thirst for hearing it—in any case it was an unexpected pleasure.

**Related Characters:** Sethe, Beloved

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 69

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Sethe recounts the tale of her earrings, she is surprised at how much the story pleases Beloved. She wonders why they relate to her memories so differently.

This passage returns to the theme of how the past continues to affect the present. Here, "storytelling" connects earlier memories to a current interaction—which is precisely what Sethe wished to avoid for both herself and for Denver. As a result, she is surprised that Beloved gains "profound satisfaction" from the tales: a combination of words that implies not only pleasure but also a deeper sense of meaning. More intriguing still, this enjoyment transfers from Beloved back to Sethe, from listener back to storyteller.

The precise significance of this transfer remains somewhat

unclear. On the one hand, it might cast Beloved as helping heal Sethe—as providing a way for her to reconcile her past and find an "unexpected pleasure" in what has formerly haunted her. A more skeptical reading, however, would see in Beloved's "thirst" a level of manipulation that painfully brings an unwanted past into the present. One way to resolve the tension might be to see how Sethe attributes Beloved's enjoyment to her "distance from the events itself." This line points to the reliance of storytelling on a certain detachment from what is being told: perhaps by forming a narrative of her past, Sethe is able to acquire her own distance from the events, to become an audience for her own story like Beloved.

> She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man... Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe.

**Related Characters:** Sethe

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 74

**Explanation and Analysis**

Sethe recounts a story a woman Nan told her about Sethe's mother. When the two were crossing from Africa on a slave-boat, Sethe's mother was raped repeatedly by white men, and she "threw away" all the children except for Sethe.

This tale sets up a cyclic quality to time in this novel, in which past events are repeated throughout different generations. Just as Sethe killed Beloved, we learn that her mother had killed many of her own children—selecting only one to save, just as Sethe only saved Denver. The abandoned children were similarly nameless, thus establishing the giving of names as a significant plot event. Furthermore, both Sethe's and Sethe's mother's stories are characterized by migration: the first from Good Home, the second from Africa. By placing in parallel their two tales, Morrison shows how social conditions can cause similar histories to appear throughout generations. Although Sethe's tale might seem to imply the progress of emancipation, she is still beholden to the symbolic terrors that crippled her mother.

> [Sethe] shook her head from side to side, resigned to her rebellious brain. Why was there nothing it refused? No misery, no regret, no hateful picture too rotten to accept? Like a greedy child it snatched up everything. Just once, could it say, No thank you?

**Related Characters:** Sethe

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 82-83

**Explanation and Analysis**

Paul D has just told Sethe that Halle saw her being attacked by the white men back at Sweet Home. In response, Sethe despairs that her memories refuse her attempts at controlling them.

This passage develops a model of deeply involuntary memory. Whereas Sethe wishes to control her relationship to the past, she finds herself stuck with "her rebellious brain." She wonders why it indiscriminately incorporates all information: nothing is "refused," and all is permissible "to accept." That memory can never say "No thank you" means that it can never be shut out of the present moment. Though Sethe earnestly wishes to control her relationship to the past, these tales continue to play an active role beyond her control.

Likening memory to "a greedy child" is a poignant simile. First, it corroborates the way that Beloved functions to induce Sethe's memory—both in that she reminds Sethe of Sweet Home and in that she greedily asks her to recount stories of her past. If before, Beloved's inquisitive nature seemed to offer a positive way for Sethe to relate to her past, here the connection to "greedy child" casts it in a less favorable light. Beloved becomes, then, a metaphor for memory's uncontrollable and ravenous nature—the way it can prey on one's current psychology.

> Mister, he looked so...free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher. ...Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead.

**Related Characters:** Paul D (speaker), Paul D

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 86

**Explanation and Analysis**

Sethe agrees to listen to Paul D's stories about the past. He recounts, here, the despair he felt when he saw a rooster named Mister.

By juxtaposing the liberty of an animal with his own lack of liberty, Paul D shows the true destitution experienced in slavery. He considers the rooster to epitomize manlike qualities of "Stronger and tougher," and to have more agency in determining his place in the world. In contrast to Mister's ability to "stay what he was," Paul D feels himself to be at the whims of others. This comparison functions in two ways: retroactively, it shows the misery of Paul D's enslavement, and in the moment it caused him to understand just how powerless he was. His interaction with the rooster allowed and allows him to articulate the horror of slavery.

Bestowed with an honorary title—"Mister"—the rooster is presented to have a human identity and sense of control. Thus even if he were to be treated as an animal by being "cooked," he would still have the honorific title that made him somehow more human and free. Paul D, on the other hand, trivializes his own name and, by extension, his own identity. Regardless of whether he is "living or dead," he believes he will not be recognized. Morrison renders humanity, then, not an intrinsic quality, but rather a question of how one's identity is constructed by others.

## Part 1, Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them.... No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it. ...The dark, dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too.

**Related Characters:** Baby Suggs (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 103-104

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here Sethe recounts the sermons that Baby Suggs would deliver at the clearing. The oration encouraged ex-slaves to love themselves and each other, a behavior in direct contrast to the hatred and dehumanization they experienced from white people.

This passage shows the way Baby Suggs was, for a time, able to cultivate a meaningful and isolated community for ex-slaves. She defines the clearing in opposition to a "yonder," which is described in terms of negations: "do not love"; "don't love"; "no more do they love" etc. The clearing, on the other hand, is characterized by affirmations and actions—which Baby Suggs implores her listeners to replicate. She becomes a spiritual leader for the community, then, and the clearing becomes her allegorical church. Morrison seems in this scene to offer a form of mental emancipation and spirituality for the ex-slaves.

It bears noticing how much of the language focuses on components of the body: "hands" "liver" and "heart." Instead of speaking only of emotional and spiritual identity, Baby Suggs maintains an almost exclusive focus on physicality. This emphasis speaks to how her unique brand of religion is non-denominational—unified by physical bodies instead of by ideology. It also underlines how the physical identity is what is most detested by those "yonder," and thus what is most in need of protection by the closed circle of the clearing. Slavery was, at its simplest level, about the dehumanization and destruction of black bodies, and so here Baby Suggs seeks to undo that horror by teaching the former slaves to love and celebrate those same black bodies.

## Part 1, Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ They chain-danced over the fields... They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings.

**Related Characters:** Paul D

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 128

**Explanation and Analysis**

Paul D remembers the time that he spent on a Georgia chain gang. He reflects specifically on the way they used music as a way to connect to each other.

This passage speaks to the way that artistic expression allowed the slaves a limited amount of agency and mobility within their lives. Though they were unable to alter their work conditions, the slaves could still control their use of language. Thus "garbling the words" becomes an expression of personal control in that they can scramble language to their whims. "Tricking the words" presents their behavior as

subversive, for the chain gang members can bend the language itself to their own purposes. That manipulation functions as a small rebellion, too, against white oppressors who otherwise maintained harsh control of language. Here, the slaveowners would not have been able to make sense of their songs.

This transformation also takes place in the language of Morrison's novel itself. For instance the term "chain-danced" is formed in a similar compound-word structure as "chain gang," but turns a noun that underlines entrapment into an expression of liberty. And this linguistic play is characteristic of her work: Morrison often uses unexpected syntax and unconventional images to disrupt our readerly expectations. She makes use of vernacular phrases and colloquial expressions—in particular those drawn from black communities—to counter the idea that literary language need not be made of a traditional form associated with white culture. Her work is thus a novelistic form of "tricking the words" so as to innovate storytelling and provide a space for literary black emancipation.

> The chain that held them would save all or none, and Hi Man was the Delivery. They talked through that chain like Sam Morse and, Great God, they all came up. Like the unshriven dead, zombies on the loose, holding the chains in their hands, they trusted the rain and the dark, yes, but mostly Hi Man and each other.

**Related Characters:** Paul D

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 130

**Explanation and Analysis**

While Paul D is working on the chain gang, a terrible storm threatens his group but also offers a route to escape. He observes that the instrument of their oppression could also serve as a route to salvation.

"The chain" becomes, in this description, far more than a physical object, but rather a way for the men attached to communicate and connect to each other. Morrison positions it as an active agent when she makes it the subject of the sentence that "would save all or none." In comparison, the slaves are "unshriven dead, zombies," language that emphasizes how dehumanized they have become in their current occupation. Thus the chain gains in agency just as the humans are deprived of it: indeed, the chain becomes the arbiter of their destiny.

At the same time, however, the cruel chain also becomes a route to escape. In connecting the slaves to each other, it gives them an opportunity to communicate without language—and to use the storm to access their freedom. In this way, Morrison transforms a symbol of slavery into a potential symbol of liberty; the slaves can use exactly what entraps them to flee entrapment.

> It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open.

**Related Characters:** Paul D, Sixo, Sethe

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 133

**Explanation and Analysis**

Paul D describes his journey after escaping from the chain gang. He imagines placing memories into a tobacco tin in his chest, leaving them stored away and inaccessible.

This passage offers one example of how ex-slaves sought to confront their harrowing pasts. Here, Paul D's strategy is to firmly seal off those memories in a metaphorical tobacco tin. He applies this process indiscriminately—to the cruel "schoolteacher" just as to his lover "Sethe" and to sensory images like butter and hickory. In contrast to the passage in which Sethe railed against how memory's involuntary nature could easily overwhelm her, Paul D seems to maintain an impressive mastery over his mind.

Yet at the same time, Morrison hints at the fickle and uncontrollable nature of memory. In seeking to control his memories, Paul D must also sever himself from the positive ones. We should pause, similarly, at the image of the "tobacco tin." Tobacco was one of the original crops grown by slave plantations in the United States, so the tin also serves as an implicit reference to the institution imprisoning Paul D. While this passage might seem to praise Paul D for his precise control over his past, the text both foreshadows that the tin will indeed be someday "pried open" and hints that Paul D's procedure of gaining this control may itself be deeply troubling.

## Part 1, Chapter 15 Quotes

The last of [Baby Suggs'] children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own—fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads when they walked.

**Related Characters:** Baby Suggs, Halle

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 163

### Explanation and Analysis

While waiting for Sethe and Halle to arrive at 124, Baby Suggs thinks fondly of her son. She recounts how her previous children had been stolen from her immediately upon being born.

Suggs' memories speak to the alienation between slaves and their relatives. The cruel actions of traders and owners would rip families apart, even severing children from their mothers. As a result, Suggs' memory is imprinted only with the initial physical components of her children, and she lacks any knowledge of their future. Describing the children in terms of fractured body parts—"a little foot"; "the fat fingertips"—emphasizes the disconnected way that Suggs engaged with them. And she has similar snapshots of their existence in time, holding only past images with no present or future to combine into a full sense of her children as people.

The passage shows how this broken relationship with one's relatives has a permanent effect on how one deals with all relationships. Suggs' earlier experiences with her children, for instance, induced complete alienation from Halle because she presumed "it wasn't worth the trouble." Morrison thus draws our attention to the fact that one's ability to take an interest in those around them is predicated on perceived value and permanence—both of which are negated by slavery.

## Part 1, Chapter 18 Quotes

And if [Sethe] thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one else could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe.

**Related Characters:** Sethe, Denver, Beloved

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 192

### Explanation and Analysis

Paul D confronts Sethe about murdering her child. During their discussion, she tells this story of her escape from Sweet Home.

Morrison juxtaposes two forms of potential action: a well-reasoned escape plan in which the route has been rationally conceptualized; and the haphazard, desperate style characterized of Sethe. Indeed, Sethe's mindset here does not seem to revolve around "thought" at all, but rather the absence of thought—the blunt rejection of "No" that grows and replicates itself into "Nonono." We have little insight into Sethe's thought process, for her journey lacks a coherent direction, a clear set of objects that she saves, or even a certain destination. Instead, she maintains the vague goal of "outside," similarly defined in terms of negation, as was the "No."

The language of this passage mimics Sethe's style of thought. Composed of short fragments, it avoids normal, fluent syntax in order to place the reader in the mind of someone making stressed and disordered decisions. It is as if Sethe is trying to convince the reader of her disorientation just as she tries to convince Paul D. And Morrison thus makes sensible to us what might have motivated a series of decisions by Sethe. In particular, she demonstrates how deeply one's psychology can be warped by the experiences of slavery—to the extent that one may even murder their own child as an act of intended love.

I can forget it all now because as soon as I got the gravestone in place you made your presence known in the house and worried us all to distraction. I didn't understand it then. I thought you were mad with me. And now I know that if you was, you ain't now because you came back here to me... I only need to know one thing. How bad is the scar?

**Related Characters:** Sethe (speaker), Beloved

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 217

**Explanation and Analysis**

After her skating outing with Denver and Beloved, Sethe grows increasingly convinced that Beloved is the spirit of her dead child. She ponders here how her dead spirit haunted 124.

This passage displays Sethe trying to reconcile with her memories—and to make sense of how past experiences exist alongside current ones. For instance, the new meaningful times with Beloved and Denver have caused her to "forget it all now," thus distancing herself from the past. Similarly, she "didn't understand it then," but the past does have a more sensible nature when now considered in retrospect. It seems that Sethe is finally able to reconcile with her own guilt, believing that Beloved is not angry "because you came back here to me." Thus her presence as a pseudo-child seems to recreate and to narrativize Sethe's past.

These descriptions present Sethe as gaining greater clarity into her past based on her current moments with Beloved. But Morrison also implies that Beloved's presence may be causing Sethe to sink inappropriately into the past—in a way that cripples her ability to progress into the future. Her singular focus on the "one thing" of the scar, for instance, speaks to emotional nearsightedness, which we also see in the way she has abandoned Paul D to be only with Beloved. Morrison thus shows how the symbolic return of the past has a double meaning: It can both order and obscure the present.

❝ I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard [Schoolteacher] say, "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up."

**Related Characters:** Sethe (speaker), Sethe, Schoolteacher

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 228

**Explanation and Analysis**

Sethe continues to involuntarily recall different events from Sweet Home. She cites a memory of Schoolteacher instructing his nephew, writing down lists of her human and animal characteristics.

This moment portrays the way slaveowners would make use of horrific and dehumanizing practices, as well as the pseudoscience they used to justify the institution itself. The Schoolteacher and his nephew have the semblance of scientific study through lining up attributes in a scientific manner. Yet their work horrifically demeans Sethe, reducing her human complexity to a series of bullet points. That one of those atomized lists is composed of "animal" characteristics is even more hideous: it shows that they believed slaves like her to only be partially human, to the extent that the non-human characteristics could be distilled through sufficient analysis.

That Sethe overhears this while asking for "muslin" is particularly ironic: muslin is a cotton cloth that would, of course, be only the concern of humans. Furthermore, the schoolteacher's nephew is notably mis-ordering the lists, and thus presumably intellectually lacking even as he describes Sethe's intellectual inferiority. Thus even in the moment when the Schoolteacher dehumanizes Sethe, her actions and the text itself make a small effort to restore that humanity.

❝ Whitepeople belived that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were right.... But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them.

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 234

**Explanation and Analysis**

Stamp Paid ponders the frightening noises of 124. He describes a certain wildness in black people, but attributes it to the cruelty of whites.

At first, Stamp Paid seems to be engaging in the stereotypes held by white people toward black people. He describes the "jungle" beneath dark skin in exotifying imagery—reminiscent of a stereotypical idea of an African landscape—that presents slaves as pseudo-apes. Thus he develops the previous point that slaves are, in some way, part animal rather than entirely human. But then comes an unexpected turn: Stamp Paid does not deny the value of this

image, and indeed claims "they were right." Yet whereas white people believe that this metaphorical jungle derives from "the other (livable) place"—that is to say Africa itself—he believes it is the result of their oppression in America. The exact rage that white people fear in blacks was, in fact, planted by white people through the institution of slavery.

This passage is a brilliant example of how the imagery of oppressors can be repurposed by the oppressed for their own uses. Morrison implies that the most effective strategy for both Stamp Paid as a character and herself as author is not to deny the efficacy of the jungle metaphor. Rather, one must turn the horrific idea on its head, showing how it is a construction of white slave owners.

## Part 2, Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ Beloved, she my daughter. She mine.... She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. But my love was tough and she back now. I knew she would be.... I won't never let her go.

**Related Characters:** Sethe (speaker), Beloved

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 236

### Explanation and Analysis

The novel has entered a pure stream-of-consciousness style at this point. Sethe repeatedly describes her deep love of Beloved and how that affection motivated her actions.

These lines reiterate that Sethe's infanticide was the result of her deep love for Beloved. The action is phrased not even as a choice, but rather as a necessity given the circumstances: "She had to be safe." In this way, Sethe seeks to justify her action not as the best choice given a set of circumstances, but indeed as the only one that could have been made. Morrison thus demonstrates how horrifically the definitions of safety and love have been warped under the specter of slavery: Love can be exemplified by murder, and safety is equated with death.

Yet the careful reader should not take this text at face value. Morrison uses halting statements and fragmented phrases to emphasize the lack of clarity in Sethe's thought process. Further, her repeated use of possessives—"she my"; "she mine"; "my love"—present the mother-daughter relationship as deeply controlling, even obsessive. The moral compass in Morrison's work is never entirely clear, and the text makes no clear pronouncement on Sethe's actions. Thus even as she makes a compelling argument for how love motivated her behavior, parts of the stream-of-consciousness writing itself undermine the validity of that position.

## Part 2, Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ For years Paul D believed schoolteacher broke into children what Garner had raised into men. And it was that that made them run off. Now, plagued by the contents of his tobacco tin, he wondered how much difference there really was between before schoolteacher and after.

**Related Characters:** Paul D, Schoolteacher

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 260

### Explanation and Analysis

Now fully immersed in memories, Paul D questions the way he separated Garner and Schoolteacher. He thinks perhaps they were not as different as he had once thought.

This passages criticizes the way both whites and blacks would sometimes form hierarchies between slaveowners. It was and is a common practice to describe certain slaveowners as kinder than others. Here, Paul D has always believed Garner is kinder: His practices are applied to "men" instead of "children," and they are "raised"—a relatively kind and nurturing verb—compared to the expression "broke into" used for Schoolteacher. Yet when Paul D revisits the actual content of the his memories, he realizes that this division may not actually be a significant as he had previously believed.

That "he wondered how much difference there really was" speaks to the flaws in viewing any behavior of a slaveowner in even relatively positive terms. Whether a slaveowner treated his slaves kindly or cruelly was secondary to the fact that he owned slaves at all, dehumanizing other people as "possessions" without identities other than those the slaveowner forces upon them. That this conclusion derives from Paul D having opened his "tobacco tin" speaks to the more positive results of revisiting one's history. Though he may be "plagued" by these memories, they also give him greater clarity into his personal past—allowing him to realize the flaws in his more positive memories of Garner.

Remembering his own price, down to the cent, that schoolteacher was able to get for him, [Paul D] wondered what Sethe's would have been. What had Baby Suggs' been? How much did Halle owe, still, besides his labor? What did Mrs. Garner get for Paul F? More than nine hundred dollars? How much more? Ten dollars? Twenty?

**Related Characters:** Paul D, Sethe, Halle

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 269

**Explanation and Analysis**

Still consumed by memories of Sweet Home, Paul D wonders about the economics of slavery. He starts to brainstorm the costs that might have been paid for other slaves on the plantation.

This description emphasizes once more the dehumanizing way that slaveowners interacted with their slaves. Whereas earlier descriptions pointed out how slaves were likened to animals, this passages views them as commodities for sale. That each person can be affixed with a certain price point condenses their identity into a single interchangeable number. Even more insidiously, this mindset seems to have infiltrated Paul D. He takes on the language and perspective of the slaveowners here—indeed, applying it to his closest family and friends. Thus Morrison not only portrays the existence of this horrifying economic mindset, but also shows how easily it can infiltrate the minds of even the slaves it oppresses, so that they develop inferiority complexes and think of *themselves*as commodities to be priced.

Yet [Denver] knew Sethe's greatest fear was...that Beloved might leave.... Leave before Sethe could make her realize that far worse than [death]...was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up.

**Related Characters:** Denver, Sethe, Beloved, Baby Suggs, Ella, Stamp Paid, Paul D

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 295

**Explanation and Analysis**

As life at 124 grows ever worse, Denver reflects on what is motivating Sethe to acquiesce to Beloved's wishes. Sethe, she explains, wants to prove to Beloved that her infanticide offered her a better end than she would have had alive under slavery.

This passage casts Sethe's relationship with Beloved in a somewhat different light than before. Whereas earlier sections justified her actions as derived from pure affection, this passage presents them as seeking some kind of repentance or justice. That Sethe wants Beloved to "realize" that another fate (slavery) was "far worse" reveals a wish for acceptance and forgiveness on Beloved's part. She wants her, in a bizarre way, to understand the horror of an alternative past that she never experienced—in order that Sethe's decision will be deemed merciful and the result of love.

Denver's focus on the loss of identity is intriguing here. She presents the worst end of slavery as that one "forgot who you were and couldn't think it up," which speaks to how mentally fractured Sethe had become by the time she fled Sweet Home. Yet if Sethe had sought to save Beloved from this fate, she also has caused it to come true: if Beloved is indeed the ghost of her child, she lost her identity and came blindly to Sethe without a clear sense of self. Morrison thus presents the murder less as a real escape from the institution of slavery, but rather as a reproduction of its horrifying ends.

## Part 3, Chapter 28 Quotes

They forgot her like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her. It took longer for those who had spoken to her, lived with her, fallen in love with her, to forget... In the end, they forgot her too.

**Related Characters:** Beloved

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 323-324

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this novel's final chapter, the narrator describes the outcome of Beloved's disappearance. She explains that Beloved soon faded from the town's communal memory.

That Beloved is described as a "bad dream" emphasizes her spectral and haunted nature. At this point, she is not deemed to be Sethe's actual child, but rather an abstract

embodiment of the horrors of slavery. As a result, she takes on different meanings for different members of the town. They "made up their tales," thus fitting her into personal narratives, but those narratives soon diverge from actual memories as they "deliberately forgot her."

Morrison here shows the way that people and communities edit their memories, both in active and passive ways. The process happens at different paces depending on the type of relationship each person held to Beloved, but slowly all move toward a similar end of oblivion. For a community to cleanse itself of negative occurrences, the novel implies, the past must be left behind.

> This is not a story to pass on.

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 324

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the novel's conclusion, the narrator reflects on the storytelling process itself. She claims that the tale ought to remain, ironically, untold.

This line uses a normative tense—"this is not"—to make a decisive, moral statement on the story. Morrison seems to take up the belief of her characters' that certain narrative and personal histories belong to the past and should not be retold or re-experienced. Yet it is deeply ironic that this line appears at the end of a novel: Morrison has clearly decided that the story *is* worth passing on to her readership as she has just told it. Indeed, we should also note that the line is written twice: first "It was not a story to pass on" and then switched to the present tense, as in this quote. This switch from past to present itself proves that the story has succeeded in being passed on.

As is typical of Morrison's work, there is no clear resolution to this interpretive paradox. The story is simultaneously too awful to recount and entirely necessary to remember. It functions somewhat like a textual version of Paul D's tobacco tin: a repository for what is too awful to be constantly around, but what cannot be ignored permanently.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### PART 1, CHAPTER 1

The novel begins in 1873, eight years after the end of the Civil War, by describing a house on the edge of Cincinnati: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom." The house is haunted by the ghost of the baby of Sethe, a former slave who lives at 124 with her daughter, Denver. They have lived in the house for 18 years. Sethe's sons, Howard and Buglar, ran away from the house a little over eight years earlier, scared by hauntings such as a baby's handprints appearing in a cake. Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, used to live at the house, but became withdrawn not long after Howard and Buglar left and did nothing but "ponder color." She died soon after.

*The fact that the novel begins with a description of the house, rather than any character, emphasizes the importance of the home to Sethe and her family. However, the haunting presence of Sethe's dead baby has disrupted any kind of ideal home, causing Howard and Buglar to flee their own family. Baby Suggs seeming depression and obsession with pondering color raises a mystery about just what could have pushed her into such a state.*

Shortly after Baby Suggs' death, Sethe and Denver attempt to call forth the ghost to talk to it, but it does not appear. Denver suggests that the deceased Baby Suggs is preventing it, but Sethe counters that the baby-ghost is simply too young to understand them. Sethe recalls burying the baby, and the engraver of its tombstone only having time to engrave "Beloved", rather than the full phrase "Dearly Beloved" that Sethe wanted. But she still believes that this one word was enough of a response to the townspeople that were disgusted with her.

*Sethe and Denver's attempt to speak with the ghost sets the tone for the prevalence of supernatural episodes in the novel. The ghost is one way in which Sethe's past continues to literally haunt her. As we will later learn, Sethe herself killed the baby, but the word "Beloved" on the baby's tombstone insists that Sethe still somehow cared for the child and was acting as a loving mother.*

Sethe remembers once suggesting to Baby Suggs that they could move out of the house to escape the ghost, but Baby Suggs told her there was no point, since there's "not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief." Baby Suggs' comment prompts Sethe to think of her own past, which she tries not to remember. But she cannot help thinking of Sweet Home, the plantation on which she was once a slave.

*Baby Suggs' comment reminds the reader that the suffering of Sethe and her relatives is only a microcosm of the suffering of all the former slaves throughout the country. Sethe cannot help but remember her past life on the ironically named farm Sweet Home, which was anything but a sweet home to her and other slaves. The past, like the ghost, haunts her.*

Sethe goes outside and is surprised to find Paul D, an ex-slave who also worked on Sweet Home, sitting on her porch. He asks about Baby Suggs and Sethe tells him that her death was easy and that "being alive was the hard part." Sethe asks about her husband Halle, who she hasn't seen since fleeing Sweet Home and thinks may be dead, but Paul D doesn't have any news about him. Sethe invites Paul D inside to stay the night.

*Paul D is another element of Sethe's past life at Sweet Home, and his arrival immediately dredges up the past, particularly Sethe's lost husband Halle.*

Upon entering the house, Paul D feels some kind of presence and asks, "What kind of evil you got in here?" He reflects on Sethe's beauty and recalls how her children had been sneaked out of Sweet Home and sent to Halle's mother, Baby Suggs, and how Sethe had run away after, to meet up with them. Paul D remembers how the owner of Sweet Home died and Schoolteacher came to manage the plantation.

*Seeing Sethe also prompts Paul D to remember things from Sweet Home. All of the former slaves are haunted by the past, just like Sethe. Even he, who is not aware of Sethe's dead child, can feel its persistent presence in 124.*

Sethe tells Paul D that the sad presence he feels in the house is from her daughter. She tells him that she works at a restaurant and sews to make money in order to feed herself and Denver. Paul D remembers more of his past from Sweet Home: Sethe came to Sweet Home at age 13, the only female slave there. All the male slaves there desired her but let her choose her own man, since they were "Sweet Home men." The owner of Sweet Home, Mr. Garner, took pride in his slaves being real men, though other slave-owners told him that no slaves could be men. Sethe eventually chose Halle, a Sweet Home man who had worked extra time to buy freedom for his mother, Baby Suggs.

*Paul D's recollections begin to show what life was like as a slave on Sweet Home. Although Mr. Garner was kinder than other slave-owners, the slaves were still looked down upon and Baby Suggs' freedom as a human being had to be bought. Nonetheless, the slaves on Sweet Home form a kind of community as "Sweet Home men."*

Denver meets Paul D and is shy around him, since she is not used to friendly acquaintances or guests. She is upset by the attention that her mother gives to Paul D and is jealous of their shared knowledge and memories of Sweet Home. She wishes for the baby to do something disruptive. She tells Paul D about the ghost in an attempt to break up his conversation with Sethe. She asks why they talk about Sweet Home if it was so bad. Sethe replies that such memory "comes back whether we want it to or not."

*Denver's relationship with her mother is so close that she gets jealous whenever she feels excluded from her in some way. Sethe's comment about the past emphasizes that memory is often involuntary.*

As Sethe and Denver start to prepare dinner, Denver makes a rude remark to Paul D and then begins to cry. She says that she can't live any longer in the house, since people avoid it and don't speak to Denver or Sethe. Paul D is sympathetic to Denver and suggests that they move, but Sethe rejects the idea.

*Denver does not see Paul D as fitting into the home that she and Sethe have made. Sethe's refusal to move shows her attachment to 124, even with its haunting, or perhaps because of its haunting.*

Sethe makes reference to having a tree on her back. Paul D asks her what she means and she explains: on Sweet Home, when she was pregnant with Denver and still lactating to nurse her infant (the baby that is now the ghost), two white boys held her down in a barn and took her breastmilk. She told Mrs. Garner and when the boys found out that she had told on them, they whipped her, leaving **a tree-shaped scar** on her back. When Sethe was escaping to Cincinnati, a white woman who helped her saw the scar and told her that she had a chokecherry tree on her back.

*Sethe's memory is one of the novel's most horrifying episodes of life as a slave. The two white boys not only physically violate Sethe, but also take from her one of the most basic, physical ways of being a mother, robbing her children of their mother's breast milk. The boys essentially treat her like an animal—taking her milk as if from a cow. The memory stays with Sethe just as the physical scar remains on her back.*

Alone in the kitchen with Paul D, Sethe puts biscuits into the oven. Paul D comes up behind her and embraces her. As she weeps, he begins to kiss her and undoes her dress. Sethe savors the brief moment of respite and pleasure but suddenly the house begins to shake, throwing her to the floor. Paul D yells at and fights the house, throwing the kitchen table around.

*The spirit of Sethe's baby, representing the persistence of the past, does not allow Sethe even one moment of relaxation or pleasure. However, Paul D fights the house and can potentially help create a new order at 124, making it a different kind of home.*

After the house settles down, Denver takes the biscuits onto the porch and eats, while Sethe and Paul D go upstairs. Alone, she thinks of her brothers and remembers her young childhood with Baby Suggs and them. Now she feels lonely and miserable.

*Even the young Denver is burdened by her past, as she misses the members of her family who have died or run away.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 2

Sethe and Paul go upstairs and enter her bedroom. After brief sex, they are too shy to talk to each other. **Sethe's scar** makes Paul think of the trees of Sweet Home. He remembers another slave named Sixo, who once walked 17 hours to see a woman, but had to turn back immediately upon reaching her in order to get back to Sweet Home in time to return to work.

*Despite their physical intimacy, there is still a lot of past—things they do know and things they don't—that stand between them and make them shy. Sex is the easy part of the connection. Sethe's scar, a physical emblem of the painful past, causes Paul D to think of his own past.*

Sethe thinks of Sweet Home and working in the kitchen there. She thinks of how slavery treats men and women like checkers, moving them around, selling them off, and breaking up families. Baby Suggs, for example, was separated from all of her eight children except for Halle.

*Sethe's thoughts emphasize how slavery breaks up families and homes, separating children from their mothers.*

Paul D thinks of how he had fantasized about Sethe on Sweet Home and how the actual consummation of that desire has failed to live up to his fantasy. Sethe remembers deciding to marry Halle and asking Mrs. Garner if there would be a wedding for them. Mrs. Garner simply laughed in reply.

*As the two characters separately reconstruct their pasts, Sethe's unofficial marriage to Halle shows that the Garners did not consider their slaves worthy of actual marriage. They may have been "kind" slave-owners, but they were still slave-owners who considered it acceptable to*

Sethe and Paul D each separately remember when Sethe and Halle had sex out in the cornfield on Sweet Home, where they thought no one would notice. Paul recalls seeing cornstalks shaking and moving. Sethe remembers grabbing and clutching cornstalks and feeling the soft cornsilk hair, concentrating on the feeling of the cornsilk, "how fine and loose and free" it was.

*Amid all of Sethe's painful memories, the consummation of her marriage to Halle stands out as a small moment of pleasure, though they were forced to meet secretly out in the cornfields, as they lacked any privacy or room of their own.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Since she was a small child, Denver has enjoyed going to a growth of boxwood in the woods behind 124. The boxwood bushes grew together to form a kind of room, where Denver felt protected and often sought refuge. Once, when she was returning to 124 from the boxwood room, Denver saw Sethe through a bedroom window, praying. A white dress was kneeling next to Sethe, with its sleeve around her waist.

*Denver's boxwood room is her own private place, a kind of refuge or home that she seeks away from the dysfunctional home of 124. The white dress with its arm around Sethe continues the idea of the haunting, and the way that the ghost seems both to depend on but also support Sethe.*

The dress embracing Sethe reminds Denver of the story of her own birth. As Sethe has told her, she was running away from Sweet Home while pregnant with Denver. She was in great pain and her legs and feet were swollen, but she was determined to get to her children (who had been sent ahead to Baby Suggs). As Sethe lay exhausted on the ground, she remembered bits of her childhood. She could barely recall her mother, but remembered dancing and singing. She thought she was going to die.

*Denver is so steeped in her mother's storytelling that she can recall the story of her own birth as if she herself remembers it. Thus, Sethe's past lives on not only with her, but with Denver as well. In extreme pain, Sethe persevered out of a motherly determination to reach her children.*


Then, she heard someone passing by. She feared that it would be a white man, but it turned out to be a friendly white woman named Amy. Amy was an indentured servant who was trying to get to Boston, where she could buy some velvet. Amy walked Sethe to a nearby abandoned house and massaged her swollen feet.

*The appearance of Amy saves Sethe's life. While Amy is white, her status as an indentured servant links her somewhat to Sethe as a slave. Their cooperation is a small example of how those oppressed and marginalized by society can come together as a community united by their difficulties.*

Thinking about the story of Amy, Denver enters 124 and tells Sethe about the dress she saw. She asks Sethe what she was praying for and Sethe responds that she was just thinking about time. Sethe tells Denver that some things stay with you and describes her ideas about "rememory." According to Sethe, you can walk into someone else's "rememory." Denver asks if nothing ever really dies, and Sethe says that nothing does.

*Sethe's idea of "rememory" encapsulates how the past continues to affect the characters in the novel. It is not just something from the past—it is something that continues to recur. One person's "rememory" can affect not only that person, but other people as well, as exemplified by the ghost of Sethe's baby.*

Denver asks Sethe about Sweet Home. Sethe tells her about Schoolteacher, who came to the plantation after Mr. Garner died. Schoolteacher would ask the slaves questions and write in his notebook, preparing for a book he was writing about them. Denver says that she thinks the incident with the dress means that the spirit of the baby has plans.

*Through his book, Schoolteacher attempts to define slaves on his own terms, without allowing them to speak for themselves. This is one of the reasons for the importance of storytelling among slaves and ex-slaves, as a way of telling their own stories and keeping their own histories alive.*


Paul D has moved into 124, disturbing the house's arrangement that Denver had grown used to. Denver had learned to take pride in the haunting of their house, but now Paul D has scared the baby's ghost away. Sethe thinks about Denver's idea that the baby has plans. She reflects that she does not trust the future enough to make plans, but now, with Paul D, wonders if she might be able to plan a future.

*Paul D's arrival changes the familial arrangement of 124 as a household. The way Denver takes pride in the haunting shows how those who are different, and made to feel separate because of it, can come to cling to the source of that difference and refuse help or compassion. Sethe, though, senses that Paul D may offer a way out of the cycle of "rememory" and haunting in 124.*

Looking around one of the rooms of the house, Sethe notices that it is completely devoid of color except for two orange squares on one quilt. Sethe realizes that this was why Baby Suggs was "starved for color" shortly before her death, always asking for bits of colored cloth. The last color Sethe remembers is the pink from part of her dead child's tombstone. But now that Paul D has moved in, Sethe is suddenly aware of how colorless the house is.

*It is only when Sethe becomes able to tentatively think about the present and the future (as opposed to the past), she begins to recognize the lack of color in 124. Color can be seen as symbolizing the vivacity in life, the enjoyment of the senses and the world around you—but Sethe and the house have been solely focused on and lost in the past.*

Paul D sings as he mends things around the house, but none of the songs he knows seem to fit the place. He thinks to himself that he cannot stay with any woman for more than two months at a time, but he feels that 124 is different. In order to survive his difficult life, Paul D has "shut down a generous portion of his head," but now those parts of himself that he has shut off—emotions, feelings, hopes—are being opened again by Sethe and 124.

*Paul D's experience at Sweet Home and after have hardened him, or forced him to harden himself so as not to be overwhelmed. But Sethe, whom he loved and desired even though she chose Halle (and he respected her choice of), reaches the parts of him that have been closed off, perhaps because he knew and loved her before he became closed off..*


Paul D tells Sethe that he can look for work around 124 and she tells him that he can stay at the house. Paul D is hesitant, since Denver evidently does not want him to stay, but Sethe assures him that it's okay and tells him not to worry about Denver. She says that Denver is "a charmed child" and credits Denver with the miraculous appearance of the white girl who helped her when she was fleeing Sweet Home and about to die. Sethe begins to think about a possible future with Paul D, but she is still preoccupied with protecting Denver and "keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her."

*Sethe is protective of her only child left at 124, though she also wants to accommodate Paul D into her life. Sethe sees the past here as a kind of monster that can spring up and overwhelm someone, and she seems to see the past in a collective way—that the past of slavery and Sethe herself could overwhelm Denver and make her unable to face the present or future because of the horror of the past. And Denver is obsessed with the past—with her own birth.*


## PART 1, CHAPTER 4

At dinner one night, Denver asks Paul D how long he's going to "hang around", which upsets Sethe. Paul asks if he should leave, but Sethe tells him not to. Denver leaves the dinner table and Sethe and Paul D get into an argument. Sethe says that Denver was rude, but still defends her when Paul D criticizes her. Paul D thinks to himself that it is dangerous for an ex-slave to love anything as much as Sethe loves Denver.

*Paul D continues to disrupt the home environment of 124. His thought that it is dangerous for Sethe to love Denver as much as she does alludes to the way in which slavery destroys mother-child relationships by separating families.*



Paul D tells Sethe that he will stay at 124 and help her, but she has to talk to Denver about making room in their life for him. He plans to take Denver and Sethe to a carnival that is open for one day to "coloreds."

*Sethe and Denver must make room for Paul D at 124 both literally and figuratively, fitting him into their lives. The segregation at the carnival is a small example of the widespread discrimination that ex-slaves like Sethe faced even after finding freedom.*

The three go to the carnival. Sethe dresses up as much as she can for the occasion, but Denver is sullen. As they walk to the carnival, Sethe notices that their three shadows are holding hands and interprets it as a good omen. The carnival is mediocre, but still delights those who attend. Denver buys candy and lemonade and begins to warm to the idea of Paul D living with her and Sethe. As they walk home from the carnival, their shadows are again holding hands.

*As the three start to get along, Sethe begins to think that they might be able to piece together a home and a family even after their traumatic pasts. Even the sort-of-supernatural image of the shadows holding hands seems to suggest good things to come.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Near 124, an unidentified young woman in a nice-looking dress climbs out of **the river**. She is described as having "new skin". She sits down on a stump outside of 124, where Sethe, Denver, and Paul D find her upon returning from the carnival. Immediately upon seeing the woman, Sethe feels as though she has to urinate and runs around to the outhouse. But before she gets there, she voids a copious amount of water behind the house, as if her water had just broken while pregnant.

*The events surrounding the appearance of this woman suggest a symbolic rebirth: she comes up out of the water of the river and Sethe has a kind of birth-giving experience upon seeing her. This symbolism helps suggest that the mysterious woman is linked to Sethe's dead child.*

Inside the house, the strange woman eats nothing but drinks lots of water. She says her name is Beloved. Paul D decides not to ask her who she is or where she's from, thinking of all the ex-slaves wandering and traveling after the Civil War, trying to find family or a better life. Sethe tries to talk to Beloved, but Beloved falls asleep, exhausted.

*Beloved's name again connects her to Sethe's dead child. Her mysterious appearance and wandering hardly astonishes Paul D, or makes him think of anything supernatural, because of how many people slavery has separated from their families, which is itself a horrifying commentary on slavery.*

Sethe and Paul D think Beloved is sick with cholera, but Denver defiantly says that she isn't. For four days, Denver tends to Beloved, changing her sheets and giving her water. Sethe tries to help her, but Denver rejects the assistance, preferring to take care of Beloved by herself.

*Just as Sethe, Paul, and Denver were beginning to feel comfortable as a group in 124, Beloved has again changed the dynamic of the home, attracting Denver's interest and attention.*

Beloved begins to eat, but only sweet things, such as honey, sugarcane, candy, and lemonade. She doesn't seem to know where she came from. Sethe guesses that her fever robbed her of her memory. Paul D is suspicious of the mysterious woman and asks Sethe if she plans to continue to house and feed her. Paul D says that Beloved is not as weak and sickly as she seems: he and Denver saw her pick up a large rocking chair with one hand. Denver lies and says that she saw no such thing.

*Beloved's strange behavior contributes to the mystery surrounding this supernatural character and suggests that she may not be simply a fugitive ex-slave as Paul D thought, but is perhaps related to Sethe's dead child. Denver lies because she is desperate to keep Beloved around to have a playmate, or perhaps Denver senses that Beloved is something more.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Beloved is devoted to paying Sethe attention. She waits for her in the kitchen in the morning and goes to meet her on her way back from work at night. Time passes with Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and Beloved all living at 124.

*Beloved's devoted attention is not normal. Her dependence on Sethe seems to be almost total, like the way a baby is dependent on its parent.*

One night, Beloved asks Sethe where her diamonds are. Sethe is confused, but then realizes that Beloved is asking about a pair of crystal earrings she once got from Mrs. Garner. Sethe tells Beloved about the earrings. Beloved derives a "profound satisfaction" from storytelling and Sethe finds that she too enjoys telling Beloved about her past.

*Beloved's love of storytelling associates her generally with memory and the past, as she encourages Sethe to revisit old memories. Her knowledge of Sethe's own past, though, continues to indicate that she is associated with Sethe's dead baby.*

Sethe tells Beloved that she got the earrings from Mrs. Garner when she married Halle. She had heard about Mrs. Garner's wedding and wanted some kind of celebration or meal to acknowledge her marrying Halle. But the Garners didn't allow Sethe to have any kind of wedding. Sethe at least wanted a dress, so she began stealing bits of fabric in order to eventually put together a dress. Mrs. Garner discovered what Sethe was doing, and gave her a pair of earrings and told her that she wanted her and Halle to be happy together. Denver asks where the earrings are now and Sethe says that they are gone.

*Sethe's earrings are evidence of the relative kindness of the Garners. Nonetheless, the Garners still owned and exploited slaves. As a counterpoint to Schoolteacher, the Garners show that even seemingly kind slave-owners participated in a horrible, dehumanizing system of slavery.*

One day, as Sethe is unbraiding Denver's hair, Beloved asks if Sethe's mother ever did her hair. Sethe says she can't remember and tells her a bit about her mother. When she was a young girl, her mother was always already working by the time she woke up in the morning. Often, she didn't sleep in the same cabin as Sethe, since it was too far from where she worked in the field.

*Beloved continues to spur recollections of Sethe's past. Sethe's memories of her mother show how slavery separates children from their mothers, not allowing for close maternal relationships.*

One time, Sethe's mother took her behind the smokehouse and showed her a mark burnt into her skin above her ribs. She told Sethe that this was how she could identify her mother. Sethe then says that her mother was hanged along with many other slaves, but that she couldn't identify the body, even though she looked for her mother's mark. Denver asks why Sethe's mother was hanged, and Sethe says that she didn't know.

*The indiscriminant killing of Sethe's mother along with other slaves shows how little slaves' lives were valued by their owners. The fact that Sethe could not even find her mother's body, nor know why her mother was killed, emphasizes her lack of a relationship with her own mother as well as her total lack of agency in her own life. Her life was full of questions because it was controlled by others, by slave-owners.*

Sethe suddenly remembers something she had forgotten: a woman called Nan had pulled her away from the dead, hanged bodies, when Sethe was trying to identify her mother. Nan told her that she and Sethe's mother were together on the boat voyage from Africa and that Sethe's mother had been raped many times by white men but always threw away the resulting infants. She finally kept Sethe and gave her the name of the black man that was her father.

*Beloved continues to operate as a force of memory, causing Sethe to remember something she had always forgotten or repressed. The story of her mother's journey from Africa evidences the cruelty of slavery that has persisted across generations. Sethe's mother's murder of her infants who were the products of rape by white slave traders is reminiscent of Sethe's own decision to kill her own children to save them from slavery.*

Sethe ends her story and Denver realizes that she hates the stories that do not have to do with her own birth or childhood, which is why she only ever asks Sethe about the white woman, Amy. Denver notices how "greedy" Beloved is to hear Sethe tell stories. She wonders how Beloved could have known about Sethe's earrings.

*Denver doesn't want to know about the past. She wants to know about her own past. Since she can't know about the far past, she wants her mother's past to start with her own birth.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 7

Paul D feels uneasy around Beloved and is still suspicious of her, since he still does not know anything about her or where she comes from. At dinner one night, Paul D asks if Beloved has any siblings and asks what she was looking for when she came to 124. Beloved answers, "I don't have nobody," and simply says that she was looking for "this place I could be in." Paul D continues to interrogate Beloved. She says that she walked to 124 from a faraway bridge. Paul D asks why her shoes look so new if she walked the whole way. Upset, Beloved admits that she stole the shoes and her dress.

*Beloved's origins remain mysterious. Her answer that she was looking for a "place [she] could be in" suggests that she, like many others in the novel, was searching for some kind of home. The bridge that Beloved speaks of can be interpreted as a bridge between this world and the next, as Beloved may possibly be an embodiment of Sethe's daughter returned from the dead.*

Paul D still feels suspicious of Beloved, even though he has known many "Negroes so stunned, or hungry, or tired or bereft it was a wonder they recalled or said anything." He remembers coming across a young black man who lived in the woods and couldn't remember living anywhere else. But Beloved seems different to Paul D. He is bothered by the fact that she arrived just as he, Sethe, and Denver seemed to be getting along together.

*Despite the strangeness of Beloved, none of the other characters yet fully recognize her as something supernatural, since the effects of slavery have driven so many people to go mad or lose their memories.*

Just as Paul D thinks of trying to get rid of Beloved, Beloved chokes on a raisin and then gets sick. Denver takes Beloved to her room, excited to share the room with her. Alone, Paul D and Sethe discuss Beloved. Paul D says he doesn't understand why Sethe continues to feed and house her.

*Intent on forming his own idea of a home with Sethe and Denver, Paul D wants Beloved out of 124. It is worth noting that while Paul D wants to focus on the future, all Beloved cares about is the past.*

As Sethe and Paul D argue, the conversation shifts to Halle. Paul D tells her that Halle actually saw when the white boys held her down and took her breastmilk. Halle was in the loft of the barn and the sight of what happened "messed him up."

*This addition to Sethe's memory deepens the cruelty of the boys who abused Sethe, since they did it in front of her own husband, driving him mad.*

Sethe is shaken by this revelation. She is upset that Halle saw the whole thing and didn't try to stop it. Paul D says that the event "broke" Halle. The last time Paul D saw him, he was sitting over a churn with butter smeared all over his face, unable to speak. Sethe asks if Paul D said anything to him, but Paul D answers that he couldn't speak, because he had a bit in his mouth.

*What appeared at first to be a story of one person's suffering (Sethe's) expands into a memory of the suffering of Sethe, Halle, and Paul D. This emphasizes that the sufferings of all the individual characters of the novel are not isolated, but are related to (and stand in for) the suffering of all slaves,* hundreds of thousands *of slaves.*

Sethe is overwhelmed by this new addition to her traumatic memory and wishes she could refuse the new information. She wants to think about the future, but her mind is constantly "loaded with the past and hungry for more." She wonders why she hasn't gone crazy from all of her suffering, as Halle evidently did.

*Sethe's past continues to overwhelm her, as Paul D adds to the slew of painful memories that she tries to keep at bay in order to think about the future. Though she wants to escape the past, she can't.*

Sethe offers to listen if Paul D should want to talk about having the bit in his mouth. Paul D says that it wasn't the extreme pain of the bit that got to him. He recalls walking past a group of roosters, including one named "Mister," which looked at him. Paul D says that Mister looked free and better than him. He says that the experience changed him and made him something less than a rooster.

*While remembering the past can be painful, there is potentially some cathartic value in sharing one's story, so Sethe offers Paul D the chance to do so. Paul D's experience with the bit epitomizes the dehumanizing aspect of slavery, which treats people as animals, as less than animals.*

Paul D doesn't tell Sethe anything more about the experience of having the bit. He keeps the rest of the story in "that **tobacco tin** buried in his chest where a red heart used to be." He resolves to keep the pain of his past locked up there and not let Sethe know that he has lost his heart. Sethe tries to comfort Paul D.

*Like Sethe, Paul D also struggles with the past. His burying memories and emotions in his metaphorical tobacco tin shows the importance of forgetting the past in order to survive, but also reveals the cost of this repression, as the hollow, unfeeling tobacco tin has replaced his heart. As Paul D and Sethe discuss their past they enact the opposite process, the painful effort to come back to life, to bring their memories back out into the open and face them, together, as they move forward.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Beloved and Denver are dancing upstairs in 124. Denver asks Beloved what it was like where she came from. Beloved answers that it was dark and hot, with heaps of people (some of them dead). Denver asks if Baby Suggs is there, but Beloved says she doesn't know the people's names. She says she came to 124 from a large bridge, searching for Sethe and hoping to see her face. She saw Sethe's earrings in the water of the river she came out of.

*Beloved's description of where she came from is still ambiguous. It can be interpreted as other-worldly (as Denver interprets it, since she asks if Baby Suggs is there), but the dark, cramped space also recalls the Middle Passage of slaves being brought by ship from Africa to America, which Beloved will later narrate. Beloved is thus again associated not only with Sethe's personal past, but with historical memory of slaves more generally.*

Denver asks Beloved never to leave and then asks her not to tell Sethe who she is. This makes Beloved angry; she says that she doesn't want to be told what to do, but she will stay at 124, because she belongs with Sethe. Beloved asks Denver to tell the story of her birth, which Denver knows from Sethe. Denver begins the tale.

*Beloved's attachment to Sethe suggests that she may be somehow related to her dead child. Her intense desire for stories again associates her with forces of memory and the past.*

The narration jumps into Denver's story: Amy has found Sethe, who tells Amy that her name is Lu. Amy cares for her and sees the **scar on her back**. She says it's a chokecherry tree with blossoms (welts) and continues to talk about her quest to find velvet in Boston, specifically carmine (red) velvet. Amy sings and massages Sethe's feet

*Denver has heard the story of her birth so often from Sethe that it as if it is her own memory now. Amy transforms the welts on Sethe's back from something awful to something beautiful. Amy's search for carmine velvet seems to symbolize hope, perhaps an impossible hope. Sethe shares such a hope, though hers is to be free with her children, something more profound than some red velvet.*

Sethe thinks that the baby she's pregnant with (Denver) must be dead. She limps to the **river** with Amy, where Sethe suddenly goes into labor. With Amy's help, she gives birth in a canoe. They stay on the riverbank that night and Amy leaves at twilight, asking Sethe to tell her baby that Miss Amy Denver of Boston helped her. Before falling asleep, Sethe thinks to herself that "Denver" is a pretty name.

*Denver's birth on the border that separates free from slave territory symbolizes her indeterminate place in between Sethe's past and Denver's potentially brighter future. Denver's name memorializes Amy's kindness, keeping the past alive in a positive way.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 9

Sethe can't stop thinking about Halle going mad. She misses Baby Suggs and wishes that she were around to help her deal with this new information. She decides to go to the Clearing. Before 124 became haunted, Baby Suggs used to be a quasi-religious figure in the community and hold gatherings at a clearing in the woods.

*Sethe's memories of Baby Suggs and the Clearing provide insight into the community of ex-slaves around 124 prior to the death of Sethe's child. It also raises the question of what happened to transform Baby Suggs from a communally loved religious figure into a depressive who cared only about little scraps of color, and what made the inhabitants of 124 now almost completely isolated from the surrounding community.*

At these gatherings, Baby Suggs would pray and then call forth children and tell them to laugh. Then, she'd call forth men and tell them to laugh. Finally, she would call forth women to cry. Then, everyone would mix together and cry, laugh, and dance as they wished. Baby Suggs would not offer any traditional sermon, but simply told people to love their own flesh and skin that white people so despised. Once things turned bad at 124, though, Baby Suggs lost her faith and stopped preaching. Missing Baby Suggs, Sethe decides to take Denver and Beloved with her to the Clearing.

*Baby Suggs' gatherings show the community coming together to deal with the lingering pain and consequences of slavery. Instead of speaking down to them with a dogmatic religious sermon, Baby Suggs simply gathers the community together and encourages them to love themselves, denying slavery's devaluation of them based on race.*

When the three arrive at the Clearing, Sethe feels just as she did when Amy left her on the bank of the river. She was weak and tired, but managed to walk along the river until she met a black fisherman who gave her food and water. The man introduced himself as Stamp Paid and ferried Sethe across the river, where a woman named Ella found her and took her to 124. Once Sethe got there, Baby Suggs took care of her, bathed her, and bandaged her.

*Sethe's memories intrude on her involuntarily. The memory of her escape provides another example of the importance of relying on the help of a larger community for Sethe and other people in her position.*

Now, at the Clearing, Sethe goes to Baby Suggs' old preaching rock and wishes Baby Suggs were there to rub her neck. Suddenly, she feels invisible fingers massaging her neck. But then, the fingers begin to choke her. Denver runs to help her and the choking stops. Sethe guesses that it was the spirit of Baby Suggs, but Denver disagrees.

*Whether from Baby Suggs or the spirit of Sethe's dead daughter, the fingers are another supernatural embodiment of Sethe's past. Sethe seeks comfort in the memory of Baby Suggs, but dwelling in memories is dangerous and can be constraining, just as the fingers are soothing at first, but then suffocating.*

Beloved points out bruises on Sethe's neck and rubs them soothingly, then starts to kiss Sethe's neck. Sethe is carried away and feels comforted, but then stops her. The three leave the clearing. Sethe briefly thinks that Beloved's fingers as she rubbed her neck felt like the presence of the ghost of her child.

*As Beloved rubs Sethe's neck soothingly, she is associated both with the ghost of Sethe's child and with Baby Suggs. Beloved can be seen as embodying various female figures of Sethe's past.*

Upon returning to 124, Sethe finds Paul D bathing. Realizing how much she wants him in her life, she embraces him. Beloved sees this and is immediately jealous. She runs outside to a stream where Denver is. Denver accuses her of choking Sethe. Beloved denies it and runs off a short distance.

*Beloved's intense attachment to Sethe means that she opposes the new household arrangement at 124 with Paul D and Sethe. Meanwhile, Denver has a sense of Beloved's selfish neediness, which could lead her to do something like choke Sethe.*

Denver recalls going to a schoolhouse when she was younger and how much she liked the lessons that Lady Jones taught. But one day a boy asked her whether her mother had been sent to jail for murder. Denver was so upset she never returned to the schoolhouse. Denver walks over to join Beloved.

*Sethe's murdering her child isolated Denver from the larger community, which would have given her some opportunity for both personal connection and a chance at a real future through education. It is not clear if Denver walks over to Beloved because she recalls how isolated she herself is and therefore feels sympathy for Beloved's own isolation, or if Denver senses that Beloved is connected to Sethe being a murderer.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 10

Paul D recalls his time working on a chain gang in Georgia: he is chained together to 45 other men who work all day and sleep in wooden boxes like cages. They never speak to each other, but somehow can understand each other by the looks in their eyes.

*Paul D's experience on the chain gang is an example of the cruelty of slavery and also a symbolic microcosm of the institution of slavery: like the members of a chain gang, slaves are held together in bondage, but this shared oppression creates a strong community out of their shared suffering.*

As the chain gang work, they sing to make it bearable. They sing in words their masters cannot understand. Often, men want to run or simply give up and go crazy, but they don't because they are all chained together and rely on each other.

*Again, the chain gang illustrates the importance of community in dealing with the horrors of slavery. Through singing, the prisoners express themselves in a way that their masters cannot understand, finding a small area of experience outside of their masters' control.*

One day, a huge rain storm begins. The chain gang has to stop working. As the rain continues, the ground floods and dirt turns to mud. Someone yanks the chain and Paul D falls to the ground. Somehow, all the prisoners understand. They dive through the mud and are able to crawl under the fence enclosing the area where they are kept. They escape to a nearby forest and hide there. In the forest, they come across a camp of sick Cherokee.

*It is only by cooperating together that the prisoners are able to escape their bondage, just as slaves must rely on each other and the help of benevolent strangers (for example, Amy) in order to find freedom. And yet, to escape, they also must slog through suffocating mud. This escape might be seen as metaphor for Paul D and Sethe's attempted escape from their haunting pasts—that they must dive through it together in order to free themselves.*

The Cherokee bring out axes and cut the prisoners' chains. The slaves gradually leave, until Paul D is the last one left. He goes north and doesn't stop until he gets to Delaware. There, he finds "the weaver lady" with whom he stays. He reflects that it took him a long time to put this painful past away in the **tobacco tin**, so that "nothing in this world could pry it open."

*The Cherokee are a people as abused and disenfranchised as the slaves. Once free, Paul D does not know where to go, except generally north. He is free, but without a home. After his painful experiences, Paul D had to put the past behind him and repress his memories in order to survive.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 11

Beloved gradually forces Paul D out of 124. He feels restless and uncomfortable everywhere, and doesn't know how to stop it and feels as if he is uncontrollably moving himself, or being moved. The process begins one night when he sleeps in a rocking chair rather than upstairs with Sethe. He begins to sleep downstairs in the chair every night.

*Beloved begins to disrupt Paul D's attempt to finally have a stable home at 124. Beloved wants Sethe completely for herself.*

One evening, Paul D switches to Baby Suggs' old room. Then, he moves to the storeroom. He recognizes that he has felt the urge to leave a home before, but this is different, since he still loves Sethe and wants to stay. Once tired of the storeroom, he begins sleeping outside in the cold house. By this time, it is autumn and cold at night.

*Paul D has felt a similar restlessness before, but this time is different, prompted by Beloved. He clearly wants to stay at 124 and create a home with Sethe.*

Beloved enters the cold house one night and asks Paul D to sleep with her. He refuses but she eventually seduces him. As she approaches him, the **tobacco tin** holding his painful memories begins to open.

*Beloved's seduction of Paul complicates her identity. She can be seen as representing a harmful extreme of desire, as she exploits what each character wants most (a sister for Denver, a daughter for Sethe, a lover for Paul D). As Paul D's tobacco tin opens, he begins to succumb to his painful past.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 12

Denver loves it when Beloved looks at her and prizes her attention. Sethe asks Beloved about her past, but all Beloved can remember is crossing a bridge. Sethe thinks Beloved was locked up by a white man and never let outside. She knows a black woman, named Ella, who was similarly locked away and abused by a father and son.

*Beloved's "bridge" can be interpreted as a bridge between the living and the dead. Ella's experience provides another example of the cruelty of slavery and racism.*

By contrast, Denver thinks that Beloved is the white dress that knelt next to Sethe, some presence of the dead baby. Denver tells Beloved about Baby Suggs, Howard, and Buglar. She grows to love doing chores with Beloved, grateful for any excuse to spend time with her. One day, Beloved and Denver go to get cider from the cold house. It is dark inside and Denver loses sight of Beloved. She is afraid that she has lost Beloved.

*As Denver begins to see Beloved as her deceased sister, she becomes more and more attached to her. Beloved prompts Denver to recall her past, just as she spurred Sethe to tell stories of hers, emphasizing the connection between Beloved and the desire for storytelling and memory.*

Denver finally finds Beloved, who assures her that she is not going to leave, because she wants to be at 124. Beloved curls up on the ground and rocks back and forth, referring mysteriously to someone's face in the darkness and saying, "It's me."

*Beloved's desire to stay at 124 shows that she is perhaps searching for a home, just as Paul D is. Beloved curling up in the darkness recalls the dark place she describes earlier, filled with so many others. Now she seems to see herself in that place, whether she is an individual or a kind of agglomeration of all suffering slaves.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 13

Paul D thinks about his time at Sweet Home. Mr. Garner let his slaves correct him, handle guns, choose a wife, learn to read, and was otherwise relatively lenient toward them. When Schoolteacher came and took control of the farm, though, things were radically different and much harsher. Paul D's recent behavior—not being able to stay put in 124 and sleeping with Beloved—makes him question whether Schoolteacher was right about him being less than a man.

*Schoolteacher exemplifies the cruel treatment of slave-owners, which causes both physical and psychological pain to the extent that Paul D has internalized Schoolteacher's racist thinking, questioning his own worth as a man.*

Paul D resolves to tell Sethe about what's been happening and goes to meet her at the restaurant where she works. He finds her and prepares to tell her but changes his mind at the last second and tells her that he wants to have a child with her. Sethe thinks the idea is ridiculous.

*Paul D is unable to voice his concerns to Sethe, perhaps because he does not want to risk losing the possibility of having a home with her, even if it is a troubled one.*

Sethe and Paul D walk back to 124. It begins to snow and they start to run, Paul D hoisting Sethe on his back. They encounter Beloved waiting for Sethe near 124, who breaks up the intimacy between Sethe and Paul D.

*Once again, Beloved comes between Paul D and Sethe, obstructing their attempts to have a life together at 124.*

One night, Sethe finally says something about Paul D sleeping in the cold house and tells him to come upstairs at night, upsetting Beloved. Sethe's kindness reminds Paul D of the woman he stayed with in Delaware, who gave him a bed with clean sheets and fed him. He was unspeakably grateful to her. Sethe thinks about Paul wanting to have a child and resolves that she cannot handle being a mother to another child.

*Paul D's memory of the woman in Delaware shows an earlier example of his failed attempt to settle down at a home. Sethe's thoughts on motherhood emphasize the intense responsibility, hard work, love, vulnerability, and duty of being a mother.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 14

That night, after Paul D and Sethe leave the dinner table and go upstairs, Denver and Beloved talk. Denver says that Sethe likes having Paul D at the house, but Beloved tells Denver to make him leave. Beloved pulls a tooth out of her mouth without any appearance of pain. She is convinced that this means her body will start to fall apart into pieces, and she explains how she finds it hard to feel complete when Sethe is not around. Denver asks why Beloved doesn't cry from the pain of losing the tooth and Beloved begins to weep. Denver holds her.

*Whereas Denver is willing to have a home arrangement with Sethe and Paul D, Beloved is focused upon having Sethe all to herself, furthering her association both with overly extreme, harmful desire as well as with the selfish all-powerful need of a baby. Her strange behavior with her tooth again suggests that she is somehow supernatural or inhuman.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 15

The novel flashes back to Baby Suggs waiting for Sethe and Halle to make it to 124 from Sweet Home. She is delighted to see Sethe arrive but is still anxious for Halle to come. She doesn't want to tempt fate by celebrating the good fortune of Sethe and Denver's arrival too soon.

*Baby Suggs' worries exemplify the awful conditions of slavery, as she is too anxious to celebrate any good fortune, since she is accustomed to loss. Baby Suggs wants her own baby—Halle—to return to her.*

Stamp Paid visits soon after Sethe's arrival and, seeing her healthy baby, goes to a nearby stream and gathers blackberries, bringing them back to 124. Baby Suggs decides to make pies and invite others to 124 to have some kind of celebration. The gathering turns into a huge feast for ninety people, with plentiful food and drink. Baby Suggs' modest provisions somehow turn into enough food for all the people, and more. Those who attend the feast begin to feel some jealousy toward Baby Suggs and her lavish feast with so much of her family reunited.

*The miraculous profusion of food recalls the biblical story of Jesus feeding 5000 men with just five loaves of bread and two fish. Yet the other townspeople, who have also suffered or had family or friends who have suffered, come to see the feast as an excessive celebration or flaunting of her own good luck.*

The next day, Baby Suggs can feel the disapproval of her neighbors and she realizes that she has offended people with her excess. She senses something bad coming, though she does not know what it could be.

*Baby Suggs has offended her neighbors by celebrating herself and her own individual family, in the face of the community.*

Baby Suggs remembers when Halle and she were bought for Sweet Home. She had injured her hip and could not work very well, but Mrs. Garner was not cruel to her as other slave owners were. Her hip was in pain every day. Halle saw this and worked extra time to buy her freedom.

*The Garners were kinder owners than Schoolteacher, but they still treated their slaves as slaves. While they allowed Halle to buy Baby Suggs' freedom, they still treated her freedom as something that had to be bought.*

At Sweet Home, Baby Suggs realized that she and Halle had arrived at a better place, but were still slaves. The Garners ran "a special kind of slavery." Upon becoming free, Baby Suggs immediately felt different, and suddenly became aware of her own heartbeat.

*The Garners had "a special kind of slavery" but it is still nothing compared to actual freedom. Upon being freed, Baby Suggs is suddenly aware of herself as a person, as exemplified by her sudden awareness of her own heartbeat.*

Once Halle buys Baby Suggs' freedom, Mr. Garner delivers Baby Suggs to the Bodwins, who will help her get set up in her new life. Mr. Garner calls Baby Suggs Jenny. She asks why and he says that was what was on her sales ticket. She says that her husband's name was Suggs and he called her Baby, so her name is Baby Suggs. Mr. Garner thinks it isn't a very good name, but Baby Suggs keeps it.

*Baby Suggs' keeping her own name—the name that she was called by the man who loved her—rather than taking the one that slave-owners assigned to her, signifies that she is now free and her own person. Further, as a slave she would have had to listen to Mr. Garner. As a free woman she can do what she wants.*

Baby Suggs meets the Bodwins and they suggest some jobs she can do for money. They tell her about a house where she can stay in return for doing some work. Baby Suggs attempts to locate lost members of her family, but doesn't know where to write to and eventually gives up. But things work out decently well, as Sethe and her children make it to 124, up until her celebration "that put Christmas to shame." Now she senses something bad coming.

*While Baby Suggs cannot locate her family, she finds a kind of family in the community of people who help establish her new life, such as the Bodwins. The celebration, which seemed to place her own joy above the considerations of the community, break the trust that was built.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 16

Soon after the celebration, four horsemen come to 124—Schoolteacher, his nephew, a slave catcher, and a sheriff. They have come to take Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home.

*The appearance of the four horsemen, reminiscent of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, is one literal way in which Sethe's past of slavery comes back to haunt her and her family. It is also an example of how permanent and pervasive the effects of slavery were. Even after slaves escaped to freedom, they were not really free, since they could potentially be recaptured by their former owners. There is also the sense that if the community had not been offended by the celebration they might have warned Baby Suggs and Sethe of what was approaching. But they did not.*


The four go around to the shed and find Sethe and her children standing by a hand saw. Sethe is holding a dead, bloody child to her chest in one hand and an infant (Denver) by its heel in the other. A nearby black man comes and takes Denver from Sethe. Schoolteacher thinks that Sethe has "gone wild" because she was mistreated by his nephews and realizes that there is nothing here for him to bring back to Sweet Home. Schoolteacher, his nephew, and the slave catcher leave. The sheriff prepares to take Sethe off to jail.

*Sethe's killing her own child is the strongest statement against slavery. Her act essentially claims that death is preferable to a life of slavery. Moreover, she implicitly asserts that it is better to be the mother of a dead child than the mother of an enslaved child. This is the central event to the novel's exploration of motherhood and slavery. Schoolteacher cannot understand such thoughts (he can't even understand that slaves are anything more than animals) and so he thinks she has gone wild. He can't see the rationality and love in her actions. At the same time, Sethe has murdered a baby, here baby, even if to protect it. She has saved and murdered the baby, and the irreconcilable fact of doing both of those things in the same action shows just how pernicious and awful slavery was.*

Baby Suggs takes Sethe's sons away from her and tries to get the dead baby from her, but Sethe will not let it go. Baby Suggs exchanges Denver for the baby and Sethe breastfeeds Denver, with the blood of her dead baby all over her and mixing with her breast milk. Sethe and Denver are taken to jail.

*Despite her attempt to kill her children, Sethe maintains a fierce sense of motherly duty, as she is reluctant to let her baby go and breastfeeds Denver immediately. Her actions show that her attempt to kill her own children was out of a kind of love, however perverse it may appear.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 17

Back in the present, at the slaughterhouse where Stamp Paid and Paul D both work, Stamp Paid shows Paul D a news clipping about Sethe killing her child. Paul D doesn't believe it's her. Stamp Paid tells him about the celebration Baby Suggs had, with the blackberries he gathered.

*Sethe's past begins to catch up with her, even as Paul D refuses to believe that the article is about her.*

Stamp Paid plans to tell Paul D about the day Sethe killed her child, how the four horseman arrived and she recognized Schoolteacher and gathered her children and ran to the shed. But he doesn't tell him, as Paul D doesn't believe that the news clipping is about Sethe.

*Attempting to plan a future with Sethe, Paul D does not want to hear about her troubled past.*

## PART 1, CHAPTER 18

When he gets back to 124, Paul D confronts Sethe about the news clipping. Sethe avoids the subject, telling him about her children and how she had no idea how to raise them on Sweet Home, since she was the only slave woman there.

*Being a mother on Sweet Home was even more difficult for Sethe, since she was the only slave woman there and had to figure out how to raise her children alone. This implies that she may have had an even more intense love for her children—she had to figure out how to do everything for them herself.*

Sethe tells Paul D about her escape from Sweet Home, and how she did it by herself, without Halle's help. She talks about how she felt when she arrived and felt freedom. She realizes that she is circling around the subject of her child's death and thinks that she can never explain it to anyone, but that she was trying to carry her children away to "where no one could hurt them."

*Sethe's thoughts stress that her killing her baby was an act of love, an attempt to protect her children from slavery. She had saved herself and had no one to rely on but herself, and killing them was the only way she had to save them.*

Finally, Sethe tells Paul D that she stopped Schoolteacher from taking her children, saying, "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe." Paul D is shocked and thinks that Sethe is different from when he knew her on Sweet Home. He tells her that her love is "too thick." Sethe asks what else she could have done, and Paul D responds, "You got two feet, Sethe, not four." He leaves 124.

*Again, Sethe insists that she acted out of love. Paul D's comment implies that Sethe played into slave-owners' dehumanizing ideas of slaves by acting like an animal. He believes that no love should be intense enough to make someone kill the object of their love. Sethe and Paul D had been rediscovering their past, rediscovering their memories together in order to move into the future. But Paul is unable to work through this revelation of the past, and so he leaves.*


## PART 2, CHAPTER 19

Stamp Paid approaches 124, feeling bad that he has caused Paul D to leave the house. He realizes that the last time he went to 124 was to take Baby Suggs away to be buried. At Baby Suggs' funeral, Sethe was silent and did not join in the hymns, offending the other mourners. As he gets closer to the house he hears a loud mix of voices and can only make out the word "mine." He goes to the door to knock but can't bring himself to. He tries to knock on the door for the next six days but turns back each time before knocking.

*At Baby Suggs' funeral, Sethe offended the community by acting like an individual apart from them. After the death of her child, she (and Denver) became increasingly isolated from the local community, such that Stamp Paid feels the need to knock on their door, rather than simply enter as he is accustomed to do with most people's homes.*

Meanwhile, Sethe is trying to move on without Paul D, who she feels has abandoned her like all the other townspeople. Beloved finds a pair of ice skates and asks what they are. Sethe decides to take Beloved and Denver skating. They go skating, laughing and enjoying themselves. They return to 124 and drink hot milk in front of a warm fire. Beloved begins to hum a song. Shocked, Sethe says that it is the song she once sang to her children and that no one else knows that song.

*While the townspeople feel offended and horrified by Sethe's actions, Sethe feels abandoned by them. Sethe attempts to make 124 work as a home with only Beloved, Denver, and her. Beloved's knowledge of Sethe's song further associates her with Sethe's dead child.*


Stamp Paid approaches 124 again, remembering how Baby Suggs became exhausted and stopped her gatherings at the clearing after Sethe killed her baby. He had tried to persuade her not to give up her gatherings but all she wanted to do was stay in bed and think about colors. As Stamp Paid approaches 124, he hears a roaring of voices that seem to vocalize the collective suffering of all slaves and decides not to knock on the door.

*Baby Suggs stopping her gatherings is indicative of the gradual withdrawal from the community of the inhabitants of 124 following the death of Sethe's child. Stamp Paid's thought suggests that Beloved represents not only Sethe's past sufferings, but perhaps the pains of slaves more generally.*


The morning after the skating trip, Sethe thinks that the hand-holding shadows she saw on the day of the carnival were not Paul D, Denver, and her, but rather Beloved, Denver, and her. She thinks that Paul D tried to convince her to be concerned with the outside world, when everything she needs is within 124.

*Sethe's reinterpretation of the shadows shows that she now hopes to make a home with only Denver and Beloved. In doing so, she begins to withdraw even more from the surrounding community, becoming more isolated within 124, within her own past and ghosts.*


Sethe thinks that Beloved knows and understands everything about her past. She remembers burying her child, specifically how she slept with an engraver so that he would engrave something on the baby's tombstone. She wanted "dearly beloved" but only got one word: "beloved." Sethe is now convinced that Beloved is the returned spirit of her dead child.

*As Sethe becomes more and more obsessed with Beloved, she starts to become overwhelmed and dominated by her past and memories.*

Stamp Paid finally works up the nerve to knock on Sethe's door, but no one answers. He sees Beloved through a window. He tells Ella that there is a strange woman at 124 and decides to ask Paul D about it. He learns that Paul D is sleeping in the cellar of the church.

*Even though the inhabitants of 124 have abandoned the community, Stamp Paid still feels a responsibility toward Sethe and Denver and begins to seek help for them.*

Sethe is late to work. She takes food back home from the restaurant, which reminds her of Sixo stealing a pig on Sweet Home. Schoolteacher questioned him about it and he said he was only feeding himself so that he would do more work for Schoolteacher, so it was not stealing. Schoolteacher beat him to show him that "definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined."

*Schoolteacher denied his slaves the ability to think and reason for themselves, as he does explicitly with Sixo in this memory of Sethe's. One of the reasons for the importance of storytelling is that it allows for slaves to be the definers of their own experiences, rather than being defined by someone else's story.*


Sethe remembers more about Sweet Home. Schoolteacher measured the slaves and counted their teeth, as if they were animals. She remembers something she has never told anyone: she once overheard Schoolteacher and his nephew writing in a book and listing Sethe's animal and human characteristics in different columns.

*Schoolteacher epitomizes the dehumanizing quality of slavery, as he treated his slaves like scientific specimens and animals.*

Sethe remembers talking to Halle about Schoolteacher, asking if he thought Schoolteacher was different from Mr. Garner. Halle said it didn't matter: he was white and a slave-owner. After enduring some of the cruelty of Schoolteacher, the slaves of Sweet Home decided to run away. The planned escape didn't work, but Sethe was able to sneak her children out.

*Halle's comment emphasizes that, although Mr. Garner was kinder than Schoolteacher, he was still a slave-owner and therefore not essentially different from Schoolteacher. The idea of a kind slave-owner (as Mr. Garner would understand himself to be) is oxymoronic, since to own slaves is, by definition, to be cruel and unkind.*

Stamp Paid believes that the noises of 124 are the voices of angry, dead slaves and ex-slaves. He reflects that white people think that "under every dark skin was a jungle" but he thinks that "it was the jungle whitefolks planted in them." Since no one has come to the door even after he knocked, he gives up on trying to see Sethe at her home.

*Stamp Paid's thoughts again suggest that Beloved embodies the painful past of slavery generally. His analysis of slavery is that slave-owners see slaves as uncivilized, when in reality they* make *slaves uncivilized by enslaving them.*

## PART 2, CHAPTER 20

This chapter follows Sethe's stream of consciousness, which repeats the name "Beloved" and insists that "she is mine." Sethe's internal monologue of thoughts continually claims that killing her child was an act of love and that the child has now come back to her. Sethe remembers her own mother, who was hanged, and says that she wanted to die after killing her daughter, but knew that she needed to live for her other children.

*Sethe's thoughts show her intense devotion to her children and increasing obsession with Beloved. Her sparse memories of her mother highlight how difficult it is to be a mother under the institution of slavery. Sethe has sacrificed her life for her children, refused to give them up, even killing them to stop anyone from taking them from her, and that obsessive love is overwhelming her.*

Sethe recalls her escape from Sweet Home and the day when she killed her child. She says she wanted to "take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is." Sethe ends the chapter by saying again that Beloved is her daughter and has come back to her.

*Sethe again insists that she killed her child out of love. Her thoughts evidence an extremely strong motherly attachment to her daughter.*

## PART 2, CHAPTER 21

Denver's monologue follows Sethe's. She asserts that Beloved is her sister and that they have a special bond: she swallowed Beloved's own blood along with her mother's milk after Sethe killed Beloved. Denver thinks of her brothers, who have left, and says she is scared to leave 124 alone.

*Denver sees herself as more than sisters with Beloved, as blood-sisters of a sort. Her intense feelings are only made more intense by the fact that she has always been alone. And being alone and isolated from the world has made her afraid of that world, making her even more alone.*

When she was younger, Denver was afraid Sethe would kill her, too. She would dream that her dad, Halle, was coming. She idealized Halle as "an angel man." Denver's monologue ends like Sethe's, insisting that Beloved is hers.

*This is the first time we see how Sethe's actions affected the young Denver. She was constantly afraid of her mother, who she knew had the capacity to kill her, even if out of love, and therefore she dreamed to be saved by her father who would never come for her. This may be why she sought a home in her boxwood room, safe not just from the ghost of 124 but also from her mother.*

## PART 2, CHAPTER 22

This chapter follows Beloved's thoughts. She insists that Sethe is hers. She says "it is always now" and her thoughts mix different times in one fluid present time. She recalls a voyage on a slave boat from Africa, the horrors of crouching below deck with so many others, some dead, without enough room to move. She continually refers to being separated from an unnamed "she."

*As Beloved embodies, to some extent, the persistence of the past, her monologue eschews historical time in favor of one fluid time, in which past memories and the present coexist. Her recollections of a slave boat associate her with Sethe's mother, who experienced such a voyage. But these fragmented memories may also suggest that Beloved gives voice to the sufferings and longings of all slaves, beyond Sethe's own family.*

Beloved recalls coming out of water and finding a house, then seeing Sethe's face and recognizing that Sethe is the face from which she was separated. Now, she thinks, they can be together again at last.

*Beloved's emerging from the water can be seen as a symbolic rebirth and her obsession with Sethe suggests again that she is at least partially Sethe's daughter.*

## PART 2, CHAPTER 23

Beloved's stream of consciousness continues. She speaks of a woman she was separated from in Africa and a face she saw before emerging from the river. She believes that Sethe is both this face and this woman from whom she has been separated.

*Through Beloved's thoughts, her separation from her mother Sethe comes to stand in for the countless separations from mothers caused by slavery, and even for the ultimate separation of Africans from their motherland.*

Beloved's thoughts are followed by a dialogue of thoughts between Beloved, Sethe, and Denver. Beloved says she comes from "the other side" and remembers Sethe. Sethe says Beloved is safe now. Denver says that Beloved came when she needed her and that she loves Beloved. Denver says "daddy is coming for us." A series of unattributed thoughts follow, addressing Beloved and repeating "you are mine."

*Sethe's thoughts show her devotion to her daughter, who she now believes has returned. The obsessive dialogue of thoughts shows the degradation of life at 124: Sethe increasingly withdraws into her home, her past, and her own thoughts.*

## PART 2, CHAPTER 24

As Stamp Paid is on his way to see Paul D, the narrative resumes by following Paul D's thoughts. He remembers the differences between Mr. Garner and Schoolteacher but now questions how different the two really were.

*Much like Sethe, Paul D is consumed by his past and memories. His questioning of the differences between Mr. Garner and Schoolteacher emphasize the essential cruelty of slavery, regardless of the slave-owner.*

Paul D remembers fleeing Sweet Home with the other slaves. They wait and observe Schoolteacher, plotting the best way to escape. But Sethe becomes pregnant, and the changes Schoolteacher makes about how the farm is run complicate their plans.

*The slaves' planned attempt to escape relies upon their cooperation as a group, though it is made more difficult by Sethe's pregnancy and by Schoolteacher.*

Paul D, Sixo, and Sixo's Thirty-Mile Woman try to escape Sweet Home, but are caught. The Thirty-Mile Woman escapes. Schoolteacher is convinced that Sixo has gone crazy and is no longer suitable for work, so he has Sixo burned alive. Sixo laughs as he dies. Paul D hears Schoolteacher discuss his own monetary value as a slave.

*Again exemplifying the cruelty of slavery, Schoolteacher kills Sixo because he only values his life in terms of how much work Sixo can perform. Similarly, he thinks of Paul D in terms of how much money he is worth. Sixo's laughter suggests at the moment that Sixo has gone crazy (though the fact that his laughing suggests that to readers means that readers are underestimating Sixo).*

Paul D is brought back to Sweet Home in chains, where he sees Sethe. Sethe got her two older children out but has not escaped. She plans to run away by herself. Paul realizes that it must have been right after this conversation, after he left, that Schoolteacher's boys took her to the barn and took advantage of her. Paul D thinks of his price and wonders what the monetary values of Baby Suggs, Halle, and others is. He thinks of Sixo laughing as he died because the Thirty-Mile Woman had gotten away, pregnant with Sixo's child.

*Devoted to her children, Sethe sent them ahead before trying to escape, herself. Paul D's thoughts about the monetary value of various characters shows him grappling with the way in which slavery treats human beings as commodities. While Schoolteacher (and, uncomfortably, the reader) saw Sixo's laughter as simply crazy behavior, it was in fact a final act of defiance against his cruel master, as Sixo knew that while he was being killed his child would be born in freedom.*

## PART 2, CHAPTER 25

Stamp Paid arrives at the Church and meets with Paul D, who is attempting to drink away his sorrows. He apologizes for Paul D having to sleep at the church and offers to set him up at a house. Paul D says he has chosen to sleep at the church, rather than a house.

*Stamp Paid's offer of help (and confidence that someone will offer a home to Paul D) shows the beneficence of the local community. However, Paul D does not want to be in a house. He needs a church, perhaps because he feels that he either does not want to be with other people or because he needs a certain closeness to something holy to combat his terrible past, or perhaps both. Earlier, with Sethe, Paul was starting to unearth and confront that past. Now he is trying to escape it through alcohol.*

Stamp Paid says he wants to make up for showing Paul D the news clipping about Sethe. He then tells Paul D about how he changed his name. He was named Joshua when he was a slave. One night, his master slept with his wife. When his wife returned to him after a night with his master, he was angry and wanted to break his wife's neck. Instead, he changed his name.

*Stamp Paid's story shows another example of the abuse of slaves by slave-owners. His name change can be seen as an attempt to separate himself from his painful past. Just as Paul D repressed his memories, Stamp Paid had to become a different person in order to put his past behind him. Also note how Stamp Paid's anger at the abuse from his master was directed toward his wife—how the abuses of slavery could turn slaves against each other.*

Stamp Paid tells Paul D that he was at 124 on the day Sethe killed her child. He tells him it was out of love and "she was trying to out-hurt the hurter." He asks Paul D about Beloved and Paul D says that no one knows where she came from. Before Stamp Paid leaves, Paul D asks him, "how much is a nigger supposed to take?" Stamp Paid answers, "All he can," and Paul D responds by repeating, "Why?"

*Stamp Paid reinforces Sethe's assertion that she loved her child, that she was taking the only path she could to escape from those who had hurt her. Paul D's painful question emphasizes the unceasing, unfathomable, abuses and indignities suffered by him and other slaves. Stamp Paid asserts that they must continue on living, to face whatever comes until it kills them. But Paul D, in his despair, cannot see why.*

## PART 3, CHAPTER 26

124 is now quiet. Sethe is getting progressively weaker, quieter, and hungrier. She has discovered a scar under Beloved's chin (where she cut her own daughter with the saw) and is entirely convinced that Beloved is her daughter. Denver feels excluded by the strong bond between the other two.

*Home life at 124 has degraded significantly, as Sethe's motherly love turns into a harmful obsession. Even Denver is outside of the all-consuming bonds of neediness between Sethe and Beloved.*

Beloved begins to dominate in her relationship with Sethe, not obeying her and throwing angry fits whenever Sethe tries to assert herself. Denver worries about Sethe. She realizes that it is up to her to leave 124 and get help. It is very hard for her to leave the house, but she eventually goes to Lady Jones.

*Beloved's control over Sethe is symbolic of Sethe's more general surrender to her own past and memories. Denver's decision to get help is heroic—she is facing a great fear in going out alone, in breaking her isolation.*

Lady Jones recognizes Denver and welcomes her into her house. Denver asks for work, so that she can bring food home. Lady Jones says that Denver only has to ask for help and the church committee will give her food, but Denver doesn't want to ask for help from strangers.

*In a role reversal, Denver must now protect and care for her own mother. The church committee is an example of the helpful community that Sethe felt herself cut off from and then turned her back on.*

Two days later, Denver finds food left on a stump by 124. All through the spring, various packages of food are left at 124, sometimes with names written, so that Denver can go to people's houses and thank them. Denver begins going to Lady Jones' house more often, as life at 124 deteriorates. Beloved seems to be going crazy and Sethe has regressed and is childlike and weak. Denver thinks that Beloved is making Sethe pay for killing her with the saw.

*As Denver has re-entered the surrounding community, the community now begins to support her and Sethe again. Within 124, things continue to get worse as Sethe's being mentally overwhelmed by her past—her love, her guilt—is matched by her physical deterioration.*

Denver goes to the Bodwins to look for work. She tells their maid Janey about Beloved and how Sethe seems to have lost her mind. Janey tells her to come back in a few days for work. Denver notices a slave figurine for holding coins at the house with "At Yo Service" written on it. After Denver leaves, the news of Beloved spreads around town. Ella convinces the townswomen that they need to help Sethe.

*The local community begins to come together to support Denver and Sethe. Under the direction of Ella, they decide to help Sethe even without being asked to do so. The slave figurine at the Bodwins' house is evidence that even abolitionists like the Bodwins are not necessarily free from the prejudices that are at the root of slavery.*

One afternoon, as Denver is waiting on her porch for Mr. Bodwin to pick her up from 124 to begin work, a crowd of women approach the house. They begin praying and then start to sing.

*The group of women singing together emphasizes the importance of community as they attempt to drive Beloved away. It is also significant that the group is made up of all women. They alone know Sethe's pain as a mother under slavery. They know the horror of what Sethe did, and yet now they are helping her, expressing understanding and fellowship.*

As Mr. Bodwin approaches, he hears the women singing. Inside 124, the singing reminds Sethe of Baby Suggs' gatherings at the Clearing. She goes out to the porch to watch them sing, along with Beloved. The singing women see Beloved as a "devil-child." Beloved has assumed the appearance of a pregnant woman

*The association of the singing women with Baby Suggs further links them with the general power of motherhood. Beloved's bizarre transformation shows that she is something more than merely Sethe's daughter returned to life. Her pregnant appearance associates her more generally with motherhood. She could be understood as the embodiment of the pains and desires of being a mother under the circumstances of slavery.*

Sethe mistakes Mr. Bodwin for Schoolteacher and runs after him with an ice pick, but she is restrained by the women. Denver runs after Sethe into the crowd of women, and Beloved thinks that both Denver and Sethe have deserted her.

*The fact that Sethe thinks Mr. Bodwin is Schoolteacher shows the degree to which she is literally living in the past, but also suggests (given the racist figurine in the Bodwin's foyer) the degree to which all white people have certain similar racist similarities. Denver runs after her mother to protect and help her, an expression of love. Meanwhile, Beloved's power is broken by being abandoned—as a baby, as a memory, as guilt, she needs attention to survive.*

## PART 3, CHAPTER 27

Paul D and Stamp Paid discuss the day when the singing women came to the house and drove away Beloved, who fled from the women and disappeared. According to Stamp Paid, 124 seems no longer to be haunted. It is "just another weathered house." Paul D thinks Sethe has gone crazy.

*With Beloved driven away, 124 is finally free from the burden of its past and can potentially become a home like any other. However, Sethe has not been able to escape from her past, as she seems to have gone mad.*

Paul D's thoughts are confirmed when Denver runs into him and Stamp Paid and tells them that she has lost her mother. But she says that she is working for the Bodwins and learning from Miss Bodwin, who hopes to try to send her to Oberlin College.

*Now that her family past has in some sense been exorcized in the form of Beloved, Denver can finally look forward to a potentially brighter future. She has escaped the dangerous, overwhelming side of memory that overwhelmed Sethe.*

Paul D asks Denver if Beloved was her sister. Denver says that she thinks so, but that Beloved was also more. A little boy has claimed that he saw a naked woman "with fish for hair" fleeing through the woods after the women sang outside 124.

*As Denver says, Beloved seems to have been both her sister and something more. She embodied the pain and suffering of slaves, the appeal and danger of the past, and the extreme love between a mother and child.*

Paul D thinks about his past, and the various unsuccessful escapes he has attempted throughout his life. After the end of the Civil War, he thought his life would become easy, but it did not. He remembers traveling north from Alabama and encountering black families and children murdered. He recalls his astonishment at first being paid for work. For seven years after the war, he wandered around and didn't stop anywhere until he came to 124.

*Paul D's wanderings represent him as continually in search of some kind of home, which he has temporarily thought that he had found at 124 before that, too, went sour. He had thought that after the war freedom would be all he or other slaves needed. But of course it is not that simple, the burdens of the past—both in memory and in racist oppression and violence—remain.*

Paul D goes to 124. He senses that Beloved is truly gone. He enters the house looking for Sethe and finally finds her humming in the keeping room. He tries to talk to her but she seems crazy. He pledges to take care of her from now on. Sethe says that her daughter has left her, referring to Beloved. He tells her, "We got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow."

*Paul D's comment to Sethe reinforces the novel's turn from the past to the future. Just as Denver is finally able to plan for a future, Paul D tries to get Sethe to let go of "yesterday" in favor of "some kind of tomorrow." And Paul D's own return to 124 signals a willingness to accept his past, to make a home in which to stay and live.*

## PART 3, CHAPTER 28

The novel describes a loneliness at 124 now that Beloved is gone and has "erupt[ed] into her separate parts." The town gradually forgets about her "like a bad dream." The townspeople need to forget about Beloved in order to move on, since "it was not a story to pass on." Gradually, even those who spoke with Beloved, including Paul D, Sethe, and Denver, forget about her. Traces of Beloved around 124 begin to disappear. The narration says, "This is not a story to pass on."

*The novel's ending suggests that forgetting about the past is the only way to move on after extreme tragedy. The novel even refers to itself as a story that should not be passed on. However, the very fact that Morrison wrote and published the novel implies that there is some value in remembering the painful tragedies in our personal and national histories. While being subsumed in the past can prevent people from living in the present, the novel ultimately claims that we owe it to the past to remember and honor those who have suffered. You must somehow do both things, both pass it on and not pass it on, and through the novel that is what Morrison does.*

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