Cold Mountain

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES FRAZIER

Charles Frazier grew up in North Carolina. His parents took him through the South throughout his childhood, and his memories of Appalachia, Georgia, Louisiana, and Alabama formed an important influence on his fiction. Frazier showed an aptitude for writing and storytelling from an early age, and by the time he'd graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1973, he'd already decided he was going to be a writer. Frazier went on to study writing at Appalachian State University, and in 1986, he received his Ph.D. in English literature from the University of South Carolina. For the next ten years, Frazier worked a number of odd jobs while working on the novel that would become *Cold Mountain*. In 1997, Frazier completed the novel and succeeded in selling it to Atlantic Monthly Press. The book was a surprise hit, selling more than 3 million copies and winning Frazier the National Book Award, arguably the most prestigious honor for American fiction. In 2003, the novel was adapted as an Academy Award-winning film by Anthony Minghella. Frazier published his second novel, *Thirteen Moons*, in 2006, and his third, *Nightwoods*, in 2011. He resides in Raleigh, North Carolina, with his wife and daughter.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The key historical event of *Cold Mountain* is, of course, the Civil War. In the early 1860s, the Southern states of the Union banded together under the leadership of Jefferson Davis to declare their independence from the Union, and from the U.S. government. The Southern states' (or, the Confederacy's) reasons for seceding were numerous, but one of the most important was their desire to continue practicing slavery—a practice that was heavily criticized in the Northern states (though millions of Northerners benefited from the cheap crop prices and free labor force that slavery created). Between 1861 and 1865, the Northern states of the Union, headed by President Abraham Lincoln, fought a deadly war with the Confederacy, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers lost their lives in battles like Fredericksburg and Petersburg. By 1865, it became clear that the Southern states, while passionate about their secession, lacked the manpower to defeat the larger, more powerful Union. In April of 1865, the Southern states formally surrendered. *Cold Mountain* also alludes to more subtle cultural changes in the middle of the 19th century, such as the liberalization of women following the Civil War. With the male work force in shambles, women had to work harder and take on more physically demanding jobs than ever before. The historian Eric Foner has argued that the new responsibilities women took on during this era paved the way for the first wave of feminism in the United States, orchestrated by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, among many others.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Cold Mountain is a "two-plot" novel; in other words, it has two halves—one centered around Ada Monroe, the other centered around Inman—that remain separate for most of the book. Partly for this reason, the novel explicitly mentions several other famous two-plot novels, such as *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* by Charles Dickens and *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot. The novel also alludes to the structure of Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, one of the foundational works of Western literature. Like the *Odyssey*, *Cold Mountain* examines the adventures of a man who is trying to return from war to his home. As in Homer's epic poem, the structure of the novel is episodic: each of Inman's experiences on the road is a self-contained story, featuring characters who don't appear in the next chapter—in this way, Inman himself becomes the "thread" between these self-contained stories. Also like the *Odyssey*, Frazier divides the story between the adventuring man coming home (Inman) and the woman (Ada) who is waiting for him and facing struggles of her own.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Cold Mountain
- **Where Written:** North Carolina
- **When Published:** Fall 1997
- **Literary Period:** 90s realism
- **Genre:** Historical novel, romance, "two-plot" novel
- **Setting:** The American South, 1860s
- **Climax:** Inman's reunion with Ada
- **Point of View:** Mostly third-person limited. The novel alternates between the points of view of Ada and Inman, the two protagonists

EXTRA CREDIT

Big bucks: Charles Frazier became a literary celebrity after the surprise success of *Cold Mountain*. As a result, he was offered a nearly unprecedented 8 million dollar advance for his second novel, *Thirteen Moons*. Not bad for a guy who struggled to keep a job for most of his 30s.

You can't please everybody: Frazier is one of the most celebrated modern American writers, but he's not without his

critics. After the release of *Thirteen Moons*, the writer Stephen Metcalf published an infamous review in *Slate*, in which he wrote, "Never have I encountered a work of fiction less willing to levy any psychic tax on its readers.*Sleep easy, dear reader*, it assures us, in all its orotund little murmurs."

PLOT SUMMARY

In the final months of the Civil War, we're introduced to two characters: Inman, a Confederate soldier who's been hospitalized after fighting in Petersburg and Fredericksburg, and Ada Monroe, a beautiful young woman who's living alone on a huge farm following the death of her father, Monroe. Ada and Inman both live in the town of Black Cove, which is overlooked by **Cold Mountain**. The novel cuts back and forth between the two protagonists, as Inman tries to return to Black Cove and Ada tries to survive there.

Inman slowly regains strength and then proceeds to leave the hospital, albeit with a large **neck wound**. He's haunted by nightmares about his time in battle, and he's so powerfully attracted to Ada that he wants to see her again as soon as possible. As he slowly walks home, he remembers seeing Ada for the first time in her father's church. On the **road**, Inman gets in a fight with three men who demand to know where he's headed. Inman fends off the men, but they chase him to a river and shoot holes in the boat he's taking to the opposite side. Inman also fears that he'll be attacked by the Home Guard, a group of Confederate soldiers who have the right to arrest and kill deserters—which Inman technically is.

Ada and her beloved father lived in Charleston for most of Ada's life, but when Ada was a teenager, they moved to Black Cove so that Monroe could be a preacher. Ada was trained for a docile life of reading and music, so now that Monroe is dead (and she's still unmarried), she's slowly starving to death. Her fortunes change when her neighbors, Sally Swanger and Esco Swanger, send a young woman named Ruby Thewes to live with Ada. Ruby is a talented farmer and a diligent worker, and she and Ada agree to live like equals, taking care of the land. Ada is amazed by how hard she's forced to work to survive.

Inman crosses paths with a strange priest named Solomon Veasey, who's carrying a young woman whom he's impregnated. Inman forces Veasey to return the young woman, whose name is Laura, to her home. Afterwards, Inman spends a night with a group of roaming gypsies, and steals food from a group of beautiful women who are bathing in the river. Soon after, Inman crosses paths with Veasey yet again. Veasey continues walking in the same direction as Inman, reasoning that he'll be killed if he sticks around any longer. During this time, Inman remembers his early experiences with Ada, such as resting his head in her lap at a Christmas party four years earlier.

Inman and Veasey come to a brothel, where Veasey tries and fails to have sex with a black prostitute named Tildy. Veasey and Inman also meet an old peddler named Odell, who claims to own a vast fortune in Georgia—one that he'll probably never be able to claim for himself.

As time goes on, Ada and Ruby become close friends. Ada learns that Ruby is the daughter of a ne'er-do-well named Stobrod Thewes. Stobrod abandoned Ruby when she was still a child, so she's been taking care of herself for almost as long as she can remember. Ada tells Ruby about her own childhood: her mother, Claire Dechutes, turned Monroe down the first time he proposed to her, but changed her mind several years later. Later, she died giving birth to Ada.

In town, Ruby and Ada meet a captive who tells them that he was arrested and tortured by the Home Guard, which is headed by a man named Teague. Although the captive served in the war, he tried to desert halfway through, and was punished for his "crime."

Inman and Veasey meet a man named Junior, who's trying to move a dead bull out of a riverbed. After helping Junior with his task, they join Junior for dinner. In Junior's home, Inman realizes that Junior is an abusive husband and father, and he may be serving his guests human flesh to eat. Inman meets one of Junior's children, a half-black girl named Lula, and Junior's (white) wife Lila. Lila gets Inman drunk and Inman is tempted to have sex with her. Suddenly, Junior bursts in and points a gun at Inman: he's lured Inman and Veasey into his home so that he could arrest them and turn them over to the Home Guard. Drunkenly, Junior forces Veasey to marry Inman to Lila; afterwards, the Home Guard shows up and marches Inman and Veasey into the forest. The horsemen of the Home Guard shoot both Inman and Veasey. Veasey dies of his wounds, but Inman miraculously survives. He crawls back to the road and eventually gains the strength to walk. Inman sneaks back to Junior's house for revenge. There, he reclaims the possessions he left there, including a rifle and money. He uses the butt of the rifle to beat Junior over the head, and then walks back to the road.

Back in Black Cove, Ada remembers one of her final meetings with Inman, just before he went off to fight. Inman, who was quiet and introspective, told Ada a long story about the lost city of Kanuga, which used to be a Native American community. One day, long ago, a stranger came to Kanuga and told the people that he came from the land of Shining Rocks. The stranger advised the people of Kanuga to journey to the Shining Rocks—but he also suggested that very soon, they'd be conquered by a dangerous enemy. The people decided to take the stranger's cryptic advice, and they traveled to the Shining Rocks, where they found a bright cave. Confused, the people returned home, where they were quickly conquered. Ada had no idea what this story meant. She said something flippant and then said goodbye to Inman, but soon regretted her words. She

saw Inman one more time before he left, and gave him a passionate kiss.

Inman comes to an Old Woman, who takes Inman into her home and treats his wounds. The woman gives Inman food and lets him rest until he's feeling much healthier. Afterwards, Inman stays with a young woman named Sara, who's lost her husband, Jonathan. Late at night, Sara is ambushed by Union soldiers, who threaten to kill her baby. Inman hunts down the soldiers and kills them, returning what they stole from Sara.

In Black Cove, Stobrod Thewes, now a military deserter, returns to Ruby and asks Ada and Ruby to take him in. He plays the **fiddle** for them, very beautifully, and Ada, feeling sympathetic, allows him to stay with them. Later, Stobrod brings a deserter friend, nicknamed Pangle, and another, Reid, to stay with Ruby and Ada. Ruby is resentful of Stobrod's presence, but agrees to let the guests stay. Shortly afterwards, Stobrod and Pangle are attacked by the Home Guard in the mountains. The Guardsmen kill Pangle and wound Stobrod. Reid, who was just out of sight when the Home Guardsmen attacked, tells Ada and Ruby what's happened. The trio goes into the mountains, where they find Stobrod, still barely alive. Ada and Ruby take care of Stobrod, trying to nurse him back to health so that they can carry him down to Black Cove.

Inman draws closer and closer to Cold Mountain, and imagines what his reunion with Ada will be like. When he's back on Cold Mountain, he's amazed to meet Ada there, as she's caring for Stobrod. At first, Ada doesn't recognize Inman, but when she does she embraces him and takes him back to Stobrod and Ruby. Inman and Ada make passionate love and share stories of their time apart.

Ada and Inman agree that to keep Inman safe, he should journey north, surrender to the Federals, and wait for the war to end. Inman and Stobrod—who's been nursed back to health—head north while Ruby and Ada return to Black Cove. But while they're still in the woods, the Home Guardsmen attack Inman and Stobrod. While Stobrod succeeds in running off, Inman attacks the Guardsmen, succeeding in killing three of them. The remaining Guardsman runs away from Inman, and Inman chases after him. Inman corners his enemy in the forest, where he realizes that the horseman is just a teenaged boy. The boy shoots Inman and runs off. By the time Ruby and Ada hear the gunshots and run to find Inman, Inman is dead.

In an Epilogue, set in 1874, we see that Ruby and Ada's fledgling community is still thriving: Ruby and Ada do the farming, and Stobrod makes the music. Ruby has married Reid, and has three children. Ada has lost Inman, but she has a nine-year-old child, presumably the product of her encounter with Inman just before Inman's death. Ada spends her days caring for her child and calmly attending to the tasks of life on a farm.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Inman – One of the two protagonists of *Cold Mountain*, Inman is a young Southern soldier who's hospitalized after sustaining heavy injuries in the Civil War. Inman, a lifelong resident of the town of Black Cove, decides to walk all the way back home in order to reunite with his love, Ada Monroe, and his journey home takes up the bulk of the novel. Throughout the book, Inman is tempted to give up on his quest—tempted with offers of sex, companionship, food, and money. But on each occasion, Inman proves his resolve by continuing on the road home, even when he's shot and nearly killed. Inman suffers from the trauma of war, and throughout the book has vivid nightmares and flashbacks to his time at Petersburg and Fredericksburg. In a way, his greatest challenge is moving past this trauma, rather than moving back to Black Cove. In the end, it seems that Inman is ready to put aside his past and start a new life with Ada—a life that's tragically cut short when Inman is murdered by disgruntled Southern soldiers.

Ada Monroe – The other main character of *Cold Mountain*, Ada is a wealthy, somewhat spoiled young woman who must learn how to take care of herself following the devastation of the Civil War. When Ada's father, Monroe, moves from Charleston to Black Cove, Ada catches the eye of the young, handsome Inman, and the two develop a warm, if repressed, romance—one that's cut short by the beginning of the war. After her father dies, Ada is on the verge of giving up all hope and starving to death. But with the help of Ruby Thewes, Ada learns how to farm, plow, sew, etc. Throughout the book, Ada—like Inman—has flashbacks to her time before the war, and seems to have a deep attraction to Inman. In the absence of "high culture," Ada learns how to live simply, practically, and peacefully. Upon Inman's return, Ada tries to bring him into the new life she's built for herself in Black Cove, and she's heartbroken when he's killed. Even so, she continues with her duties as a farmer, moving from day to day instead of dwelling on the tragedies of the past.

Monroe – The father of Ada Monroe, a talented, charismatic preacher. Monroe seems to be a kindly, if overbearing father, and for many years he is the only man in Ada's life. While our knowledge of Monroe is strangely limited—he's available to us only in flashbacks—we learn that he tried to court Ada's mother, Claire Dechutes, for many years before he finally succeeded in marrying her. Monroe's death marks the true beginning of Ada's story in the novel—in the absence of Monroe, Ada must take care of herself.

Ruby Thewes – Ruby Thewes is Ada Monroe's opposite in almost every way: she has a poor relationship with her father, Stobrod Thewes; she's been taking care of herself since she was a little girl; she's fiercely independent, etc. After the

destruction of the Civil War, it is Ruby's way of living, not Ada's, that perseveres in Black Cove. As a result, Ada depends on Ruby to learn how to farm and plow—without Ruby, Ada would starve to death. In part, Ruby agrees to help Ada because she's getting a great deal: she gets half a farm for herself. But as time goes on, it becomes clear that Ruby is Ada's friend and loyal ally. In the novel's Epilogue, we learn that Ruby is still living with Ada ten years later, and has three children with Reid.

The Georgia boy / Reid – A young man who joins forces with Pangle and Stobrod Thewes after deserting the Confederate army. Reid is mercifully absent when the Home Guard attacks Stobrod and Pangle, so that he's able to alert Ada Monroe and Ruby Thewes to the danger. In the end, we learn that Reid marries Ruby and has three children with her.

Stobrod Thewes – The bumbling, ne'er-do-well father of Ruby Thewes, Stobrod is one of the novel's most complex characters—he's both comic and deeply serious, likable and despicable. As a younger man, Stobrod was a poor father—he never hit Ruby, but neither did he take care of her. After the beginning of the Civil War, Stobrod went off to fight, leaving Ruby to fend for herself. Halfway through the war, Stobrod deserted and returned to Black Cove, where he finds Ruby living with Ada Monroe. In spite of Stobrod's poor parenting, it's suggested that he's beginning to redeem himself by playing the **fiddle**—something he does with jaw-dropping artistry and craft. As Ada acknowledges, Stobrod's example proves that any man can change, provided they have the will to do so.

Solomon Veasey – A dimwitted, immoral priest whom Inman meets while Veasey is literally dragging a young woman (Laura) through the road. Solomon has authority in his community because he's a "man of God," but he squanders this authority by betraying his priestly vows of chastity and having sex with Laura. As a result, he's chased out of town. Alone in the world, Solomon joins with Inman, much to Inman's annoyance. While Solomon (much like Stobrod Thewes) is a despicable character in many ways, his desire to start a new life is rather poignant—and so his death at the hands of the Home Guard is still tragic in its own way.

Sara – An 18-year-old woman who shelters and feeds Inman during his quest back to Black Cove. Sara is lonely—her husband, Jonathan, is dead, and she has no one to help her take care of her infant child. As a result, Sara is eager to rely on Inman for warmth and companionship—late at night, she convinces Inman to lie in bed beside her, without touching her or saying anything.

The Old Woman – The old woman takes care of Inman after he's wounded by the Home Guard. She's calm, knowledgeable, and seemingly completely comfortable living in solitude. Yet she engages Inman in conversation when he stays with her, suggesting that she still craves some human contact, despite her protestations to the contrary. The old woman gives Inman powerful medicines that help him recover quickly and return to his quest to return to Black Cove with new enthusiasm. As such, Inman's return would be impossible without the old woman's help.

Teague – The informal leader of the Home Guard, Teague is arguably the primary antagonist of the novel. While the supposed purpose of the Home Guard is to discourage military deserters and strengthen the Confederate forces, it becomes clear over time that (in the novel at least) the Home Guard is made up of cowards too frightened of the war to serve in battle themselves—and Teague is no exception. We also come to see that Teague—far from being an honorable Confederate soldier—is an unabashed sadist who enjoys toying with his victims before arresting or killing them. It's interesting to note that there are almost no good, loyal Confederate soldiers in *Cold Mountain*: the soldiers tend to be either deserters like Inman or bullies like Teague.

Claire Dechutes – The mother of Ada Monroe and the wife of Monroe. Claire Dechutes is a beautiful young woman, and Monroe tries and fails to woo her for many years. All the information about Claire is presented to us as a memory layered within a flashback, but in this roundabout way we're told that Claire eventually marries Monroe after a short, unhappy marriage to another man. Claire dies giving birth to Ada.

Junior – Junior is arguably the most unambiguously evil character in the novel—a two-faced hypocrite and possible cannibal who sells out Inman and Solomon Veasey to the Home Guard, breaking the unwritten rules of hospitality in the process. While our knowledge of Junior is limited, we know that he married a white woman, Lila, who bore him half-black children, suggesting that she took another lover. In addition to Junior's evident racism and domestic abuse, it's suggested that he eats human beings whom he murders. There's no hint of a redeeming quality in Junior, and it's hard to muster much sympathy when Inman takes his revenge on him.

Odell – An old peddler who claims to have once been a wealthy man in Georgia. Odell tells Inman that he fell in love with Lucinda, a slave, and then went off to fight in the Civil War. Odell has no idea what became of Lucinda, or whether his fortune in Georgia is intact.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Swimmer – A young Cherokee child who befriends Inman when Inman is also a boy. Swimmer teaches Inman spells and incantations, some of which Inman chants to himself during his long walk home to Black Cove.

Lucinda – The slave with whom Odell fell in love, later shipped off to Mississippi by Odell's spiteful father.

Birch – A young member of the Home Guard, who kills Inman at the end of the novel.

The captive – A Southern soldier who's arrested by the Home Guard for deserting.

Byron – A member of the Home Guard.

Balis – A Southern soldier and fellow invalid who's in the hospital with Inman.

Lee – One of Inman's fellow soldiers.

Mrs. McKennet – An old, talkative resident of Black Cove.

Ayron – A member of the Home Guard.

Lula / Chastity – Junior's daughter—or at least the child of Junior's wife, Lila.

Lila – Junior's wife, who tries to seduce Inman.

Sally Swanger – One of Ada Monroe's neighbors in Black Cove, and the woman who sends Ruby Thewes to live with Ada.

Esco Swanger – The husband of Sally Swanger.

Tip Benson – A young piano tutor who tries and fails to seduce Ada Monroe.

Lucy – Ada Monroe's cousin, who lives in Charleston.

Potts – A traveler who points Inman toward Sara's house.

Pangle – A big, dimwitted deserter who's highly talented at playing the banjo.

Tildy – A black prostitute with whom Solomon Veasey tries to have sex.

The Blind Man – An old man who talks to Inman while Inman is staying in the hospital, and asks Inman to describe his experiences during the Civil War.

Laura – A young woman whom Solomon Veasey seduces and impregnates.

Blount – A rich, foolish man who flirts with Ada Monroe.

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.

WAR, MEMORY, AND TRAUMA

It's both correct and incorrect to describe *Cold Mountain* as a "Civil War novel." The book is set in the United States during the mid-1860s, when the Civil War between the Northern and the Southern states was still underway. (See Background Info for more on this topic.) And yet the Civil War itself—the bloodshed, the political battle to secede from the Union, the military strategies—is almost entirely absent from this book (when there's a battle, for instance, it's always presented in flashback). So even though this is a novel about the Civil War, Frazier prefers to write about the war by studying its impact on individual people; i.e., the literal and emotional wounds it causes.

By presenting the actual events of the Civil War mostly in flashback, *Cold Mountain* makes an important point: the destruction of the war was psychological as well as literal. Inman, the protagonist of the book, is a former soldier on the Southern side. At the beginning of the novel, Inman is in the hospital with a nasty **neck wound**, the product of his service in battle. But although Inman's neck wound eventually heals, the trauma he's sustained in battle only gets more vivid with time. He has vivid nightmares about the deaths of his friends and peers during the war, and feels a tremendous amount of guilt at having killed enemy soldiers. Even Ada Monroe, the novel's other protagonist, feels the trauma of the Civil War, despite the fact that she's never set foot on a battlefield. The war drags Inman, Ada's lover, away from her, leaving Ada to a lonely, uncertain future. Furthermore, the things that people usually turn to in times of crisis, such as family or religion, are nowhere to be found: the only priests or parents in the book are corrupt, absent, or dead.

If the devastation of the Civil War is largely psychological, the overarching question posed by *Cold Mountain* is, "How do the survivors of a war move on with their lives?" While there's definitely not an easy answer to this question, the book suggests that the only way to conquer one's traumatic memories of the past is to look ahead to the future. At first, Ada is living a stagnant life; alone on her father's farm, she has no future. It's only after Ada begins to set herself definitive goals—maintaining her property, most of all—that she begins to recover from some of her psychological scars. By the same token, Inman's journey to return to Ada could be interpreted as a kind of "therapy" for his experiences in the Civil War: he can either look ahead to a new future with Ada, or settle for a lifetime of nightmares. The harsh truth, which Ada realizes toward the end of *Cold Mountain*, is that there's nothing inevitable about the healing process—it takes tremendous willpower to get over one's trauma. Inman and Ada begin to move on with their lives because they *want* to move on, and work hard at it every day. As we can imagine, other veterans of war aren't so lucky.

The ultimate tragedy of *Cold Mountain* is that willpower and the desire to look ahead to the future aren't always enough. The war's impact may be largely psychological, but it's not *only* psychological: in the final chapters of the novel, Inman is murdered by members of the Home Guard (a vestige of the Southern army), who want to punish Inman for desertion. We arrive at the depressing conclusion that tragedy is unpredictable and basically uncontrollable. Even so, we see in the novel's Epilogue that Ada hasn't let Inman's death weigh her down with further traumas; instead, she continues to work on her farm and care for the child she had with Inman, looking

ahead to each new day of work. Optimism and willpower aren't always powerful enough to restore peace and order to one's life, but they're still important.

ISOLATION, SURVIVAL, AND COMMUNITY

One of the greatest tragedies of the Civil War was that it tore entire communities apart. The men who were old enough to serve in battle left their families behind, while the women were faced with the unenviable task of surviving by themselves in lonely, empty households. The two protagonists of *Cold Mountain*, Ada Monroe and Inman, face many different kinds of isolation. In general, it's fair to say that the novel is interested in two different kinds of challenges posed by isolation: first, the literal, practical challenges of surviving on one's own; and second, the more abstract, psychological challenges of loneliness.

As far as the first challenge goes, *Cold Mountain* keeps coming back to the same point: it's difficult, if not impossible, to survive on one's own. On the contrary, survival—eating, keeping warm, caring for one's wounds—requires people to cooperate with one another. As the novel begins, Ada Monroe is slowly dying of starvation. She's been trained her entire life to study books and music, meaning that she has almost no knowledge of how to maintain a thriving farm. It's not until Ruby Thewes, a capable, well-trained farmer, offers Ada help that Ada begins to survive: she has to learn how to pull a plow, plant seeds, and so on. In much the same way, Inman only succeeds in returning to **Cold Mountain** because people offer him help (above all, food and lodgings—see Hospitality theme) along the way home. Even when Inman makes it back to Cold Mountain, he's on the verge of starvation: if not for the help of people like the Old Woman, who cares for his wounds, or Sara, who feeds him and hides him from the Home Guard, Inman would never have made it home alive.

One interesting question we might ask is why Ruby offers Ada her help, assuming that Ruby is so capable of taking care of herself. While it's certainly true that Ruby is getting a great deal by teaming up with Ada (she gets half a farm to herself), Frazier also suggests that Ruby befriends Ada because she needs human companionship as well as nourishment and shelter. This leads us to the second main challenge of isolation: the psychological toll of loneliness. During Inman's journey back to his home, many people offer him food and shelter—and one reason they do so is that they're lonely, and angling for some human contact. Even the Old Woman, who boasts that she doesn't get lonely at all, peppers Inman with questions about his experience in battle, his love for Ada, etc.—no matter what she claims, it's clear enough that she needs company, the same as everyone else in the novel.

In the end, *Cold Mountain* shows us that community is the cornerstone of the human experience. In two different senses, it's fair to say that no man is an island: no one can truly provide for themselves and survive without some kind of assistance, and no one can live a fulfilling life without craving some kind of interpersonal contact. Because this is the case, human beings need a community, based on cooperation between people. As the novel draws to a close, we see the fledgling community that Ruby, Ada, Stobrod Thewes (Ruby's father), and Reid (a friend of Stobrod's) have built for themselves on Ada's farm, a powerful reminder that in the midst of a dangerous and divisive war like the Civil War, community becomes more important than ever.

THE QUEST TO RETURN HOME

In interviews, Charles Frazier has acknowledged *Cold Mountain*'s debt to Homer's *Odyssey*, one of the foundational works of Western literature (see Background Info for more on this work). Unsurprisingly, Frazier's novel touches on one of the oldest themes in the Western canon (and the key theme of the *Odyssey*): the quest to return home. Inman, the novel's main character, spends most of the book trying to walk back to his hometown of Black Cove, where the love of his life, Ada Monroe, still lives. It's worth thinking about why and how Inman goes about his quest.

The first question we need to think about is why Inman wants to return to his home so badly—why walk hundreds of miles, risking his life? This is an especially tough question to answer, since Inman himself never explicitly states his reason for wanting to go home. It's easy to surmise that Inman is afraid of being sent back into battle as soon as he recovers from his **wounds**. And yet Inman's reason for wanting to return to Black Cove, specifically, is a little different. Black Cove is Inman's home—he's lived there all his life. One reason that Inman loves Black Cove is that, as far as he can tell, it never changes: **Cold Mountain** (the mountain near Black Cove) will always be Cold Mountain. In the midst of a terrifying, traumatic war, Inman wants to return to Black Cove to remind himself of who he was before. He wants to forget about the Civil War and carry on with his life, uninterrupted. But there's also another reason why Inman wants to return: he wants to move forward with his relationship with Ada Monroe, whom he'd been in love with before he was shipped off to battle. The key point here is that Inman's quest to return to Black Cove is intimately personal. With every step he takes toward his home, Inman reminds us, and reminds himself, of his identity: his lifelong connection to the town, and his passionate love for Ada. Even if we can't exactly understand Inman's connection to Black Cove itself, we can all understand his desire to go home, and in this way, Inman's quest for home makes him a sympathetic and believable character.

One interesting feature of quest narratives, beginning with the *Odyssey* (and extending through *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,

Heart of Darkness, and even *Apocalypse Now*) is their episodic structure. In *Cold Mountain*, Inman's encounters along the **road** to Black Cove have an episodic, self-contained quality. The characters he meets along the way often disappear from the novel after one or two chapters; i.e., after Inman moves on with his quest (notable exceptions include Teague, the leader of the Home Guard, and Solomon Veasey, the priest). The "thread" connecting these brief, chapter-long encounters together is Inman himself. This quality of the novel suggests all kinds of interesting questions, most notably, "How do the 'episodes' challenge or change Inman?" As the novel goes on, it becomes clear that Inman's encounters with strangers along the road back to Black Cove test his commitment to his quest. With every life-threatening encounter, Inman's devotion to Ada becomes more impressive—it's easy to imagine a weaker man giving up on the quest entirely. By the time we get to the end of the book, then, Inman's "episodes" have had an undeniable impact on his character: they've made him strong, mature, and even heroic.

ROMANCE, SEXUALITY, AND REPRESSION

In addition to being a novel about war, trauma, and survival, *Cold Mountain* is also about the romance between its two main characters, Inman and Ada Monroe. Inman and Ada live in a time when it's difficult, if not impossible, to speak openly about sex and sexuality. As a result, they're both extremely sexually inexperienced, and more or less completely ignorant of the anatomy of the opposite sex. Keeping this in mind, it's worth thinking about the nature of Ada and Inman's mutual attraction in more detail, especially since Inman walks hundreds of miles to be with Ada. And how does Frazier, a writer from a far more sexually liberated time, depict love and sexuality in the 19th century?

As the novel begins, sex is a mystery—sometimes enticing, sometimes frightening. The society of the 19th century forbids frank discussions of sexual desire and tries to repress free and open sexuality at all times. In particular, women are encouraged to hide their beauty from men: they wear heavy dresses, dark blouses, and tight corsets that render the female body strange and unknowable. By the same token, the sexual acts that we learn about at the beginning of *Cold Mountain* seem bizarre, forbidden, and frequently disgusting: the priest Solomon Veasey impregnates a girl, and a father, Junior, sleeps with dozens of married women. These misdeeds reveal individual characters' neuroses, but also reflect (and are in some ways caused by) the era's limited, repressed understanding of sexuality. When society presents all sexual desire as dangerous and scary, it's more likely that one's sexuality will emerge in unhealthy ways.

As the novel moves on, sex and sexuality gradually become less frightening and abusive: instead of a man assaulting a woman for his own pleasure, we see men and women making love and falling in love out of mutual desire. On his way home, Inman strikes up a brief romance with Sara, a woman who desires him as much as he desires her. Sara, whose husband, Jonathan, has died, wants Inman's emotional companionship, and his physical presence in her life—even if it consists of nothing more than his lying in bed next to Sara—is a vital part of that. With these episodic encounters, *Cold Mountain* paves the way for what is by far the most passionate (and mutual) relationship in the novel, the romance between Ada and Inman. It's not until Ada and Inman have sex that they feel truly comfortable with each other. Only after their lovemaking do they open up about their traumatic pasts, their secrets, and their dreams of the future. In this way, the novel puts forward a very un-19th century message: sex is an important, natural aspect of the love between two adults, as well as an important part of maturity.

On one level, *Cold Mountain* is a novel about the destruction of American antebellum culture following the Civil War, one important part of which was the repression of women and of sexuality. The characters find themselves in a strange new world in which sexuality is no longer so guarded and forbidden. While some of these characters treat the collapse of society as an invitation to engage in sexual perversions—rape, incest—the two protagonists, Ada and Inman, find a way to love one another without the sexual repression they've experienced their entire lives.

HOSPITALITY AND QUID PRO QUO

Because *Cold Mountain* is a quest story like the *Odyssey*, its "episodes" keep coming back to the same scenario: a host offering hospitality to a weary traveler. Most of the time, the weary traveler is Inman, stopping for the night along the **road** back to Black Cove. But at other times, the traveler is passing by Ada Monroe and Ruby Thewes's farm in Black Cove, and the situation is more or less the same: Ada and Ruby provide him with food and shelter for a few nights. The theme of hospitality is important to *Cold Mountain* because it links together the two halves of the novel. Whether we're reading about Inman traveling along the road or Ada and Ruby on their farm in Black Cove, there's an unwritten code of hospitality in the characters' world.

The main rule of hospitality in *Cold Mountain* is that there's no such thing as a free lunch. There's always a *quid pro quo* (an exchange, literally "something for something") when a host offers to take care of a traveler for the night. The host will give the traveler food and shelter, but the traveler needs to provide something in return. Sometimes, the "something" is a literal object—for instance, Inman offers the mysterious Junior an expensive saw in return for food and a bed for the night. But most of the time, the traveler's payment is less literal. Stobrod Thewes "pays" for his housing in Black Cove by playing beautiful **fiddle** music for Ruby Thewes, his daughter, and Ada

Monroe. A lot of the time, the payment is information, or emotional companionship—when Inman shacks up with Sara, for instance, he simultaneously accepts Sara's generosity and repays his debt by offering her some desperately needed male companionship. Even the Old Woman who cares for Inman's **wounds** wants something from Inman—news of the outside world.

In times of war, the *quid pro quo* of hospitality is an important, almost sacred rule of many societies. This means that to break the rules of hospitality is almost a sin. Sure enough, the most repellant characters in the novel, such as Junior, are the same characters who violate their end of the code of hospitality—Junior gives Inman food and shelter, but then betrays Inman to the soldiers of the Home Guard, who nearly kill Inman. Not coincidentally, Junior is also one of the few characters in *Cold Mountain* who's portrayed as unambiguously evil—he's an adulterer, and also possibly a cannibal.

At several points in *Cold Mountain*, the characters discuss the unreliability of money during the Civil War. But while money changes its value over time, the basic rules of hospitality stay intact and universally acknowledged (so that the few characters who break the rules are portrayed as evil). In a way, hospitality is the "currency" of the novel—the one thing that stays the same, in an era when everything else is in flux.

SYMBOLS

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

COLD MOUNTAIN

Cold Mountain, the mountain that neighbors Black Cove, is clearly one of the novel's key symbols. It's such a big, imposing sight that it's impossible to forget it—everybody who's lived in Black Cove knows Cold Mountain like the back of their hand. Furthermore, the characters say on more than one occasion that Cold Mountain never changes—it's the same as it was before the Civil War, and it'll be the same again in a hundred years. In this way, Cold Mountain is a symbol of the characters' collective past, and an important reminder of why Inman wants to go back to Black Cove in the first place: he wants to travel back to a time before he was a soldier.

THE NECK WOUND

During his service in the Civil War, Inman sustains a horrible neck wound that then causes him a great deal of pain throughout the rest of the novel. Inman's neck wound is an externalization of the psychological wounds he'll grapple with over the course of the story—in other words, it's a powerful symbol of the lasting trauma of war.

BIRDS

Birds are some of the most conspicuous and ambiguous symbols in the novel: crows, ravens, sparrows, turkeys, etc. At various points, the characters see birds flying past and project all sorts of symbolic meanings onto the sight. Inman envies birds for being able to fly home—unlike Inman himself, who's forced to walk all the way back to Black Cove, his childhood home. Ruby Thewes and Ada Monroe try to find prophecies of the future by interpreting the movements of crows, symbolizing their uncertainty about their own futures (and echoing the ancient practice of augury—using birds to predict the future). In all, birds are symbols of both escape and the human desire for some kind of higher meaning. In times of great danger and uncertainty, the characters envy birds for their freedom, and also look to them to try and find a purpose in the seemingly random twists of fate. It's telling that toward the end of the novel, when Ada begins to accept the terms of her new life, that she refuses to "interpret" the sight of a murder of crows at all—because she's finally satisfied with her own life, she has no need for escape, and therefore no need to dwell on the birds.

THE FIDDLE

Before we're introduced to him, Stobrod Thewes is described as a lazy ne'er-do-well who can't even take care of his own child, Ruby. But when we meet Stobrod, he's turned over a new leaf. Stobrod's desire to become a better man—more honest, harder working, etc.—is symbolized by his devotion to playing the fiddle. Stobrod uses his talent for music to provide joy and amusement to others, and devotes long hours to learning and perfecting his craft. In a novel about making big changes in life, Stobrod's fiddle is a powerful reminder that it's not too late to start again.

THE ROAD

One of the key symbols in the novel is the road that Inman follows from the hospital all the way back to his childhood home in Black Cove. Often, the road takes Inman to unfamiliar places, where the only signs of human civilization are Inman and the road itself. What the ocean is to the *Odyssey*, the road is to *Cold Mountain*: a constant reminder of the protagonist's devotion to his quest, his desire to return home, and the very human act of constantly traveling onward to new things.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove Press edition of *Cold Mountain* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

He handed it to Inman and said, Come on, cite me one instance where you wished you were blind.
Where to begin? Inman wondered. Malvern Hill. Sharpsburg. Petersburg. Any would do admirably as example of unwelcome visions.

Related Characters: The Blind Man (speaker), Inman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Inman--one of the two protagonists of the novel--thinks back on his experiences in the Civil War. He's speaking to an old blind man whom he meets while he's far away from his home. The blind man asks Inman to name a time when he wished he were blind--i.e., a time when he witnessed things that he wishes he could forget.

The passage is important because it establishes the theme of trauma. Inman isn't just trying to journey back to his hometown; he's also trying to rid himself of his own guilt and anxiety at having lived through the bloodiest war in American history. The passage is also interesting insofar as it alludes to Homer's *Odyssey*,one of the key inspirations for *Cold Mountain. T*he presence of the old blind man at the start of the tale might allude to Homer, the legendary blind poet who arranged and wrote the *Odyssey*.

But what Inman did not tell the blind man was that no matter how he tried, the field that night would not leave him but had instead provided him with a recurring dream, one that had visited him over and over during his time in the hospital. In the dream, the aurora blazed and the scattered bloody pieces—arms, heads, legs, trunks—slowly drew together and reformed themselves into monstrous bodies of mismatched parts. They limped and reeled and lunged about the dark battlefield like blind sots on their faulty legs.

Related Characters: Inman, The Blind Man

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Here we're given a window into Inman's inner life, as he experiences a recurring nightmare. In the nightmare, Inman is back on the battlefield during the Civil War. While Inman's experiences were frightening and traumatizing enough by themselves, they become even more so in his dreams; the dead bodies that Inman saw on the battlefield seem to come back to life, menacing Inman and seeming to draw him toward death.

Throughout the novel, the Civil War itself is practically a "character"--a powerful, almost indomitable force that pains Inman and prevents him from returning to Cold Mountain alive and well. One could say that the Civil War symbolizes the specter of death itself. Inman has survived his military service, and yet death still seems to haunt him and call out to him.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Cookery had become a pressing issue for Ada. She was perpetually hungry, having eaten little through the summer but milk, fried eggs, salads, and plates of miniature tomatoes from the untended plants that had grown wild and bushy with suckers. Even butter had proved beyond her means...

Related Characters: Ada Monroe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Ada Monroe, another resident of the area around Cold Mountain, has come to live all by herself on her father's farmland. Ada is an intelligent woman, but she has no practicality--she can read and write, but she can barely cook, let alone farm.

Although the novel is partly the story of Inman's odyssey to return to his childhood town, the novel is *also* the story of Ada's coming-of-age. Over the course of the book, Ada learns to take care of herself and take care of her father's property at the same time. In this early scene, Ada is barely able to feed herself; just as she is spiraling into starvation, her farm is spiraling into decay. Thus, Frazier will pair external description of Ada's attempt to control her land with the more psychological story of how Ada grows into a confident young woman.

Teague and his Home Guard roaring around like a band of marauders. Setting their own laws as suits them, and them nothing but trash looking for a way to stay out of the army.

Related Characters: Esco Swanger (speaker), Teague

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Ada learns from Esco Swanger, a neighbor, about the Home Guard, one of the key antagonistic forces in the novel. Because the novel takes place during the Civil War, there is a draft in place. Thousands of young men desert or run away, however, rather than risking their lives in a long and increasingly bloody war. In order to ensure that the Southern troops do their duty and serve the army, members of the Home Guard (including Teague and his gang) ride around the country, tracking down deserters and punishing them. The irony is that even though Teague is punishing deserters too cowardly to fight in the army, Teague himself is a coward, exploiting his position in the Home Guard so that he himself doesn't have to fight in the war.

Even now, return to Charleston was a bitter thought and one that her pride rejected. There was nothing pulling her back there. Certainly not family. She had no relatives closer than her cousin Lucy, no kindly aunts or doting grandparents welcoming her return. And that state of kinlessness too was a bitter thought, considering that all around her the mountain people were bound together in ties of clan so extensive and firm that they could hardly walk a mile along the river road without coming upon a relative.

Related Characters: Lucy, Ada Monroe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Ada Monroe has just lost her father, her closest relative in the world. Ada has no mother and no siblings, so she's essentially alone in the world. Frazier draws an important contrast between Ada's state of alienation and the claustrophobic "closeness" of other families in the area. Where Ada has no family to speak of, at least not in Cold Mountain, Ada's neighbors have huge families, and they all live in the same place.

The passage establishes kinship as the informal structure of society in a war-torn United States. Because the formal governments of the country are in chaos, American citizens must rely on other forms of law and order to survive. Family provides a natural point of organization--even if there's no governor, mayor, or president, the "family unit" provides a check on crime and misbehavior, encouraging loyalty and respect. And yet Ada doesn't even have a family--thus, in the midst of the Civil War, she is doubly isolated. And yet Ada's isolation--both from her family and from her society--is a blessing as well as a curse. Because she has no family, Ada will have the freedom to create her own artificial family with Ruby, Inman, etc.

Chapter 3 Quotes

As Inman walked, he thought of a spell Swimmer had taught him, one of particular potency. It was called To Destroy Life, and the words of it formed themselves over and over in his mind. Swimmer had said that it only worked in Cherokee, not in English, and that there was no consequence in teaching it to Inman. But Inman thought all words had some issue, so he walked and said the spell, aiming it out against the world at large, all his enemies. He repeated it over and over to himself as some people, in fear or hope, will say a single prayer endlessly until it burns itself in their thoughts so that they can work or even carry on a conversation with it still running unimpeded...

Related Characters: Swimmer, Inman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Inman recalls a childhood friend, Swimmer, who taught Inman a Cherokee spell to annihilate life. Swimmer, a Cherokee himself, seemed not to understand the seriousness of his own incantation (or at least assumed that saying it in English robbed it of power). And yet now that Inman is a fully-grown man, he takes Swimmer's spell very seriously--indeed, he repeats the spell over and over again.

Inman's decision to repeat Swimmer's spell reflects his traumatic experience in the Civil War. Inman's experiences in battle have been so vivid and frightening that they've left his faith in humanity and life itself shaken. Surrounded by violence and death, Inman has come to question the value of life. As the novel goes on, Inman will have to choose between embracing life and embracing violence and bloodshed. As we can see in this passage, Inman seems to

have adopted a dark, nihilistic worldview, in which everything is his enemy and he could find solace in destruction.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ After Ada made her decision known, Ruby wasted no time. She knew who had excess animals and produce, who would be willing to trade favorably. In this case it was Old Jones up on East Fork she dealt with. His wife had coveted the piano for some time, and knowing that, Ruby traded hard. Jones was finally made to give for it a pied brood sow and a shoat and a hundred pounds of corn grits.

Related Characters: Ada Monroe, Ruby Thewes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Ada joins forces with Ruby, a young woman who's vastly experienced in farming and living independently. In this passage, Ruby shows Ada how to survive on her farmland--the two women trade Ada's "useless" possessions, such as her piano, for useful items like corn grits and animals.

The passage illustrates the vast, informal economy that flourished in the United States during the Civil War. Without a reliable system of currency, people exchanged goods for other goods--a pig for a piano, etc. Frazier also suggests that Ada is turning a corner, abandoning the time in her life when she had the luxury of indulging in "useless" pleasures like piano music. From now on, she'll have to be practical, spending all her time and energy surviving and keeping up her property.

❝ Looking back on her life so far, she listed as achievements the fact that by the age of ten, she knew all features of the mountains for twenty-five miles in any direction as intimately as a gardener would his bean rows. And that later, when yet barely a woman, she had whipped men single-handed in encounters she did not wish to detail.

Related Characters: Ruby Thewes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Frazier introduces us to Ruby Thewes, one of the novel's key characters. Ruby is a young woman, but she's vastly experienced with farming, fighting, and generally surviving. While Ada may be older than Ruby, her life has been characterized by luxuries like travel and music--unlike Ruby, Ada knows nothing about taking care of herself.

Ruby is a key character in the novel because she embodies the changing gender norms that accompanied the Civil War. In the antebellum period, many women were in a position to do no work. However, following the beginning of the Civil War--and the rapid depletion of the male workforce--women discovered that they had no choice but to do the work that had previously been reserved for men (farming, planting, etc.). Historians have argued that women's growing role in farming and manufacturing during the Civil War paved the way for the rise of the feminist movement in the U.S. in the late 19th century. By the same token, Ada's increased involvement in the care of her own property paves the way for her growth from a timid, childish individual into a strong, confident woman.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ —Listen to me, Laura, he said. That preacher does not speak for God. No man does. Go back to sleep and wake up in the morning with me just a strong dream urging you to put him behind you. He means you no good. Set your mind on it.

Related Characters: Inman (speaker), Solomon Veasey, Laura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Inman encounters a corrupt priest, Solomon, who has kidnapped a girl, Laura, whom he'd previously impregnated. Fearing that Laura's life is in danger, Inman fights Solomon and brings Laura back to her home. After Inman returns Laura home, he gives her some advice--don't trust Solomon, or any other man who claims to speak on behalf of God.

Inman's advice to Laura is important for a number of reasons. First, it reflects his disillusionment with the institutions of antebellum America--the same institutions that have sent him to fight in the Civil War and be gravely wounded. Following his time in battle, Inman has learned to distrust authority of any kind, as trusting authority is what

sent him to the hospital in the first place. Moreover, Inman's advice to Laura reflects the informal code of right and wrong that he's slowly developing. Inman doesn't trust priests or politicians, but he's no nihilist. On the contrary, he continues to protect those like Laura who are too weak to defend themselves. So in spite of the trauma he's endured during battle, Inman continues to fight for what he knows to be right.

Inman had dealt with gypsies before and thought them possessed of a fine honesty in their predatory relationship to the rest of mankind, their bald admission of constantly seeking an opening. But they were benign-seeming in this quiet bend of the river. It was no concern of theirs how the war concluded. Whichever side won, people would still need horses. The contest was no more to them than a temporary hindrance to business.

Related Characters: Inman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97-98

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Inman crosses paths with a group of traveling gypsies. (For the purposes of consistency with the novel, we'll continue to use the word "gypsy," though it's unclear whether they're actually Roma.) The gypsies, we're told, are friendly--they even give Inman food and shelter--and pose no threat whatsoever to Inman's safety. Inman is fascinated by the gypsies, precisely because they have no allegiance to either side in the Civil War; they'll sell their products to whomever wants to purchase them.

Inman--still reeling from the devastation he's witnessed during the Civil War--envies the gypsies for their freedom from the draft and from the violence of war. At other times in history, the gypsies' lifestyle might seem derelict and unenviable--in the midst of a bloody war, however, it's liberating.

Chapter 6 Quotes

And, as with most things, Monroe had an explanation. He said that in their hearts people feel that long ago God was everywhere all the time; the sense of loneliness is what fills the vacuum when He pulls back one degree more remote.

Related Characters: Monroe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Ada, who is newly confident in her ability to control her own farmland (thanks to Ruby's help), experiences a strange crisis of faith here. As she stares out onto her property and onward into the wilderness, she feels a profound sense of loneliness. She remembers her father, Monroe, a preacher, telling her that loneliness is the sense of the absence of God.

Monroe's explanation for Ada's loneliness is both relevant and oddly insufficient. Ada is feeling lonely, but her reasons are far more concrete than Monroe's ideas would suggest. Ada isn't just missing God--she's missing her father, Inman, and her old life. Even so, Monroe's observations suggest that Ada continues to view the world with a mixture of fear and anxiety. Surrounded by Cold Mountain, Ada feels isolated--it's as if she's trapped on the tiny "island" of her own property. Over the course of the novel, Ada will learn to explore the natural world and "find God" there.

Chapter 7 Quotes

He made a motion as if to backhand the preacher, but the man did not run or fight or even try to raise his staff to parry. Rather, he hunched his shoulders to take the blow like a cowed dog, and so Inman pulled up and did not strike. He reasoned that lacking the will to drive the man off, he'd just walk on and see what came about.

Related Characters: Solomon Veasey, Inman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Inman takes pity on Solomon--the corrupt priest who'd made off with Laura, the young girl he'd impregnated. Although Inman clearly despises Solomon, he doesn't strike him, and he doesn't yell at Solomon when Solomon tries to follow him.

It's worth wondering why Inman behaves so passively when confronted with Solomon's presence. First, the fact that Inman refrains from hitting Solomon suggests that he continues to abide by a strong personal code of right and wrong, even after enduring the trauma of the Civil War.

Moreover, the fact that Inman doesn't protest when Solomon tries to follow him along the road suggests that Inman--in spite of what he says--might secretly be desperate for human companionship. After months of isolation in a hospital, Inman will take whatever he can get, even if he has to team up with a corrupt priest.

> When Odell finished talking he was drunk and sat blotting at his eyes with his shirt cuff.
> —It's a feverish world, Inman said, for lack of better comment.

Related Characters: Inman (speaker), Odell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Inman meets a strange man, Odell, who claims to be the owner of a vast fortune, based in land holdings, which the Civil War prevents him from enjoying. Odell complains about the agony he's endured over the course of a lifetime--he's been forbidden from marrying the woman he loves, a slave. Inman can think of nothing to tell Odell, other than to agree that the world is a strange, "feverish" place.

In the traumatic aftermath of the Civil War, Frazier suggests, the only real "bond" between Americans was the mutual recognition of the war's devastation. Inman and Odell don't necessarily share common beliefs or a common religion, but they're united in their disgust with the brutality of the war itself. And Inman's choice of adjective--"feverish"--is interesting: with it Frazier suggests the surrealism and nightmarish qualities of postwar life, in which Inman and the other characters encounter a variety of bizarre characters and situations.

Chapter 8 Quotes

> He wished Claire not to marry before her eighteenth birthday. I agreed. Two years seemed not too long to wait, and a fair request on his part. Within a few days he took me home to dinner as his guest. My introduction to your mother was at his hand. I could see in her eyes that she knew me from the night in the yard, but she said not a word of it. I believed from the beginning that my feeling toward her was returned.

Related Characters: Monroe (speaker), Ada Monroe, Claire Dechutes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Ada remembers everything her father, Monroe, told her about her mother, Claire. As the passage makes clear, Monroe and Claire both grew up in a society in which sex and sexuality were strictly monitored at all times. Women like Claire were policed in their sexual behavior--their fathers forbade them from marrying before a certain age, for instance, and even then only to someone the father approved of. The passage also suggests how romance works in a strictly controlled society like this--Monroe is forced to "guess" whether or not Claire returns his affections, because his interactions with her mostly pass through the mediation of her father.

It's interesting that Ada's only real memories of her mother are likewise mediated by *her* father. Since Claire died giving birth to Ada, Ada has never had a strong female presence in her own life. The absence of a mother-figure suggests why Ada's coming-of-age arrives so late in her life: without a strong maternal presence to guide her into adulthood, Ada is forced to fend for herself.

> The months when we knew you were to come seemed a strange blessing for a pair such as we were: old and marred by the past. When Claire died in childbirth, I could not hardly think that God would be so short with us. I could do little for weeks. Kind neighbors found a wet nurse for you and I took to my bed.

Related Characters: Monroe (speaker), Ada Monroe, Claire Dechutes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Monroe continues to tell Ada about her mother, Claire. As Monroe explains, Ada's birth was a bittersweet experience, since Claire died in childbirth. In part, Claire died giving birth to Ada because she was a little older than the average mother--Claire had already been involved in a long relationship before she settled down with Monroe.

The passage foreshadows one of the key themes of the

novel--the tradeoff between life and death, between happiness and misery. Here, Ada's birth is "balanced out" by Claire's death, much as the birth of Ada's child will be balanced out by Inman's untimely death. A spirit of gloom and sadness hangs over even the happiest moments in *Cold Mountain*, reflecting the mood of the post-war United States.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ —Come eat supper with us, the man said. And we've a hayloft that's good for sleeping.
—Only if you'll take that saw off our hands, Inman said to the man.
—I expect two dollars federal. Fifty in state scrip, Veasey said, perking up.
—Take it on, Inman said. No fee.

Related Characters: Solomon Veasey, Inman, Junior (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Here Frazier shows us the informal system of bartering that holds together American Southern society during the Civil War. Inman and Solomon help a stranger, Junior, move a heavy load. In return, Junior offers to let Inman and Solomon stay at his house--and Inman completes the transaction by giving Junior a valuable saw he's obtained during his travels. While Veasey selfishly wants to profit from the exchange by bringing paper money into the matter, Inman "correctly" allows Junior to keep the saw without any further payment--they're "square."

In the absence of reliable currency or a reliable system of government, the rules of bartering and trade were of vital importance to the United States (particularly in the South). Throughout the novel, Inman must trade his possessions for food and shelter, and this scene is no exception. Furthermore, notice that Inman's status as an honorable man--a worthy protagonist for the novel--is confirmed in the instant that he performs a fair transaction (the saw in exchange for shelter). By the same token, Solomon's status as a corrupt character is confirmed when he selfishly tries to make extra money from the trade. By and large, the "good" characters in the novel are those who abide by the rules of hospitality and *quid pro quo*.

❝ Junior raised up his face and looked at him but seemed not to recognize him. Inman stepped to Junior and struck him across the ear with the barrel of the LeMat's and then clubbed at him with the butt until he lay flat on his back. There was no movement out of him but for the bright flow of blood which ran from his nose and cuts to his head and the corners of his eyes.

Related Characters: Junior, Inman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Inman has been ambushed by the Home Guard, and it's revealed that they were in cahoots with Junior, the man who offered Inman a place to sleep at night. The Home Guard tries to kill Inman, but Inman manages to escape. To avenge his near-death, Inman returns to Junior's property and beats Junior over the head with his rifle, perhaps killing him.

Does Inman do the "right" thing here? Junior has violated the most basic code of Southern society at the time--the code of hospitality. There's an unwritten law that a host must offer lodgings to travelers in need, provided that the traveler can provide some kind of service or trade in exchange (Inman gave Junior a saw, sealing the transaction). By violating the terms of their deal (i.e., turning Inman over to the Home Guard) Junior proves himself to be a villain, below all contempt or sympathy.

Whether or not one agrees that Junior "deserves" his beating, it's important to note that Inman seems to be giving in to his desire for blood and violence. Long months of serving in the Civil War have left Inman deeply scarred and with a mind still full of violence--and he gives in to this violence when avenging Junior's crimes.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ —Here is far enough, she said. Go on back. As you said, I'll see you when I see you.
—But I hope that's soon.
—We both do, then.

Related Characters: Ada Monroe, Inman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Inman says goodbye to Ada Monroe, with whom Inman has struck up an intimate romance. Inman is about to ship off to fight in the Civil War, and he's unsure if he'll ever see Ada again. Inman's final interaction with Ada before he leaves is poignantly understated--the two lovers agree that they wish to see one another very soon.

It's interesting to recognize that while Inman is traveling back to Cold Mountain in large part to reunite with Ada, it's not clear that he's doing so until now--about halfway through the book. Because of Frazier's careful structuring, readers get the sense that Ada and Inman are gradually "remembering" their love for one another--they're slowly emerging from the haze of war and depression to reunite. Furthermore, the understated tone of the passage suggests that Inman and Ada's love is far from over--indeed, it's not until they're separated from one another that their passion for each other truly begins to flourish.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ —What is it you do in those books? Inman said.
—I make a record, the woman said. Draw pictures and write.
—About what?
—Everything. The goats. Plants. Weather. I keep track of what everything's up to. It can take up all your time just marking down what happens. Miss a day and you get behind and might never catch back up.
—How did you learn to write and read and draw? Inman asked.
—Same way you did. Somebody taught me.

Related Characters: The Old Woman, Inman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

In this strange scene, Inman is taken in by an old woman who spends all day taking care of goats. The woman is a hermit--she lives alone, and seemingly relishes her aloneness, spending all her time writing and drawing.

Frazier portrays the Old Woman with a mixture of admiration and subtle pity. The woman claims to be entirely self-sufficient, saying she doesn't really need human company at all. There is something both awe-inspiring and pathetic in the way that she spends all her time recording her experiences; one could say that the old woman is trapped in an "eternal present," living from day to day.

In short, the old woman represents the kind of life that Inman--still traumatized by his experiences in battle--is tempted to embrace. Perhaps it's possible to be happy on one's own, far from one's home and the troubles of human society. (It's worth noting that the old woman seems to be based on Calypso from Homer's *Odyssey*--i.e., the woman who tempted Odysseus to live in an "eternal present" and abandon his quest to return home.) And yet Frazier subtly implies that the kind of lifestyle the old woman celebrates--the life of a hermit--is never entirely possible. "Somebody" taught the old woman how to read, and she seems to need the occasional company of travelers like Inman; in other words, true self-sufficiency is just a pipe dream.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ To Ada, though, it seemed akin to miracle that Stobrod, of all people, should offer himself up as proof positive that no matter what a waste one has made of one's life, it is ever possible to find some path to redemption, however partial.

Related Characters: Stobrod Thewes, Ada Monroe

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

Ada and Ruby meet Stobrod, Ruby's deadbeat father. Stobrod is, in many ways, a contemptible character: instead of raising Ruby as a father should, Stobrod has spent most of his life on the road, traveling from town to town in search of money and food.

Yet in spite of his lackluster parenting, Stobrod now seems to be a symbol of redemption and self-improvement. For all his former moral ugliness, Stobrod is now capable of playing beautiful fiddle music--he brings great joy and contentment to both Ada *and* Ruby by performing. Ada concludes that Stobrod has proven that it's possible to find at least "partial" redemption for one's sins.

Notice that Ada uses the word "partial." In the world of *Cold Mountain*, it's impossible to forget the agony of the past altogether (whether "the past" means the nightmare of the Civil War or the pain of abandonment). Human beings are capable of striving to overcome their sins, but there's no evidence that it's possible to surpass one's sins altogether.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ —If I was to ask you to do something, would you do it?
Inman considered that he should frame an answer here on the order of Maybe, or If I can, or some like provisional phrase. What he said was, Yes.
—If I was to ask you to come over here and lay in bed with me but not do a thing else, could you do it?
Inman looked at her there and wondered what she saw looking back. Some dread shape filling the clothes of her husband?

Related Characters: Sara, Inman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Inman finds shelter in the home of a young woman named Sara. Sara has a child, but her husband--the father of the child--has been killed in the Civil War. Sara is clearly lonely and attracted to Inman, but she's also still loyal to her husband and his memory. So Sara asks Inman to lie next to her in bed. As Inman correctly guesses, Sara is trying to use Inman to "channel" a sense of her own deceased husband, whom she still loves.

It's important to notice that Inman is reluctant to play the part of a dead man--and yet he agrees to help Sara without any protest ("Yes"). When confronted with another person's trauma and grief, Inman--who has plenty of trauma and grief of his own--immediately tries to help. In general, the passage evokes the (possibly futile) ways that humans try to cope with their own sadness. Sara's request to Inman might seem bizarre, but it's the best way for her to regain some contact with a man she continues to love.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ He would come walking up the road into Black Cove, and he would be weary looking. What he had been through would show in his face and in his frame, but only so much as to suggest heroism. He would be bathed and in a clean suit. Ada would step out the door onto the porch without knowing he was coming, just going about her doings. She would be dressed in her fine clothes. She would see him and know him in every feature. She would run to him, lifting her skirts above her ankle boots as she came down the steps.

Related Characters: Ada Monroe, Inman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 312

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Inman imagines how his reunion with Ada might play out: perhaps he'll get a chance to bathe and wear a suit, and perhaps the sight of Inman will delight Ada to the point where she'll rush down to greet him and embrace him.

As we'll see very soon, Inman's actual reunion with Ada will be very different from the one he's imagining. And yet it's important to consider the importance of Inman's "reunion fantasy." Inman has traveled hundreds of miles by foot, just so that he can see Ada once again. Throughout his journey, his reunion fantasy has been a beacon of hope, inspiring him to keep moving forward, even when his chances of ever seeing Ada again seem pretty hopeless. In short, Inman has *decided* to overcome his trauma by reuniting with Ada. His idea of how the reunion will play out might not be realistic, but it provides the spiritual nourishment he needs.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ —I'm ruined beyond repair, is what I fear, he said. And if so, in time we'd both be wretched and bitter.

Related Characters: Inman (speaker), Ada Monroe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 333

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Inman lays bare his deepest fear to Ada: the Civil War has destroyed him, turning him into a violent, nihilistic wreck. Inman fears that he'll spend the rest of his life reliving the horrors of the battlefield. It's only in this moment that we fully recognize the scope of Inman's quest to return to his childhood home in Cold Mountain. With his life and body in ruins, Inman turns to the last place where he can remember being happy—Cold Mountain—in the hopes that he'll be able to "turn back the clock" to a time before he was "ruined beyond repair."

By the same token, Inman has also returned to Cold Mountain in the desperate hope that Ada will be able to help him through his troubles. Inman fears that he'll marry Ada, but then poison her with his trauma and "bitterness." Nevertheless, Inman looks to Ada—desperately, and maybe even a little selfishly—as a relief for his pain.

Epilogue Quotes

❝ Ada had tried to love all the year equally, with no discrimination against the greyness of winter, its smell of rotted leaves underfoot, the stillness in the woods and fields. Nevertheless, she could not get over loving autumn best, and she could not entirely overcome the sentimentality of finding poignancy in the fill of leaves, of seeing it as the conclusion to the year and therefore metaphoric, though she knew the seasons came around and around and had neither inauguration nor epilogue.

Related Characters: Ada Monroe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 355

Explanation and Analysis

In the Epilogue to the novel, we learn what happens to Ada after Inman's tragic death. Ada simply carries on with her life—she carries on taking care of her farm, proving that she's truly "come of age" and become a confident, capable adult. At the same time, Ada never entirely forgets Inman—she hangs on to her grief, year after year. And yet Ada doesn't allow her grief to weigh her down. Instead of wallowing in the tragedy of her lover's passing, she turns to her work, her friends (Ruby, for example), and above all her child (with Inman) for happiness and contentment. In short, the rest of Ada's life is bittersweet—full of joy and yet haunted by tragedy.

In the end, then, Frazier leaves us with the idea that pain and tragedy can be overcome, if not forgotten, if one chooses to move forward with one's life and accept pain along with joy. Ada certainly doesn't forget about Inman, but neither does she allow Inman's memory to shape her reality. It's appropriate that Frazier ends his novel with the melancholy image of the autumn trees—a symbol of both decay and rejuvenation.

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.

CHAPTER 1: THE SHADOW OF A CROW

It's early morning. A man named Inman wakes up to find himself in the hospital, surrounded by grotesquely buzzing flies. Inman stares out the window and sees only the flatlands. He thinks about how he's used up all of his candles, meaning that he can't read his book to pass the time.

The novel begins on a tone of hopelessness and gruesomeness. The main character, Inman, wakes up to the sound of flies—often a sign of rotting meat. The implicit message is that Inman is dying, or is surrounded by death.

Inman has been in the hospital for three weeks. His first week was hot and painful, and he was also bored out of his mind. As Inman settled into the routine of life in the hospital, he began to contemplate the "metal face of the age"—a face that seemed to prophesize the end of everything he cared about. Inman remembers being a child long ago, sitting in school on the side of **Cold Mountain**, and listening to his teacher lecture him on old, noble English wars.

Inman's education can hardly prepare him for the harsh realities of modern warfare (symbolized by a "metal face"). Indeed, nothing could have prepared people in the 19th century for the carnage unleashed by industrial technology. Notably, we're not told which war Frazier is talking about, though we'll quickly surmise that it's the American Civil War (see Background Info).

As the morning passes, Inman becomes conscious of the man sitting next to him in the hospital—a man who needs crutches to walk. Every morning, this man spits out the window and then sits at a desk with a big pile of papers. The man's name, Inman remembers, is Balis, and before the war he'd studied Greek in North Carolina. Balis spends all his time translating ancient Greek texts into modern English. Balis has lost one of his legs to gangrene, and he smells disgusting.

The presence of Greek in this book is an early sign of Frazier's literary debt to Homer's Odyssey, *one of the foundational works of Western literature, and an important influence on the plot of* Cold Mountain. *Just like the hero Odysseus, Inman will have to journey back to his home and loved ones after being away at war.*

Inman thinks about how he ended up in the hospital. He was fighting in "the war" near Petersburg when he was injured. His companions in battle had been so sure he was going to die of his wounds that they'd read a prayer for him. But he somehow survived, and was moved to a field hospital. After two days, Inman was sent to another hospital. Inman remembers little of this period, except the incredible heat and horrible smells of the hospitals.

Civil War buffs will recognize Petersburg as one of the deadliest battles of the Civil War. The vast majority of soldiers there died in rapid gunfire, something that was unprecedented in war up to that point. Interestingly, Frazier doesn't give a very clear description of Petersburg: instead, he goes for psychological realism, describing Inman's trauma and disorientation.

Inman had several wounds, the worst of which was a deep **neck injury**. After a few days, his neck injury "spat out" a collar button that had gotten jammed into the injury by a bullet. Slowly, Inman's neck began to heal. He's spent all summer in the hospital, slowly recovering from his wounds. He spends hours at a time staring out of a window. He sees **birds** flying by, and wanderers walking down the **road**.

Inman's neck wound will return again and again in the novel to remind us of his time in the war. Frazier's point is that Inman's experiences in the Civil War continue to impact his behavior—the neck wound is a physical injury, but it's also a symbol for the other kinds of psychological wounds that Inman sustains.

As he eats breakfast, Inman sees an old man walking down the **road**. He's hunched over, and uses a cane to find his way. Inman walks outside the hospital and greets the man, who is blind. Inman asks the blind man how much he'd pay to be able to see, then comments that he's seen a lot of things he'd wish he could un-see. The blind man invites Inman to tell him about "one instance when you wished you were blind."

The blind man is another sign of Frazier's debt to Homer (traditionally, Homer is said to have been blind, like his character the blind prophet Tiresias). Furthermore, the blind man reinforces the scope of Inman's trauma in the Civil War: Inman has witnessed so much pain and tragedy that he wishes he could un-see it, even if it means losing his vision altogether.

Inman thinks about all the ways he could answer the blind man's question, remembering the battles at Malvern Hill, Petersburg, Fredericksburg. Inman decides to tell the blind man about Fredericksburg. Inman fought in Fredericksburg alongside many other soldiers. At the beginning of the fight, a bullet grazed Inman on the wrist, causing him enormous pain but doing no serious damage. Inman and his fellow soldiers ran to a **road**, where they found themselves under fire from the "Federals" (i.e., the Union soldiers). Inman and the other soldiers shot down the Union troops from an extremely close distance—in some cases, Inman shot enemy soldiers point-blank. As the hours of battle went by, Inman found himself falling into a dreamlike rhythm: he'd shoot down dozens of Federals, until all the pleasure of killing them disappeared.

Fredericksburg was another brutal battle during the Civil War, where a huge number of soldiers were wounded or killed by modern gunfire—weaponry far deadlier and more precise than it had been in previous American wars. The real horror of the war for Inman, we can see, isn't just that he was wounded—it's that he witnessed his peers passively murdering other Americans. Inman is so inundated with pain and tragedy that his brain "turns off," and becomes numb to any feeling whatsoever. For the rest of the novel, Inman will struggle to fight this state of numbness (which is often a part of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD).

By the end of the first morning of fighting, Inman and his peers were caked in dust, dirt, and gunpowder. A fellow soldier of Inman's named Lee told Inman that war was hellish—otherwise men would enjoy it too much. Inman sensed that Lee thought of war as a holy act—a test of one's faith in God.

One of the overarching questions of this novel is, Is there a God?—or, more broadly, Does life have any meaning? For Lee, pain and tragedy have a purpose, and there is a divine plan for everything. From Inman's perspective, however, there's no "reason" or "meaning" for tragedy—it's just tragedy.

In the late afternoon in Fredericksburg, there were dead Federals everywhere. Some of Inman's peers stole the dead soldiers' boots. In the nighttime, Inman witnessed his peers killing wounded Federals with hammers. The look on Inman's peers' faces was calm and dreamy.

The calm, dreamy look on the soldiers' faces is a sign of their trauma—they're so dissociated from reality by what they've done that they're scarcely human anymore. This is an early sign of what Inman will have to deal with for the rest of the book: men and women who've been turned into monsters by the fallout of the Civil War.

The blind man listens as Inman explains all this. He tells Inman to forget what he's seen at Fredericksburg, and Inman agrees with him. Privately, though, Inman thinks about a dream he keeps having, in which he sees a huge pile of bloody limbs crawling on the ground. He also has a recurring dream of a corpse calling him by name.

Inman can't escape his own memories of the Civil War. This suggests that his quest to return to his childhood town is motivated by a desire to forget as much as anything else—he's going to return to his old home in the hopes that he can "return" to his state of mind before going off to war.

Inman returns to the hospital. He sees Balis working at his Greek translations. Inman passes the time by reading a book—Bartram's *Travels*. In it, Inman finds a passage about the Flower Gatherer, a kind of Cherokee wanderer. It makes Inman happy to read about Bartram's experiences traveling through America and learning the names of the flowers and mountains. Partly because he's enjoying his book, Inman is careful not to look too healthy in front of his doctors.

Inman is afraid that he'll be sent off to fight once again—as the South was desperate for men at this point—so he pretends to be sicker than he really is. This is an early sign of the importance that the characters attach to staying out of the war at all costs. Many of the people in the novel are military deserters—men traumatized by what they've seen, afraid of dying, or disillusioned by whatever "cause" they're fighting for.

Inman receives money from "home." He uses his money to buy clothes and other items in the town near his hospital. Inman buys a great number of items, including shoes, socks, knives, etc. By the end of the day he's spent a big pile of money. He goes to get a drink at a tavern nearby. He sits outside with his coffee, clutching a handkerchief to his still-wounded neck, and thinks of the blind man.

In this short scene, we see Inman trying different kinds of "therapy" for his trauma: buying things, drinking, touching his wound, etc. Nothing works—his only option left, as we'll see, is to return to his home and try to rebuild the life he had before the war..

Inman reads the paper, and learns that at Petersburg, Cherokee warriors working with the Southern army are scalping Federals. Inman remembers meeting a young Cherokee named Swimmer—Swimmer and Inman met years ago when they were teenagers. Swimmer worked as a herder near the Balsam mountain. Once, Swimmer and his herders played a ball game with Inman and his friends. They ate and drank and talked late into the night.

Inman is deeply nostalgic for the period in his life before he had to go to war. He envies Swimmer, his childhood friend, because Swimmer represents a kind of freedom for Inman. But as Inman acknowledges, Swimmer probably ended up being relocated by the U.S. government, proving that nobody in America can escape the government's authority for long.

Inman learned that Swimmer was an intelligent, knowledgeable explorer and navigator. Swimmer also told Inman about spells he learned for spreading death and sickness, and Inman listened to Swimmer talk about these spells with fascination. Swimmer gave Inman a ceremonial gift—a ball racquet made of hickory. Sitting outside the tavern, Inman hopes that Swimmer isn't fighting in the war.

In a time of need, Inman turns to his own past. He remembers idyllic days of playing with Swimmer. But even these memories are tainted by Inman's experiences in Petersburg: he can't help but accept that Swimmer could be fighting in war—in other words, that Inman's pleasant memories are just memories, nothing more.

Inman looks at the coffee grounds swirling in his cup and remembers an old method of divination: reading discarded tea leaves. He wonders how a seer would read the coffee grounds in his cup, and looks around for signs of the future. Finding none, he remembers something Swimmer told him: the spirit can be torn into tiny pieces, even while the body is alive and well. Inman also remembers a story Swimmer told him about dead spirits being reborn in the sky. When Inman first heard this story years ago, he told Swimmer that he'd climbed to the top of **Cold Mountain**, one of the highest peaks in the world, and didn't see anything like a spirit world. Swimmer replies, "there's more to it than just the climbing."

This section of the novel spells out the relationship between uncertainty, superstition, and quests. Inman is tempted to believe in the magic of tea reading. There's a special kind of comfort in his superstition—in a time when Inman's own future is completely uncertain, he likes to believe that there's some way of understanding and perhaps controlling the future. Swimmer's example suggests that life is more complicated than that: in other words, the future can't be predicted. Instead, the only thing that can redeem Inman is work—a quest, like the one Inman's about to embark on.

Inman writes a letter (we're not yet told to whom). In the letter, he describes his experiences in the war as "awash with blood." He concludes the letter, "I am coming home one way or another, and I do not know how things might stand between us." He completes the letter, and senses that his neck and hip—which is also wounded—ache. When Inman returns to the hospital, he notices that Balis isn't present—his bed is empty. Inman learns that Balis has died that afternoon. He examines the notes Balis was writing. They seem like gibberish, though Inman can make out one phrase, "We mark some days as fair, some as foul, because we do not see that the character of every day is identical." Inman finds this notion absurd.

In this section, we see Inman rejecting Balis's ideas, which Inman dismisses as cynical. Contrary to what Balis says, Inman believes that he can work hard to improve his life, instead of accepting that his future is out of his own control. It's because Inman refuses to give in to his own trauma—because he refuses to spend the rest of his life reliving the horrors of Fredericksburg and Petersburg—that he sets out on a quest to return to his home. We don't know who, exactly, Inman is planning to reunite with, but we can tell that his desire to do so reflects his refusal to spend the rest of his life in the hospital.

CHAPTER 2: THE GROUND BENEATH HER HANDS

A woman named Ada sits on the porch of "the house that was now hers." She's writing a letter (to whom we're not told). In the letter she says, "Despite your long absence … I will never conceal a single thought from you." After finishing her letter, Ada looks around: she sees a peaceful garden, full of fruits and vegetables.

In the second chapter, we can begin to tell how the novel is structured. Frazier alternates between chapters told from Inman's perspective and chapters told from Ada's (Ada is the person to whom Inman writes a letter, and who's writing her own letter to Inman).

Ada's father, a preacher named Monroe, died recently. Since that time, she's been in charge of her father's farm, but doesn't do much work on it. Indeed, she's so reluctant to work her farm that she's having trouble finding food—for the time being, she eats mostly eggs, milk, and tomatoes. She remembers being a child and playing with her cousin, Lucy.

Although Ada never fights in the Civil War, her situation back at home in some ways parallels Inman's. She's pulled away from her friends and family, and forced to survive on her own. Uncertain of her own future, Ada takes refuge in memory: rather than worry about the future, she thinks about her carefree days with Lucy (much as Inman thinks about Swimmer).

We learn a little more about Ada. Ada grew up in Charleston. At Monroe's insistence, she got an unusually advanced education for a woman. She studied Latin French, and Greek, and learned to paint and play the piano. Now, Ada's education seems strangely useless—nothing she learned in school is going to help her manage the 300 acres of property that now belong to her. Ada thinks about Monroe's recent death, and how the farm hands have left as well, either to fight in the war or to desert.

Frazier makes a clear distinction between practical and abstract knowledge. Ada, in part because she's a woman (but also because she's wealthy), has been schooled only in abstract knowledge, which doesn't necessarily serve any purpose when it comes to the practicalities of survival: music, languages, history, etc. Faced with the very real possibility of starving to death on her farm, Ada must accept that her education, while interesting, has left her totally unprepared to survive the Civil War.

Ada is ill-equipped to run a farm. She isn't even sure why she's running the farm at all—she has no use for goats or cows. She sees a big rooster walking around the farm, and tries to shoo it away. The rooster attacks her, cutting her wrist with its beak. Ada goes inside to find clean clothing, but finds none. Ada realizes that her "will to do" is almost gone. She spends the next few minutes going through her father's things.

Ada's own farm is rejecting her authority, and she'll need to learn how to control it if she's going to survive. Afraid of what she'll have to do to survive, Ada again retreats into her memories—she's almost given up on living life.

Ada reads books in the late morning—by people like George Eliot, Nathaniel Hawthorne, etc. She reads in her study, staring out at the hazy shape of **Cold Mountain** nearby.

Instead of trying to survive, Ada turns to art and literature for sustenance. It's interesting that she reads a novel by Eliot, whose famous "two-plot" novels were another important influence on Cold Mountain.

Ada reads a book about "frontier adventure," which she finds enjoyable but strangely sad. Afterwards, she tries to cook herself some breakfast, but it takes her two hours just to turn on the stove. She eats bread for breakfast and tomatoes for dinner. Then she goes outside to pick flowers.

Ada is essentially a child—she has little to no way of providing for herself. Her helplessness seems closely tied to her gender—women in the 19th century simply aren't expected to perform manual labor—but also to her class, as Ada has no real knowledge even in the more traditionally "feminine" sphere of cooking.

Ada strolls to the chapel on her property. Monroe is buried outside this chapel, and his grave is so new that there isn't even grass growing on it. He died in May. He was so old that his complaints of being tired and sore didn't concern Ada much, since they were nothing new. When Ada discovered his dead body, she thought he was just sleeping. She watched him being buried two days later. As she watched, she noticed his pale, flabby skin and blank eyes.

We begin to see why Ada is so hopeless. She's depended on her father for her entire life, and now he's dead. This suggests that Ada has a lot in common with Inman—just as Inman is afraid to face the future alone, and continues to fixate on his traumatic past, Ada is afraid to go on living without the companionship of her father, and fixates on the gruesome images of his dead body.

Ada remembers her father's funeral. The preacher talked about Monroe's kindness and wisdom. Afterwards, men buried him in the ground. Sally Swanger, a friend of Ada, offered to take care of her until Ada returns to her father's farm in Charleston. Ada tells Sally that she won't be returning to Charleston any time soon—she'll stay on her father's property here.

Ada seems too proud to depend on anyone other than her father for help, so she turns down Sally Swanger's offers of help. It's interesting that Ada refuses to return to Charleston—despite the fact that it's her childhood home, she seems to feel more comfortable and at home in Black Cove. Perhaps she's just too depressed to go anywhere at all.

In the present, Ada walks by her father's grave plot. Walking past the chapel, she enters Black Cove, the town near her home. She notices a man working at a mill—plowing and sowing grains. She continues walking on to where Sally Swanger lives.

We get a better sense for the size and scale of the town where Ada lives. It's tiny and intimate: everyone seems to know what's going on in other people's lives.

At the Swangers' home, Ada finds Esco Swanger, Sally's husband. Esco greets Ada, mostly because he wants an excuse not to work. Ada realizes, with disappointment, that she's come too late—the Swangers have already eaten. Esco walks Ada to where Sally sits and sews thread. Ada, Esco, and Sally talk about the war, and the danger of the Federals' arrival. Ada recalls that the Swanger family opposed the war from the very beginning, and is still pretty sympathetic to the Federals.

Here, Frazier gives us a feeling for the politics in the town. There are some who are sympathetic to the Federal—or Union—forces of the North. But most support the Southern troops, who've fought to secede from the Union. That there's some controversy over which side to support suggests that Ada's town is on the border between the North and the South (i.e., it's on the Mason-Dixon line).

Esco warns Ada of Teague and his Home Guard, a group of marauders and robbers who've taken the law into their own hands, taking advantage of the instability in the area. Esco has heard rumors of the Guard invading people's houses and stealing their food and money. The Guard targets families that showed support for the Federals.

We have yet to meet any soldiers who show a sincere love for battle, or for the Union or South. The only soldiers we've seen are severely traumatized by what they've experienced in war, or, like Teague, they're cowards taking advantage of the chaos of war for their own gain.

Esco complains that the war has "put a price on anything"—people's time and political commitment have become newly valuable commodities. He adds that there have also been many ill omens lately—premature births, eclipses, dead goats, etc.

Esco highlights two major themes of the book—the uncertainty of the future in the face of trauma and war, and the widespread system of bartering ("tit for tat," or "quid pro quo") that goes on in America at the time. This is particularly the case because paper money is so variable and untrustworthy during this period, with the South printing its own money but having little to back it up.

Sally asks Ada if she's ready to go back to Charleston yet, but Ada admits that she's not. Ada tells Sally she hasn't heard anything from Charleston—she has no idea if her father's fortune is still intact. Esco suggests that Ada look into a well, so that she can see her future. Reluctantly, Ada agrees. She stares into a deep well and notices a strange wheel shape at the bottom. She also sees a vision of a strange man, walking down a **road**.

It's not yet clear what, if anything, Ada's vision at the bottom of the well means. She thinks she sees a man walking down a road, but of course, this could just reflect her desire *to be reunited with Inman (from whom she's received a letter recently). One thing is clear: the future is highly uncertain, thanks in no small part to the damage caused by the Civil War.*

Esco asks Ada if she saw anything in the well, and Ada replies that she didn't. Sally offers her food inside. After her meal, Ada leaves the Swanger house and walks back to the farm. On her way home, she stares up at **Cold Mountain**.

Ada's refusal to discuss her vision suggests that she's not sure if she really saw anything at all, but also that she's not confident enough in what she saw to discuss it with others. These both point to the same thing: the uncertainty of all signs and predictions of the future in the novel.

Ada remembers coming to the town of Black Cove six years ago, hoping to cure Monroe of his tuberculosis. Monroe's doctors in Charleston recommended that they all move out of the city so that Monroe could get some fresh air. Ada had never seen mountains before arriving at **Cold Mountain**. She was delighted to find Monroe so interested in Cold Mountain's foliage and animals. She thinks, "I would follow this old man to Liberia if he asked me to do so."

Ada didn't choose to come to Black Cove of her own free will—she came out of loyalty to her aged father, whom she seems to have loved dearly. While Ada's relationship with her father is touching and poignant, it also signals her immaturity. No matter what she wants, Ada can't spend the rest of her life guarding her father's memory—she has to move on with her life, and learn to live as her own woman.

When Monroe and Ada first arrived at Black Cove, Monroe made a point of introducing himself to his new congregation, one family at a time. His congregation was mostly made up of unshaven, dirty, but decent people. Shortly after arriving, Monroe visited Sally and Esco, accompanied by Ada. Monroe proceeded to teach Esco to read, and he educated both Esco and Sally in the subtleties of the Bible. Esco had a particularly limited understanding of Christ's sacrifice—Monroe spent hours explaining the concept of the holy trinity to him. It was only much later that Monroe realized the truth: Esco and Sally were lapsed Baptists, meaning that they already knew all about Christ. Esco, wanting to give Monroe something do so, had feigned ignorance the whole time. After Monroe found out about Esco's prank, he became good friends with the Swangers. Eventually the Swangers joined the church.

In this amusing section, we get the idea that Monroe is out of touch with his own congregation. He's a good man, and very well-meaning, but he's so unfamiliar with what the average person in Black Cove is capable of understanding that he's ready to believe that an elderly man has never heard of the Holy Trinity before. This vicariously suggests that Ada is even more out of touch with her neighbors than Monroe is—she has no real connection to the town of Black Cove. With this in mind, it's no surprise that Ada feels no need to farm her own land in Black Cove—not only does she not know how to farm it; she also doesn't feel that it really belongs to her.

Ada goes to sleep, and has a strange dream in which she's standing at a train station. She sees a glass case containing the bones of a man, which glow and slowly become covered in flesh. She climbs onto the train, and realizes that it's leading her out to Charleston, "in the past." Ada wakes up late at night, and realizes that the man in the case was Monroe, her own father.

The symbolism of Ada's dream is unclear. Perhaps Ada is realizing the truth about her relationship with her father: Monroe was a good man, but Ada can't spend the rest of her life remembering him, without being "carried" back into the past.

A new day begins, and Ada wonders what will become of her when she returns to Charleston. She'll probably have to ingratiate herself with some of Monroe's old friends—indeed, she'll probably need to get married soon. Ada finds the prospect of getting married terrifying—when she lived in Charleston, she avoided suitors as much as possible. When she was nineteen, for instance, she turned down two separate marriage proposals.

Here, we begin to see why Ada is so opposed to returning to her childhood home. Although Ada was born in Charleston, she doesn't really think of it as her home at all—on the contrary, she associates Charleston with marriage. Society expects Ada to marry, but it seems that she has no intention of doing so. While this might seem a little immature of Ada, we can sense that Ada feels a strong desire to be free and independent—but of course, independence also requires a self-sufficiency that Ada is sorely lacking.

Ada sits on her porch, and sees a figure walking toward her. It's a young woman. Without asking, the woman sits next to Ada on the porch. She explains to Ada that "Old Lady Swanger" has told her that Ada is in need of some help. Ada admits that this is true, and the woman—who introduces herself as Ruby—immediate begins telling Ada how to farm the property: she'll need to plow, plant, harvest, etc.

Although Ada has turned down help from Sally Swanger, Sally still gives it to Ada, anyway. Instead of sending Ada money or supplies, she sends Ada a friend and helper: Ruby. Ruby will give Ada companionship, while also teaching her how to take care of herself.

Ada quickly grows to like Ruby. Ruby explains that she's not exactly a servant or a hired hand—something more like an adviser. Ruby makes it clear that she won't be Ada's servant; they'll be something like equals. As they talk and laugh, Ada notices the rooster that attacked her earlier. Without hesitation, Ruby gets up and breaks the rooster's neck. She immediately begins making plans to cook the rooster.

Critics have detected homoerotic themes in the relationship between Ruby and Ada (consider that Ada was thinking about how much she hates the idea of marriage right before she met Ruby for the first time!). Whether you buy this or not, it's important to see that Ruby and Ada's relationship isn't one of master and servant—it's based in equality, cooperation, and friendship.

CHAPTER 3: A COLOR OF DESPAIR

Inman stands on the **road**, staring out into the distance. He's been traveling for a few days, but he hasn't gotten very far at all; in fact, his view right now isn't too different from his view in the hospital. He's passed by dozens of farms, and been sleeping under the stars. At times, he's had to defend himself from wild dogs, sustaining a nasty bite in the process.

This is the start of Inman's "odyssey"—though Frazier doesn't give us details, it's clear that he has deserted the army and is walking home to Black Cove. At first, Inman's journey doesn't seem like a journey at all—he feels like he isn't getting anywhere. If the hardest part of a task is convincing yourself to begin with, the second hardest part is sticking with it for the first few hours, days, or weeks.

It's still early in the day, but as time goes on, Inman gets hot and dizzy. The insects buzz around him. In the distance, Inman can see two men sitting on a store porch: one reading a newspaper, the other cleaning his fingernails with a pick. Inman walks into the store, noting that one of the men owns a Whitworth .45, an exceptionally fine gun. Inman buys food and supplies from the store, then goes to sit outside. The two men abrasively ask Inman where he's headed, but Inman doesn't reply.

As in many "quest stories" (starting with the Odyssey*) Inman's encounters will be episodic in nature, as he encounters different characters along his journey. These men (his first encounter) don't seem at all friendly—we can sense that they're hostile to strangers of any kind, suspicious of deserters or "Federals," and willing to use force against anyone they don't like.*

The two men Inman noticed on the porch stand up and approach him (Inman notices that the man with the gun has left his weapon behind). They're accompanied by a third man, a smith, who's carrying a heavy scythe. Inman reaches for the knife in his pocket, but before he can the three men have attacked him. Inman manages to jerk the scythe out of the smith's hand and fend off his aggressors. Instead of hurting the three men, Inman waits until they've backed off, then begins to walk away. Before Inman gets far, however, the smith has picked up the Whitworth. Quickly, Inman backs up, snatches the gun from the smith's hand, and beats him over the head with it.

This is the first major fight scene in the novel, and it sets the tone for the similar scenes to follow. As is the case here, Inman is almost always outnumbered by his opponents, symbolizing his isolation and loneliness along the road to Black Cove. And yet Inman manages to outmaneuver his opponents, using his superior intellect and strength (this might seem a little unrealistic—could a severely wounded soldier actually outmaneuver three armed men?).

Inman walks out of the town, still carrying his supplies. He remembers a spell that Swimmer taught him years before: a spell called "To Destroy Life." He repeats the incantation to himself, centering on the phrase, "Your soul will fade." As he talks to himself, Inman remembers a sermon that Monroe delivered years ago, quoting from Emerson: "That which shows God in me, fortifies me." Monroe delivered the sermon on the day that Inman first met Ada.

We can't help but ask ourselves—how did Inman manage to defeat three armed men? Frazier suggests one possible answer here: Inman is fortified by his memories of Ada, and his desire to return to her as soon as possible. And yet there's another possibility: Inman is so traumatized and nihilistic that he feels he has nothing to lose, and so can be recklessly brave and indifferent to whether he lives or dies. These two sides of Inman's character—his love and his self-hatred—are at war with each other for most of the book.

Inman remembers falling in love with Ada. He began attending church just to see her. Many of the people in Black Cove made fun of Monroe and Ada because they were out of touch with the town. Ada in particular was seen as snooty and pretentious. On the day that Inman first saw Ada, Monroe spoke in church about the beauty of **Cold Mountain**, and the inevitability of death (this was Monroe's favorite topic).

As we get more of these flashbacks, we begin to see the connection between Inman and Ada. Inman is a poor, working class boy, while Ada is wealthy and privileged. In addition, Ada is seen as an outsider in Black Cove, while Inman is secure in his connection to the town. Even though in the past Ada and Inman were very different, they've become increasingly alike as the Civil War has stripped away all but the most basic aspects of humanity and survival..

Inman continues to think about Monroe. Monroe was fond of saying that he was on a mission in Black Cove: to bring Christianity not only to the townspeople but also to the Native Americans living nearby. Inman didn't pay much attention to Monroe's sermon because he was too busy staring at Ada. After the sermon, Inman's friends, Mars and Dillard, teased him for staring. A stranger told Inman that Ada probably had a betrothed back in Charleston already.

At many points in the novel, Frazier questions the role of organized religion. Monroe may be a good man, and yet the influence he has on his congregation seems to have little if anything to do with his Christian faith. Instead, Inman (and the other characters in the novel) seem to draw more strength from their love for each other and from more personal or "natural" rituals and beliefs.

The next day, Inman went to see Sally Swanger, whom he knew to be a friend of Monroe and Ada. Sally agreed to introduce Inman to Ada. A few days later, Inman and Ada were formally introduced in the Swanger house—Sally told Ada that Inman's parents built the chapel where her father preached. Inman noticed that Ada seemed oddly impatient with him.

For the second time in the novel, Sally Swanger is portrayed as playing a pivotal role in Ada's life: she introduces Ada to Inman, and she introduces Ada to Ruby. At first, Ada isn't exactly smitten with Inman—he's just another working class boy.

Inman remembers more of his meeting with Ada. Ada teased him for being shy and silent, and Inman finally summoned the courage to tell Ada that she'd been the subject of "great speculation." Ada laughed but didn't ask what about. She bid good day to Inman soon afterwards. As he walked out, Inman noticed Ada touch her father's arm and say something to him.

This section suggests that Ada isn't really ready for a relationship with a man like Inman—the only man in her life is Monroe. Some critics have pointed to an almost sexualized relationship between Ada and her father, but even if we don't buy this, it's clear enough that Ada is immature and inexperienced in talking to men her own age.

Back in the present day, Inman walks along the **road**, noticing the tall trees and plants in the surrounding forest. He wonders to himself how he ever believed that *this* was his country, and worth fighting for. He imagines returning to **Cold Mountain** and building himself a big, empty cabin where he'll never have to use his ears again.

For the time being, the nihilistic, self-hating part of Inman's personality seems to be the more powerful one. He feels no sense of connection with the land around him—bitter after his service in the Civil War, Inman questions why he was ordered to fight for a country that he'd never really seen. At this point he just wants to be away from the rest of humanity forever.

Inman comes to a river, next to which there's a sign for a ferry. A young woman, possibly Native American, ferries Inman across for 20 dollars. Inman is intrigued by the woman's exotic appearance and strong arms. The woman tells Inman that they're moving across Cape Fear River. Inman notices big fish swimming in the murky depths of the water, and compares them to the small, timid fish in the lakes near **Cold Mountain**.

At many points in the novel, Inman crosses paths with young, attractive women. One could say that these women provide Inman with a sexual awakening—or temptation—as they represent a kind of freedom, sexual or otherwise, with which Inman is more or less inexperienced. (Even though Inman doesn't do anything romantic with the Native American woman, he's attracted to her appearance.)

Inman then notices the three men he attacked standing on the shore, pointing their gun at him. Suddenly, Inman notices a small hole in the boat—there's a leak. The young woman yells that she and Inman will need to hang onto the boat to avoid drowning (Inman knows that he can't swim). Inman holds on to the remains of the boat, frightened of getting eaten by a monstrous catfish.

This whole scene has a fantastical, larger-than-life tone, and Inman's fears of getting eating by a giant catfish seem particularly childish. Perhaps this is meant to suggest that Inman, for all his experiences in war, is still a young, callow man with a lot to learn about the world.

Eventually, Inman and the young woman reach the shore. Inman pays the woman for her trouble, including extra money for the ruined boat. He walks inland toward the woods, and discovers that his **neck wound** has opened again, though he's not sure when this occurred.

The symbolism of the neck wound becomes clearer and clearer as the book goes on. Inman continues to be haunted by his experiences in war, just as his neck wound continues to cause him pain and consternation, even long after he's out of the hospital.

CHAPTER 4: VERBS, ALL OF THEM TIRING

Back in the town of Black Cove, Ada and Ruby have reached an agreement: Ruby will teach Ada how to run a farm, and in return, Ada will pay her money and feed her. Ada and Ruby spend their first days together making a list of everything that they'll need to do at the farm. They'll need to plant seeds, harvest crops that have been in the ground for too long, and dozens of other tasks. Ruby also has plans to make the farm profitable: she and Ada will make hard cider, which is highly valuable and popular at the time. They go into town to buy cloth, needles, and other necessities. Ada notes that paper money has become so unpredictable that nobody seems to want it anymore.

It's worth remembering what Esco told Ada that following the Civil War, everything has a price on it. We can see this in the strange, businesslike relationship between Ruby and Ada. In the absence of money, Ruby and Ada strike up an unorthodox "quid pro quo" (literally "something for something") in which Ada gives Ruby food in exchange for Ruby's training. One of the interesting things about this relationship is that neither party is really in control of the other: Ruby needs Ada's resources just as badly as Ada needs Ruby's help.

Ada surprises herself by selling her piano. As she prepares to part with it, she remembers receiving piano lessons from Tip Benson, a young man who tried and failed to seduce her—as soon as he was indiscrete, Ada informed her father. Ruby uses Ada's piano to make good deals with neighbors—she's using Ada's "useless" possessions to purchase useful ones.

The dichotomy between useless and useful couldn't be clearer in this section. Ada's old life, symbolized by her piano (and all the emotional baggage that goes with it, including her sexual harassment), is disappearing. Ada must struggle to survive, but her struggle has a silver lining: she has a chance to reinvent herself as a stronger, more confident woman.

As Ada parts with her piano and other possessions, she can't help but think about Monroe, and the Christmas party he gave four years ago—just before the war began. At this party, the men debated about the South's right to secede and predicted that the South would easily defeat the North if it ever came to war. Some of the younger men, such as Mars, drank from flasks. There were also women of mixed race present, though nobody seemed to pay them much attention.

The party Ada remembers is heavily masculine in almost every way—there's even a guest named Mars, after the Roman god of war (about as masculine as it gets). We can see the naiveté of the Southerners' politics—they're so confident in their own states' military might that they can't conceive of a situation in which the bigger, more powerful Union could defeat them.

At the Christmas party, Ada had a little too much to drink. Sally Swanger, also drunk, told Ada that she should marry Inman as soon as she could. Ada was embarrassed by this suggestion. But when she got up to leave the room, she found Inman sitting outside, wearing a black suit. Inman greeted Ada and pointed out that she looked flushed. Shyly, Ada sat in Inman's lap for a while, while Inman smiled quietly. Afterwards, Ada got up and returned to the party.

Inman and Ada are undeniably attracted to one another, but they're both so sexually inexperienced that they don't know how to interact with each other. Thus, Ada's display of attraction to Inman, while sincere and passionate, seems strangely childish—she rests in his lap because she has no idea what else to do.

As Ada remembers her experienced with Inman, she looks through the basement of her house, searching for coffee. She and Ruby drink the coffee and talk about Ada's love of books—including *Little Dorrit* by Charles Dickens. Over the course of the next few days, they trade the extra coffee for bacon, potatoes, baking powder, chickens, salt, and beans—all necessities for life on a farm.

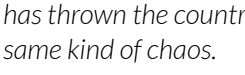
Frazier continues to allude to "two-plot" novels, such as Little Dorrit, *signaling the narrative structure of his own novel. In the absence of currency, Ruby and Ada have to use their wit and quick-thinking to strike up useful deals and get the materials they need to survive.*

Ada is struck by how busily she and Ruby have to work in order to survive on their farm. Ruby is a harsh coach and teacher—she makes Ada work in the fields, dirtying her clothes, even when Ada doesn't want to. Ada learns that Ruby is the child of a "ne'er-do-well" farmer named Stobrod Thewes. Ruby grew up in squalor, and learned all sorts of tricks for taking care of herself. As a child, Ruby was always frightened of being eaten by a wild animal prowling around **Cold Mountain**. Cherokee women talked about evil spirits and monsters, and she was always afraid one of them would kill her. In spite of her fears, Ruby grew up quickly. She learned how to pull a plow and cook food, because her father couldn't do either.

Ruby doesn't just provide Ada with the training she needs to survive on her own—she also gives Ada the pleasure of human contact. Ruby, we see, is a strikingly sympathetic character who's had to take care of herself for most of her life. Because Ruby isn't shy about her own past, she never seems like an intimidating figure—she humanizes herself in Ada's eyes. Ruby and Ada are as different as it's possible to be: where Ada adored her father, Ruby despises hers, and has no use for him whatsoever.

When Ruby was older, she began to wonder about her mother—the kind of woman who would marry a man like Stobrod. She never succeeded in learning anything about her mother, because Stobrod enlisted in the army before she could ask him. Ruby hasn't heard anything from her father since he went off to fight, so she's sure he was killed in battle. In her father's absence, Ruby learned how to run a farm, and how to fight off enemies with her bare hands. She's 21 years old at the moment, at least so she thinks—she was never totally sure.

Ruby and Ada have a lot in common, in spite of their differences—neither Ada nor Ruby seems to know much about their mother. Ruby also proves that she's tough and self-sufficient—she can fight off adults with her bare hands, despite the fact that she's a young woman. In a way, Ruby has been training for the aftermath of the Civil War for her entire life—she seems not to mind that the war has thrown the country into chaos, because she was born into this same kind of chaos.



CHAPTER 5: LIKE ANY OTHER THING, A GIFT

Inman walks along the Deep River. He's afraid that he'll run into the Home Guard, a group that steals and kills indiscriminately in the area, all while supposedly hunting down deserters from the Confederate army. Inman sees a man dressed in black, walking with a horse. The man seems to be insane: he carries a torch, and can barely stand. Inman watches as the man cries out, "We once lived in a land of paradise." Inman realizes, with horror, that the man is dragging a woman behind him.

As Inman proceeds with his quest, his experiences become increasingly surreal. The surrealism of this chapter reflects Inman's confusion about his place in the world, and the general confusion of the United States itself at this time. To some, it must have indeed seemed that America was transitioning from paradise to hell.

Inman draws his pistol, rushes toward the man, and orders him to set the woman down at once. The man responds, "You're a message from God saying no." The man lets go of the woman, and her body drops to the ground. Inman asks the man if the woman is dead, and he shakes his head—he's merely drugged her, so that he can kill her. He also claims to be a man of God—a priest—boasting to Inman that it would be a sin to shoot him. The man explains that the woman is pregnant, and he is the father. Inman helps the woman back onto the horse—she doesn't speak, but she's clearly alive. Then Inman orders the man to march to the nearest town.

The horseman could be said to symbolize the moral bankruptcy of authority in America at this time: there were two presidents, corrupt judges and senators, and hypocritical clergymen (of which this horseman appears to be one). In a state of civil war, the legitimacy of authority of any kind came into question: it was impossible to know whom to trust. Inman seems to have little trust in authority figures of any kind—for this reason, he doesn't pay attention to the horseman's claims of holiness.

Inman walks with the priest, the woman, and the horse. It's late at night, and Inman can't help but stare up at the stars. Inman knows many of the constellations in the sky, including Orion. He asks the priest, "How did you get in this fix?" The priest responds that the woman was lonely, and lived with her grandmother. He conducted an affair with her in secret for a while, knowing that if anybody found out about it, he'd be banished from town.

The priest first seemed like an intimidating, if hypocritical figure, but as the chapter goes on, the priest becomes more villainous (it seems that he was trying to kill Laura just to maintain his reputation in his community) and yet simultaneously more childish and pathetic.

When they're close to the girl's house, Inman takes a handkerchief and stuffs it in the priest's mouth, gagging him. While the priest sits outside, tied up, Inman carries the girl into the house, in which an old woman (presumably the girl's grandmother) is sleeping. As Inman is carrying the girl into bed, the girl wakes up. Inman asks for her name—Laura, she says. Inman warns Laura that the priest doesn't "speak for God—no man does." He leaves Laura to sleep, and finds some pork and corn bread in the house, which he takes with him.

As we move along, we get a sense for Inman's moral code. Inman doesn't seem to believe in any particular religion—on the contrary, he subscribes to a looser, more intuitive system of what's right and what's wrong, and yet within that system he is very honorable and moral. Thus, Inman captures the priest and sends the girl back to her home. While this would seem to be a "good deed" by any definition, it's notable that Inman doesn't do it for nothing—he rewards himself by taking some food.

Inman walks outside, where the priest is still tied up. Inman writes a long letter explaining that the priest is a hypocrite, and leaves it in a tree near where the priest is tied. He points his pistol at the priest's head and ungags him. The priest complains that Inman has ruined his life forever, and damns Inman to hell. Inman shrugs and walks away.

Inman has his own code of right and wrong, and doesn't feel the need to obey moral authorities, such as the priest. As a result, he feels no sympathy when the priest childishly complains that Inman has ruined his life.

Inman eats the cornbread and pork, and then sleeps under the stars. When he wakes up, he cleans his pistol. It's a small Belgian model, not particularly powerful or deadly. Inman walks along a **road**, which takes him to a small town. As he walks through town, Inman smells fresh meat cooking. He eventually arrives at a group of gypsies, standing around a big stewpot. The gypsies allow him to eat from the pot, for which he's very grateful.

Inman's encounter with the gypsies is one of the only times in the novel when he gets something for nothing—as far as we can tell, Inman gets to eat for free, thanks to the gypsies' generosity. The very oddness of this scene reminds us of how important the rules of "quid pro quo" are to this novel—on almost all occasions, Inman is forced to obtain food or shelter by trading something of his own.

In the afternoon, Inman walks through town and comes upon a young woman, riding a horse. The woman is beautiful, and wears a man's sweater. She's riding her horse near a riverbank, and splashes around in the water when the horse stumbles. The sight of the woman, Inman concludes, is "stirring."

Once again, Inman experiences semi-sexual feelings, but doesn't act on them—he's essentially a young man, too inexperienced even to understand what he's feeling for the young woman. In a sense, Inman's journey back to Black Cove is really a process of sexual awakening, and for the time being, Inman's still in the early stages of this process.

As dusk falls, Inman sees gypsy children playing near the riverbank. He also comes across a carnival show nearby, and Inman stops there, hoping to find food. A performer leads Inman to a large tent—inside, he finds a man throwing knives at a woman, entertaining a large audience. Another man plays the banjo, and still another plays the drums. There are many Native Americans among the performers—Cherokee, Seminole, Creek, etc. The performers ask Inman to join them for dinner, and Inman obliges. Together, everyone eats, talks, and jokes "as equals."

Frazier's novel is full of detailed recreations of life in the South during the 19th century. Here, we see the kinds of things that might have entertained an American in the 1860s: carnival attractions and banjo music. The scene is also notable for its somewhat idealized depiction of racial equality: even though Inman is white and his hosts are Native American, there appears to be little racial tension between them. (Frazier has been criticized by some writers for idealizing 19th century race relations—it's somewhat unlikely that an actual encounter like this would have gone down quite so peacefully, or that the Native Americans would have felt like "equals" as Inman does.)

After the meal, the carnival performers tell Inman about their time spent traveling the country. They claim that the **road** is its own country: it has its own laws and rules, but it also gives all its travelers great freedom. One of the performers also says something strange: in the future, the word "slave" will only be a metaphor.

This is one of the most eloquent expressions of the "Freedom of the road" in the novel. The carnival performers are exactly right: there is a kind of freedom in not being tied down to any one place, and Inman seems to agree with this idea. The irony is that although Inman is journeying from place to place, often savoring the freedom of the road, he's only doing so in order to get back home.

Late at night, Inman finds that he can't sleep. He opens his book and reads about adventurers traveling through the wilderness. Then, when he's very drowsy, he begins to think about Ada, four years ago, when she sat in his lap at the Christmas party. That night, he offered her his palm, and she tried to read his fortune, but couldn't find anything to read. Inman dreams about Ada walking through the forest in a white dress.

Inman idealizes Ada, picturing her in white (the color of innocence). He has obvious sexual feelings for her, and yet his attraction to Ada seems to stretch beyond the merely sexual. In Ada, Inman sees someone with whom he's brave enough to face the future (a future so cold and ambiguous that when Inman shows Ada his palm, she can't find any signs written there).

The next morning, Inman wakes up early. He begins walking back toward his home, invigorated by his evening, and by his dreams of Ada.

Inman is clearly invigorated by his memories of Ada. There's not much that could compel him to walk all the way back to his home, but Ada's memory is enough to inspire him.

CHAPTER 6: ASHES OF ROSES

It's fall, and Ruby and Ada are working in a field. They pull weeds and harvest turnips and onions. As time goes on, Ada has been experiencing the pleasure of watching crops grow: she feels a sense of ownership and personal accomplishment that she'd never known.

This is when Ada's character really starts to change. In the first chapters of the novel, she's passive—just waiting for her food to run out. Now, she's actually making *something. Maturity, Frazier suggests, is all about productivity—by working on her farm, Ada comes to* earn *her farm.*

Ada and Ruby give shelter and food to a group of travelers who are moving from Tennessee to South Carolina. The travelers—who are mostly women, since many of their husbands are off fighting for the South—are accompanied by a pair of "kind slaves." (The narrator notes that the two slaves could easily have killed their masters, but don't.) The travelers tell Ruby and Ada that they were attacked by Federals and driven away from their homes.

This is another passage that came under fire when the novel was first published. Some critics found these scenes a little "vanilla" in their idealization of race relations between black slaves and their Southern masters (it's never explicitly stated why the slaves don't kill their masters, except that the slaves are "kind," but the implication seems to be that there's some extra bond of trust or friendship between them). This section is also important because it shows the quid pro quo *of hospitality working in the opposite direction—instead of Inman receiving hospitality, Ada is now offering it.*

As time goes on, Ada notices that Ruby, despite being a very capable farmer, has a strange way of getting things done. She's very superstitious, and believes in "signs" that predict the future. She's very attentive to small creatures, like bugs and worms, because she thinks that they provide clues about the best areas for farming. Ruby explains that she got most of her knowledge from elderly women she knew when she was growing up. Ada hesitantly suggests that some of the signals Ruby interprets aren't "signs" of anything; they're just random chance. Ruby dismisses this idea immediately. In her opinion, there are no accidents.

One of the most important motifs of the novel is the ambiguous "sign"—sometimes this sign is a flock of crows, or a cluster of bugs, or any mysterious sight that seems to "mean" something. Ruby, a superstitious optimist, believes that there's some inherent meaning in the signs—this reflects her faith that life itself has some predetermined meaning. Ada, on the other hand, doubts that there's a "master plan," and for this reason, she distrusts signs.

After talking with Ruby, Ada walks around her property, staring up at the **birds**. She wonders if the numbers of birds in each flock, or the type of bird in a flock, contains some kind of secret message. In the evening, Ruby and Ada sit on the porch, reading from Homer.

One of the key ambiguities in Homer's Odyssey *is whether Odysseus is in control of his own destiny—i.e., whether his adventures have some kind of an order or are preordained—or whether it's all random and he has free will. Thus, it's appropriate that Frazier pairs Homer with the sight of the flock of birds—another ambiguous sign that might signal God's plan, or nothing at all. In yet another connection, the practice of augury (predicting the future by watching the movements of birds) was also practiced in ancient Greece, and it even features in Homer's work.*

Late at night, Ada thinks about a party she attended just before the attack on Fort Sumter (i.e., the beginning of the Civil War). She explains what she remembers of the party to Ruby. At the party, a rich, foolish man named Blount flirted with Ada, and Ada reluctantly allowed him to walk with her by the river, and then take a boat ride with her. On the boat, Blount talked too much: he was an arrogant, proud man, and a diehard supporter of the Confederacy. Blount confessed to Ada that he was scared of the possibility of having to enlist in a war. Ada didn't know what to tell Blount—for some reason, she couldn't force herself to say, "It'll be all right."

It's interesting to see the way that Frazier parallels American history with personal history, i.e., the way he parallels Ada's life with the milestones of the Civil War. It's important to keep in mind that the Civil War is the backdrop to Ada's experience with Blount—not the other way around. This signals that history, as Frazier understands it, is always told from the perspective of individuals with their own unique problems and worries. Ada, like many of her peers, can't quite force herself to believe that the Civil War will be a success for the South—thus, she can't reassure Blount.

Ada continues telling Ruby about the party. Blount gave Ada a kiss on the cheek, sensing that Ada was uninterested in him, and left her alone. Afterwards, she went into her room, where she was surprised to find a strange woman. On closer inspection, Ada—who was very drunk at this point—realized that she was staring at her own reflection. The next day Ada ran into Blount in the streets, and Blount seemed eerily calm. Ada never saw him again, but later learned that he was killed at Gettysburg.

Blount doesn't appear in the novel for very long, but he's a strangely tragic character. Blount isn't a particularly good man, but he isn't a villain, either. And yet he earns the same fate as most of his peers, whether good or bad: he's killed in the war. It's often said that war is indifferent; if you're a soldier, it doesn't matter whether you're a good person or not—your chances of living or dying are still tragically random.

Back in the present, Ada and Ruby stare out into the night sky. Ada feels an overpowering sense of loneliness as she makes out the outline of **Cold Mountain**. She remembers something Monroe told her—the sense of loneliness is really the sense that God has vanished.

This is a sobering chapter because it reminds us that in America after the Civil War, there was a powerful sense of disillusionment—that the old order of things has collapsed, and even God himself has vanished, leaving human beings to fend for themselves. Frazier's point—for now, just hinted at—is that this isn't necessarily *tragic: there's a kind of freedom and joy in aloneness and self-determination.*

CHAPTER 7: EXILE AND BRUTE WANDERING

Inman walks through forests, by rivers, and through fields. The weather is pleasant, and he meets few people—mostly slaves. He tries to find the proper path to Salisbury, consulting people he passes along the way. Later he notices a group of beautiful young women bathing on the banks of a river. The women, who seem not to know that they're being watched, lift up their skirts, revealing their smooth, pale skin. Instead of hungering for the women's bodies, Inman finds himself hungering for the baskets of food they've left near the river. When the women jump into the water, Inman sneaks out and steals some of their food—fish and biscuits.

This is a vivid portrayal of the psychology of survival. Inman is a man, with sexual needs, but first and foremost, he's a being, who needs food and water to survive. In the end, Inman's need for food overcomes his need for sexual pleasure—thus, he steals the fish instead of talking to the young women (this scene could also be interpreted as another allusion to the Sirens episode of the Odyssey, *in which beautiful, seductive sea monsters hypnotize Odysseus and his men).*

Inman continues walking along the **road**. After a time, he crosses paths with none other than the priest he previously tied and gagged, whose face is covered in bruises. The priest, much to Inman's surprise, doesn't yell at Inman—he just thanks Inman for saving him from sin. He explains that after Inman left him, the townspeople beat him and banished him from town. He tells Inman that he'll walk along the road with Inman, "if you don't mind." Inman is about to tell the priest to take a different route, but then he realizes that the priest is a beaten man—harmless and docile. He allows the priest, whose name is Solomon Veasey, to walk beside him.

Frazier doesn't spell out exactly how we're supposed to feel about Solomon Veasey. Yes, he's a corrupt man and a horrible priest. And yet he's also going through the same turmoil as Inman and Ada: his world has been torn apart by war. This doesn't justify Veasey's actions by any means, but it does suggest that we should offer Veasey some sympathy—as Inman seems to do in this scene.

Veasey babbles to Inman about starting a new life out West. He claims he's headed to Texas to be a farmer. He shows Inman the revolver that he's going to trade for his first bull and cow. Inman and Veasey eat honeycomb and berries in the afternoon, and Inman notices that Veasey is like a child—naïve and easily scared. Later on, Veasey spots a big catfish swimming in the water, and dives in. Inman watches in amusement as Veasey tries and fails to wrestle the catfish from the water. When Veasey is worn out, Inman draws his gun and shoots the fish, killing it instantly. Inman and Veasey eat the catfish.

It's worth asking why Inman agrees to travel with Veasey. In part, Inman seems to sympathize with Veasey's desire to start over in Texas. And in part, Inman finds Veasey pathetic and immature—not a real threat at all. Perhaps the most important reason why Inman agrees to travel with Veasey is that Inman needs some companionship. He has no practical reason to take care of Veasey (it means less catfish for him, after all), but Veasey at least provides Inman with someone to talk to.

In the evening, Inman tells Veasey about his experiences in Petersburg. He remembers fighting beside the troops from South Carolina. Inman's commander, Haskell, ordered them into the battle, and together the troops ran past mortar fire and loud explosions. Dozens of Inman's peers died in the fight—explosives tore their bodies to pieces.

This scene works as a kind of therapy for Inman. Inman needs another human being—even if it's someone as corrupt as Veasey—to listen to his problems. While Veasey doesn't really offer any sympathy or encouragement to Inman, he listens to Inman—and maybe that's enough.

The next day, Veasey and Inman arrive at a small country shop to buy food. Veasey immediately draws his weapon and points it at the shopkeeper. Inman, disturbed, takes a heavy object and hits Veasey over the head with it—he has no intention of stealing from the shop. Inman apologizes to the shopkeeper, saying, "He's but a fool."

In this strange, comic scene, Inman treats Veasey like a child (albeit a dangerous one), apologizing to the shopkeeper as brusquely as if Veasey were a naughty eight-year-old.

Inman and Veasey continue walking down the **road**, Veasey rubbing his head where Inman struck him. They come to a large wooden building, an inn. A stranger lets them inside, and Veasey grins, as if he knows exactly what to expect. Inside, there's a "black whore," Tildy, who greets Inman and Veasey. Tildy asks Veasey if he has "a lot to give," and Veasey assures her that he's rich. Before Veasey and Tildy can leave the room, a stranger stops Tildy and tells her to leave Veasey. Veasey tries to draw his weapon, but he's too slow—the stranger points his gun right at Veasey. Inman is able to diffuse the situation by drawing his own gun and saying that he doesn't want trouble. After a tense moment, the stranger lowers his weapon and nods, and Tildy and Veasey leave the building together.

In this episode (one of maybe half a dozen in the chapter), Veasey loses his dignity and his property in the whorehouse. It's not entirely clear if Tildy and the stranger plan to rob their customers, or if the stranger just took a disliking to Veasey—or both. In either case, the scene is significant for the way it again positions Inman as an authority figure—almost like a parent. Inman has matured in many different ways in the last couple of chapters, and his newfound sense of authority and leadership is apparent here.

Since Veasey has just left the building to have sex with Tildy, Inman is by himself. He decides to spend the night in the inn, paying about five Confederate dollars for food and shelter for the night. Later in the night, Inman encounters an old peddler whose name is Odell. Odell offers Inman some whiskey from Tennessee, which they enjoy together. Odell tells Inman that he was born rich, but lost his property in Georgia due to the chaos of the war.

Once again, Inman provides for Veasey, and it's not totally clear why he does so. But one potential answer comes with Odell. Just as Odell gives Inman and Veasey food and drink in exchange for listening to his stories, so too could Inman be said to provide for Veasey in return for Veasey's companionship and audience.

Odell continues telling Inman about his life. He grew up on a plantation, and studied to take over the plantation when he grew up. As a young man, he fell in love with a slave named Lucinda, even though he was already married. He also developed a bad gambling habit. A short time later, Lucinda became pregnant. Odell tried to buy Lucinda from his own father, but instead, his father sold Lucinda to another slave owner in Mississippi. Odell, overcome with grief, left his father's plantation for Mississippi, but never found Lucinda. He's slowly been losing his money for the last few years, but believes that he still has a huge fortune waiting for him back in Georgia.

Odell's story captures the emotional and historical turmoil of the period following the Civil War. Odell, we might say, is the typical Southern gentleman, in all his contradictions and vices. Like many Southern gentlemen of the antebellum period Odell squanders his vast fortune on his own desires (in his case, gambling). More to the point, Odell also has a desire for his own slave—a desire that's especially creepy in light of the fact that he seems more or less indifferent to the concept of slavery itself. (He may claim that he "loved" Lucinda, but it's hard to love someone you don't regard as fully human.) Like most of the Southern gentry, Odell loses his dignity and class after the war—and probably his fortune, too.

Odell finishes his tale, and Inman is so overcome that he says, "It's a feverish world." The next morning, Inman and Veasey reunite. Veasey claims that he had a wonderful night, although Inman notices that Veasey has a long scratch on his eye. Together, they set off down the **road**.

Inman's reaction to Odell's story might as well be ours. Odell has had a lot of bad luck, but it's also hard to be too sympathetic to Odell's feelings for Lucinda, considering his feelings about slavery. The only sensible reaction is Inman's: "The world is a strange place." It's also worth noting that Inman doesn't abandon Veasey, although it would be easy enough for him to do so when they separate—he seems to get something out of Veasey's company, even if it's only community.

CHAPTER 8: SOURCE AND ROOT

Ada and Ruby walk into town, even though it's raining. They're on a mission to buy supplies for plowing: scythes, horseshoes, etc. Ruby notices **crows** flying through the sky, and suggests that they're an omen of something bad. Ada is too tired to pay much attention to her—she's been working very hard for the whole week.

Again, we see the symbol of birds representing—or else not *representing!—the future. Where before Ada was willing to argue with Ruby about the significance of the birds, here she's too tired to bother. This signals that Ada is losing herself in her work, but also being influenced by Ruby more and more.*

In town, Ada and Ruby buy powder, caps, and other ammunition materials. They also buy a copy of *Adam Bede* by George Eliot. In one store, Ada listens to an old woman named Mrs. McKennet brag about the heroism of the Southern troops, as reported in the local newspaper. As she listens, Ada can tell very clearly that the newspaper stories about the battles are propaganda. Ruby tells Ada that she's uninterested in the war—the entire country is the same, anyway: just a "godless land" of greedy people.

At the beginning of this chapter, we're presented with two different kinds of superstition: the superstition that says that a flock of birds can predict the future, and the superstition that claims that Southern soldiers, because of their culture and pride, are immune to military defeat. Interesting, Ruby accepts the former superstition but rejects the latter.

Ada and Ruby walk through town, and come across a handcuffed captive telling a story about having killed dozens of Federal soldiers. After returning from his first battles, the captive claims to have "unvolunteered," hence his imprisonment. It was the Home Guard that arrested him, the prisoner clarifies.

In a way, the handcuffed captive could be said to represent desertion itself, in all its moral ambiguity. One can't call the captive brave *for stealing away from the Confederate army, but it's pretty hard to condemn him, either. Interestingly, Inman himself almost never thinks or talks about the moral dilemma of desertion—so even though military desertion is an important aspect of the text, it's mostly discussed via minor characters.*

The captive continues his tale, and Ruby and Ada listen. In vivid detail, the captive sets the scene: his father, an old man, stands outside the house, waving an old, fancy-looking pistol at the Home Guard horsemen. The old man addresses one of the horsemen as Teague, and asks him about the two black horsemen. Teague grins and doesn't respond. When the old man orders the horsemen to dismount, everyone but Teague does so. Teague explains that he and his friends are looking for "outliers" in the area. As Teague speaks, a man named Ayron—one of the other horsemen—attacks the old man, snatching the gun out of his hands. Ayron, his friend Byron, and Teague beat the old man.

Teague—the primary "antagonist" of the book—seems to represent the worst of the Old South world, in which the authority of a white man over black subordinates isn't questioned. We've been told that Teague and his followers are just cowards, too frightened to actually fight in the Civil War themselves. That interpretation seems validated by what we see in this story: Teague seems to be enjoying the experience of intimidating the old man. Capturing and killing deserters is his sadistic pleasure, not his duty.

After Ayron, Teague, and Byron finish beating the old man they approach the old house he was defending. A few moments later, they come out, dragging a "captive" with them. (At this point in the text, the narrator begins describing this group as "The Guard.") They drag the captive, who's struggling desperately, away from his house, tying him up and gagging him as they do. They playfully argue about the best way to hang their victim. Then Birch, one of the other Home Guard horsemen, suggests that they bring the captive in to jail, for the sake of variety. Reluctantly, the other horsemen agree.

The motives of the Guard (or of Teague and his men at least—in theory the Home Guard were supposed to be a last line of defense against the Union) are revealed in this scene. While the Guardsmen seem to be arguing amongst themselves, we get the sense that they're talking in order to intimidate their prisoner: perhaps they've already made up their minds to arrest him. Of course, it's also possible that Birch, a younger and less sadistic member of the Home Guard, genuinely wants to spare the captive's life.

The captive finishes his story. Ada and Ruby are shocked by what they've heard—they can't decide whether the captive was exaggerating or not. Afterwards, they walk back from town. On the way home, they notice a beautiful bird—a **heron**. Ada has the powerful sense that the heron is a "solitary pilgrim," and feels like she's remembering something she saw long ago. She can't decide if the heron is offering her a blessing or a warning.

In this section, Ada seems to be picking up Ruby's fondness for signs and prophecies. And yet Ada seems more critical about her own need for prophecy than Ruby was: in other words, Ada questions what the sight of the heron really signals (she lists two contradictory interpretations of the bird), and even implies that it might not mean anything.

Ruby tells Ada about her childhood, during which she saw plenty of herons. In fact, Ruby's mother told her father, Stobrod, that it was a **heron** that impregnated her, not Stobrod himself. This reminds Ada of her own parents. She remembers Monroe marrying her mother late in life, when Monroe was 45 years old; Ada's mother was 36. Ada imagines that she was the product of "some sad miscalculation."

Ada's encounter with the heron actually brings her closer to Ruby, since Ruby has her own emotional associations with the bird. Frazier's point seems to be that prophecy or belief, whether factually "true" or not, has a kind of emotional truth in that it brings people together and can give someone a sense of purpose in life.

Ada remembers a day shortly before Monroe's death. She and her father were reading Emerson together. Suddenly, Monroe launched into a story about how he met Ada's mother—information he'd never shared with her before. Monroe met Ada's mother when she was only sixteen years old. He saw her for the first time when she was riding a horse, and thought that she looked beautiful. Shortly afterwards, Monroe began courting this woman, whose name was Claire Dechutes. Claire's father didn't exactly disapprove of Monroe's courtship, but he also insisted that Claire wait until her eighteenth birthday to get married. Monroe agreed to this arrangement: he'd wait two years for Claire.

In return for the information Ruby shares with Ada about the heron, Ada gives Ruby (and us) information about her own parents. Previously, we didn't know anything about Ada's mother. But Ruby's honesty about her own circumstances, as well as Ada's thoughts about the meaning of the heron "sign," have inspired Ada to open up about her own life. There's a sense that by talking about her past, Ada is getting over her insecurities and traumas, and becoming more of an adult in the process.

Monroe continued telling Ada about his relationship with Claire. After nearly two years had passed, Monroe caught Claire kissing another man. Furious and confused, Monroe rode away, and decided to book a trip to England by ship. When he returned from his trip, he found that Claire had gone to live in France with her new suitor. Dismayed, Monroe resolved to devote himself to studying the Bible and being a good minister.

This is a strange portion of the text, because it's a story within a story (within a story): Frazier is telling us about Ada telling Ruby about Monroe telling Ada about Claire. This creates the sense that Ada is still trapped by her memories of her father—sucked into the past.

Nineteen years after leaving Claire, Monroe returned to the Dechutes home to find that Claire was back—her husband had been a cruel man. Monroe then proposed marriage to Claire, and she accepted. She died in childbirth shortly thereafter. Back in the present, Ada remembers listening to Monroe telling her this story, awestruck.

Claire's experiences with her husband, and later Monroe, suggest the diminished role of women in public and private life at the time. Women had little control over their own fortunes: they were expected to marry, and often ended up marrying the wrong people.

CHAPTER 9: TO LIVE LIKE A GAMECOCK

Inman and Veasey arrive at a woodcutters' clearing. There's a huge tree lying in the middle of the **road**, and it's clearly been cut with a sharp saw. Inman finds the saw resting by the tree, and Veasey suggests that they take it and sell it. Veasey clarifies that God is "not too" respectful of property rights—property is only a tiny detail of his plan. Inman reluctantly agrees. Veasey takes the saw, and they continue walking.

This is a funny moment, and it goes a long way toward endearing Veasey to the reader. Veasey is clearly corrupt, bending the rules of right and wrong to suit his own needs, but here his crime seems victimless and amusing.

A short while later, the duo finds a man standing before a dead bull in a stream. The man cries out for help, and Inman and Veasey walk off the **road** to help him (Veasey leaves the saw by the side of the road). The man explains that the bull's carcass is spoiling the potable water in the stream: he wants help pulling the bull away from the water. After some thought, Inman, Veasey, and the man agree to use leverage to move the bull. They spend the afternoon trying to find ways to lift the bull with tree branches, but nothing works. Eventually, they give up in frustration, and use the saw to cut the bull to pieces. After they finish their task, the man invites Inman and Veasey to dine with him. Inman accepts, offering Veasey's saw as payment.

Here we see the camaraderie fostered in times of war. Inman and Veasey have never met this stranger before, but they still offer him their help. The conceit of a bull poisoning the water seems symbolically loaded—perhaps it represents the corruption of the South before and after the Civil War, or the tremendous burden of moving on from past traumas. In any case, we should notice the "quid pro quo" here: Inman gives the stranger the saw in exchange for food and lodgings. Although Veasey gets the saw for nothing, it doesn't take long before the saw enters the informal bartering system that dominates life in the book.

The trio walks away from the stream, happy to be done with their work. The man introduces himself as Junior, and he "entertains" Inman and Veasey with stories of having had sex with married women years ago. He tells Inman and Veasey about his wife—a horrible person, he claims, who gave birth to a black baby (obviously not Junior's). The wife refused to name the real father of the child, but Junior was unable to obtain a divorce. Later, Junior's wife bore two more children—also probably not Junior's.

The more we learn about Junior, the more villainous he seems to become. He's clearly a man without many principles, given his affairs with married women, and what's worse, he's a hypocrite: he resents his wife for cheating on him, even though he's done the same thing many times over.

Junior takes Inman and Veasey to his house, where he offers them food and coffee. At dinner, Junior's child walks out, and Junior wonders aloud if she's an "octoroon" or a "quadroon" (racist terms for someone who's part black). The girl says that her name is Lula, but Junior angrily yells that her name is Chastity. Later on, a young woman enters the room, and Junior addresses her as Lila, his wife. Lila is wearing almost no clothing—something that surprises and shocks Inman. Inman is more shocked when Junior openly touches Lila's breasts.

Junior seems particularly oblivious and lecherous in this scene: he has bizarre arguments with his "children" about their real names, illustrating his lack of authority even in his own house. Junior also offers no words of affection to Lila—he seems to treat her as an object for his sexual pleasure, not a person.

Lila goes outside, and Inman follows her. He sees Lila greeting her sisters, who look almost identical to her. Inman greets the sisters, but they don't say anything to him. Lila touches Inman's shoulder and calls him "Big man." She offers him a strong drink, which Inman accepts, and she tells him about how once Junior killed a man out of anger. She goes on to name other occasions when Junior was violent, even suggesting that Junior murdered his own mother. She offers Inman more food and drink, and Inman—who's still hungry—accepts, though he notices that the meat is "too big for hog, but too pale for cow." Inman begins to feel drowsy, and notices shapes that resemble human beings, resting in the fireplace. Before Inman can eat any of the strange meat, Lila slides his plate away and tells her sisters to leave them alone. Then, she lets Inman—who can barely stand or talk—touch her breasts and thighs. Suddenly, the door bursts open and Junior barges in with a gun.

In one of the creepiest parts of the novel, Frazier strongly implies that the food Inman is eating is human flesh: it's possible that the murderous, bizarre Junior has killed some of his previous guests (or enemies) and roasted them for food. The erotic scenes in this section seem particularly off-putting, since they're paired with the suggestion of cannibalism. Given all we know about Junior, it would seem that Junior was planning to ambush Inman the entire time—waiting for Inman to go off with Lila, and then barging in on him with a loaded gun. There are also more references to the Odyssey here. Lila and her sisters "drugging" Inman references the episode of the "Lotus-eaters," and Junior's cannibalism seems to allude to Odysseus's encounter with Polyphemus the Cyclops in the Odyssey.

Junior stands over Inman and Lila, pointing a gun right at Inman's head. He marches Inman outside, where Inman sees Veasey standing. Junior yells out that he's found some "outliers," and a group of horsemen approach him—the Home Guard. The horsemen tie up Inman and Veasey and build a fire. Junior yells that the horsemen should "wed" Inman and Lila, using Veasey as the preacher. Veasey reluctantly proceeds to marry Inman to Lila, with Junior hollering songs. Afterwards, the horsemen lead Inman and Veasey down the **road**, into the dark.

Apparently Junior works with the Home Guard, and uses the offer of food and lodgings to attract deserters like Veasey and Inman. Then he alerts the Home Guard to the deserters' whereabouts. In short, Junior violates the unwritten (but sacred) laws of hospitality: he betrays his guests' trust. The more we learn about the Guardsmen, the clearer it becomes that (at least in Frazier's version of history) they don't care about the Civil War at all: they have their own petty and sadistic agenda..

For the next few days, Inman walks with the horsemen, not knowing where he's headed. Slowly, other prisoners join then—other suspected deserters from the army. They're given no food and little water. Inman fantasizes, deliriously, about escaping from the Home Guard. After a long time, the Guard orders the prisoners to stop. Some of the Guard members then raise their guns, point them at the prisoners, and fire. Inman feels a bullet hit him in the side of the head. He falls to the ground, dimly conscious, and hears someone shout, "Get them underground." The group doesn't exactly bury Inman and the other prisoners—they just throw some dirt over them and ride off. When the Guard is gone, Inman climbs out from the dirt, and then loses all consciousness.

Inman again comes close to dying, but miraculously survives—one could say he's reborn from the dirt. While it may seem odd that Inman can survive being shot, it's worth recalling that guns weren't as precise or powerful then as they are today—it's entirely possible that a gun misfired, or shot a bad bullet. Perhaps more to the point, Frazier portrays Inman as an otherworldly, even superhuman character, capable of fighting off three opponents at once or surviving a hail of bullets. His survival, then, isn't intended to be realistic at all, but rather symbolic.

When Inman regains consciousness, he finds himself staring at a huge wild boar. Inman climbs to his feet, noticing that his head is bleeding. He notices that Veasey is lying on the ground, dead, but he feels little sympathy for his companion. Inman begins to walk back to the **road**.

Whatever sympathy Inman had for Veasey while Veasey was alive has seemingly vanished. This again suggests that Inman only cared about Veasey because Veasey was a companion to him, but also that Inman's experience of violence continues to make him colder and more traumatized.

After hours of walking, Inman comes to a "yellow" slave, who is herding some bulls down the **road**. The slave calls Inman a "dirt man," but offers him a melon, which Inman eats eagerly. The slave also advises Inman on how to get back to his home: walk toward the Blue Ridge mountains and then go south. The slave explains that his master taught him how to read, write, and navigate, and Inman is impressed. He reaches for his money to pay the slave for his help, but then realizes that his possessions are back on Junior's property.

In this deus ex machina *moment, Inman is given help for free. The slave who helps Inman is an almost magical character, who suits the surreal tone of this chapter. That Inman has left his possessions behind reminds us why Junior lures deserters into his home: he wants to steal their property under the guise of patriotism.*

The chapter cuts ahead a few nights: Inman is standing outside Junior's house, preparing to sneak inside. He throws a bone to a dog to distract in, then rushes toward the house. Outside, he sees the knapsack he left, which contains his gun, and all his money. He finds that the knapsack's contents are still there, except for Veasey's gun. Looking up, Inman sees Junior nearby. Junior approaches Inman, seeming not to know who it is. When Junior is close enough, Inman rushes toward him and hits him in the head with the butt of his gun. He beats Junior again and again, until Junior is covered in blood, and doesn't stir. Then Inman walks into the distance.

It would appear that Inman murders Junior both as an act of personal vengeance and (perhaps) to protect others from Junior's monstrous activities. Even if Inman commits murder here, it's hard for us to sympathize with Junior, who is the most unambiguously evil character in the book. Inman, however, is becoming colder and more violent as his quest goes on—his twisted experiences along the road seem to be further robbing him of humanity.

The next day, Inman is still walking along the **road**, away from Junior. He sees a flock of **crows** flying above him, and notices that they're circling close to a snake. The snake tries to hiss and defend itself from the birds, but to no avail—the crows attack it. Inman imagines the crows blackening out the sky completely.

As Frazier clearly intends, it's impossible to read this passage without imagining some interpretation for it (just as Ruby sees crows and tries to interpret them). Perhaps the snake symbolizes Inman—always under attack from people like Junior or the Home Guard—or perhaps the snake symbolizes America itself, being torn apart from all sides. Inman also seems to be psychologically regressing here—retreating into a space of traumatic numbness, similar to the one he entered immediately after the war.

CHAPTER 10: IN PLACE OF THE TRUTH

Ada and Ruby have obtained a horse named Ralph, which they'll use to plow their land. They also set traps to keep the farm safe from scavengers like squirrels and gophers. Ruby tells Ada that she'll be leading Ralph across the farmland to familiarize the horse with its new plowing route. Ruby is also planning to trade food with Esco.

Although Ada is taking more responsibility for her farm, Ruby is still running the show, at least for now: it's Ruby who controls Ralph, and Ruby who plans to make more trades with Esco.

While Ruby leads Ralph through the farm, Ada makes a scarecrow to protect the crops. She rummages through the house for tools with which to make the scarecrow. Inside, she comes across some of her old clothes, including a dress and a hat Monroe bought her years ago on their trip to Europe. Ada decides that she'll dress her scarecrow with these things.

Symbolically, Ada transforms the clothes Monroe bought her into a scarecrow. This suggests that she simply has no free time to dwell on the past anymore—she must put everything to good use, even something as sentimental as her father's old gifts to her.

Ada sets up the scarecrow, and Ruby comes back from her trading with Esco. In the afternoon, Ada combs Ruby's dark hair with an old, fine brush. Ada imagines Ruby as a young child—lonely and abandoned by her family. Then Ruby and Ada set themselves a challenge—plaiting each other's hair. Ruby notices that Ada's scarecrow is already scaring away **birds**, and she compliments Ada on her work. Afterwards, Ruby and Ada compare the plaits they've made for each other. Ruby assures Ada that she's done a better job on Ruby's hair than Ruby has on Ada's hair.

In this touching scene, we see Ruby and Ada as equals, plaiting each other's hair with care and affection. Even if Ruby is more of a leader and an organizer than Ada, this shouldn't suggest that Ruby is "in charge." On the contrary, Ruby and Ada enjoy a friendship that's markedly different from the marriage Ada might otherwise be faced with if she were back in Charleston. Instead of being subservient to a man, she's now a partner to Ruby. This further suggests a possible romantic aspect to their relationship, or else strengthens the idea that the two continue to grow closer as something like sisters.

In the evening, Ada looks at the letter that she's received from Inman. She has no idea how old the letter is—it could be a few weeks old, or a few months. In it, Inman tells Ada that he's been wounded in the neck, and that he looks nothing like his former self. This reminds Ada of the photograph of Inman that she owns. Inman gave her this photograph before he went off to war: in the picture, he wears a military uniform, including a jacket and a hat. Ada remembers Inman presenting her with this photograph. He stopped by one afternoon, while Monroe was reading by the fire. Together, Ada and Inman took a walk by a river, talking about Inman's upcoming military service. Ada couldn't stop thinking about the possibility that Inman would be killed.

So far, there haven't been many descriptions of Inman's interactions with Ada: we know that Inman and Ada have feelings for each other, but don't know much else. Here, though, we get a better sense for why Ada cares about Inman. She's concerned for Inman's safety, and worries that he'll be hurt in the war. It's interesting to contrast Ada's reaction to Inman's military service with her reaction to Blount's service: clearly, she has real compassion for Inman and little for Blount.

Ada continues remembering her walk with Inman. Inman told her a story about an old Cherokee woman whom Inman met as a child. The Cherokee woman told him that there was once an ancient town near **Cold Mountain**, called Kanuga. One day, the woman went on, a mysterious stranger came to Kanuga, claiming to be from a place called Shining Rocks. In Shining Rocks, the stranger claimed, life was easy—there was no war, sickness, or suffering of any kind. The stranger advised the people of Kanuga to journey to Shining Rocks, but he also warned them that soon they would be conquered by invaders. Confused, the people of Kanuga decided to journey to Shining Rocks in hope of a better life. When they arrived in Shining Rocks, they found a strange cave, in which there was a bright white light. Confused, the people of Kanuga returned to their home. Soon after, the stranger's words came true: invaders conquered their land.

In this long, mysterious parable, there's a sense that something important has been lost, or is about to be lost forever—an entire civilization, a way of life. In this sense, the story reflects the Civil War, itself a violent conflict that destroyed the Southern way of life in all its beauty, evil, and contradiction. Inman's parable is also clearly important to him personally, and seems like a reflection of his feelings for Ada. Like the people of Kanuga, who got a glimpse of something wonderful but then were immediately conquered, Inman has a beautiful, frightening glimpse of his possible future with Ada—but at the same time he knows that he is about to go off to war, and so this future may never be anything more than a dream.

When Inman told Ada this story, Ada was unsure how to react—she had no idea what it meant, but could sense that it meant a great deal to Inman. She could tell that Inman was trying to be light and cavalier, even though he felt a strong sense of foreboding about his time in the army. Inman's final words to Ada that day were, "I'll see you when I see you."

Inman and Ada, in spite of their mutual attraction, certainly aren't a "couple" yet—they're both so shy, inexperienced, and repressed by the conditions of their society that they are unable to express their true feelings. Thus this goodbye, which potentially could have been their last, feels so unsatisfying.

When Ada returned to her home after seeing Inman, she found Monroe, still reading by the fire. Ada tried to distract herself by playing the piano and reading, but couldn't stop herself from thinking about Inman. She had no idea how she'd react if Inman died during the war. She felt guilty for not making more of an effort to understand Inman's story about Kanuga. That night, she had feverish dreams about Inman's beautiful body. She was a very inexperienced lover, and had no real idea what men looked like naked, but her imagination filled in the details.

In this scene, Ada's confusion and uncertainty about her place in the world is obvious. She has no sexual experience with men and no way to express her real feelings, and she feels a strong sense of immaturity overall. This parallels her confusion with regards to Inman's story about Kanuga: she thinks that it has some elusive meaning that's just out of her reach.

The next day, Ada woke up and went to visit Inman one more time before he left. She found him in his house, polishing his boots. Ada told Inman that she was sorry about the way they left things yesterday. Boldly, she approached him and squeezed his hand. Then they kissed—something they'd both wanted to do yesterday. Before anything else could happen, Ada backed away, suddenly conscious of the fact that she was wearing many layers of clothing: dress, blouse, corset, etc. She repeated Inman's words, "I'll see you when I see you." This was the last time Ada saw Inman. The narrator concludes, "The war turned out to be a longer experience than either had counted on."

The interruption of history prevents Ada and Inman from exploring their feelings for one another beyond this brief, passionate moment. The Civil War is a barrier—emotional, temporal, and physical—between them. For that matter, there are lots of barriers between the two protagonists: just as Ada becomes conscious of all the layers of clothing between herself and Inman, so the very structure of the novel (with its two separate plots) becomes a kind of metaphorical divide.

CHAPTER 11: THE DOING OF IT

Inman follows the slave's directions toward the Blue Ridge mountains. He takes safe **roads** and sleeps under the stars, often having the same nightmare about Fredericksburg. Inman wakes up every night from this nightmare and tries to convince himself, "I am stronger every minute," but to no avail.

We're more than halfway through this novel, and Inman's growth and is still very shaky. Try as he might, he can't stop returning to the battles where he endured trauma.

Every day, Inman gets farther and farther from civilization. Eventually, he's walking through an area where the only sign of human civilization is the **road** itself. One day, he comes to an old woman setting up a trap for animals. The woman notices that Inman is wounded, and offers him food and care. Inman agrees.

The mysterious old woman takes care of Inman in return for companionship and conversation. In this case, the quid pro quo *of hospitality is less literal, but still very present.*

The old woman takes Inman to her home, which is nearby. On the walk to her home, the woman points out **birds** flying through the sky. She yells, "Hey there" to the ravens in the trees, and they caw back to her. At her home, the woman kills a goat and cooks it for herself and Inman. As the woman works at cooking, Inman inspects her home. It's full of herbs, papers, and books.

This chapter is full of omens—or potential omens—including the birds we've already seen several times in the novel. Interestingly, neither Inman nor the old woman seems very interested in trying to understand what the flock of birds means. Indeed, the old woman seems to have a kind of mystical connection to them—they're not symbols to her, but rather companions.

Inman and the old woman sit down to dinner. The woman asks Inman if he's come from "killing men in Petersburg," and she asks to see his "papers." Inman shows the old woman his **neck wound**, and claims he lost his papers. The woman nods knowingly. She tells Inman she's lived alone in her house for 26 years. She was once married, to a mean, much older man. She left her husband for her current home, and has no idea if her husband is still alive.

Like Junior, the old woman knows very well that Inman is a deserter, but she doesn't care at all. She seems to feel a powerful connection with Inman, perhaps because she too is a "deserter." Where Inman abandons his country and his military, the old woman turns her back on her husband.

It's now Inman's turn to tell the old woman about himself. He tells the woman about his **neck wound**—he received it while fighting with the Federals in Petersburg. Inman says that his newer wounds—bullet holes—come from "the other bunch." The old woman nods and tells Inman that his life is full of danger. Inman is surprised to see kindness in her eyes. Moved, he tells her something he's been thinking for a while: war is mankind's natural reaction to the sameness of the world. The world is full of cycles and patterns—by declaring a war, humans create their own, unique event.

Inman and the old woman are clearly on the same page about the Home Guard, judging by Inman's use of the phrase, "The other bunch." Most importantly, though, Inman finds himself communicating with the old woman without actually talking to her—he can see kindness in her eyes, independent of anything the woman says or does. It's for this reason that Inman feels comfortable opening up about his thoughts to her. As Inman sees it, war and violence are as basic a part of the human experience as nature itself—an unavoidable aspect of the cycle of time (even though humans like to think of war as a unique historical event). The upshot of all this is that, since war is "just" a natural part of human life, it can be recovered from.

The old woman gives Inman a strange ball, made of herbs, and tells him to swallow it. Inman does so. The evening moves on, and Inman is inspired to open up to the old woman about Ada. He tells her about Ada's beauty, her personality, and his desire to marry her. The old woman finds fault with Inman's desire to marry Ada for her beauty—she claims, "Marrying a woman for her beauty makes no more sense than eating a bird for its singing."

At several points in this chapter, the way Inman behaves around the old woman is compared to how Inman behaves with Ada. Around Ada (and in every other scene he's been in) Inman has been terse and reserved, but now he finally feels comfortable (or just weary) enough to finally open up and express himself. As the old woman suggests, there's a kind of "Romeo and Juliet" irony about the romance in this book—Inman and Ada are basically two inexperienced young people experiencing a first crush, but because of external situations their "young love" becomes a matter of life and death.

The old woman shows Inman her papers—she writes and draws pictures all day long. She claims that she's almost never lonely in her home, as she has lots of work to keep her busy. As the evening turns into night, Inman and the old woman fall asleep. He wakes up late the next day, feeling foggy from the medicine the woman gave him. He goes back to sleep, and when he wakes up, he finds that at least another day has passed.

It's hard to totally believe the old woman's (mostly unprompted) claim that she's indifferent to human contact—especially as she seems to relish her time with Inman, enjoying their conversation and the opportunity to dole out advice to her young guest.

The old woman walks into the house and greets Inman. Inman tells the woman that he needs to be going soon. The woman nods, and points Inman on the right path back to **Cold Mountain**.

This ends one of the most positive of Inman's "episodes" on the road, as he gets some much-needed rest and healing after all his previous encounters with danger.

CHAPTER 12: FREEWILL SAVAGES

Ruby wakes up early to cook eggs for herself and Ada. As she cooks, she notices a man standing outside. She gets her gun and runs out. The man, she can see, is very well dressed, and looks surprisingly casual. Suddenly, Ruby realizes who she's looking at: it's Stobrod, her father. Amazed, Ruby asks Stobrod how old he is, and he says that he's 45. Ruby accuses her father of being a deserter. Stobrod denies this and claims he's a war hero.

This is our second introduction to Stobrod (previously we'd been told that he's a bad father to Ruby). The fact that Stobrod is a deserter in and of itself proves nothing—as we've seen with Inman, this certainly doesn't make him a bad person—but the fact that Stobrod lies about it suggests that his desertion stems from fear more than principle.

Reluctantly, Ruby lets Stobrod into the house for some coffee. She tells Ada that they'll feed him and then send him on his way. Inside, Stobrod tells Ruby that he's living with a group of "freewill" people, who drink and roam instead of settling in any single place. Ruby doesn't pay close attention to Stobrod. After he finishes his coffee and eggs, she sends him away. Stobrod nods and walks into the distance, not looking back.

In the twilight of the war, Stobrod, just like Inman and Ada, must try to make a new life for himself. The difference is that while Ada and Inman try to tie themselves to a specific place—Black Cove—Stobrod roams. The understated quality of this scene between Stobrod and Ruby is both tragic and a little amusing: we can sense that they have a lot to say to each other, but instead the isolation of the characters from each other continues.

The next day, Ruby and Ada get to work making molasses. In the afternoon, they sit by their barn and stare off at **Cold Mountain**. When they walk back to the house, they find Stobrod standing outside, looking in expectantly. Although Ruby wants to send her father away at once, Ada reasons that they have plenty of food for him. At supper, Ada asks Stobrod about his time in battle, but Stobrod says little. He produces a **fiddle** and plays it for his hosts' entertainment. He tells Ruby the story of how he made the fiddle: he cut maple branches to make the wooden frame, boiled the wood to bend it into the right shape, carved it carefully, etc. His only remaining task was to kill a rattlesnake to place inside the fiddle. This, Stobrod explains, is a custom for fiddlers—adding a snake's raddle to the fiddle is considered a sign of good luck, and of an outstanding instrument.

This is a critical section in the chapter, because it creates a new bond between Stobrod, Ruby, and Ada. For the most part, the "marauding" characters in this novel are villainous or threatening—the Home Guardsmen are the perfect examples. And yet Stobrod is a different species altogether, and also seemingly different from his old self as an absent father. Stobrod's devotion to music—not just playing it, but building the physical instrument—has more in common with Ada's newfound interest in working her farmland. In short, Stobrod isn't as loutish and lazy as he seemed at first: he has a genuine passion, something that gives his life meaning.

Stobrod explains how he came to be so interested in fiddling (Ruby points out that before the war he played the **fiddle**, but showed no great passion for it). In 1862, Stobrod was stationed in Richmond. There, he was sent to play the fiddle for a girl who was dying, and whose last wish was to hear fiddle music. He played six tunes for the girl—the only six tunes he knew. When he was finished, the girl demanded more music, and Stobrod was forced to admit he didn't know anything else. The girl asked Stobrod to improvise a tune for her, and Stobrod proceeded to try. The tune he invented was so horrible that the girl's mother cried to hear it. Surprisingly, the girl liked the tune—she told him it was nice, just before dying. For a long time afterwards, Stobrod only played his improvised tune on the fiddle. He gradually learned more about fiddling by spending time with black fiddlers. Now, he knows some 900 tunes.

Frazier humanizes Stobrod by giving Stobrod a backstory, and a tragic one at that. Whatever Stobrod's failures as a father, he's clearly capable of emotions like guilt, empathy, and compassion. It's no coincidence that the dying young girl—arguably a stand-in for Stobrod's own daughter, Ruby—is the one who compels Stobrod to keep fiddling. One could interpret his fiddling as a kind of displaced apology, not just to the little girl but to Ruby, as well.

Stobrod plays a strange tune called "Green-Eyed Girl" for Ada and Ruby. Ruby is amazed that her father shows so much talent for the **fiddle**. She remembers how he got his nickname long ago—he stole a ham, and was beaten in punishment with a stob (stake) as a rod. Ada thinks that Stobrod's fiddling proves that "no matter what a waste one has made of one's life, it is ever possible to find some path to redemption, however partial."

Although Stobrod's identity—his very name—reflects his loutish, good-for-nothing qualities, he's trying hard to redeem himself for his past actions. Even if he doesn't know how to be a good father to Ruby, his fiddling has a recognizably therapeutic and redemptive quality. Ada (herself a pianist) picks up on this, praising Stobrod for trying to better himself through art.

CHAPTER 13: BRIDE BED FULL OF BLOOD

Inman walks through the mountains, trying to find his course back home. It rains heavily, making navigation very difficult. He runs low on food, and his wounds continue to cause him great pain, even though they're beginning to heal.

The chapter begins with Inman in a state of enormous pain and hopelessness. He has no real idea where he's going and his wounds, both physical and psychological, incapacitate him. Inman's condition is improving, but so slowly that he can barely sense it.

One day Inman sees a man walking behind him through the mountains. Inman demands to know who the man is. Cautiously, the man makes a strange sign with his hands. Inman realizes that this man must be a member of a hospital charity—he recognizes the sign from his own time in the hospital. The man, who introduces himself as Potts, asks Inman if Inman is an "outlier," and Inman denies this cryptically. Potts offers to walk Inman to a house a few miles away—Potts claims to know a "good gal" who can help Inman.

For a few chapters now, Inman has had strikingly good fortune: hosts who give him food and shelter and ask surprisingly little in return. Potts seems to be no exception to this rule. And yet we find ourselves questioning his motives, as Junior's example has obviously made Inman suspicious of travelers who are too friendly or too generous.

Potts and Inman walk to the house, and Inman walks inside. He introduces himself to the woman inside as a friend of Potts (who has continued on his way). The woman offers Inman a bed and food. The woman tells Inman that her name is Sara and that she's eighteen years old. Inman is impressed that Sara survives on her own. Sara explains that she pulls her own plow, butchers hogs, grinds cornmeal, etc. She also takes care of her baby child. She says that her husband has died in the war.

Sara seems to be a totally self-sufficient person: she can take care of all her own material needs. And yet Sara's material self-sufficiency only underscores her psychological need for companionship. She's clearly missing her husband, and misses having an adult with whom to share her thoughts and feelings.

Inman eats the meal Sara fixes for him. At dinner, he watches Sara nurse her baby, and can't help fixating on her round, white breast. Afterwards, Sara offers Inman some fresh clothes—her husband's old clothing. Inman feels odd about wearing another man's clothing, let alone Sara's husband's clothing.

Now that he's fed and sheltered, Inman has the luxury of focusing on his own sexual needs. The symbolism of this scene is clear: Sara is shaping Inman in her husband's image, presumably because she misses human contact, and her husband in particular.

Sara offers Inman a bed in the house, and when she shows Inman the bed, he realizes that it's also the bed where Sara sleeps. Sara asks Inman to sleep beside her, but "not do a thing else." Inman agrees. As he lies next to Sara, she begins sobbing. She tells Inman about her husband, John. She and John fell in love years ago—their child is a living memory of her love for her husband.

Sara may not even be sexually attracted to Inman: her motives for asking Inman to sleep beside her run deeper. Like many of Inman's other acquaintances on the road, Sara's priority is conversation and companionship: she so lonely that she's desperate to have someone to confide in.

As Sara weeps next to Inman, she begins to stroke Inman's body. She touches his scar but then pulls her hand away. Eventually, she falls asleep, but Inman stays awake. A woman hasn't touched him so tenderly in a long time.

It's significant that Sara fixates on Inman's scar, a symbol of his own tragic past. Sara has a lot of pain of her own, and so her connection with Inman is based on their pain—perhaps the one thing they have in common.

Late at night, Inman wakes up—Sara is shaking him. Sara whispers that someone's outside, possibly the Home Guard or robbers, and Inman will need to hide himself at once. Inman sneaks out the back of Sara's house. Peering out from his hiding place, he sees three horsemen—wearing blue jackets—ordering Sara to come out of the house with her hands up. Inman can tell that the men are Federals by their blue jackets. They point guns at Sara and ask her where her money is hidden. To torture Sara, one of the horsemen goes into her house and comes out carrying Sara's baby. He threatens to hurt the baby unless she tells him about her money. After many hours, during which the men dangle Sara's baby over fire, the men realize that Sara is telling the truth: she has no money. They take Sara's hog and ride away. Sara yells that she was just about to kill the hog for food—now she'll starve to death.

Sara is brave when confronted by the soldiers, and refuses to rat out Inman. This is especially impressive, considering that the soldiers are Northerners (hence their blue jackets) and thus especially unfamiliar and antagonistic to Southerners. These particular Union soldiers are cruel and sadistic, and seem to take a sexual pleasure in harassing Sara, a defenseless woman. The soldiers' priority isn't really any different than Inman's: they're both just trying to survive. The difference, of course, is that the soldiers wrap themselves in the flag, claiming to be patriotic warriors, whereas Inman enjoys no such immunity.

Instead of returning to Sara, Inman decides to follow the three horsemen. He follows them on foot for several miles, until he sees them settle down for the night. Once he has a good shot, Inman takes out his pistol and shoots one of the men in the head. The two remaining Federals walk into the night in search of their friend's killer. Inman hides until he has another good shot, and when he does, he shoots one of the remaining Federals. There's one Federal left, and Inman shoots the man in the chest. Inman then looks through the man's pockets for valuables—he finds cigarettes, which he takes for himself.

For not the first time in the book, Inman takes out a larger, better-armed group of enemies. Again, this section isn't exactly realistic, but it reinforces Inman's status as a larger-than-life figure—albeit one with deep psychological wounds. We're reminded that Inman can be ruthless at times—he has no compunction, for instance, about stealing from a dead man (nor is this the first time he's stolen in the novel).

Inman leads Sara's hog back to its home, where he finds Sara going through her usual morning routine of boiling water. He and Sara kill the hog and eat it for supper. Sara, grateful for Inman's help, offers him a razor to shave his face. Inman shaves, and finds himself staring at an unfamiliar face in the mirror. Sara smiles and tells Inman that he looks "part human now."

There's a familiar trope in stories about men traveling through the wilderness, that when they see their dirty, hairy faces in the mirror, they don't recognize themselves. This version, however, is reversed: Inman is so accustomed to being wild and dangerous that he doesn't recognize his old, clean-shaven face.

Later, Sara sings for her baby—a strange song, more like a ballad than a lullaby. There's a lyric in the song about a "bride bed full of blood." The next day, Inman sets out on the **road**.

Like Stobrod, Sara takes comfort in music when there's nothing else to make her feel better. In spite of Inman's obvious connection with and attraction to Sara, he's too loyal to Ada and Black Cove to give up on his journey now.

CHAPTER 14: A SATISFIED MIND

Ada and Ruby spend most of the fall working with apples. This requires them to plant seeds, pick apples, carry heavy bags of fruit, etc. The work is tiring, but easier than what Ada was doing in the summer. Ada gets a strong sense of accomplishment when she cuts down dying trees for firewood—though her sense of accomplishment shrinks when she realizes that she'll have to do it all over again in just a few days.

As Ada progresses with taking care of her farm, she faces the challenge of a farmer's life in which nothing is permanent. There's no way for a farmer to complete something and then relax: every task is cyclical, and so will have to be done again in a few days or weeks or months. While this is frustrating, it can be reassuring as well.

Inside the house, Ada pens a letter to her cousin Lucy, who lives in Charleston. In the letter she describes the changes in her life, and suggests that Lucy wouldn't even recognize her if they were to meet again. Ada has learned to think literally and practically, she explains—when she sees a **crow**, for example, she does not "seek analogy for its blackness."

One of the biggest changes we see in Ada here is that she has become firmer and more literal in her thinking—she's lost the more "poetic" mindset she had when she lived a life of leisure and reading. There's no time for her to linger over metaphors or abstract meanings anymore.

Ada works hard, cutting hay with a scythe. Late in the evening, exhausted from her day's work, she sits by the wire, staring up at the stars—Ruby is still doing work. Suddenly, Ada hears Ruby's name called—it's Stobrod and a friend of his. Ada stands up and tells Stobrod that Ruby isn't here. Stobrod nods but sits down next to Ada. Ada notices that Stobrod's friend—whom he calls Pangle—is carrying a banjo.

Although Ada rejects piano playing as "useless," since she's working on a farm all day, she doesn't discount the importance of art altogether. Stobrod doesn't have much a community, but the few friendships he does *maintain seem based around music and performance.*

Ada politely asks Stobrod how he's doing, and Stobrod explains that he's been living in the mountains, "like an outlaw." He introduces his friend as a "simpleminded" boy—possibly related to the Swangers. Stobrod explains how the "boy," who's actually around 30, recently learned how to play the banjo—it's his only talent.

It's unclear if Pangle is mentally disabled or not, but either way his singular devotion to the banjo seems to have given his life joy and purpose (just as the fiddle has given Stobrod's life new meaning).

Stobrod goes on to explain to Ada how he found his friend a banjo. A few months ago, Stobrod and some other military deserters snuck into a wealthy man's home. The gang tied up the man and his wife and beat him. While the other deserters stole food and alcohol from the house, Stobrod stole only a banjo, which he gave to Pangle. In the present, Stobrod and Pangle play music for Ada's entertainment. Ada is moved by the music—it's strange and not always pleasant, but it reminds her of her father, who loved fiddling, unlike most preachers. As they play, Ruby arrives, and she sits next to Ada, listening.

It's interesting that Stobrod's fiddle music reminds Ada of Monroe, her father. This particular kind of associative memory seems wildly different from the flashbacks through which Frazier has previously presented us with information about Monroe. There's no sense of trauma or tragedy here: it's as if Stobrod's music is helping Ada come to terms with her father's death—not by making her forget it, but by encouraging her to accept it and then move on.

It's now late at night. Stobrod and Pangle stop playing their instruments. Ruby mutters to Ada that her father is about to ask them for a favor. Stobrod explains that he needs "caring for"—he's poor and hungry all the time, and can't stand the thought of being sent back to fight in the army. Ruby dismissively tells Stobrod to "eat roots" to survive.

If we consider the novel so far, Stobrod's request for a favor doesn't seem so unreasonable. Everyone in this book makes trades—often, something concrete in exchange for something abstract. Here, Stobrod wants to trade abstract (but valuable) music for food and shelter.

Stobrod complains to Ruby that she's not being very sympathetic. Ruby angrily reminds Stobrod of how he went about brewing liquor years ago. When Ruby was eight years old, he left her to go into the mountains to brew liquor. Stobrod left his child for months at a time, and Ruby was forced to forage for wild food and catch fish in the river. Essentially, Ruby says, Stobrod let her starve. The one thing she'll say for him, she admits, is that he never beat her. But he never patted her on the head or hugged her either. Stobrod and Pangle walk away, quietly.

Ruby shows no signs of coming to terms with her father—she can't forgive him for abandoning her when she was still a girl, and we don't expect her to, either. Frazier certainly isn't saying that Stobrod's love of music excuses or expunges his sins as a father—rather, he's trying to suggest that Stobrod is trying *to be a better man; it's an active process with no clear end in sight.*

Ada and Ruby go into the house to sleep. Ada pulls out a telescope and points it at the stars. She thinks of the majesty of the stars, and compares the spectacle with John Keats's poem *Endymion*—she concludes that the natural world is more beautiful and complex than any poem could ever be. She writes Inman a simple letter: "Come back to me."

Ada was raised to read poetry and play music. But as she enters real adulthood, she becomes convinced that the true beauty of the world can be found by getting in touch with nature. It seems like Ada will be working on her farm for the rest of her life, so she's heavily invested in the ongoing process of taking care of her land—and appreciating the natural world's beauty. But clearly she doesn't want to do this alone: she wants Inman by her side.

CHAPTER 15: A VOW TO BEAR

Inman walks through the mountains, stopping only rarely. He stops to help a weeping woman, whose child has just died. Inman builds the child a tiny coffin and buries the child in the ground. In gratitude, the woman invites Inman for dinner, and cooks him a meal. That evening, Inman goes on his way.

This is one of the clearest examples of the quid pro quo *of hospitality in the novel: Inman provides a very clear service for the weeping woman, at once abstract and concrete, in return for which he gets food.*

Inman continues walking, often sleeping in abandoned buildings. One day, he passes by two skeletons dangling from the trees. The skeletons still have some hair and flesh on them.

The skeletons are a reminder of the harshness and danger of this world, and how close to death the characters are at any given moment.

A few days later, Inman camps out near the edge of a cliff. He wakes up at dawn to the sight of a huge bear. Quickly, Inman picks up his gun and points it at the animal. Then he remembers a promise he made himself to never to shoot a bear again. As a child, Inman hunted bears all the time. In Petersburg, however, he had a feverish dream in which he was chased by bears, and eventually took on the qualities of a bear himself. In the present, Inman stares at the bear, praying that he won't be forced to shoot it. Inman notices that the bear is guarding a young cub.

Here we have another loaded conceit: a man who becomes a bear in the process of being chased by bears. One could say that Inman, in being chased by bullies and murderers, has become a bully and a murderer himself. (Think of the way he beats Junior, or the pleasure he takes in smacking Veasey over the head.) Inman seems to sense this—hence his dream, and his reluctance to hurt a tiny bear cub.

The bear seems to be approaching Inman, and suddenly it charges. Inman is able to dodge the bear's attack, and the bear's momentum pushes it over the cliff—it falls to its death. Inman contemplates leaving the cub by itself, but then he realizes that the cub will die. He considers taking the cub as a pet for Ada, but he quickly dismisses this idea. In the end, he shoots the cub. Because he's starving, he packs the bear meat to eat.

Inman's desperation to survive compels him to do some things that, on the surface, seem cruel and heartless. Killing a bear cub to survive in the wilderness might be justified by Inman's need to eat something. But Inman's real fear, it would seem, isn't just that he has *to kill the cub, but that he might not feel the appropriate guilt or reluctance to do so.*

Inman proceeds with his journey. He can sense that he's very close to home. One day, he realizes that he's actually staring at **Cold Mountain**. Although Inman is overjoyed to be near the end of the journey, he also feels guilty and sinful as he eats his bear meat.

As Inman approaches the end of his quest, it becomes more obvious than ever that the quest has changed him in every way. Paradoxically, by trying to return to the psychological state he was in before he experienced the trauma of war, Inman has endured even more trauma.

CHAPTER 16: NAUGHT AND GRIEF

The chapter begins with Stobrod, Pangle, and another friend walking through the mountain. The other friend is a young boy from Georgia, who's no more than seventeen years old. The trio is headed for Ada's farm. Stobrod explains to the Georgia boy that Ada has finally convinced Ruby to take care of her father. Ruby has agreed to let Stobrod and his friends stay on the farm, provided that they work and don't eat too much.

As the novel approaches an end, it seems that Ada and Ruby have built a little community at Ada's farm: populated by Stobrod, the Georgia boy, and others. Even building this kind of unorthodox "family" is shown as a crucial aspect of a fulfilling life in this book full of isolated characters.

The trio comes to a fork in the **road**. They decide to rest there and eat and drink. They take swigs of whiskey they've stolen, and eat beans. The Georgia boy, whose stomach is very upset, stumbles off to vomit and take care of himself. While he's away, the Home Guard—led by Teague—ambushes Stobrod and Pangle.

By a lucky coincidence the Georgia boy avoids being captured by the Home Guard because of an upset stomach.

Teague, grinning fiercely, tells Stobrod that he's heard rumors of a gang of outliers hiding out in the mountains and robbing innocent people. He tells Stobrod that he and his Home Guard will be joining Stobrod around the fire. The horsemen dismount and begin cooking their food over the fire—sausage. Teague orders Stobrod to play his **fiddle**. Stobrod and Pangle begin playing a tune, largely improvised. They're shaky at first, but gradually they settle into a pattern. The music is "direful and elegiac." When the song is over, Birch, one of Teague's followers (and a very young man), whispers to Teague that Stobrod and Pangle are "holy men."

As the novel nears an end, we see more of Teague—he's practically the main antagonist of this long, episodic novel (certainly, he's the only villain who shows up repeatedly in the beginning, the middle, and the end of the book). It's telling that even when Stobrod and Pangle play for Teague and his followers, some of the Guardsmen think that Stobrod is "holy"—Stobrod's music is powerful enough to make the Guardsmen (except for Teague) forget their usual cruelty.

Teague pauses for a long time. Then he stands up and orders Stobrod and Pangle to stand against the tree. They do so, still clutching their instruments like weapons. Teague pulls out his rifle and points it at the two friends. He orders the musicians to take off their hats and cover their faces. When Stobrod and Pangle have both done so, Teague and his followers fire.

Teague's cowardice is clear in this section. He's clearly been touched by Stobrod's playing—even if he won't admit it, his long pause proves that the music has moved him. Teague can't stand to look into the eyes of his two victims, so he orders them to hide their faces.

CHAPTER 17: BLACK BARK IN WINTER

As the chapter opens, the Georgia boy is sitting with Ada and Ruby, describing the deaths of Stobrod and Pangle—he escaped their fate because he went into the woods to vomit just before the Home Guard arrived. Ruby is oddly calm and quiet as the Georgia boy explains himself. The only thing she says is, "Why were you not killed or taken, if you were close enough to witness?" Ada tells the boy that he'll need to take them to the area where Stobrod and Pangle were shot. The boy doesn't like this idea at all—he has no desire to return to the mountain. Ruby says that she'll be able to find her way to Stobrod on her own—she has no need for the Georgia boy, anyway.

The Georgia boy is the lone survivor of Teague's massacre. Although Ruby has no special fondness for her father, she seems to have no second thoughts about going into the mountains to track him down. This suggests that Ruby, even if she doesn't feel especially fond of Stobrod, still shares a bond with him: she at least owes him a proper burial (at this point, she assumes that Stobrod is dead).

Ada and Ruby pack shovels, preparing to go and bury Stobrod and Pangle. Before they leave, however, they direct the Georgia boy back to his home. They know he'll need to leave as soon as possible to avoid being hunted down by the Home Guard.

It's interesting to see Ada and Ruby, two women, assume a leadership role, while directing the Georgia boy to safety. This suggests that Ada in particular has grown more accustomed to taking care of herself, rather than relying on men.

Ada and Ruby set out to find Stobrod and Pangle's bodies. Following the Georgia boy's directions, they venture into the mountains. On their first night in the mountains, they sit by a fire, sensing that they're surrounded by wild animals. The next day, they come to the fork in the **road** that the Georgia boy identified for them; there, they find Pangle's body lying next to a tree. Ruby can't find Stobrod, however, and his **fiddle** is also missing. Ruby wonders aloud if the Home Guard took Stobrod with them instead of shooting him.

It would appear that Stobrod is still alive—the absence of his body and fiddle signal as much. Although Ruby hasn't shown much love for her father up to this point, she seems to grudgingly accept that his fiddle-playing is top-notch—perhaps she suspects that the Home Guardsmen, touched by his music, took Stobrod with them on their journey.

Ada and Ruby bury Pangle near a chestnut tree. It takes a long time to bury him, and Ada has to dig part of the grave with her bare hands. After they finish, they goes to wash their hands in a creek. By the creek, they see evidence of an ancient civilization: an old stone shelter, and arrowheads. As she washes her hands, Ruby is surprised to see Stobrod, leaning against a big rock. Ruby and Ada realize that Stobrod is still alive—he's breathing faintly, in spite of his gunshot wounds.

For not the first time in the novel, a character survives horrific gunshot wounds from close range. As we've seen, these situations aren't handled realistically; Frazier doesn't even bother to prove to the reader that such a miraculous event could happen in "real life." Frazier is seemingly more interested in the aftermath of violence than in violence itself, and this leads him to drag his characters through (sometimes implausible) scenes.

Ruby and Ada resolve to nurse Stobrod back to health. They tie Stobrod to Ralph, their horse, and slowly descend from the mountain. This is an agonizingly slow process, since they can't ride Ralph too hard, for fear of hurting Stobrod. Eventually, they come down to an empty stone building near the mountains—seemingly the remnant of an old Cherokee village. There, Ruby uses some of her supplies to cook food for Stobrod. Ada is so nervous and tense that she vomits up her meal. It begins to snow in the mountains—this doesn't bode well for Stobrod, Ada thinks.

After spending an entire book being nursed back to health and confidence, Ada now signals her moral and psychological progress by taking care of someone else—indeed, someone who's older and more experienced than she. Still, she's nervous about doing so, hence her vomiting. Frazier also populates this scene with artifacts from other cultures, such as the Cherokee. This creates a strong sense of decay, history, and the rise and fall of civilization. Ruby and Ada are literally sitting in the ruins of the Cherokee world, but perhaps Ruby and Ada's own culture is destined for the same fate as the Cherokee's.

CHAPTER 18: FOOTSTEPS IN THE SNOW

Inman draws closer to **Cold Mountain** every day. In the high altitude, it snows heavily. One day, Inman notices that the snow in front of him is stained with blood. He sees that a fire was lit in the area very recently, and he can also see what looks like a grave. He goes to a nearby creek to get some water. He's extremely hungry, and hasn't had any food since he finished eating the bear cub. Inman tries to distract himself from his hunger by thinking about reuniting with Ada.

Cold Mountain itself is becoming stronger as a symbol in the book, here an enormous physical reminder that Ada is nearby. Inman's long "odyssey" is almost at an end.

The next day, Inman arrives on the outskirts of Black Cove. He has taken some time to make himself look more presentable before his arrival—he's bathed in a creek and attempted to cut his hair and shave, but with little success. As he enters Black Cove, he sees a cabin, from which smoke is rising. He knocks on the door of the cabin and finds the Georgia boy inside. The boy invites Inman in, and Inman hears about the Georgia boy's witnessing of Stobrod and Pangle's deaths. Inman listens patiently to the boy's story, then asks him if he knows who Ada Monroe is. He's amazed to find that the Georgia boy has met Ada. The boy points Inman toward Ada's farm and wishes him good luck.

The two halves of the novel are finally beginning to come together! Inman is so close to Ada that he's meeting the people with whom Ada herself just brushed shoulders. This is a clever way for Frazier to build the suspense—we've been waiting hundreds of pages for Inman and Ada to reunite, and now that they're in the same town, it's still going to take a while before they do so. At the same time, we know that Teague and the Guard are on the prowl in the area, so Inman is still in constant danger.

Inman sets off for Ada. He imagines how his reunion with Ada might play out. He wants to believe that seeing Ada again will cure him of his nightmares and his horrible memories of Petersburg.

Here it's confirmed: Inman returned to Cold Mountain in part so that Ada could cure him of his trauma. It's as if Inman hasn't fully accepted this fact until just now—now that the end of his quest is in sight, he's starting to realize how high his hopes are.

The chapter cuts to Ada and Ruby, who are carrying Stobrod down from the mountain. They wake up one morning to the sound of Stobrod coughing up blood. Ruby tells Ada to shoot a turkey for them to eat, but Ada objects that she's never fired a gun before. Ruby insists that Ada try while Ruby tends to her father. Ada goes off, awkwardly waving a rifle in front of her. She aims at a cluster of **wild turkeys**, fires, and is amazed when two of them fall, dead.

Ada takes a big step here by shooting and killing a flock of turkeys. This suggests a couple things. First, it shows Ada taking care of herself and assuming a traditionally masculine role: the hunter. Second, since turkeys are a kind of bird, it reminds us of Ada's growing impatience with prophecy and superstition—all those flocks of crows.

Inman hears a gunshot in the distance. He draws his own weapon and moves toward the sound. As he approaches, he sees a figure: the figure of Ada Monroe. He calls her name, and Ada doesn't answer. She sees a dirty beggar, with bloodshot eyes and old clothes. Yet as Inman stares into Ada's eyes, he's "overcome by love." Ada doesn't know what to do or say. Eventually, she tells Inman, "I do not know you." Her gun is still pointed at him.

It's tragic but understandable that when Inman and Ada finally do see one another, Ada barely recognizes Inman. Inman has been changed by his journey—not just in a physical sense, either. He's become more savage and brutal, taking revenge into his own hands time and time again. The real question becomes—do Inman and Ada really have anything in common anymore, or was their attraction merely physical all along?

There's a long pause, in which Ada stares deep into Inman's eyes. Inman turns slightly, as if to move away. Somehow, when Inman turns his head, Ada remembers what he once looked like. She whispers his name, and Inman says, "Yes." Ada can see that the dirty beggar before her really is Inman—hungry and cold, but still Inman. She lowers her gun and says, "Come with me." They walk back to where Stobrod and Ruby are stationed.

For not the first time in the novel, a deep personal connection arises from a long, meaningful stare. For all his distrust of prophecies and signs, Frazier has a mystical—even magical—side: he believes that two humans can communicate with something as simple as a look. Here, Inman's stare doesn't just let Ada know who he is—it seems to communicate something of the trauma and pain he's gone through in the last 300 pages of the book.

CHAPTER 19: THE FAR SIDE OF TROUBLE

Ruby, Inman, and Ada are inside a tiny cabin in the mountains, taking care of Stobrod. As the day drags on Inman, falls asleep while Ruby and Ada attend to Stobrod, cleaning his wounds as best they can. While they work, Ruby tells Ada something that she's been thinking ever since first seeing Inman: she and Ada can do without him. Ada acknowledges that Ruby is right—they don't need Inman's help caring for the farmland. But Ada also admits that she "wants" Inman.

This section of the text has been important to the arguments of queer theorists who see a homoerotic tension in Ruby's friendship with Ada. Either way, it's easy to understand why Ruby would be a little jealous of Inman—Inman seems to be "breaking up" Ruby and Ada's friendship. Ada, for her part, acknowledges this, but feels drawn to Inman for reasons she can't entirely articulate.

Hours later, Inman wakes up to find himself in a warm cabin, in which a fire has been built. Stobrod is also waking up, but Ada and Ruby are nowhere to be seen. Inman quickly gets Stobrod some water. As he gives Stobrod the drink, he remembers all the different kinds of battle wounds he's seen over the years.

Inman has slowly been curing himself of his trauma. A major part of his "therapy" consists of interacting with other people who've gone through similar experiences. Here, he meets Stobrod, someone who, we can sense, has seen just as much violence as Inman. (They both nearly died from gunfire at the hands of the Guardsmen, for instance.)

Afterwards, Inman walks outside, where he finds Ada walking around in the "yellow light." Ada touches Inman's back with her hands and tells him he feels thin. Together, Ada and Ruby tear apart one of the **birds** Ruby caught and drop it in a pot of water. Inman is starving, and when the food is ready he eats it ravenously.

Again, we see birds—an important symbol in the book—being stripped of their majesty and mystery. This process corresponds to the novel's main characters, Inman and Ada, becoming more confident in their own lives. In this sense, we might say that Inman and Ada no longer need *birds—they no longer need these big, ambiguous symbols of escape to make sense of their lives.*

Inman shows Ada the book, by Bartram, which he's carried with him throughout his journey. He asks Ada if she wrote him letters while he was in the hospital, and Ada says that she did. Because Inman never got these letters, Ada summarizes them for him: details about her life. As Inman listens to Ada, he bursts out, "I'm ruined beyond repair, is what I fear." Ada isn't sure what to say. Eventually, she tells Inman that she knows people can be mended—he's no exception. Gently, Inman touches Ada's body, and they kiss.

The big tension of this book has been—what is Inman going to do *when he reunites with Ada? What will they say to each other? Will they get married? The "elephant in the room" is that Inman has seen some pretty horrible things, so it's hard for him to just return to his old life wooing Ada, even though this is seemingly why he returned to Black Cove in the first place. Even if physicality isn't the "solution" to Inman's problems, it's definitely an important part of his desire to return to Ada.*

Later on, everyone falls asleep together in the cabin: Stobrod snores heavily, keeping the other three people awake. Ada stays up, thinking about Inman, who looks old and wizened. Inman isn't the man she knew before the war—but neither is she the same woman she once was.

Looking into each other's eyes, Ada and Inman measure their own progress in the last few years: they've grown older, more mature, and a little sadder. The question, then, is whether are not they've also grown apart.

The next morning it continues to snow in the mountains. Ada and Inman go hunting together. As they hunt, Ada tells Inman about Monroe's death, her decision not to return to Charleston, Ruby, etc. As they hunt, they come upon an arrowhead lodged in a tree. The arrowhead looks very old. Inman and Ada imagine that it landed in the tree centuries ago, and has been there ever since.

This section is haunted by images of the past: both literal ones, like the arrowhead, and more abstract one, like Ada's description of her father's death. The one truth to which Frazier keeps returning is that the past is never really over, as long as we have memories. But this doesn't mean that we're doomed to be dominated by the past: we can find ways to move on and reshape the past, just as Ruby and Ada "reshape" the Cherokee ruin into a hospital for Stobrod.

Ada and Inman rejoin Ruby and Stobrod, having failed to catch anything. Stobrod, conscious again, asks who Inman is. Inman simply replies, "I gave you water." Ruby tells Ada about her plans: together, the four of them could work the farmland, planting apple trees, pulling the plow, etc.

It's inspiring to see Ruby, who'd previously been skeptical about living with Inman, now planning a new life on the farm for herself, Ada, and Inman. The future seems bright—they can work together on the farm as a kind of family unity.

Ada finds Inman lying in bed with his shirt off. As if in a trance, she begins removing her clothing—first her skirt, then her corset. She tells Inman to look away, but he replies, "Not for every gold dollar in the Federal treasury." Inman touches Ada's naked body, and pulls her into bed.

Inman and Ada are clearly attracted to each other, and their physical attraction is an important part of their desire to move forward with their lives. Inman and Ada want to live together, to have children, to spend their lives on the farm. In the process, they want to forget their pasts, or at least move beyond their traumas.

The chapter cuts ahead an hour—Ada and Inman lie in bed together. They talk through the night. Inman talks about his childhood, for which he's very nostalgic. He barely touches on his time during the war—he mentions people's names, but gives no details about what happened to them. Ada asks Inman to tell her about his journey home. He doesn't say much about his travels either, but instead talks about meeting "a number of folks on the way." Inman tells Ada that it's a gift to be able to forget one's own pain. Ada disagrees slightly—she thinks it's good to forget pain, but it also takes a conscious effort, a *desire* to forget.

It's telling that neither Ada nor Inman gives a huge amount of detail about their past. This could signal that the characters are still guarding painful secrets. But perhaps it's meant to show that Inman and Ada are no longer obsessed with their own pasts—instead of stewing over their own pain, they're more interested in starting a new life with each other. This is the meaning of Ada's monologue about the desire to forget and move forward: more than anything else, moving past trauma is an act of will.

Inman and Ada continue talking. They plan to get married, and to order books about art, botany, and travel. Inman will learn Greek, and Stobrod will play the **fiddle** for them, assuming that he survives. Ada tells Inman about what their life would be like in Black Cove, if they were married. As Ruby said, they could all work on the farm together. They conclude, "Oh, the things they would do."

There's something both optimistic and wistful about this final section of the chapter. The future looks bright—and yet it seems strangely out of reach, as if it will only ever be an abstract ideal (like the Shining Rocks in the Cherokee story). In short—the novel isn't over yet; more tragedy awaits.

CHAPTER 20: SPIRITS OF CROWS, DANCING

The next morning, Ada and Inman are still lying in bed together. They're forming a plan. The war will be over in a few months at most, they agree. Therefore, Inman's best course of action might be to lay low for a few months, rather than trying to return to battle straight away. Ada, Ruby, and Inman arrive at another possibility: Inman could go north to the Federals, surrender to them, and take a loyalty oath. This way, Inman will have an advantage when the Federals inevitably win the war later this year.

Ada and Inman have a plan: they're going to try to work around the politics of life in the war-torn South and "wait out" the Northern soldiers. As it became increasingly clear that the South was going to lose to war, more and more Southern soldiers did exactly this: they cared more about surviving the war than about loyalty to their state.

In the mountains, Stobrod begins to recover. His wounds shrink, and he's able to eat solid food again. Ruby, Ada, and Inman prepare to return to the farm: Stobrod is finally healthy enough to be carried down by horse. Inman proposes that Ada and Ruby go ahead to the farm—if they travel with Inman and Stobrod, they'll be in danger. Stobrod and Inman plan to walk north to the Federals, where they'll surrender and then lay low, hoping that the war ends soon. Ruby and Ada agree to this plan.

One reason why we, the readers, question Ada and Inman's plan is that it requires Inman and Ada to break up again, if only for a short while. After their reunion, this is a dramatically unsatisfying turn in the plot—one which, we sense, can only lead to some unhappy accident.

Ada and Ruby head down through the mountains, with Inman and Stobrod taking a different route, heading north. When Inman and Stobrod are nearly out of the woods, however, they're ambushed by Teague and the Home Guard. Teague sneers at Stobrod, "Hard man to kill." Inman looks to the horsemen of the Guard, their rifles drawn and pointed right at him. He remembers being back in the army, and realizes that nothing he says will dissuade these people from attacking him.

As might have been suspected, Inman isn't out of danger yet: he still has to contend with Teague and the Guardsmen. As Inman surveys his enemies, we realize that he's grown over the course of the novel, both because of his quest and because of his reunion with Ada. Inman has gained a new perspective on war: he sees it for the sad yet inevitable mess that it is.

Suddenly, Inman slaps Ralph (the horse), and Ralph—bearing Stobrod—charges away from the Home Guard, into the woods. At the same time, Inman draws his pistol and shoots one of the horsemen. Inman shoots another rider, leaving only three. One of the horsemen turns and rides away, afraid of the danger. Teague fires his rifle, but his horse is so agitated that he misses Inman entirely. The sound of the gunshot further agitates Teague's horse, and Teague falls off. Quickly, Inman runs forward and grabs Teague's rifle out of his hands. When Teague draws a knife, Inman shoots Teague in the chest. The final horseman dismounts and runs toward Inman, but Inman is too fast for him—he hits the man over the head with the butt of his rifle.

For the last time in the novel, Inman will fight, and defeat, a larger, more powerful force. This happens so quickly that, from a traditional standpoint, it isn't quite dramatically satisfying: Inman dispatches with the main antagonist of the novel, Teague, in just a few sentences. Once again, however, Frazier is more interested in capturing Inman's reaction *to the danger than in providing a dramatic resolution to the book—i.e., he's more focused on how Inman has changed over the course of the novel than on killing off Teague in an entertaining way.*

Inman looks up and sees the third horseman, Birch, riding away into the forest. Inman takes his rifle and chases the horseman. As Inman tries to get a good look at his opponent, he realizes that Birch is really a boy—not even old enough to shave his face. The trees become so thick that the Home Guard rider can no longer ride away—he's trapped. Inman raises his gun and tells Birch to drop his weapon. He wants an excuse to save the boy's life, he insists.

The most important sign of Inman's changing personality comes here, when Inman refuses to kill the final guardsman, even though he has every advantage over his young opponent. The "old Inman"—the Inman who killed Junior—probably would have killed Birch. And yet Inman now seems to have embraced mercy instead of revenge.

Instead of obeying Inman, Birch tries to bolt away on his horse. Almost immediately, the horse gets tangled in the trees, and Birch falls off. He reaches for his pistol, but Inman yells for him to drop it at once. Instead of responding, Birch "moves his hand" and suddenly, Inman falls to the ground.

After a novel of defying death and cheating the odds, Inman's luck catches up with him. Ironically, he partly dies because he makes the conscious choice to spare the life of the person who eventually murders him—one could even say that Inman sacrifices his own life to save Birch's. No matter what, this ending is tragic in both its irony and in the sparse, disconnected way Frazier describes it.

Meanwhile, Ada and Ruby are walking back to their farm when they hear gunshots. Stobrod comes running toward them, and explains that the Home Guard ambushed them. Ruby, Ada, and Stobrod rush toward the gunshot sounds. By the time they're close by, the boy has already gathered his horses and ridden off, leaving dead bodies on the ground.

Inman, the protagonist of one "half" of the novel, is suddenly gone. The question now becomes, how will Ada live her life without him, given that she had just planned to start a new life with Inman by her side?

Ada looks through the woods, and eventually comes to Inman, lying on the ground. Ada allows Inman to rest his head in her lap. The scene is almost peaceful, the narrator notes—so peaceful that one would be tempted to imagine an alternate world in which Inman and Ada live together as a married couple for many decades.

In this scene, we come full circle—Inman's first romantic encounter with Ada occurred when she sat in his lap, years before, and now the roles have reversed. Of course, the narrator makes clear the differences between that idyllic early scene and the present moment: back then, Inman and Ada had a happy future to look forward to; now, they have none.

EPILOGUE: OCTOBER OF 1874

The Epilogue begins, "Even after all this time and three children together, Ada still found them clasping each other at the oddest moments." The Georgia boy—whose name, we finally learn, is Reid—and Ruby have ended up married to each other, with three children who love to play with each other all the time. As the day goes on, a nine-year-old girl also runs up to Ada and addresses her as "mama." Ada embraces the child.

The ambiguous first sentence of the Epilogue almost tricks us into thinking that Inman has survived and married Ada after all. But in fact, it's Ruby who's gotten married—rather ironically, considering that she's always been fiercely independent, and leery of men. And yet there's one reminder of Inman left in Black Cove: Ada's child. Judging by her age, we can guess that Inman is the child's father (the child was probably conceived just before Inman's death).

Ada has spent the last decade enjoying the beauty of the natural world. Working her farm with Ruby has taught her to love the stars, the trees, and the soil. In the evening, Stobrod plays the **fiddle** for Ada, Reid, Ruby, and all four children. As the night goes on, Ada reads to the children, and slowly they get sleepy. While Ada reads, the narrator notes that she has trouble turning the pages: she's long since lost the tip of one finger chopping wood. Tomorrow, Ada thinks to herself, will be a long, demanding day—just like the others.

In the end, we see that Ada and Ruby do succeed in building a new community for themselves. This certainly doesn't mean that Ada forgets about Inman—on the contrary, the understated nature of this epilogue suggests that Ada thinks of Inman, her lover, all the time, not least because she's raising the child she conceived with him. Furthermore, the "wound" Ada sustains (her missing fingertip), seems to signal that Inman's tragic death left its mark on her life in ways both physical and emotional. Nevertheless, because she's inspired by the task of caring for her farm and her child, Ada refuses to wallow in the past: she devotes herself to living here and now, working on her farm, loving her child, and listening to Stobrod's beautiful fiddle music. As Ada has already said, strength and happiness are acts of will: she simply refuses to spend the rest of her life moping over Inman. We the readers might weep for Inman's death, but Ada does not.

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