

# Herland



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born on July 3, 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut. Charlotte's father, Frederic Beecher Perkins, abandoned her, her mother, and her older brother when Charlotte was very young, leaving the family impoverished. Still, Charlotte was able to go to school sporadically and enjoyed spending her free time in the local library. When Charlotte was 24, she married Charles Walter Stetson and the two had their only child, Katharine Beecher Stetson, the next year. Following Katharine's birth, Charlotte entered a deep depression and was given the infamous "rest cure" that would inspire her famous short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." Eventually, Charlotte took the unusual step of separating from her husband, ultimately divorcing him in 1894. Charlotte and her daughter moved to Pasadena, California, but Charlotte sent Katharine back to Charles when he married his second wife. In Pasadena, Charlotte became involved women's rights activism, which can be felt throughout many of her fictional works. After living in Pasadena for several years, Charlotte moved back east. She met her cousin, Houghton Gilman, and the two married in 1900. They never had children together and, in 1922, Houghton died suddenly. After Houghton's death, Gilman moved back to Pasadena, where her daughter was living. Gilman continued to write until 1935 when a doctor diagnosed her with incurable breast cancer. Bereft and unwilling to endure the pain late-stage cancer would cause, Charlotte chose to end her life by suicide several months later, on August 17, 1935.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Herland* was first published in serial form in 1915, less than one year after the beginning of World War I and two years before the United States became involved in the war. The emphasis on peace, cooperation, and humanity found in *Herland* reflects the desires of many Americans who feared what the raging war in Europe meant for their own families. As an active women's rights advocate, Gilman was also aware of the rising fame of Margaret Sanger (the founder of Planned Parenthood), who was prosecuted for passing out literature on contraception under the Comstock law (which prohibited giving out contraceptive information) in 1914. Gilman explores women's reproductive control and its benefits throughout *Herland*. Furthermore, Gilman was active at the height of the American women's suffrage movement, which opposed traditional views of women as unequal to men and, in 1920, successfully won

women the right to vote.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*Herland* was followed by a sequel, *With Her in Ourland*, which picks up the story of Van and Ellador immediately following their departure from Herland. As a work of utopian fiction, *Herland* has roots in Sir Thomas More's sociopolitical work [Utopia](#), in which More created an ideal world characterized by equality and peace. Like *Herland*, Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* portrays an idyllic world populated entirely by women. However, the women in de Pizan's work are taken from real life and include some of the most famous and accomplished female artists, thinkers, and humanists in history. Rider Haggard's Victorian work of imperialist fiction *She* involves an expedition (much like the one in *Herland*) to a remote civilization that is ruled over by a powerful and mysterious sorceress called She-who-must-be-obeyed. Motherhood is one of the most important elements of Herlandian society, and, in a similar thematic vein, Amy Tan's [The Joy Luck Club](#) focuses on the relationships between several Chinese women and their daughters. *Herland* is also one of many notable works exploring marriage in Western culture—for instance, George Gissing's *The Odd Women* examines gender roles in Victorian marriage and the lives of women who reject those roles, choosing an unmarried life instead.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Herland
- **When Written:** 1915
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** 1915 in serial form, 1979 as a book
- **Literary Period:** Early modernism
- **Genre:** Feminist science fiction, utopian fiction
- **Setting:** Herland
- **Climax:** Terry tries to rape Alima and is expelled from Herland
- **Antagonist:** Terry O. Nicholson
- **Point of View:** First-person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Famous Family.** After being abandoned by her father, Charlotte Perkins Gilman spent time living with some nearby aunts. One of these aunts was none other than Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

**Limited Education.** For one of the most important feminist

writers of the 20th century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman had a surprisingly limited education. By the time she left school at 15, she had been to seven different schools and had only accumulated four years' worth of formal education.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Vandyck "Van" Jennings says that the following events are written from his own memories, since he lost the detailed notebooks and pictures taken in Herland itself. Van states that he is going to do his best to describe the country without his old notes because the world needs to know what life there is like.

Van writes that the real adventure begins when he, Terry O. Nicholson, and Jeff Margrave are on an expedition unrelated to Herland. Their guide tells them that there is a mysterious country hidden in the wilderness that is comprised entirely of women and their daughters, with no men or boys; however, all the native men who have tried to find the land disappear without a trace. The guide brings them to a river that has evidence of red and blue dye that the guide claims is coming from the land of women. Thirsty for adventure and tantalized by the idea of a country full of women, Terry suggests to Van and Jeff that they should go back to America, prepare for a long expedition, and return to the area to find the mysterious women. Jeff, who believes that a country of women sounds like a utopia, and Van, who is intrigued and wants to study the sociology of an all-female society, both agree with Terry's plan.

The men return to America and Terry, who is extremely wealthy, arranges to have a plane and motorboat bring them back to the unnamed jungle where Herland is rumored to be. The men find the river of dye and follow it as far as they can before having to leave the boat and prepare to fly over the mountains. Terry is an experienced pilot, so he flies himself, Van, and Jeff over the mountains. From the sky, the men can see miles of **forests**, well-developed towns, and even people down below. Terry lands the plane and the men hide it as best as they can in the forest. While the men prepare to explore the country by foot, they talk to each other about what they've seen so far. They theorize that the towns are so well developed that there *must* be men somewhere, although they might live in another part of the country. As it is, the only people the men were able to see from the sky were women.

The three men walk through the forest, closely inspecting the trees. Jeff and Terry realize that every single tree is growing either fruit or nuts and that the land has been very carefully cultivated so that it is producing the maximum amount of food that it can without being overburdened. In fact, the forest is more like a giant garden than a wilderness. The men remain wary, fearing that there must be men ready to protect all the women with violence if they have to. As they walk through the

forest, Terry hears stifled giggling coming from somewhere nearby. Looking around, the men notice three figures watching them from the branches of a large tree. The men carefully begin climbing the tree and stop when they are within talking distance of the women. Terry introduces himself, Jeff, and Van by pointing at each and saying their names. One of the women does the same, introducing herself as Ellador and her companions as Alima and Celis. The women refuse to let the men any closer, so Terry holds out a bright necklace to Alima. Van realizes Terry's plan is to grab Alima as soon as she gets close to the necklace, but the plan fails when Alima deftly grabs the necklace and drops from the tree before Terry can grab her. The women take off running and are soon out of reach. Pulling out their binoculars, the men see the women entering the closest city and start walking there.

When they enter the city, they notice that it is clean and well-maintained. Before they get far, however, a group of middle-aged women that Terry calls "the Colonels" surrounds them. Jeff, Van, and Terry follow the women to a large gray building. The men become alarmed and decide to fight back and make a run for freedom rather than be taken prisoner. It doesn't take long for them to be overpowered, but in the process Terry shoots his gun twice and a cry from one of the women is heard. The Colonels place anesthetic rags over Terry, Jeff, and Van's faces, which makes them fall asleep. When they wake up, they are in a large room with comfortable beds. They get up together and look around the room, discovering a bathroom with all of their toiletries inside and a closet full of **Herlandian clothes**, although their own clothes are missing. The men decide to wash up and get dressed before trying to find a way out of their room. The clothes (constituting a one-piece undergarment, stockings, and knee-length tunics) are very comfortable and have numerous pockets, much to the men's surprise. After getting dressed, they knock on the only locked door in the room. The door opens into a large dining hall full of tables, chairs, and sofas. There is plenty of food and 18 women are waiting for them. Each man is placed at his own table opposite a middle-aged woman who gives him a book, evidently designed to teach the men the Herlandian language and for the men to teach the women English.

Over the next few weeks, Jeff, Van, and Terry are given daily lessons by the women who gave them their books. These women—Somel, Moadine, and Zava—are tutors who also teach the men Herlandian history, religion, and culture. The tutors also ask the men to teach them about the world outside of Herland. After several weeks, however, Terry becomes restless and insists on trying to escape. One night, the men make a long rope out of their clothes and bedsheets and use it to escape out of their window and over the garden wall below. After traveling through the country by night and sleeping by day for several days, the men find their plane. However, it has been covered by a tough cloth that they can't cut through without knives.

Suddenly, Alima, Celis, and Ellador appear a short distance away, giggling while they watch the men try to tear the cloth. Having learned some of the Herlandian language, Van and Terry try to get the women to give them a knife so they can fly their plane away. Alima, Celis, and Ellador refuse and run away when the men desperately lunge at them to steal their knives. The Colonels appear and take the men back to the fortress. The men are surprised that they are not punished for running away, but rather treated like truant children. Their tutors explain that if the men learn the language and promise not to hurt anyone, they will be allowed to go around the country and meet everyone. With this in mind, the men rededicate themselves to their lessons.

In bits and pieces, Van, Jeff, and Terry learn that there have been no men in Herland in over 2,000 years. Before that, the country had a lot of men, an army, a king, and access to the sea. However, wars, a volcanic eruption that cut the country off from the rest of the world, and a slave uprising led to the deaths of all the men in the country, leaving the women stranded and forced to rebuild the cities themselves. After 10 years of rebuilding and cultivating the land, one woman mysteriously became pregnant. She had one daughter and then, over the years, four more daughters. These girls were raised and loved by the whole community. When the girls grew up, each of them also had five daughters. This pattern continued for the next 2,000 years. Motherhood became a sacred calling and every woman looked forward to giving birth, which also motivated the women to make improvements to their society that would last from one generation to the next. However, they soon realized that they would have to limit population growth or else there would be too many people to feed. Having cultivated every available inch of their land, the ancient Herlandians decided that the country could support about three million people, which meant each woman could only have one child from then on (although some women, called Over Mothers, were given special permission to have a second child). The Herlandians learn to prevent pregnancies by focusing their physical and mental energy on work as soon as they begin experiencing the feeling of exultation that indicates their body is trying to create a child. When a child is born, the entire community comes together to educate and care for her. This process of reproduction is called parthenogenesis (or “virgin birth”) and only results in daughters, never sons. The women establish a religion based on motherhood and make a continuous conscious effort to improve their society to ensure its sustainability for centuries to come.

In exchange for information about Herland, Jeff, Van, and Terry tell their tutors about life in the rest of the world, especially America. The women always take notes and, as the men find out later, they also keep charts about topics the men avoid talking about. The men frequently find themselves embarrassed to share certain details of social conditions in America because

they are frequently inferior to conditions in Herland, where wars, poverty, and disease have been eliminated. The condition of American women is particularly interesting to Somel, Zava, and Moadine, especially as the men reveal that women are kept in the home and expected to raise children while men do all of the public work. Soon, Jeff, Terry, and Van are invited to travel across the country and give lectures about world history and culture to classes of girls and young women.

During their tour of the country, Jeff, Van, and Terry again meet Celis, Alima, and Ellador. Friendship between them soon turns to courtship: Jeff worships Celis, Terry falls madly in love with Alima (although the two of them frequently argue), and Van’s friendship with Ellador slowly ripens into deep romantic love. Courting Herlandian women, however, proves to be a struggle—there are no gender roles to dictate behavior and the women themselves have never experienced sexual attraction and struggle to understand why the men do. Eventually, the three couples get married, but marriage proves even more difficult than courtship. Ellador doesn’t understand Van’s desire to have sex, saying that she can only do it if she feels like it is useful, namely when they are consciously creating a child. Van is initially annoyed by this but agrees to wait until she’s ready. Celis and Jeff, however, do have sex and Celis becomes the first woman of Herland to become pregnant by a man in 2,000 years. Terry becomes enraged with Alima because she refuses to start a sexual relationship with him. One night, he hides in her room and attempts to rape her, believing that if he does then she will become submissive to his desires. However, Alima fights back and calls for help, Terry is taken prisoner, and the women decide Terry must leave Herland forever. Van and Ellador decide to return to America with Terry so that Ellador can explore the outside world. All three of them promise not to reveal the location of Herland until (and if) Ellador returns with a thorough report of life outside their peaceful country.



## CHARACTERS

**Vandyck “Van” Jennings** – Vandyck Jennings is the narrator and protagonist, called Van by all characters. Van is a sociologist who enjoys going on adventures with Jeff Margrave and Terry O. Nicholson so that he can study primitive societies. Van decides to go with Terry and Jeff to discover the whereabouts of the legendary Herland because he sees it as a unique opportunity to study the sociology of a community that (allegedly) is made up entirely of women, although Van initially doubts that it’s possible for any “civilized” society to exist without men. Upon discovering Herland and being imprisoned by the Colonels, Van seizes the opportunity to learn more about the Herlandians and rapidly develops a sense of friendship with his assigned tutor, Somel. As Van becomes more proficient in the Herlandian language, he and Somel discuss the importance of motherhood in Herlandian culture, Somel

describes her civilization's history, and Van gives Somel some insight into what life outside of Herland is like. Later, when Van and the other men are given more freedom, Van begins courting Ellador, a young Herlandian he met when he first arrived in the country. The Herlandians were eager to reinstate a bi-sexual community and so encourage the three men (the first they had seen in over 2,000 years) to select a mate: Van chooses Ellador, Terry chooses Alima, and Jeff chooses Celis. Although the Herlandians haven't practiced marriage throughout their long history, the men show them how to conduct a traditional Christian ceremony. After their marriage, Ellador and Van struggle to find common ground—Van initially wants a traditional Western marriage and Ellador opposes the idea of fulfilling a submissive, passive role. Ultimately, Van and Ellador reach an understanding and Ellador chooses to go with Van to America after Terry is expelled from Herland. Van represents the cold, scientific attitude many male academics and scientists had towards women, especially at the time the novel was written—they saw them as objects to be studied rather than as full people.

**Jeff Margrave** – Jeff is one of the three American explorers who discover Herland. Jeff is a doctor by trade, but Van describes him as having the heart of a poet: he is romantic, idealizes women, and is brimming with chivalry. For Jeff, Herland is clearly a utopia full of beauty, love, and wholesomeness. Jeff stands in stark contrast with Terry, who is a womanizer and full of lust, and Van, who is coldly scientific. Jeff looks forward to discovering a nation full of women because he believes it will be an ideal, gentle, peaceful society, free from the violence and cold ambition that characterized America in the early 20th century. While the men are imprisoned in Herland, Jeff is assigned Zava as a tutor and the two of them genuinely enjoy each other's company. In conversations about American culture, Jeff is frequently the one who highlights the most negative aspects of it, such as the high prevalence of poverty and the mistreatment of women. Jeff courts and eventually marries Celis, one of the first young Herlandian women he met. Jeff and Celis are the only one of the three couples (the others being Van and Ellador, and Terry and Alima) to consummate their marriage, thus making Celis the first Herlandian woman to become pregnant by a man in over 2,000 years. In the end, Jeff decides to stay in Herland while Terry, Ellador, and Van go back to America after Terry is expelled from the country. Jeff embodies the early 20th century view of women as helpless, weak creatures who needed to be protected and even worshipped by men—Jeff himself is often described a “born worshipper.”

**Terry O. Nicholson** – Terry is one of the three American explorers who discover Herland. Terry is a wealthy and privileged womanizer who believes that he, Jeff, and Van will be “Hailed as deliverers” by the women of Herland. Of the three men, Terry is the least happy with what they find in

Herland—not only are they held prisoner by the middle-aged Colonels, but none of the women show any sexual interest in him at all. Terry formulates a failed plan to escape and frequently yells at his tutor, Moadine, for preventing him from enjoying the company of younger Herlandian women. When the men are allowed to meet the younger women, Terry is upset because all of them reject his efforts to flirt with them. Eventually, Terry begins a tumultuous courtship with Alima, one of the first women he talked to in Herland. Alima is as strong-willed and opinionated as Terry, so the two frequently fight, break up, and then get back together until they finally get married. After they are married, Terry becomes enraged by the fact that Alima won't have sex with him. He tells the other men that all women like being “mastered” shortly before trying to rape Alima—an action he thinks will force her to be submissive to him from then on. Instead, Alima fights back and calls for help, and Terry is kept prisoner in a small room with a garden. It is finally decided that Terry has to leave Herland, which he readily agrees to. He brings Ellador and Van to help him glide their plane off the mountain Herland sits on and they all go back to America together. Terry symbolizes the misogynistic attitudes many 20th century men had towards women—he sees them as objects to possess and becomes furious when he finds that the women of Herland have none of the submissive, passive qualities that he believes any “real” woman would naturally have.

**Ellador** – Ellador is the young Herlandian woman who marries Van. Ellador is one of the few children of an Over Mother (a woman who is given special permission to have more than one child). Ellador stands out from many of the other women for her intelligence and openness. She is stunningly beautiful and unfailingly kind and patient. Ellador tells Van about Herlandian religion and the education of children, and after hearing about American customs from Van she becomes increasingly interested in leaving Herland to learn more about the rest of the world. After her marriage to Van, Ellador struggles to understand why American women have sex with their husbands for any reason other than to create a child. Because of this, Ellador asks Van not to ask her to have sex with him until they are both ready to have a child, which is something Van struggles with but ultimately agrees to. After Terry is told to leave Herland as a consequence for trying to rape Alima, Ellador decides to leave with him and Van.

**Celis** – Celis is the Herlandian woman who marries Jeff. Celis is frequently bewildered by Jeff's evident adoration of her and rebuffs his attempts to treat her as weak or in need of protection. Aside from this, Celis and Jeff fall deeply in love with each other and become the only couple (the others being Ellador and Van, and Terry and Alima) to consummate their marriage. Celis is also the first woman in Herland to get pregnant by a man in over 2,000 years and is therefore treated with extreme reverence and kindness. Terry, Ellador, and Van



leave Herland before the birth of Celis's child, but Jeff decides to stay with her in Herland.

**Alima** – Alima is the Herlandian woman who marries Terry. Like Terry, Alima is strong and passionate. Unlike Terry, Alima's passion does not take the form of lust and after their marriage, the two frequently argue about her unwillingness to have sex with him. Eventually, Terry and Alima fight so much that she asks Moadine (Terry's former tutor) to stay in a room near her for protection and Alima stops spending time with Terry. One night, however, Terry sneaks into Alima's room and hides. When Alima comes in, Terry tries to rape her in order to make her more submissive to his desires. Alima fights back and calls for help, Terry is taken away, and the Herlandians decide to expel him from Herland. Despite this, Van says Terry is madly in love with Alima and becomes heartbroken when Alima refuses to say goodbye to him. That last thing the characters hear about Alima is that she moved to the northern part of the country to get away from Terry.

**Somel** – Somel is Van's tutor in Herland. Shortly after Van, Terry, and Jeff are taken to the fortress in Herland, Somel is assigned to teach Van how to read, write, and speak the Herlandian language as well as to learn English herself. Van and Somel get along very well because they are both highly inquisitive and eager to learn from one another. Even after the men are released from the fortress, Somel and Van maintain a steady friendship and Somel visits him shortly before his marriage to Ellador. Somel also teaches Van about Herlandian culture, history, and traditions.

**Moadine** – Moadine is Terry's tutor in Herland. Moadine is assigned to teach Terry the Herlandian language and to learn English from him. They also discuss Herlandian culture and American culture, and Terry frequently asks her when he will be allowed to visit the younger women. Even though Terry is often blustery and frequently yells at Moadine, she is unfailingly patient and kind with him. Alima asks Moadine to stay near her after her marriage to Terry turns sour due to her refusal to submit to his sexual desires. When Terry tries to rape Alima, it is Moadine who ties him up and has him carried to a makeshift prison cell.

**Zava** – Zava is Jeff's tutor in Herland. Zava is assigned to teach Jeff about Herlandian language and culture, as well as to learn about the English language and American culture from Jeff. Zava and Jeff get along well because Jeff sees her as a mother figure and is prone to idealizing all women.

**The Colonels** – The Colonels are a group of middle-aged Herlandian women who enforce peace and keep an eye on Jeff, Terry, and Van. The Colonels always appear when there is trouble with the three men. They are very strong, organized, and stern, which repulses Terry because he expects all women to be weak and submissive. After Terry's imprisonment, the Colonels are the ones who guard his cell.



## 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.



### WOMANHOOD AND FEMININITY

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist utopia novel *Herland* follows three American men—Van (the narrator), Jeff, and Terry—in the early 1910s as they discover and learn about the legendary Herland, an ancient civilization made up entirely of women who have not seen any men or other outsiders in over 2,000 years. The three men learn of Herland from natives in a mysterious and largely unmapped country; these natives claim that there is a dangerous country full of women and that men who go to find it disappear without a trace. After making the necessary preparations and armed with the latest technology (namely an airplane that can take them over the mountains that protect Herland), the three men successfully discover this lost civilization. However, the women there are not the timid, submissive, weak, and primitive creatures they expected, nor are the men themselves treated as the conquering heroes they imagined themselves to be. Through Jeff and Van's changing beliefs about womanhood—and Terry's refusal to change his own beliefs—Gilman argues that society's belief that women are inherently inferior to men is based on socially constructed ideas of femininity and does not reflect women's natural abilities and characteristics.

Van, Jeff, and Terry each harbor distinct ideas of what type of womanhood they will find in Herland. However, all of their beliefs are based on the assumption that the women of Herland will naturally possess all the same ideal qualities of femininity that women in American do. Terry is a wealthy and adventurous womanizer brimming with "intense masculinity." He believes that "There never was a woman yet that did not enjoy being mastered," and thus that the women of Herland will prove submissive to his sexual desires. Jeff is a doctor with the heart of a poet. According to Van, Jeff "idealized women, and was always looking for a chance to 'protect' or to 'serve' them," highlighting Jeff's perception of women as weak and helpless. Van, a sociologist, does not look forward to any kind of romantic or sexual conquests in Herland. With his "airs of sociological superiority," Van believes that women are incapable of creating a "civilized" society without men's help and hopes to study these women as inferior objects rather than as fully developed people.

Once they arrive in Herland and begin to learn more about the women there, however, it becomes clear to the men that the

women there do not conform to traditional Western ideals of femininity. The women of Herland challenge their definitions of femininity and traditional beliefs about women's natural inferiority. When the men first enter a Herlandian town, they are surrounded by a group of stern older women who forcibly carry them off to a fortress. Van describes them as "uncomfortably strong women," which challenges Jeff's beliefs that women are naturally weak and helpless. After failing to captivate the younger women, Terry declares that "these women aren't *womanly*." By this he means that the Herlandian women are not as submissive nor as flirtatious as he assumed they would be when the men began the expedition. Van, however, is pleasantly surprised by the "sociological achievements" of Herland. In fact, he accepts "Herland life as normal" and life in 20th-century America as "abnormal," proving that women *do* have the practical and intellectual abilities to maintain a "civilized society" despite Van's initial prediction.

Although Terry remains stuck in his narrow definition of femininity, Jeff and Van both learn that their beliefs surrounding womanhood and femininity are actually social constructs that defy rather than comply with nature. Entering Herland, all three men had an "easy air of superiority" that made them feel as if they could impose their will and desires on the women. This attitude leads to Terry's attempted rape of his Herlandian wife, Alima, and his expulsion from Herland. Terry's inability to change his perception of women as inferior stands in stark contrast to the realization both Jeff and Van come to: "those 'feminine charms' we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity." In other words, what they considered natural femininity in women was actually a façade that women put on in order to "please [men] because they had to." Jeff decides to stay in Herland, and Van brings a Herlandian wife back to America, highlighting both men's acceptance of Herland's brand of femininity. By the time Van leaves, he notes that he became "well used to seeing women not as females but as people." This means that Van now accepts women as naturally equal rather than naturally inferior objects to be studied—they are not just inferior "females" but "people" just like himself.

Gilman created the country of Herland to prove that women are not naturally inferior to men and that popular conceptions of femininity are not rooted in biological fact. The success of Herland as a society proves that the only thing holding women back from achieving the same (if not better) things as men are the social restrictions that men have placed upon them.



## GENDER ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* is about a utopian society entirely composed of women and girls. When three male explorers (Van, Terry, and Jeff) enter Herland and begin learning about the history of the Herlandian people, they learn that the women have existed

without men for over 2,000 years. With thousands of years and dozens of generations standing between the women of Herland and experience with heterosexual relationships, the Herlandians have peacefully existed without concern for gender roles or romantic relationships. However, the appearance of the three men makes it possible to reestablish the existence of opposite-sex relationships. To that end, Jeff and Celis, Terry and Alima, and Van and Ellador get married. However, it isn't long before the newlyweds are forced to confront their very different lifestyles: the women wish to preserve the egalitarian spirit that characterizes Herlandian culture within their marriages, while the men expect their new wives to take on traditional Western gender roles; that is, to become submissive and passive. Van and Jeff adapt their beliefs about marriage to fit the expectations of their wives and thus enjoy happy marriages; Terry, however, tries to force Alima into a submissive role by attempting to rape her and is consequently expelled from Herland. In *Herland*, Gilman argues that by abolishing traditional gender roles and practices, men and women can enjoy happier and more equitable relationships.

The three American men enter their respective relationships with the assumption that they, as the stronger sex, will fulfill certain roles (such as protectors) while the women will limit their roles to wives and mothers. One day, while Jeff and Celis are walking in the woods, Jeff insists on carrying Celis's basket because, as he explains, "We assume that motherhood is a sufficient burden—that men should carry all the others." While this comment certainly recognizes the towering difficulties associated with motherhood and respects that role, this comment also tacitly implies that married women are limited to the role of mothers—they can no longer work or engage in an active life too far outside the confines of their homes because it is too much of a "burden." However, Van realizes that because the Herlandians had been cut off from men for so long, they had grown up with nothing to fear and "therefore no need of protection." As men, Van, Jeff, and Terry assumed they would take on the role of protectors, but because the women don't need protection the men are unable to fulfill what they consider a vital role in a "normal" relationship. This calls into question whether the women can be reasonably expected to fulfill their assigned role if the men cannot, opening the door to the possibility of a new kind of relationship based on choice and equality rather than the restrictions of traditional gender roles.

Another element of traditional gender roles in relationships that the American men and Herlandian women confront is the question of last names. Terry, whose views are representative of the possessive element of traditional Western marriage, explains that "A wife is the woman who belongs to the man." Because of this, the woman takes the man's last name, thus showing *who* she belongs to and highlighting the commonly held belief that men take ownership of women upon marrying them. When she hears this, Alima exclaims, "Then she just loses

[her name] and takes a new one—how unpleasant!” In calling this arrangement “unpleasant,” Alima highlights how unfair traditional gender roles appear from an outsider’s perspective.

After their respective marriages, the three men hope and expect that their wives will simply fall into traditional gender roles, especially in regards to sex. Instead, the men are forced to make a decision: either force their wills on their wives or adapt to a marriage based on equality and choice rather than possession and dominance. Van writes about traditional marriage in Western culture, saying, “The woman may have imagined the conditions of married life to be different; but what she imagined, was ignorant of, or might have preferred did not seriously matter.” This means that women are expected to surrender themselves completely to their husbands and husbands are allowed to do whatever they want with their wives. Terry eventually becomes enraged with Alima for not having sex with him after their marriage and tries to rape her, but he’s stopped and sentenced to expulsion from Herland. With this, Herland firmly rejects the notion that husbands own their wives and are therefore justified in using force to fulfill their sexual desires. Unlike Terry, Van finds happiness in his marriage *because* he decides to be with Ellador “on [her] own terms,” which includes not having sex until she is comfortable with the idea. This abolishes one of the central gender roles in a traditional marriage—the idea that wives must surrender themselves to their husband’s will—and instead establishes equality between Van and Ellador, which leads to her final decision to go to America with Van.

Van, Jeff, and Terry all marry Herlandian women with the expectation that their wives will simply and naturally fall into their prescribed gender roles. Even before their marriages, however, Celis, Alima, and Ellador reject American gender roles and traditional practices, calling attention to how meaningless they are and challenging the belief that gender roles are natural. This rejection opens the door to a new kind of marriage—one based on trust, equality, and choice.



## COMMUNITY

In *Herland*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman creates a world full of women who work together for the common good. The Herlandian women are constantly looking to the future, trying to find ways of improving it for the next generation. Rather than losing their individuality in the pursuit of this common goal, however, Herlandian women actually find individual happiness and fulfillment in the idea that they are creating a safe, progressive, and happy community for their daughters and granddaughters. This is something that Van, Jeff, and Terry (20th-century American explorers) have a difficult time wrapping their heads around because they come from a culture in which individual ambition is considered more important than collective progress. In describing Herland, Gilman provides a compelling

illustration of the potential a community has for universal happiness and peace when citizens work together for the common good instead of focusing on individual gain.

In Herland, poverty has been eliminated and every individual citizen enjoys a high standard of living as a result of their dedication to making life better for everyone. When Van, Terry, and Jeff explain that some women in America work because they are poor, their tutors ask them, “What is *poor*, exactly?” This question implies that poverty is not something that Herlandians are faced with, meaning all the women there live comfortably and with far greater security than those in America. In describing the appearance of Herlandian towns, Van writes that “Everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all.” The beauty, order, and “sense of home” reflects Herlandians’ collective belief that the entire country is their home and should therefore be treated and maintained as such. In Herland, the three men find “a land in a perfect state of cultivation” in which every plant bears edible food. The evident work that had to go into cultivating the land so well is further evidence of the community’s dedication to ensuring all its citizens’ needs are being met.

In Herland, children are seen as “the most precious part of the *nation*” (emphasis added), which is why children’s education is considered a community-wide effort and is geared toward “mak[ing] the best kind of people” to ensure continued happiness for the community as a whole. Van writes that “[Children] were People, too, from the first.” This means that children are not treated as inferior beings to be talked down to, but as people deserving of respect; by doing this, the Herlandians prepare their children to treat other children (and, later, adults) the same way. In preparing children for the future, the Herlandians also believe that “real growth lay [...] through education.” However, this doesn’t just mean education in hard facts—personal growth is also encouraged through social education in which the whole community plays a part. By the time Herlandian children reach adulthood, “what one kn[ows], all kn[ow], to a very considerable extent.” This means that equal education in childhood results in greater equality in adulthood, which helps promote a sense of unity and oneness that is then passed on to the next generation.

Throughout their 2,000-year history, the Herlandians’ primary focus was on creating conditions conducive to long-term sustainability. As Jeff, Van, and Terry discover, the most important reason for Herland’s success lies in the sense of community that exists throughout the land. Van writes of the children of Herland, “They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together—not by competition, but by united action.” By discouraging competition in favor of “united action,” Herlandians eliminate societal divisions that occur as a result of conflicting individual interests. When the three men arrive in Herland, they find that the country’s “most conspicuous

feature” is the “evident unanimity of these women.” This highlights the universal agreement on important decisions that exists in Herland as a result of their sense of unity. Moadine explains the motivation to work for the benefit of future generations rather than immediate personal benefit by saying, “You see, we are *Mothers*.” The Herlandians, then, have a deep, selfless, abiding love for the next generation because of their own motherhood—in making a better future for their individual children, they also seek to make a better future for *all* children.

There is no doubt that Herland is a successful community: poverty has been eliminated, universal education ensures equality from one generation to the next, and there is a true sense of unity and kinship between individual citizens. All of this, as the American men learn, is due to the fact that every individual Herlandian values the future of the entire community over individual gain, thus highlighting the importance of fostering a sense of community in ensuring the long-term success of a country.



## MOTHERHOOD AND REPRODUCTIVE CONTROL

As a society full of women, Herland is also a society full of mothers. As Gilman explains in her novel

*Herland*, Herlandian women reproduce through a process called parthenogenesis in which an ovum develops into a baby without being fertilized by a man’s sperm. Motherhood is considered sacred and giving birth is the most important part of any Herlandian woman’s life, although they are only allowed to reproduce once unless they receive special permission. When three men—Americans named Terry, Van, and Jeff—discover Herland, they struggle to understand the importance the Herlandians place on motherhood. The men ultimately learn that motherhood is the reason for Herland’s success—the maternal love that Herlandians feel for their own children extends to all children, and thus they selflessly work to improve their world for their daughters and their daughters’ daughters. Motherhood in Herland is starkly contrasted with motherhood in America in the 20th century, as Gilman explores the importance of women having control over their reproductive lives on both the personal and national levels.

American motherhood as described by Terry, Van, and Jeff is fraught with stress and frequently comes at a great personal cost. The primary reason for this is that American mothers have very limited control over their reproductive lives. Van describes American motherhood as “involuntary fecundity” in which mothers are “forced to fill and overflow the land.” Without any socially acceptable and safe forms of birth control, American women—particularly married ones—have virtually no control over how often they have babies. Unfortunately, it is the lower-class women who are most burdened by an overabundance of children, as shown by Jeff’s observation that “the poorer [women are], the more children they ha[ve].” This only

perpetuates poverty from one generation to the next as impoverished mothers are unable to give their children adequate education, ample food, or opportunities for advancement. For women of the middle or upper classes, motherhood “[keeps] them in the home.” This means that once a woman—even a more affluent one—becomes a mother, she has to give up all other personal ambition or an active life in the public or professional sphere.

In Herland, however, women have complete control over their reproductive lives and limit the number of children they each have to one (or two in special cases). This not only makes motherhood more precious and desirable, but also encourages the whole community to take an active role in raising the children. Early in their history, Herlandians realized that overpopulation could create a burden on their country that would lead to poverty, hunger, illness, and even war. For them, limiting reproduction was key in preventing these things from happening and thus creating a happier and more sustainable community. Furthermore, reproductive control helps Herlandians become “Conscious Makers of People.” Thanks to reproductive control, motherhood is planned for—a conscious decision that one does not feel compelled to make, and therefore is a positive thing instead of a burden.

What’s more, the culture of Herland is portrayed as overwhelmingly positive *because* motherhood is a conscious decision instead of something women are forced into by a lack of reproductive control. In fact, reproductive control and limiting population growth is the primary reason for the happiness of Herlandians. Even though many women want to have more children, the choice not to benefits everyone, especially the children. This is shown in Somel’s statement that “the reason our children are [...] so fully loved, by all of us, is that we never [...] have enough of our own,” meaning that the collective love and devotion of the entire community is funneled into the care of all the children, instead of just a select few at the top tiers of society. Van notes that in America “children [...] constitute about three-fifths of the population; with [Herlandians], only about one-third.” The overwhelming number of children prevents American society from being able to properly care for them, but a lack of reproductive control also prevents Americans from limiting population growth the way Herlandians do. Because Herlandians were able to check population growth relatively early in their history, their present community is able to thrive: there is enough food for everyone, nobody struggles with poverty, education is universally accessible, and no child is considered a burden. This sends a powerful message to readers about the profound benefits access to contraception can have for individual women, their families, and entire communities.





## SYMBOLS

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



## HERLANDIAN CLOTHES

Herlandian clothes represent the Herlandian culture's dedication to practicality and making the most out of every available resource. A typical Herlandian outfit consists of a soft one-piece undergarment that goes over the knees and shoulders, "a kind of half-hose" that comes over the hem of the one-piece, and knee-length tunics. As Terry, Jeff, and Van discover, these clothes have numerous carefully placed pockets and are designed for maximum comfort and mobility while still looking nice. This runs in direct opposition to the expectations of the men, who believed that a society full of women would have sacrificed practicality in favor of frivolous details and needless embellishments. The pockets on Herlandian clothes serve the double purpose of ornamentation and usefulness: they are placed in such a way that one can reach into them with ease and without feeling restricted by them, but the vibrant stitching on the pockets provides an element of fashionable beauty. Furthermore, the extra fabric used to make the pockets makes the clothes warmer, which is important in the winter months. These garments highlight the fact that the Herlandians have found a way to balance practicality with beauty and comfort with usefulness, rather than sacrificing one for the other.



## THE HERLANDIAN FOREST

The well-kept Herlandian forests symbolize the relationship between Herlandians and nature. When Jeff, Van, and Terry first enter Herland, they are amazed by the fact that seemingly every square inch of forest is actually carefully cultivated, and every tree and bush bears edible fruit and nuts. This shows that the Herlandians maintain a healthy relationship between themselves and nature: they dedicate hours and labor to maintaining and protecting the forest, and in return the forest provides them with ample food throughout the year. Furthermore, the Herlandians do not ask for more from the land than what they need. There are no factories, railroads, over-cultivated land, or needless buildings; nor is there bad air, unclean water, or dead soil. By choosing nature over industrialism, the Herlandians have created a happier and healthier life for themselves. Nature, for the Herlandians, is not an insentient thing that should be exploited, but rather a living part of their community that they work *with* rather than *on*. This is clearly seen in how well the forests are cared for and used.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Yellow Wall-paper, Herland, and Selected Writings* published in 2019.

## Chapter 1: A Not Unnatural Enterprise Quotes


☹☹ Jeff idealized women in the best Southern style. He was full of chivalry and sentiment, and all that. And he was a good boy; he lived up to his ideals.

You might say Terry did, too, if you can call his views about women anything so polite as ideals. I always liked Terry. He was a man's man, very much so, generous and brave and clever; but I don't think any of us in college days was quite pleased to have him with our sisters. We weren't very stringent, heavens no! But Terry was "the limit."

[...]

I held a middle ground, highly scientific, of course, and used to argue learnedly about the physiological limitations of the sex.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings (speaker), Jeff Margrave, Terry O. Nicholson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 12

## Explanation and Analysis

Van describes each man's perspective on women before they reach Herland and get to know the culture, history, and people there. Each man's perspective highlights one of the most typical 20th-century beliefs about women. Jeff's idealization of women reveals that he sees them almost as a different species. He believes women have qualities and characteristics that place them above men in numerous ways. On the other hand, his sense of "chivalry" shows that he simultaneously sees women as weak and in need of men's help and protection. This also puts him, as a man, in a special position as protector of the ethereal creature that is a woman.

Terry is the womanizer of the group. As a "man's man," he embodies the 20th century's beliefs about masculinity. His bravery, strength, and wit make him an ideal companion for other men, but his other masculine traits make him a danger to his companions' sisters. Van reveals that he has always recognized Terry as dangerous to women when he says that most men considered Terry "the limit." This implies that Terry does not treat women as well as he should—he objectifies them and sees them as objects to be used for his own pleasure rather than as people. Other men worry

about Terry being around their sisters because he might take advantage of them sexually and ruin their reputations. Van, however, is almost sexless in his perception of women. He sees them as neither angels to be revered nor objects to be used, but as creatures to be studied. They do not arouse his sense of romance or lust, but rather his pity because they are physiologically inferior to men.

## Chapter 2: Rash Advances Quotes

●● In all our discussions and speculations we had always unconsciously assumed that the women, whatever else they might be, would be young. Most men do think that way, I fancy. “Woman” in the abstract is young, and, we assume, charming. As they get older they pass off the stage, somehow, into private ownership mostly or out of it altogether. But these good ladies were very much on the stage, and yet any one of them might have been a grandmother.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker), The Colonels

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 24

### Explanation and Analysis

When Van, Jeff, and Terry enter one of the cities in Herland, they are surrounded by a bunch of middle-aged women whom Terry calls “Colonels.” The appearance of these women forces the men to confront one of the most obvious misconceptions—that all the women there must be young and beautiful—they had about the women of Herland. This highlights how the men think about women in their own society. Once a woman reaches a certain age, according to Van, she “pass[es] off the stage,” meaning she disappears from men’s notice in public life. In other words, Van is saying that men generally cease to notice women once they are no longer sexually appealing enough to be considered as a potential partner. And women, it’s tacitly understood, must no longer seek to be noticed by men at that point. The Colonels, however, have not done this despite their advanced age—by putting themselves in front of Jeff, Van, and Terry, the Colonels are making themselves noticed. This shows that, in Herlandian culture, age does not determine a woman’s activity in public life.

Van notes that he and other men also generally expect women to be “charming.” That is, men expect women to do things that are appealing to men to secure their notice. The

Colonels are securing the notice of Jeff, Van, and Terry, but they are doing so in a way that conveys their authority in this situation—they do not want to attract the attention of the men for romantic purposes, but rather to make it known that the men are outnumbered and therefore must submit to the will of the women.

●● We seemed to think that if there were men we could fight them, and if there were only women—why, they would be no obstacles at all.

Jeff, with his gentle romantic old-fashioned notions of women as clinging vines; Terry, with his clear decided practical theories that there were two kinds of women—those he wanted and those he didn’t; Desirable and Undesirable was his demarcation. The last was a large class, but negligible—he had never thought about them at all.

And now here they were, in great numbers, evidently indifferent to what he might think, evidently determined on some purpose of their own regarding him, and apparently well able to enforce their purpose.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker), The Colonels, Jeff Margrave, Terry O. Nicholson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 24-25

### Explanation and Analysis

Van highlights how unprepared he, Jeff, and Terry were for their experiences in Herland by emphasizing the fact that they entered the country with the assumption that women wouldn’t put up a fight against them; or, if they did, that the women would be easy to overpower. This is especially apparent in how Jeff and Terry view women. Jeff thinks women are “clinging vines,” by which he means that women naturally attach themselves to men for protection from danger. And Jeff, of course, is supposed to be the man to whom beautiful women cling to for protection. This places women in a position in which they are not able to defend themselves, let alone launch an offensive attack against the men. This means that Jeff is unprepared to see women as opponents and so is doubly surprised by the appearance of the Colonels.

Terry, on the other hand, doesn’t think at all about any woman who’s not sexually appealing—“Undesirable” women simply don’t exist in his mind. As middle-aged women, the Colonels are “Undesirable” by Terry’s standards, and yet their presence is undeniable here. While Terry might be less

averse to the possibility of fighting women than Jeff, he's still taken aback by the fact that his potential opponents do not conform to his definition of "Desirable" after convincing himself that Herland would be full of beautiful young women. Furthermore, Terry is surprised that the Colonels have "some purpose of their own" for him that has nothing to do with what he wants or expects; he's used to imposing his desires on women, rather than the other way around.

## Chapter 5: A Unique History Quotes

☝ "They are a protection," Terry insisted. "They bark if burglars try to get in."

Then she made notes of "burglars" and went on: "because of the love which people bear to this animal."

Zava interrupted here. "Is it the men or the women who love this animal so much?"



"Both!" insisted Terry.

"Equally?" she inquired.

And Jeff said, "Nonsense, Terry—you know men like dogs better than women do—as a whole."

"Because they love it so much—especially men. This animal is kept shut up, or chained."

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings, Jeff Margrave, Zava, Terry O. Nicholson (speaker), Moadine

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 58

### Explanation and Analysis


Jeff, Van, Terry, and their tutors compare how cats are kept as pets in Herland to how dogs are kept as pets in America. After the men tell their tutors that some dogs bite children, the women become interested and want to know all about why the dogs are kept at all. Moadine takes special note of the fact that dogs are used as protection from "burglars." This helps highlight just how unused to crime the women of Herland are. Moadine's note has less to do with the need for dogs as protection from burglars and more to do with the existence of burglars at all. In Herland, everyone has plenty of food, ample clothing, and access to all the comforts of home they could need or want—there is no need for anyone to steal and thus no burglars. The fact that there are burglars in America implies that there are people who do not have all of their needs and wants provided for, calling into question how successful American society really is.

Zava rather bluntly notes that it is out of "love" that American dogs are kept "shut up, or chained," primarily by men. The plight of the dogs, Gilman hints here, is similar to the plight of American wives, as Terry will soon reveal when he says women are both idolized and kept in the home with the children. Like dogs, women are kept "shut up" in their homes, ostensibly because men love them so much. This further implies that when men love something enough, they want to take possession of it, keeping it "shut up, or chained" so it can't escape and so nobody can steal it away.

☝ Here you have human beings, unquestionably, but what we were slow in understanding was how these ultra-women, inheriting only from women, had eliminated not only certain masculine characteristics, which of course we did not look for, but so much of what we had always thought essentially feminine.

The tradition of men as guardians and protectors had quite died out. These stalwart virgins had no men to fear and therefore no need of protection.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 63-64

### Explanation and Analysis

After recounting some of the history of Herland—how it came to pass that only women existed there and how they developed their society into the peaceful, harmonious place that Van, Jeff, and Terry discover—Van begins to compare its culture to America's. The story of the Herlandians challenges what Van (and Gilman's early-20th century audience) believed about womanhood and femininity. So many of the qualities that both American men and women were raised to believe came naturally to all women simply do not exist in Herland. The women of Herland are not submissive, shy, and helpless; they are innovative, brave, curious, and strong-willed. In describing them as "ultra-women," Van highlights how the Herlandians have transcended all that he and his companions thought possible by defying the stigma and stereotypes associated with femininity in Western culture.

Van also highlights how the absence of men (and thus many of the characteristics associated with masculinity) has actually served to make Herland a safer place. According to Van, men are traditionally considered both "guardians and

protectors.” However, men are also the ones who pose the greatest threat to women, as shown in the latter half of Van’s final statement where he says that the women of Herland don’t need protection because they “ha[ve] no men to fear.” This means that men are both the threat against and the defenders of women; take away the threat, however, and there is no longer a need for a protector. The fact that the women don’t need protectors also highlights how safe the country itself is: there are no wars, no conflicts, and no vicious wild animals that pose a real threat to the health and safety of the women.

☛ These women, whose essential distinction of motherhood was the dominant note of their whole culture, were strikingly deficient in what we call “femininity.” This led me very promptly to the conviction that those “feminine charms” we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity—developed to please us because they had to please us, and in no way essential to the real fulfillment of their great process.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 65

### Explanation and Analysis

During one of his numerous outbursts, Terry states that the women of Herland aren’t “womanly.” Although Van is irritated by Terry’s observation, he notes that there is some truth to Terry’s statement because the Herlandians aren’t traditionally feminine. Van’s experience with the Herlandians leads to a massive feminist awakening for him, forcing him to question all that he used to believe about womanhood, femininity, and nature, as seen in this passage. The lack of femininity in Herland is, as Van says, “striking[.]” The women there are not shy, nervous, frail, soft-spoken, submissive, or coy. In fact, the women only ever act naturally, giving Van and his companions the unique opportunity to observe womanhood in an environment where there are no sex-based social mores or customs to guide their interactions with the men. Because the women of Herland are acting naturally, Van is able to see that what is considered femininity in America is not actually based on nature but is instead constructed by society.


Furthermore, Van realizes that much of what he thought was natural femininity is only an act designed specifically to please men. This shines a light on what being a woman in

20th-century America is like. Instead of enjoying the same freedom of self-expression as men, American women are encouraged and expected to continuously put on a show to please the men around them. Van notes that women try to please men because they have to—it’s the only way they’ll attract a suitable husband and thus secure the financial and social protection that can only be achieved through marriage.

☛ As I learned more and more to appreciate what these women had accomplished, the less proud I was of what we, with all our manhood, had done.

You see, they had had no wars. They had had no kings, and no priests, and no aristocracies. They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together—not by competition, but by united action.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 66

### Explanation and Analysis

While tracing the history of Herland from its earliest roots to the present day, Van is awed by the society’s progress and accomplishments and somewhat ashamed that male-dominated American society has not achieved the same. This comparison directly challenges the beliefs about manhood that Van entertained when he first entered Herland; he believed that men were superior and that women were decidedly inferior. In fact, Van was very vocal about his belief that a civilization made up of women could not be truly civilized but would rather be primitive and underdeveloped.

Because the Herlandians have no kings, priests, or aristocracies, there are no social, political, religious, or economic divisions. Their community is truly united and equal. Because there is no competition, progress in Herland is propelled by “united action,” meaning everyone is working together towards the same goal, thus making it easier to achieve that goal. However, in Western society, there *are* kings, priests, and aristocracies. As a result, society is divided along numerous lines that prevent it from becoming truly egalitarian and harmonious. Divisions lead to wars, which is why Western culture (divided) has them and Herland (united) doesn’t. The existence of war, poverty, and religious discrimination in Western culture and the nonexistence of these things in Herland calls into question



whether Western countries are truly more civilized than Herland, a supposedly primitive and underdeveloped one.

## Chapter 6: Comparisons Are Odious Quotes

“The children in this country are the one center and focus of all our thoughts. Every step of our advance is always considered in its effect on them—on the race. You see, we are *Mothers*,” she repeated, as if in that she had said it all.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings, Moadine (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 73

### Explanation and Analysis

When Terry tries to reassure Moadine that he and the other men have no intention of hurting the children or younger women and so can be trusted around them, Moadine explains to him that the primary concern is actually that the older women might hurt the men if the men do accidentally hurt a child. Motherhood is truly a sacred institution in Herland—each woman is only allowed to have one child (except in rare instances when a woman is honored by state and allowed to have a second child) and the society as a whole is completely dedicated to making the best possible life for the next generation. This is what Moadine means when she says that children are the “one center and focus” of everyone’s thoughts. Nothing is done without first considering the potential negative and/or positive consequences it will have for the children, both born and unborn.

In his narration, Van notes that when Moadine says “You see, we are *Mothers*,” she says it as if it explains everything. As Van and the other men get to know more about the culture in Herland, they soon find that it *does* explain everything. The idea of motherhood is associated with selfless, unconditional, and abiding love. As mothers, the women of Herland embody this. They do not work for individual gain or success, but for their children. They do not question whether the next generation deserves all the work and sacrifices the current generation makes for them; they simply do it out of the natural love they already have for their children. This also helps explain why Moadine and the other tutors take their time in allowing the men out around the younger women: it gives them the opportunity to make sure they are making the right decision for the society’s children.

“There you have it. You see, they were Mothers, not in our sense of helpless involuntary fecundity, forced to fill and overfill the land, every land, and then see their children suffer, sin, and die, fighting horribly with one another; but in the sense of Conscious Makers of People. Mother-love with them was not a brute passion, a mere “instinct,” a wholly personal feeling; it was—A Religion.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 75

### Explanation and Analysis

After explaining that the importance of motherhood in Herland has roots in the tragic deaths of all the men 2,000 years before and describing the elation ancient Herlandian women felt when they began reproducing via parthenogenesis, Van compares motherhood in Herland to motherhood in America. The most distinctive difference between motherhood in the two cultures is that American women are helpless in determining when (and, to an extent, if) they have children, but Herlandian women enjoy reproductive control. Van describes American motherhood as “helpless” and “involuntary.” This highlights the fact that, in general, women have no control over their reproductive lives. Motherhood is something forced upon them through this lack of control, and therefore it doesn’t carry with it the same amount of positivity that Herlandian motherhood does. However, as Van also notes, that doesn’t mean that American mothers don’t love their children, but rather that the love they do have is “brute passion” and instinctual. By this description, motherhood is a mere animal function, not a thought-out and welcome choice.

Even more importantly, the “helpless involuntary fecundity” of American women (and women outside Herland in general) results in overpopulation. Van writes that mothers are often forced to watch their children “suffer, sin, and die” instead of seeing them thrive in society. This relates to Jeff’s earlier comment that poor women—in other words, those unable to give their children the best possible care and start in life—often have the most children. This is contrasted with motherhood in Herland, where mothers are “Conscious Makers of People.” This description highlights the fact that, thanks to reproductive control, mothers in Herland get to consciously choose to have a child and when. Furthermore, they have the means to educate and shape that child into the best possible person, unlike impoverished American mothers. Mothers in Herland, then, are not helpless, and motherhood is not something forced upon them, so therefore it does not become a financial, emotional, and

physical burden.

## Chapter 7: Our Growing Modesty Quotes

☝☝ At home we had measured him with other men, and, though we knew his failings, he was by no means an unusual type. We knew his virtues too, and they had always seemed more prominent than the faults. Measured among women—our women at home, I mean—he had always stood high. He was visibly popular. Even where his habits were known, there was no discrimination against him; in some cases his reputation for what was felicitously termed “gaiety” seemed a special charm.

But here, against the calm wisdom and quiet restrained humor of these women, with only that blessed Jeff and my inconspicuous self to compare with, Terry did stand out rather strong.

As “a man among men,” he didn’t; as a man among—I shall have to say, “females,” he didn’t; his intense masculinity seemed only fit complement to their intense femininity. But here he was all out of drawing.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker), Jeff Margrave, Terry O. Nicholson

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 81

### Explanation and Analysis

Van shares how his perception of Terry changed after a few months of living in Herland and getting to know the women there. Throughout the story, Terry stands out for his particularly bad attitude and low opinion of women; unlike Van and Jeff, Terry never has a feminist awakening or even begins to accept women as his equals—he simply sees all women as sexual conquests and himself as a dashing hero. Among the “faults” Van mentions are Terry’s narcissism, misogyny, inability to adapt, and closed-mindedness. These things didn’t stand out in America because so many other men shared them—including, to an extent, Jeff and Van.

Terry is meant to embody the ultra-masculine ideals of manhood in the 20th century (brave, dashing, handsome, strong, etc.), but when he drops into a culture without any gender roles, he finds himself “out of drawing,” or out of place. Jeff, however, is highly romantic, chivalrous, and poetic; masculinity with him is much quieter and has not made him closed-minded. Van, too, has a less noticeable kind of masculinity. His role as a sociologist and scientist make him uniquely willing to let go of his old presumptions

and create new ones in the light of new evidence—in this case, discovering through observations at Herland that gender roles are social constructs imposed on both men and women and are by no means natural or necessary. Terry, it seems, can only thrive in a society where there are clear gender roles, especially because those roles put him in a position of superiority to “females.” By “females,” Jeff means women outside of Herland who conform to prescribed gender roles and embody femininity the same way Terry embodies masculinity.

☝☝ “But does not each mother want her own child to bear her name?” I asked.

“No—why should she? The child has its own.”

“Why for—for identification—so people will know whose child she is.”

“We keep the most careful records,” said Somel. Each one of us has our exact line of descent all the way back to our dear First Mother. There are many reasons for doing that. But as to everyone knowing which child belongs to which mother—why should she?”

Here, as in so many other instances, we were led to feel the difference between the purely maternal and the paternal attitude of mind. The element of personal pride seemed strangely lacking.

**Related Characters:** Somel, Vandyck “Van” Jennings, Moadine (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 82-83

### Explanation and Analysis


One day Terry asks the tutors if any of the women have family names (surnames). The men learn that all of the women of Herland only have one name, although sometimes descriptors are added as marks of respect for good deeds or special skills. This is surprising to Van, Jeff, and Terry, who assume that when a person has a child, they want to leave some mark that tells everyone else that child belongs to them. The surprise of Moadine, Somel, and Zava highlights a very important difference between patriarchal and matriarchal attitudes and societies as Gilman describes them. In Herland, the women respect each other based on each other’s good deeds, contributions to society, and personal characteristics. The question of who a woman’s mother is never comes up (except when they are talking

about very young children and babies) because it seems irrelevant. This means that people are not given greater or lesser respect for belonging to this or that family, as they would in America where someone's surname can be used to determine what social class their family belongs to. For example, this book was written in the 1910s when the Rockefellers were one of the most powerful families in America and anyone bearing the Rockefeller name was treated with deference and respect even if that individual, personally, did not deserve it.

Furthermore, the lack of family names highlights the possessive nature of patriarchal attitudes. When a woman marries a man, she takes his last name; similarly, when a child (boy or girl) is born, they take their father's last name. This is how the husband/father conveys to the world that they own their wife and children, that *this is their* family. Van notes that this difference makes it seem like the women lack "personal pride," but it really indicates the emphasis they all place on individual achievement and contributions to Herland's progress or maintenance—it is what each woman *does* with her life to help the entire community that matters, not who gave birth to her.

☛ To them the country was a unit—it was *Theirs*. They themselves were a unit, a conscious group; they thought in terms of the community. As such, their time-sense was not limited to the hopes and ambitions of an individual life. Therefore, they habitually considered and carried out plans for improvement which might cover centuries.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 86

### Explanation and Analysis

Van tries to explain why the women of Herland were able to create the highly developed, peaceful, and egalitarian society that he, Jeff, and Terry discover. The men begin their adventure with the belief that if there is a society full of women without any men, then it will be a primitive, desolate, and underdeveloped civilization full of fighting and bitterness. However, they discover a landscape that has been taken care of so well that every inch of it serves some practical purpose and a culture that enjoys absolute peace and harmony. Here, Van highlights the fact that the entire country "was a unit—it was *Theirs*." This means that the entire place belongs to everyone equally, and everyone

(equally) has a responsibility to take care of it, protect it, and try to improve it for their children. There are no divisions of land, which eliminates the seeming inevitability of fighting over who gets what, where the borders are, and whether space should be private or public.

This sense of unity extends to how the women view their entire population. While it is a civilization made up of individuals, those individuals think of themselves as necessary parts of a larger whole. This not only gives them a great respect for the work they themselves do for Herland, but also keeps them motivated to continue trying to make things better because everyone gets to enjoy the benefits of progress equally. Furthermore, the Herlandians have learned to look beyond their own individual lives and plan "for improvement which might cover centuries." By doing this, the women of Herland help ensure the continued existence, peace, and prosperity of their country.


☛ We had expected them to be given over to what we called "feminine vanity"—"frills and furbelows," and we found they had evolved a costume more perfect than the Chinese dress, richly beautiful when so desired, always useful, of unflinching dignity and good taste.

We had expected a dull submissive monotony, and found a daring social inventiveness far beyond our own, and a mechanical and scientific development fully equal to ours.

We had expected pettiness, and found a social consciousness besides which our nations looked like quarrelling children—feeble-minded ones at that.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings (speaker), Jeff Margrave, Terry O. Nicholson

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 88

### Explanation and Analysis

Van, Terry, and Jeff think back to what they thought Herland would be like before they arrived there and learned about it. Their initial thoughts reveal an implicit bias that has been challenged throughout their time in Herland. The men have all developed similar beliefs about womanhood and femininity based on life in 20th-century America, a patriarchal society in which gender roles are strictly prescribed. Having been surrounded since birth by these gender roles and encouraged to believe that women are

inferior by nature, the men were prepared to find a civilization that embodied all the worst characteristics of femininity, as shown by this passage.

The men expected to be surrounded by evidence of “feminine vanity” because they were taught to believe all women are naturally conceited and vain, which prevents them from being practical. As they discover, however, the women of Herland are characterized instead by practicality, as shown in their clothes. The men expected to find “dull submissive monotony,” meaning they believed the women would lack the ambition and energy to create a developed, exciting, and lively society. Instead, the “daring social inventiveness” of the Herlandians highlights their desire to create the best possible world for themselves and future generations. By “pettiness,” Van means that he and the other men expected to find women who seek out faults in one another, but Herlandians prove warm, patient, and accepting. This passage as a whole shows how Gilman designed Herland to subvert key aspects of 20th-century America’s beliefs about femininity and womanhood.

women in Herland like him best of the three. Van’s disgust at being told this reveals his true beliefs about women—being compared to one, for Van, is an insult, which indicates that femininity and womanhood are generally looked down upon in his home culture. It is a testament to how much Van has grown that he quickly recognizes not only his own bias, but also the fact that womanhood in Herland is different from the American conception of womanhood. This also indicates that natural womanhood (the kind found in Herland, which is free of gender roles) is not in itself offensive. Rather, the offensive thing is what Western culture has turned womanhood into by designating certain qualities (weakness, timidity, ignorance, etc.) as feminine and thus natural to biological women.

Somel further challenges this way of thinking by noting that there must be some characteristics “which belong to People.” By this she means characteristics that are intrinsic to all human beings, regardless of sex or socially constructed gender roles. By introducing this idea, Gilman is also challenging everything about 19th- and 20th-century ideas about sex and gender. It was a commonly held belief that women and men are entirely and fundamentally different—in everything from their bodies to their emotions to the way their minds work. Any overlap—such as a man showing “too much” emotion or a woman showing “too little”—was taken as unnatural. Through Somel, Gilman asserts that there *are* indeed similarities between men and women as human beings, and that these similarities are the basis for their actual equality.



## Chapter 8: The Girls of Herland Quotes

☛ “We like you the best,” Somel told me, “because you seem more like us.”

“More like a lot of women!” I thought to myself disgustedly, and then remembered how little like “women,” in our derogatory sense, they were. She was smiling at me, reading my thought.

“We can quite see that we do not seem like—women—to you. Of course, in a bi-sexual race the distinctive feature of each sex must be intensified. But surely there are characteristics enough which belong to People, aren’t there? That’s what I mean about you being more like us—more like People. We feel at ease with you.”

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings, Somel (speaker), Jeff Margrave, Terry O. Nicholson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 97

### Explanation and Analysis

After Jeff, Terry, and Van are released from their imprisonment in the fortress, Somel tells Van that the Herlandians see the arrival of the men as an opportunity to integrate them into the community through marriage, thus making it a bi-sexual (instead of mono-sexual) society, as it was over 2,000 years ago. Somel then tells Van that most

☛ What left us even more at sea in our approach was the lack of any sex-tradition. There was no accepted standard of what was “manly” and what was “womanly.”

When Jeff said, taking the fruit basket from his adored one, “A woman should not carry anything,” Celis said, “Why?” with the frankest amazement. He could not look at that fleet-footed, deep-chested young forester in the face and say, “Because she is weaker.” She wasn’t. One does not call a race horse weak because it is visibly not a cart horse.

**Related Characters:** Celis, Jeff Margrave, Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 100-101

### Explanation and Analysis





Shortly after reuniting with Celis, Alima, and Ellador, the men begin courting them and realize just how difficult it is to navigate heterosexual romantic relationships without prescribed gender roles. In this context, when Gilman says “sex-tradition,” what she means are socially constructed gender roles that dictate men and women’s behavior. The exchange between Jeff and Celis highlights the difference between each culture’s (Western and Herlandian) views about womanhood. Jeff is the most chivalrous of the men and believes that it’s only right for him to take on all tasks that require any amount of physical strength. Celis, who has no conception of what “chivalry” is because she has grown up in a culture without different sexes and gender roles, is innocently puzzled by Jeff’s motives—if she is capable of carrying a basket, why should someone else do it for her?

This moment is also very important for Jeff on a much deeper level. His entire perception of womanhood is defined by his belief that women are weak, frail, helpless, and in desperate need of protection. However, Celis and the other women in Herland subvert this belief—they are neither weak nor frail nor helpless, and there is nothing in Herland that they must be protected against. Furthermore, Gilman highlights the importance of not using the visible physical differences between men and women (namely that women are generally smaller than men) to deny equality when she writes: “One does not call a race horse weak because it is visibly not a cart horse.” In other words, men and women may look different, but that doesn't mean that women are in any way inferior.

☛ You see, if a man loves a girl who is in the first place young and inexperienced; who in the second place is educated with a background of caveman tradition, a middle-ground of poetry and romance, and a foreground of unspoken hope and interest all centering upon the one Event; and who has, furthermore, absolutely no other hope or interest worthy of the name—why, it is a comparatively easy matter to sweep her off her feet with a dashing attack. Terry was a past master in this process. He tried it here, and Alima was so affronted, so repelled, that it was weeks before he got near enough to try again.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker), Alima, Terry O. Nicholson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 101-102

### Explanation and Analysis

While Van explains the difficulties he, Terry, and Jeff experience during their courtships with Ellador, Alima, and Celis, he also describes what courting in Western culture is like. In this passage, Gilman lays bare the fact that young women are essentially trained for nothing but marriage—they are told romantic stories about falling in love and encouraged to view marriage (“the one Event”) as the ultimate success. What they are *not* taught is how to be self-sufficient; they are not given a practical education that might lead to a career, but only one seemingly designed to limit their ability to qualify for a well-paying job that they could support themselves with. It is also important that these young girls are “inexperienced,” meaning they don’t know the realities of the world; they don’t know that men are sometimes motivated by selfish and potentially harmful desires, and they don’t know the reality of what marriage is like.

Terry, as Van notes, was a “master” of sweeping women off their feet in America, but the women of Herland lead very different lives than women in Western civilization. Herland women are encouraged to be self-sufficient and, because there are no men and therefore no marriages, they are not taught to look forward to a romantic relationship with a man as the most meaningful event in their lives. Because of these crucial differences, Terry is unable to appeal to Alima in the same way he appealed to American women; more importantly, Alima is unable to truly understand Terry’s desires and feels only disgust and anger at him for trying to force his will on her.

☛ All the surrendering devotion our women have put into their private families, these women put into their country and race. All the loyalty and service men expect of their wives, they gave, not singly to men, but collectively to one another.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 103

### Explanation and Analysis

Van tries to explain how difficult it was for him and his male companions to make the women of Herland understand what marriage and becoming a wife mean in the outside world. Because Herlandians see themselves as a large and indissoluble unit, they can’t wrap their heads around Western culture’s tendency to privatize as much of people’s

lives as possible, dividing themselves up by families instead of viewing themselves and the rest of their community as a united whole. In both cultures, however, Gilman portrays women as intensely dedicated to those they love, whether it's their family or their entire community.



By “surrendering devotion,” Van means selflessness—just as American wives and mothers are selfless in the work they do for their husbands and children, Herlandians are selfless in their effort to create a better world for future generations. Notably, Van says that men “expect” “loyalty and service” from their wives. In other words, it is not something they are simply given, but an expectation to live up to. By contrast, Van says Herlandians freely give “loyalty and service” to their country. Furthermore, the relationship between individual Herlandians and the rest of the community is equitable—all give, and all benefit from this giving because it creates a better life for everyone. It is also notable that Van says Herlandians give their “surrendering devotion” to their “race” as well as their country. This further highlights one of the elements of Herlandian motherhood that Van has tried to articulate before: the women do not just want to reproduce, but to create people who embody Herland’s values and thus improve the race itself, instead of just improving the actual country (such as cultivating land, cleaning, etc.).

## Chapter 9: Our Relations and Theirs Quotes

“They’ve no modesty,” snapped Terry. “No patience, no submissiveness, none of that natural yielding which is woman’s greatest charm.”

I shook my head pityingly. “Go and apologize and make friends again, Terry. You’ve got a grouch, that’s all. These women have the virtue of humanity, with less of its faults than any folks I ever saw. As for patience—they’d have pitched us over the cliffs the first day we lit among ‘em, if they hadn’t that.”

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings, Terry O. Nicholson (speaker), Alima

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 107

### Explanation and Analysis

The courtship between Terry and Alima is anything but peaceful and easy—their relationship is characterized by frequent arguments during which they often separate. Most of their arguments are rooted in the fact that neither of

them can understand the other, so Alima doesn’t understand Terry’s sexual and physical desire and Terry doesn’t understand Alima’s *lack* of sexual desire. Above all of the feminine “charms” a woman can have, Terry values submissiveness. In other words, Terry wants and expects women to let him have his way and do as he pleases with them. Alima is one of the strongest and most stubborn Herlandians that Terry, Van, and Jeff have met and she does not simply give in to Terry’s desires to make him happy. Because of this, Terry lashes out and refuses to admit that she (or any of the women in Herland) have good qualities. In fact, in earlier passages, he denies that they are actually women at all, whereas here he limits his criticism to just denying their femininity.

Van’s response to Terry’s outburst highlights his growing understanding of womanhood and femininity. Earlier, Van’s tutor insinuated that there are qualities inherent in both men and women that transcend sexual differences. By saying that the women in Herland have “the virtue of humanity,” Van is showing his acceptance of the idea that women don’t necessarily have to be conventionally feminine to be virtuous or attractive.

“We have two life cycles: the man’s and the woman’s. To the man there is growth, struggle, conquest, the establishment of his family, and as much further success in gain or ambition as he can achieve.

To the woman, growth, the securing of a husband, the subordinate activities of family life, and afterward such “social” or charitable interests as her position allows.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 110-111

### Explanation and Analysis

Van tries to explain how the lived experiences of men and women in Western civilization differ, highlighting the fact that there are different expectations for men and women—unlike in Herland, which only includes women. Van writes that both men and women go through a period of “growth.” Another way to describe this is to call it a period of education: men are educated in a field that they can then work in when they begin their careers, while women are educated in how to care for a home and children. A man’s period of growth opens up numerous doors for him and he

enjoys an almost infinite number of directions in which he can take his life. His period of “struggle,” Van indicates, is his period of working to make a comfortable living followed by a period of “conquest” in which he gets to choose a wife. After starting his family, men are allowed to do whatever they must to be successful and fulfilled; they can direct their ambitions in whatever way they choose. Even after marriage, the world is wide open to men.

Women, on the other hand, have limited options. Rather than having a period of “conquest” in which they can choose a husband, they must dedicate their energies to “securing” a husband. In other words, they must take a passive role and *be* chosen rather than choosing. Van describes the domestic life of women as “subordinate,” which highlights the fact that their “jobs” as wives and mothers are seen as inferior and meant to serve others instead of bringing personal fulfillment to the women themselves. More importantly, the world is somewhat closed to women after marriage—a woman can only *move* and *do* as much as her husband’s success allows. Even these things are primarily limited to “social” or “charitable” interests instead of personal ones. An American woman’s life cycle, Gilman indicates here, is defined by selflessness, and there are few opportunities for her to change that.

☛ This seemed to us a wholly incredible thing: first, that any nation should have the foresight, the strength, and the persistence to plan and fulfill such a task; and second, that women should have had so much initiative. We have assumed, as a matter of course, that women had none; that only the man, with his natural energy and impatience of restriction, would ever invent anything.

Here we found that the pressure of life upon the environment develops in the human mind its inventive reactions, regardless of sex; and further, that a fully awakened motherhood plans and works without limit, for the good of the child.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 111-112

### Explanation and Analysis

As Van learns more about Herlandian society, he also learns how much they’ve done to make educating children easier, namely by simplifying their language to be easier to understand and speak. Van says he and his companions were struck by two things: that a nation would have the

fortitude to make those changes, and that women were the ones who took the initiative to do it. What they fail to consider, however, is that it is apparently *because* the nation is full of women that it was able to develop such a simple language. This is because the Herlandians are not just women, but mothers trying to raise their children together. Simplifying the language, then, doesn’t just make it easier for children to learn, but for the next generation of mothers to teach their own children.

Because of Western concepts of femininity and womanhood, Van and his male companions believe that women don’t have the same “natural energy and impatience of restriction” that drive men to change their surroundings to suit their wants and needs. However, after seeing the social conditions in Herland, Van admits that Herlandians are living proof that initiative is something anyone can develop when conditions permit. For Western women, social and environmental conditions prohibit them from expressing their innovativeness even if they do have it; it’s seen as a masculine quality and therefore inappropriate for women. It is not nature, then, that keeps Western women from enjoying the same level of “natural energy” and innovativeness as men, but rather the need to conform to prescribed gender roles in Western society.

## Chapter 10: Their Religions and Our Marriages Quotes

☛ “What is a ‘wife’ exactly?” she demanded, a dangerous gleam in her eye.

“A wife is the woman who belongs to a man,” he began.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck “Van” Jennings, Terry O. Nicholson, Alima (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 128

### Explanation and Analysis

During one of the conversations between Van, Terry, Jeff, and the Herlandian women they are courting, Terry tries to explain that American men give women their last names after marriage to show the world whose wives they are. Van notes that when Alima asks what a wife is, she has a “dangerous gleam in her eye.” This indicates that she wants to make Terry admit something potentially embarrassing or even shameful. Terry is ready to answer this question because he sees no shame in the idea that a wife “belongs to a man” once she marries him. This highlights just how deeply



Terry believes in Western gender roles and the idea that men have all the power. This is shown by Terry's decision to say a wife "belongs" to her husband rather than portraying marriage as an equal relationship. For instance, he could have said that a woman becomes a wife when she gets married, but instead he portrays wives as objects that are owned.

Terry's answer also reaffirms the idea that possessiveness is a key element of Western masculinity. A man *wants* to own his wife because it reaffirms his masculinity, which is synonymous with power and superiority. It also means that, as something that is owned, a wife must be submissive to what her owner (her husband) demands of her. This is precisely what Terry wants from Alima, as is shown time and again after their marriage, particularly in his ultimate decision to attempt to rape Alima in order to subdue her and make her submissive.

## Chapter 11: Our Difficulties Quotes

☞ This is one thing which we did not understand—had made no allowance for. When in our pre-marital discussions one of those dear girls had said: "We understand it thus and thus," or "We hold such and such to be true," we men, in our own deep-seated convictions of the power of love, and our easy views about beliefs and principles, fondly imagined that we could convince them otherwise. What we imagined, before marriage, did not matter any more than what an average innocent girl imagines. We found the facts to be different.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings (speaker), Jeff Margrave, Terry O. Nicholson, Ellador, Celis, Alima

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 132

### Explanation and Analysis

Despite the difficulties that arise during their courtships, Jeff marries Celis, Terry marries Alima, and Van marries Ellador. As Van points out in this passage, the men did this in the firm belief that they would be able to persuade their new wives to adopt their own beliefs about marriage in due time. More importantly, Van reveals that the men maintained this belief even after the women explicitly told them their beliefs and values. This highlights the fact that even though the men (or at least Van and Jeff) have begun to change their perceptions of women, they still maintain a tacit belief in their own superiority and the idea that they have some authority over their wives.

Earlier in this same chapter, Van writes that what American women think marriage will be like before their weddings is of little importance afterward—husbands define what marriage will be like for their wives, not the other way around. With Herlandian wives, however, the roles are reversed: the wives define what marriage will be like for their husbands, and what the American men thought marriage would be like beforehand is unimportant. As husbands, then, Jeff, Van, and Terry find themselves confronted with the same dilemma that, according to Van, American wives commonly face: either adapt to their spouse's expectations, or be miserable in a failed marriage.

☞ You see, with us, women are kept as different as possible and as feminine as possible. We men have our own world, with only men in it; we get tired of our ultra-maleness and turn gladly to the ultra-femaleness. Also, in keeping our women as feminine as possible, we see to it that when we turn to them we find the thing we want always in evidence. Well, the atmosphere of this place was anything but seductive.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 140

### Explanation and Analysis

After his marriage, Van tries to explain what life in Herland as a man is like, highlighting the fact that in Herland he no longer has his "own world" full of masculine men (aside from his two companions, of course). Van says more than once that women are "kept" different or that men "keep[]" their women a certain way. Namely, women are "kept" feminine. In other words, women are prevented from being anything other than what men find appealing and appropriate. This serves an important purpose for men, who can then turn to the society of women when they are bored by a world defined by "ultra-maleness." This also means that men are allowed the best of both worlds, the man's world (the public sphere) and the woman's (the domestic sphere). Women, however, are "kept" from experiencing the man's world because men prevent them from stepping too far outside of their ultra-feminine roles.

Herland is a world without gender roles, and so it is a world that Van and his companions have repeatedly noted is lacking in femininity. The women simply act naturally, not as a male-dominated society dictates that they should. One of the feminine qualities that men look for in women is submissiveness. When Van says that by keeping American



women feminine, men also ensure that when they return to their wives, they'll "find the thing [they] want," he means that wives will be submissive to their husbands' sexual desires. Van interprets the lack of femininity in Herland as "anything but seductive," meaning that the women (including his wife) have not developed the feminine charms and submissiveness that he hoped they would after marriage.



## Chapter 12: Expelled Quotes

☛ In missing men we three visitors had naturally missed the larger part of life, and had unconsciously assumed that they must miss it too. It took me a long time to realize—Terry never did realize—how little it meant to them. When we say *men*, *man*, *manly*, *manhood*, and all the other masculine derivatives, we have in the background of our minds a huge vague crowded picture of the world and all its activities. To grow up and "be a man," to "act like a man"—the meaning and connotation is wide indeed. That vast background is full of [...] men everywhere, doing everything—"the world."

And when we saw *Women*, we think *Female*—the sex.

But to these women, in the unbroken sweep of this two-thousand-year-old feminine civilization, the word *woman* called up all that big background, so far as they had gone in social development; and the word *man* meant to them only *male*—the sex.

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings (speaker), Ellador, Alima, Terry O. Nicholson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 147

### Explanation and Analysis


After Terry attempts to rape Alima, he is ordered to leave Herland. Van decides to go with Terry because two people are needed to fly the plane and because Ellador is eager to experience America for herself. As they prepare to depart, Van thinks over his experiences in Herland and highlights one of the key mistakes he and his companions made: assuming that the women of Herland missed the existence of men and would accept men (and all their masculinity) into their culture at any cost. For Van and Jeff, the realization that Herlandians were less interested in masculinity than they were in the idea of fatherhood is a humbling experience because it forces them to confront their perceptions of women. As Van writes, when a Western man thinks of a woman, he thinks "*Female*—the sex." In other

words, men don't conceive of women as individuals that belong to their same species and have meaningful lives, but as simple others with little connection to the world at large. They are merely a "sex" rather than living, breathing members of a community. This is because only men are free to "do[] everything" and go everywhere while women are separated from worldly pursuits, which echoes Van's previous description of how men purposely keep women as different from men as possible.

Terry, who is so used to being important and popular, can't conceive of the possibility of his own irrelevance. As Van describes, when the Herlandians think of men, they think of "*male*—the sex," making men the insignificant "others" in Herland. In other words, American men are to Herlandians what women are to American men: essentially unimportant. In order to understand this, Terry would have had to let go of some of his masculinity, just as Van did when he decided to let Ellador take the lead when it comes to sex in their relationship (a traditionally masculine role in Western culture). Terry's persistent unwillingness to do this proves to be his downfall, as he's expelled from the country and barred from returning.

☛ We talk fine things about women, but in our hearts we know that they are very limited beings—most of them. We honor them for their functional powers, even while we dishonor them by our use of it; we honor them for their carefully enforced virtue, even while we show by our own conduct how little we think of that virtue; we value them, sincerely, for the perverted maternal activities which make our wives the most comfortable of servants, bound to us for life with the wages wholly at our own decision, their whole business, outside of the temporary duties of such motherhood as they may achieve, to meet our needs in every way. Oh, we value them, all right, "in their place," which place is the home[.]

**Related Characters:** Vandyck "Van" Jennings (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 152

### Explanation and Analysis

While Van tries to articulate how important Ellador is to him, he begins describing some of the gender-based double standards in American culture. When Van says that men honor women "for their functional powers," he means for their ability to bear children. Of course, for American women to bear children, they must have sex (unlike the parthenogenic Herlandians). Because men expect their

wives to be submissive and have sex whenever their husbands demand it, women often bear more children than they can care for. Having children, as Jeff and his companions have explained before, is used as justification for why women must remain in the home. This explains what Van means when he says men “dishonor” women by how they (men) “use” women’s “functional powers”—the thing men honor women for becomes the means by which men keep women in subjection. Gilman makes a second, similar argument through Van’s statement about women’s “virtue” (which here means her chastity or virginity). Men simultaneously demand that women close to them (sisters, potential wives, daughters) remain chaste while demanding the opposite from the objects of their sexual desires, married or not. Once a woman gives up her “virtue,”

however—once she does what men want or even force her to do—she no longer has any value.

Van’s final statement is a blunt admission that in the world he comes from, women are only valued when they stay “in their place” (the home). This means that women are not valued for their intellectual potential or achievements, their wit, talents, or personality, but for conforming to men’s expectations. This helps explain why Terry and Alima’s marriage was so tumultuous and ultimately failed—neither one of them were willing to conform to the other’s expectations and desires. In contrast, Van’s marriage to Ellador succeeds for the opposite reason: he gives up his need to make her conform, and instead adjusts his own expectations.



## 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: A NOT UNNATURAL ENTERPRISE

The narrator writes that this account is being written from memory because he was not able to bring his notes, pictures of the buildings and women, and records with him when he left the country. The narrator states that he won't provide details of where this mysterious country is for fear of inspiring other adventurers, missionaries, or greedy expansionists to try and find it. He assures the reader that the people in the country he's writing about don't want those kinds of people to find them—and, if someone does find that country, they won't get along as well as the narrator and his group did.

The narrator introduces himself as Vandyck Jennings and his comrades (men he had been friends with for years before they began their adventure) as Terry O. Nicholson and Jeff Margrave. Terry is a wealthy adventurer, thirsty to explore new lands and upset that so much of the world has already been explored and mapped. Terry is an apt airman with plenty of money to spend on equipment for the group's journeys. Jeff is a doctor by trade, but also a natural poet with a strong interest in botany. Vandyck (called "Van") is a sociologist but takes an interest in any topic that has to do with humanity. Van writes that when the three men were given the chance to join an expedition in mostly uncharted territory, all three jumped at the chance. However, this expedition is only the starting point of their larger adventure.

In a flashback, Van's interest is piqued when he hears the guides talking about the existence of a mysterious "Woman Land" up in the mountains. According to rumors, this land is full of women and girls—not one man or boy lives there. These rumors, however, have not been verified as fact because, aside from one man many years ago, no man who goes looking for Woman Land ever comes back. Jeff, Terry, and Van initially balk at these rumors, but on the last day of their expedition one of their guides leads them to a waterfall flowing over the face of an enormous cliff. The river that the waterfall feeds into has traces of dye and a piece of some kind of cloth in it. According to the guide, this is proof of the existence of Woman Land somewhere over the cliff.

*The narrator immediately makes it known that the country he's talking about is completely isolated from the rest of the world. More importantly, the country is obviously better off that way, as shown by his reluctance to share its location. This implies that he is torn between his desire to share his experiences and a wish to protect the country itself.*



*As explorers, these men conform to traditional beliefs about manhood and masculinity: they are brave, daring, strong, and bursting with ambition and the energy to succeed. In this case, their ambition is to be a part of an expedition that will shed new light on the world by exploring uncharted territory and studying the people there.*



*Jeff, Van, and Terry struggle to believe in the existence of a place like Herland because it contradicts all that they think they know of humanity. Aside from the obvious question of how women can reproduce and become mothers without men, the men don't believe women are capable of maintaining an entire civilization without the help of men. They will continue to struggle with their concepts of femininity and the achievements of the women in this mysterious country throughout the narrative.*



After seeing the dye, the men begin to wonder if Woman Land is actually real. Terry wants to climb up the cliff right away, but the guide refuses to go up himself. So instead, Terry tells Jeff and Van that they should return home to America, make preparations for an extended expedition, and return to the waterfall to discover whether Woman Land exists or not. Van notes that the dye and cloth indicate the existence of a civilization with the ability to spin, weave, and dye clothing better than the other local tribes, although Jeff and Terry express some doubt because if the civilization is so developed, then it would have been discovered long ago. The men debate the existence of Woman Land all the way back to America and during the time it takes Terry to make arrangements for their return.

Terry's immense wealth proves invaluable as he prepares his massive yacht, motorboat, plane, and other supplies for the group's expedition. As they travel by sea from America to the mysterious country, the men discuss their plan to take the motorboat up the river to the waterfall and then fly over the cliff by plane, leaving instructions for where to find them at a nearby consul in case they don't return after a month. Despite these instructions, the men laugh at the notion that a rescue party might have to save them from a country full of women.

Van writes that Jeff, a true romantic, believes that if the country exists, it must be a veritable paradise of "roses and babies and canaries." Terry, on the other hand, is preoccupied with the idea that he will be surrounded by women who will adore him as much as American women do. Van believes his idea of the country will prove closer to the truth: it might be a matriarchy, but men and boys do in fact live there, albeit apart from the women. Van also assures Terry that women in this kind of civilization are perfectly capable of defending themselves.

In the present, Van tells the audience that his guess was no closer to the truth than what Jeff or Terry believed the country and the people there would be like. In fact, Van says that it's "funny" to think back to the ideas the group initially had about the country with the benefit of hindsight. Their speculations about what the society would be like continued as they made their journey up the river to the waterfall, always beginning with the phrase: "Admitting the improbability."

*The men share similar Western views of civilization: if a nation or country is truly civilized, then it would explore the world, as well. Because this alleged civilization is so isolated, the men refuse to believe that it can also be civilized. What they mean by "civilized" here is developed, educated, and organized. Still, they want to believe that such a place exists, hence their determination to return to the area.*



*The men reveal more about their views of womanhood and femininity by laughing at the idea that they might need to be saved from women. Their belief reflects one of the major prevailing beliefs about women in the 20th century: that women are too physically weak to pose a serious threat to men.*



*Van, Jeff, and Terry represent three of the 20th century's primary beliefs about women: Jeff romanticizes them and embraces the feminine stereotypes that women are soft and beautiful (which is why he believes a country full of women will be all "roses and babies"); Terry is a womanizer who believes women must adore and submit to his desire because of his masculinity; and Van takes a cold, scientific view of women as objects to be studied, not as fully developed human beings who are equal to men.*



*Van uses the word "funny" to describe the group's former beliefs about women. This implies that his views have since completely changed, and so have those of Jeff and Terry. Even though the group continually admits that the existence of a civilization made up entirely of women is an "improbability," their decision to try and find it reveals that they want it to exist and, on some level, believe that it is actually somewhat probable.*





Returning to his flashback, Van writes that Terry believes the women must always be fighting each other because, as women, it's part of their nature. Jeff opposes this idea and insists that the women enjoy a peaceful existence with a strong sense of sisterhood. Van, however, balks at Jeff's idea and insists that because the women are all mothers, there will be no universal bond of sisterhood. Terry reasserts his belief that the women are always fighting and insists that the society will be very primitive, despite evidence of their skill at weaving and dyeing clothing. He also shares his belief that the women will fight over him and that, eventually, he'll be elected king. He jokingly adds that the other two men will have to be executed for the safety of his throne.

Once again returning to the present, Van writes that he struggled to keep the peace between Jeff and Terry because they had such divergent opinions of women. Van describes Jeff as being chivalrous, sentimental, and an idealizer of women. In contrast, Terry is a "man's man" that most men wouldn't want their sisters to date. Terry, according to Van, considered beautiful women to be "game," and was indifferent towards those he didn't consider beautiful. Jeff, however, could be just as annoying because he put "rose-colored haloes" on all women. Van describes himself as taking a more scientific view of women and adamantly believed that women have "physiological limitations." Van states that no man in the group held progressive views of women.

Back in the events of the past, Terry, Van, and Jeff secure their motorboat on the lake and prepare to fly over the cliff. Van suggests that the group should first observe the country from the sky before exploring by foot. The group agrees and they fly over the cliff. From the air, they see forests, but also cities and parks. They fly the plane a little lower and observe that the land looks more like a garden than a jungle. They finally spot crowds of people and note that the crowds are made up entirely of women and girls. Van says that there "must be men" because the cities look highly developed. Terry abruptly decides to land the plane, despite Jeff's protests that they should fly around some more. The men hide the plane in some brush and begin walking to "Herland."

*Terry makes it clear that, if this country full of women exists, then it is the ultimate opportunity for sexual conquest. This is based on the assumption that the women they find there will experience sexual attraction towards himself or even Jeff and Van. Furthermore, Terry highlights his belief that women aren't capable of creating a functioning society on their own because they would fight each other too much. Meanwhile, Jeff's idealization of women is shown in his belief that a country full of women would be characterized by a peaceful sense of sisterhood above all else.*



*Jeff and Terry's perceptions of women are both extreme—Jeff sees them as angels and Terry sees them as objects. Both of these perceptions strip women of their equality to men, although Jeff's does this in a more insidious way. While Jeff might respect women more than Terry does, his strong sense of chivalry implies that he doesn't believe women are able to take care of themselves—they are too weak, too delicate, and too angelic to hold their own in the sinful world of the 20th century. Van's perception of women also strips them of their humanity by making them passive objects of study that he, with his superior intellect, can talk about as inferiors.*



*Even though Jeff, Van, and Terry have seen for themselves that there are no men in sight, Van believes that there still must be men somewhere because of how developed the cities are. This reveals that the men are projecting 20th-century Western beliefs about womanhood and femininity (that women are frivolous, weak, helpless, and both intellectually and physically inferior to men) onto all women, rather than being open to the idea that different cultures have different beliefs about women's abilities. Over time, the men will continue to struggle to reconcile their preconceived beliefs about women with what they see and experience in Herland.*



## CHAPTER 2: RASH ADVANCES

Jeff, Van, and Terry note that they are about 15 miles from the nearest city and proceed carefully through the **Herlandian forest**. The men still believe that there must be other men—the biggest threat to their safety—somewhere. As proof, Terry reminds the men that there were babies in the group of people they saw from the air. Jeff and Terry observe that the trees around them have been carefully maintained—there are no dead branches, they've all been trained, and every tree grows either fruit or nuts. Terry also points out that there are numerous birds everywhere, but no cats. He believes this is because the men there kill the cats and let the birds live.

Suddenly, Jeff, Van, and Terry hear giggling coming from somewhere nearby. Terry suggests that the sound came from a large tree and runs over to check it out. Van warns Terry to be careful of poisoned arrows, but Terry excitedly calls the men over and points out three figures hiding up in the branches of the tree. Van notices that the figures are beautiful young women and rather than showing fear, they seem curious about the men as Jeff, Van, and Terry climb the tree. The women (who have short hair and wear breeches with tunics) stare at the men before erupting in giggles. Terry, growing more and more excited by the sight of such gorgeous women, introduces himself, Van, and Jeff by pointing to each in turn. One of the women points to herself and says “Ellador” and then points to the other two and says “Alima” and “Celis.”

Terry tries to beckon the women over, but they refuse to come closer to the men. In fact, Ellador uses hand gestures to insinuate that Terry, Van, and Jeff should leave the place altogether, which Terry refuses to do. Terry tells the two men he brought “bait” and pulls out a shiny necklace, which he holds out to the woman closest to him. The woman (Alima) is clearly interested in the necklace and seems to ask her companions what to do—one of them encourages her to take it while the other warns her not to—before reaching out for it. Watching this, Van realizes that Terry is laying a trap for Alima and doesn't like it, but his fears are alleviated when Alima is able to grab the necklace out of Terry's hand before he can grab her. The three women drop out of the tree and the men follow.

*The beautiful and garden-like forest is the first indication of what kind of society Herland is: they are intelligent and organized, not primitive and undeveloped; they are strong enough to successfully cultivate the earth and care for the large trees, not weak and helpless. Because these are qualities that the American men typically associate with masculinity, Van, Jeff, and Terry take the forest as proof that there are Herlandian men and that they are active members of society.*



*The women's appearance immediately contradicts 20th-century Western expectations of femininity: the women have cut their hair short instead of letting it grow out and they are wearing breeches instead of dresses. Alima, Celis, and Ellador's actions reveal why this might be. Their clothes enable them to climb, run, and leap with ease—activities that would be difficult to do in long, heavy dresses. Short hair, too, makes it easier to be active because it doesn't get in their eyes or tangled in branches. Furthermore, Alima, Celis, and Ellador are fearless rather than nervous at the sight of strange men, which contradicts Jeff's view of women as weak, nervous, and desirous of protection.*



*Terry describes the necklace he has as “bait,” highlighting his belief that all women are naturally drawn towards beautiful ornaments. It also reveals something about Terry's expectations of Herland: it will be his hunting ground, and with the careful use of “bait” like necklaces and other trinkets, the “prey” he will catch will be Herlandian women who, he assumes, will naturally be sexually attracted to him.*



At first, Jeff, Terry, and Van try to chase the women, but soon realize they can't keep up. Terry notes that the men in the country must be great runners while Van declares that the people there are clearly still "arboreal." Jeff chastises Terry for scaring the women away—an accusation Terry rejects on the grounds that women like being chased. The men pull out their binoculars and see that the women are entering the city about four miles away, which amazes Van. Terry asserts that he already loves the country as the three men start walking towards the town. On the way there, the men marvel at how well paved the roads are, which Terry claims is further proof that men must live there.

Once inside the city, Terry and Jeff point out that the entire city is in a perfect state of order and cleanliness; there is no smoke, dirt, or garbage to be seen. Suddenly, as the men turn onto a new street, they find themselves surrounded on all sides by a group of stern-looking middle-aged women. Van and Jeff feel like children who have been caught breaking the rules, but Terry quickly counts the women and looks for a good escape route.

Terry tells Van that every woman must be over 40, but the men also notice that every woman still appears young and healthy. Terry, wondering what the women want, shoots them his signature grin and begins pulling out beautiful scarves and jewelry from his pack. The women take the trinkets without comment. Terry wonders what he and the other men are supposed to say or do with a "regiment of old Colonels" like the ones before him.

In the present, Van writes that he, Jeff, and Terry had initially assumed that the women of Herland would be young. According to Van, this way of thinking of women is characteristic of most men. The idea of "woman" conjures up images of charming young ladies who gradually disappear from sight as they get older. Van asserts that the Colonels they ran into in Herland evidently hadn't disappeared from sight just because of their age. Furthermore, the women showed no fear, anxiety, or even curiosity. Instead, they were apparently prepared to chastise the men for intruding on their town.

*Jeff, Terry, and Van all have different responses to seeing Herlandian women for the first time, and their responses reflect their overall beliefs about women. Terry notes that the men must be fast runners because he believes women are things to be pursued, which is reaffirmed when he tells Jeff that women like to be chased. Van, on the other hand, is more focused on how well the women run and climb, taking it as evidence that they are still "arboreal" (tree-dwelling) and therefore somewhat primitive, highlighting the fact that he views women through a primarily scientific lens. Finally, Jeff is worried by the idea that Terry has scared the women because Jeff believes that women are weak, frail, and in need of masculine protection.*



*The cleanliness of the city indicates that the people who live there all make a conscious effort to take care of it together. This is different from American cities, which are notoriously dirty, as Van later tries to explain to Ellador before they leave Herland for America.*



*Just like with Celis, Alima, and Ellador, Terry tries to use shiny jewelry as "bait," although this time it is to help him win the favor of the older women and not to try to catch and seduce them. Terry's description of the women as Colonels (a traditionally masculine term that the men continue to use to describe the group) highlights how stern and orderly the women are, which is a far cry from the primitive chaos Van initially predicted they would find in Herland.*



*The appearance of the Colonels immediately subverts the men's general expectations of Herland and sets the tone for what the rest of their discoveries will be like. As the men will find out, the women of Herland don't much care what they believe or expect of women. The men are (for the first time) no longer in a position of power or authority and must adjust their expectations to account for the reality of Herlandian life.*



Van writes that he, Terry, and Jeff were initially comfortable being led away by the Colonels but changed their minds when they saw that the women were leading them into a large gray building. Van says that now he can laugh at the idea that he and the other men ventured into Herland prepared to fight against men but unprepared to fight women—Jeff, after all, believed women were weak “clinging vines” while Terry only saw them as potential sexual conquests. The women of Herland, however, prove indifferent to what Jeff, Terry, and Van believe about them.

In the flashback, Jeff, Van, and Terry discuss whether they can escape the Colonels to avoid imprisonment. The Colonels corner them against the doorway, providing no possibility of escape. Although Jeff and Terry both swear that they can't use violence against women, Van insists that they have no choice unless they want to be sent into the building. The three men size up the Colonels, who are all clearly physically strong and agile. As they stare, one of the women gives a command and they start moving in. Terry, Van, and Jeff decide to fight rather than be pushed into the building. However, the women prove too strong for them and Terry shoots his pistol into the air twice to scare them away. Nonetheless, the women grab the men and carry them in by force. Inside, the men are given anesthesia and they lose consciousness.

### CHAPTER 3: A PECULIAR IMPRISONMENT

Van slowly regains consciousness from the anesthesia and finds himself in a state of perfect comfort on a large bed with a soft quilt. He lies in the bed, quietly taking note of the room and its tall windows for a few minutes before Terry wakes up; it's only then that Van remembers what happened. Jeff also wakes up and the three men notice that they are dressed in peculiar but extremely comfortable robes. They notice an open door that leads to a bathroom where they find their toiletries and a closet full of **Herlandian clothes**. Terry declares that they need to discuss their situation before anything else. Jeff notes that although the women could have hurt them, none of them are hurt. Van says this is evidence that all the Herlandians are women. Terry points out that the women have stripped them of all their clothing, which makes Jeff blush.

*Van is speaking from the present when he describes his, Terry's, and Jeff's entry into Herland as laughable. This indicates that whatever he believed in the beginning, he no longer believes (or at least not to the same extent). Van's description of what Terry and Jeff expected (by “clinging vines” Van means Jeff believed the women would cling to the men for protection) also says a lot about their expectations for the community as a whole—they simply didn't believe the women would want to protect themselves, let alone be able to.*



*In this instance, the women show a high degree of organization and unity while the men are disorganized and somewhat divided. This again subverts the men's belief that women simply can't act as a unified whole because they are naturally quarrelsome. The united action of the Colonels is reflective of the unity that exists in the rest of the community—the Herlandians are intensely unified due to their feelings of sisterhood and their common goal to improve life in Herland as much as possible.*



*One of the beliefs the men have about womanhood and femininity is that women are not prone to violence, and this seems to be confirmed by the fact that they have not been injured in any way. In fact, they have been dealt with rather gently—they wake up in comfortable beds and the majority of their possessions remain with them. This respectful treatment also implies that the woman may think the men can be useful (which ultimately proves to be the case).*



Terry says that although they're trapped, the women are evidently harmless and so their next steps should be to put on some new clothes. They each grab some **Herlandian clothes** from the closet (a one-piece knee-length undergarment, stockings, and a knee-length tunic with ample pockets) and wash up in the bathroom. Van praises the Herlandian clothes for their sensibility and comfort, but Terry says wearing the clothes makes them all feel "like a lot of neuters." Terry wonders if they will get breakfast. Jeff says he thinks the Herlandians mean to treat the men like guests, Terry declares they'll be "Hailed as deliverers," and Van believes the women plan to study them.

Jeff, Van, and Terry find a locked door and knock on it when they hear voices on the other side. When it opens, they enter a room with one large table, several couches, and several small tables laid with food. There are also 18 women (the Colonels, much to Terry's displeasure) waiting for them. Each man is shown to his own small table to eat with one of the Colonels while five other women stand guard at each table. As soon as the men finish eating, the women sitting with them give them each a small book designed to teach the men the Herlandian language and give them a way to teach the women English; for every Herlandian word the men learn, they write down the English equivalent. Their tutors, Van notes, are incredibly perceptive and patient in helping the men through their difficulties in learning the language.

When they are alone again, Jeff praises the way the Herlandians are treating them by giving them such a comfortable room, ample food, and the freedom to move around instead of being physically restrained. Jeff says that they would be treated much worse if they were in a "man-country." Irritated, Terry insists that there must be men somewhere. Van agrees, saying that the men may be in a different part of the country. Van says that the men there might be "subdued [...] and [...] shut up." Terry drily remarks that the three of them are now in the same position. The three of them go to one of the windows to look out. Although the windows aren't barred, they are high above the ground in an isolated area. Terry says they will have to escape from the fortress eventually. Jeff and Van agree.

*Terry's complaint that the clothes make him and the other men feel "like a lot of neuters" means that the clothes are not traditionally masculine, nor are they necessarily feminine. The clothes are, in fact, sexless—they are representative of the Herlandians' dedication to practicality rather than stereotypically "feminine" frivolity and love of ornamentation. When Terry says he and the other men will be "Hailed as deliverers," he reveals his belief that the women yearn for romantic relationships with men. What the men will deliver them from, then, is a sexless life.*



*Once again the Herlandians prove themselves to be organized, unified, and intelligent—more than the men initially believed they would be. The desire to both teach the men Herlandian and learn English themselves is the first indication of the community's common love of education and learning. It also proves that the Herlandians do have a reason for keeping the men instead of killing or hurting them—to learn from them.*



*Van, Jeff, and Terry do not seem to recognize the irony of their situation: they are being "subdued" and "shut up" by the women just as American women are kept "subdued" and "shut up" by American men. The way American women (especially wives) are treated—and the way gender roles are used to justify how they're treated—becomes an increasingly important topic that the men discuss with their tutors and other Herlandians.*





Walking away from the window, Jeff remarks on how the women are reacting to their presence. In particular, Jeff says that “It’s as if our being men was a minor incident.” Van agrees with Jeff’s observation, but Terry lashes out, saying that the only reason the women are reacting that way is because of their age. Jeff admits that this might be true but reminds Terry that the three younger women they saw earlier were curious but unafraid of the three men. Terry thinks about this over the next few days and complains that if he had managed to catch Alima, they could have used her as a hostage to negotiate with the leaders of Herland.

Over the following days and weeks, Jeff, Van, and Terry continue working with their tutors and take walks in the walled-in garden under supervision. From the garden, they get a better view of the fortress, confirming their suspicion that it is an ancient structure. Their guards regularly knit and read, and Terry says that seeing them knit is almost enough to make them seem feminine. Still, Terry dreams of being let loose among the younger women. Van gloomily asks Terry how he can be sure they’ll ever be let out of the fortress. The three men think about this possibility until Van suggests that perhaps if they are respectful and do well in their Herlandian lessons, then eventually the Colonels will let them free.

In a narrated aside, Van discusses the Herlandian language that he, Terry, and Jeff were trying to learn, saying that it has an easily understood phonetic system that sounds beautiful. Van also shares details about the exercise regimen he and the others were encouraged to do, which included dancing, running, and hurdling. In all these things, the women’s abilities surpassed those of Terry, Van, and Jeff. Van remembers trying to imitate the Herlandian method of jumping over hurdles (lifting one’s legs up and twisting the torso in midair) but failing to reach the same level of skill as the Colonels.

Returning to the past, Van, Terry, and Jeff continue to receive lessons from their tutors; Van is taught by Somel, Jeff by Zava, and Terry by Moadine. Although Van and Jeff develop real friendships with their tutors, Terry scorns Moadine and refuses to accept her friendship. The tutors bring the men maps of Herland, pictures, engravings, and—as the men grow more and more fluent in the Herlandian language—books. Terry’s anger and impatience, however, prevents Van and Jeff from enjoying the experience as much as they might have if he weren’t there. Van begs Terry to just be patient until the women let them out, but Terry rails against the idea that he must be “let” out.

*Terry’s irritation at hearing Jeff’s statement that the fact that they are men seems only incidental to the Herlandian women reveals just how much importance he places on his maleness and masculinity. For Terry, manhood is synonymous with superiority and power, and it is the key to his success with women in America. Terry has been relying on the idea that the women in Herland will be hopelessly sexually attracted to him as a man’s man, so the idea that they might not be is deeply unsettling.*



*Terry looks for any indication of traditional Western femininity in the Colonels because he is unable to conceive of womanhood without his idea of femininity—it would be unnatural. In this, Terry exemplifies the belief that femininity is an essential element of womanhood. However, advanced age might explain a lack of femininity, so in looking forward to being around the younger Herlandians, Terry reveals his hope that he will might still find more femininity in that age group.*



*One of the fundamental beliefs about womanhood that Van, Jeff, and Terry flew into Herland with was that they, as men, would inevitably be physically stronger than the Herlandians. However, the Colonels prove the men wrong. This instance echoes Van’s earlier comment that, in the present, he can laugh at the idea of men walking into Herland with the assumption that the women would be easily conquered.*



*Terry proves incapable of developing a relationship with Moadine because he is unable to recognize or accept a woman as his equal, which is fundamental in any genuine friendship. Furthermore, the idea that he must be “let” out implies that Terry is actually in an inferior position to the women, which is at the root of his anger. Without enjoying a sense of superiority—and, more importantly, having that superiority recognized by others—Terry can’t be content.*



Terry eventually convinces Jeff and Van that it is time for them to escape. Terry, who has carefully observed every detail of their surroundings, points out that if they can make a long enough rope then they can use it to climb out of their window, then over the garden wall onto a path far below. The men formulate a plan to make a long rope out of their **clothes** and bedsheets in the middle of the night (the only time they are left alone). They carry their plan out one night when there is a full moon to guide them.

*Terry suffers the most from being imprisoned because he is unable to cope with feeling inferior to the women, which is why he is the one who decides they must escape. It is notable that at no time do any of the men consider asking their tutors or the Colonels to let them leave the country in peace, which shows that the men still don't quite view the women as rationale people with whom they can speak openly.*



## CHAPTER 4: OUR VENTURE

After successfully reaching the path below the garden, Jeff, Van, and Terry quickly put as much distance between themselves and the fortress as they can. They load the numerous pockets of their **Herlandian clothes** with nuts from a nearby tree and drink from a stream before retiring to a well-hidden crevice on a steep bank at sunrise. The men sleep through the day and travel by night until they find their plane. However, the plane has been covered by a strong cloth that they are unable to tear apart with their hands. As they struggle with the cloth, they suddenly notice Celis, Alima, and Ellador watching them from a short distance away. Jeff, Van, and Terry cautiously approach the women, but they signal for the men to stop. The women throw them some cakes and set up a game to play.

*The fact that the plane has been covered implies that the Herlandians predicted that the men would try to escape and took action to stop them. This, again, shows a higher level of organization and unity than the men believe the women are capable of.*



Jeff, Terry, Van, Celis, Alima, and Ellador enjoy playing the game, but Van tells the other men that they should hurry and get away. They beg the women for knives to cut through the covering, but the women refuse to give them any. The men desperately grab sharp rocks and try to cut through the cloth, but to no avail. Terry suggests that he, Jeff, and Van should make a dash at the girls to steal their knives. However, this attempt fails as Celis, Alima, and Ellador easily outrun them. Jeff, Van, and Terry reluctantly return to their plane. When they get back, they are surrounded by Colonels and peacefully brought back to the fortress. On the way, Van observes the towns they go through and notices that although there are a lot of children, none of them are boys. Furthermore, the towns are uniformly clean and beautiful.

*The children that Van sees are direct evidence that the women of Herland are mothers, but the lack of boys or men also seems to confirm the rumors that Herland is made up entirely of women as true. The uniform cleanliness of the cities is also more evidence that taking care of the country is both a community-wide effort and an important priority for all the women.*



The next day, Somel, Moadine, and Zava tell Jeff, Van, and Terry that not only did everyone know they would try to get back to their plane, but that they were followed and watched the entire time. Terry is humiliated by the news, but Van is amused by what the tutors say. The tutors do their best to explain that if the men can master the language and promise not to do anyone any harm, then eventually they will be shown around the country. The men rededicate themselves to learning the language and studying their books. Terry, however, soon grows bored and complains that the books are dull. Van points out that he can't expect wild or romantic adventure stories in a land with no men. At this, Terry grows angry and decides to ask the tutors where the men are.

One afternoon while Jeff, Van, and Terry sit with their tutors, Terry asks if there are any men in the country. Somel tells him that there hasn't been a man in the country in 2,000 years. Astonished, Terry brings up the existence of children and Jeff says that what Somel says is hard to believe because in no other part of the world are women able to reproduce on their own. Zava asks if it happens in any other form of life and Jeff explains that some species of insects reproduce through parthenogenesis, or "virgin birth." When Zava asks what a virgin is, Jeff explains that it is used to describe women who have not had sex. Zava then asks if the same word isn't applied to men as well; Jeff says it is, but only rarely.

Van asks if the tutors expect him, Jeff, and Terry to believe that no men or boys have existed in Herland for 2,000 years. Somel tells him that this is the truth, although she and the other women know from observing animals about the existence of fathers. Somel also tells Van that she, Zava, and Moadine have been anxiously waiting for the men to learn enough of the Herlandian language to be able to share their knowledge of the outside world. To the reader, Van insists that these women, despite their isolation, are not ignorant. Rather, they are deeply wise and quick to understand everything they're told and are endlessly patient. Somel tells Van that she wants him and the other men to teach the tutors as much as they can. In return, the tutors will teach the men all about Herland.

*Terry's short temper is sharply contrasted with the patience of both Jeff and Van, who enjoy learning more about Herland. This shines a light on the different motives each man had in choosing to come to Herland: both Jeff and Van saw it as an opportunity to learn, but Terry expected excitement, adventure, and romance. Because of this, Terry is doubly embarrassed by the fact that during the one adventure the men do have—trying to escape—they were not even remotely as sneaky or successful as he believed they were. In this, as in many other things, the women of Herland prove themselves much more intelligent and organized than the men believed.*



*The conversation between Jeff and Zava about the use of the term "virgin" highlights a very important sexual double-standard in Western culture. The term "virgin" usually applies to women because women are expected to be virgins whereas men (who are rarely described as virgins) are not. However, this calls into question how necessary it is for women to be virgins because in order for men to lose their virginity (in an acceptable way, that is; same-sex attraction, whether between men or women, was extremely taboo in the early 20th century), they must have sex with women. The difference is that only women risk losing their reputations when they lose their virginity outside of marriage; men, on the other hand, are free to use sex as a source of personal pleasure and pride.*



*The earnest desire Zava, Moadine, and Somel have for information about the outside world is reflective of the entire community's love of learning. Later, they will explain to Jeff, Terry, and Van that learning in Herland is considered a lifelong process that everyone enjoys. This also explains why the women assume the men will be as eager to learn about Herland as the women are to learn of the outside world.*



Jeff asks if there were men in Herland over 2,000 years ago. Zava confirms that there were and promises to let the men read a book of Herland's history soon. Zava also expresses interest in comparing the history of Herland to the history of the rest of the world with the men's help. Terry asks if there are any animals other than birds and insects in Herland. Zava says they keep cats as pets and Somel jumps in to explain that larger animals, including dogs and cows, were allowed to go extinct because they took up too much space. Terry asks how the women get milk without cows and, confused, Somel explains that the women make their own milk. Jeff struggles to explain the dairy industry in America (including how calves are removed from their mothers), which makes their tutors turn pale and hurry out of the room.

*Zava, Moadine, and Somel have a strong reaction to Terry's description of the American dairy industry, particularly his account of how calves are removed from their mothers while they are still nursing. Although the men know that the Herlandians are mothers, this is their first indication of just how important motherhood is to them—the mere thought of a baby (any baby, no matter the species) being taken from its mother horrifies them and drains the blood from their face. It is also the first time the tutors express genuine horror in reaction to what life outside of Herland is like.*



## CHAPTER 5: A UNIQUE HISTORY

Returning to the present, Van writes that it's useless for him to focus his narrative on the adventures he, Terry, and Jeff had in Herland because there were no adventures to be had—no battles to fight or wild beasts to tame. Indeed, the only remarkable animals in Herland are the pet cats, who have been bred not to make noise or kill the birds, although they are encouraged to kill mice and other rodents that might damage the food supply.

*One of the defining features of Herland is the peace that exists there, which is shown by Van's statement that he and his companions didn't really have adventures there. Because the Herlandians do not need to expend their energy on overcoming obstacles or defending themselves, they are able to direct all of their focus on improving the world they live in, making it a happier place for everyone.*



Returning to the flashback, Terry, Van, and Jeff sit with Somel, Moadine, and Zava, talking about the cats. The conversation turns to the domestication of animals in the world outside of Herland, particularly dogs. The men explain that there are many different breeds of dogs with many different uses (such as hunting or sledding), but dogs are primarily bred for companionship because people love them. The tutors say they understand the love other people have for their dogs because of the love they have for their cats. The tutors explain that in Herland, there are very few male cats and they are kept in walled gardens to prevent unwanted mating outside of the established annual mating season. The women ask if there's a similar system for dogs and the men explain that very few people want female dogs that might have puppies, so most pet dogs are male.

*The attitude Jeff, Van, and Terry say Americans have toward female dogs is reflective of how Americans view women. Just as female dogs are seen as inferior companions, human women are seen as inferior to men. Furthermore, women are considered something of a burden because (like female dogs) they might reproduce more than their owners (that is, their husbands) would like.*



Zava asks Terry if the dogs in America are as kind and gentle as the cats in Herland. Jeff mischievously speaks up, saying that there are many dogs that bite children. This catches the tutors' attention and they ask how many dogs there are. Jeff says that nearly every family has one and Terry chimes in to say that every little boy loves to have a dog. Somel asks if little girls like the dogs too. Terry, a little deflated, says that girls also like them. Through careful questioning, the tutors learn that dogs are sometimes kept as protection from burglars (which Moadine takes careful note of) and are often chained up. Zava notes that because people (but mostly men) love pet dogs so much, they are kept either shut up or chained. Jeff admits that seeing a dog on a chain has always seemed pathetic to him.

In the present, Van shares what he learned about Herland's history. In Herlandian history books, Van read that Herland was once a much larger country, reaching all the way to the coast. The ancient Herlandians had an army, ships, and a king. Successive misfortunes (wars and a volcanic eruption) culminated in a slave uprising during which the men and boys were killed. The remaining women, cut off from the world after the volcanic eruption, did their best to rebuild their society without men. After 10 years, one woman mysteriously began having children, ultimately giving birth to five girls. These five daughters also grew up to have five daughters apiece. This pattern continued from one generation to the next and was the beginning of the Herlandian race that Van, Jeff, and Terry discovered.

Van writes that he, Jeff, and Terry initially struggled to understand how these women had not only eradicated so many masculine characteristics in their society, but also gotten rid of feminine ones. For example, because there were no men, the women had no reason to be afraid and therefore no need for protectors. Terry was incredulous about the idea that women could naturally be as cooperative as the Herlandians, saying that women are too jealous and fight too much to form a harmonious society. Van reminded Terry that what they had seen so far seemed to contradict Terry's opinion. Terry admitted the truth of this but stated that "these women aren't womanly."

*This is one of several times that Jeff intentionally reveals the less than savory elements of American culture. This is evidence of Jeff's apparent distaste for American life and growing belief that life in Herland is superior. He wants to bring up America's faults so they can debate them, but only in seemingly minor areas such as keeping dogs; he's still not quite ready to discuss gender dynamics explicitly. Somel's question about whether girls like dogs as much as boys and its effect on Terry also reveals just how little the men (especially Terry) value what girls like—what is most important in Terry's mind is that boys like dogs; whether girls like them is little more than an afterthought.*



*The devastating loss of men must have left the ancient Herlandian women unsure how their culture would survive and also forced them to cooperate in order to move forward. Because of this, the discovery of reproduction through parthenogenesis immediately became a source of hope and joy to the women—it meant that their culture would not simply die out but live on. This also explains why motherhood continues to be so important to Herlandians; they simply never stopped associating reproduction with hope, joy, and opportunity.*



*Terry is unusually stubborn in the way he hangs onto his beliefs about women. Even when he is confronted with undeniable evidence, he is unable to admit that his ideas might be wrong, instead saying that the Herlandians aren't "womanly." By this he means that they aren't feminine by the standards of 20th-century Western culture.*





Van records that he and Jeff were as patient as they could be with Terry, who had never gone so long without having some adventure (romantic or otherwise). Still, Van notes that there is some truth to what Terry said about the women of Herland not being “womanly.” According to Van, the Herlandians lack the traditional characteristics of femininity that one expects women to have. This quickly led Van to the conclusion that the “feminine charms” one expects women to have are not natural at all, but simply “reflected masculinity” put on to please men. Terry, however, never reached this conclusion, and both Jeff and Van had to warn him not to run completely wild once they were released from the fortress.

Returning to the subject of Herland’s history, Van writes that the ancient Herlandians dedicated themselves to planning for their future children and improving their country for them. Specifically, the Herlandians turned their attention to how to create “the best kind of people.” They recognized early that education was the surest way to promote good qualities and eliminate bad ones. Van writes that as he was learning about these women’s accomplishments (creating a society free of war, class divisions, and conflict), he began to lose respect for what men had done in the rest of the world.

In a flashback, Van, Terry, and Jeff try to convince Somel, Moadine, and Zava about the benefits of economic competition as motivation for men to work. Terry suggests that no man would work if he didn’t have to. Confused, the tutors ask if this applies only to men. Terry hastily explains that women might continue to work in the home for the good of their children, but the “world’s work” is done by men. The tutors excitedly ask what work the men do in the rest of the world that isn’t being done in Herland. Terry explains that men do “everything” while women are revered and kept in the home with the children. Zava incredulously asks if women really don’t work, forcing Terry to admit that poor women do. When Zava asks how many poor women there are, Jeff mischievously says there are seven or eight million in America.

## CHAPTER 6: COMPARISONS ARE ODIOUS

Van assures the reader that he had always been very proud of America, but the questions that Somel, Moadine, and Zava ask during his time in Herland leave him, Terry, and Jeff in the awkward position of having to discuss elements of American society that they would rather avoid. As the men grow more fluent in the Herlandian language, their tutors begin asking them more and more questions about American culture. They are particularly interested in what Terry said about working women.

*Unlike Terry, Van is open-minded and with time he finds that his opinions about women begin to change as he learns more about the women in Herland. The Herlandians represent what women can be when they are allowed to develop naturally instead of being forced to “reflect[] masculinity” in order to fit in socially and secure a husband, which was often seen as the most important part of an American woman’s life. This means that Van also accepts that what he believes about femininity is not actually natural (which is what he was taught in America), calling into question whether “natural” masculinity might be false as well.*



*America (like most Western countries) is a patriarchal society; Herland, however, is a matriarchal society. Van’s growing shame for what America has done reflects Gilman’s belief that a matriarchal society would actually be superior to a patriarchal one. Additionally, the description of motherhood in Herland as creating “the best kind of people” emphasizes the importance the women place on personal growth for everyone in their community, not just people they are biologically related to.*



*In Herland, motherhood is sacred, and mothers are revered. Terry claims that mothers in America are revered, as well. One of the defining differences, however, is that mothers in Herland are not prevented from doing the “world’s work” on account of their motherhood, but rather, they work because they are mothers and want to make sure the world their children live in is as near perfect as possible. This is why the tutors immediately assume that the work the men are doing in the world must be different than what the women are doing in Herland.*



*Even though Jeff purposely brings up some of America’s faults for the men to discuss with their tutors, the men are still generally eager to make the Herlandians believe that American culture is superior. However, their desire to hide certain details about American culture shows that the men realize their culture isn’t actually superior, despite what they’ve always believed.*



Zava, Moadine, and Somel ask what “poor” is. Terry’s initial reaction is to assure them that most European countries tell Americans that they don’t know what poverty is really like, because American society is so successful. Zava innocently says that she and the other tutors simply don’t know what poor means and repeats the request for more information. Van explains how some people are able to work their way to the top of the pecking order (the upper classes) while those on the bottom (the lower classes) struggle to survive, which sometimes forces women to work for money. Moadine assumes that the women who are forced to work for money don’t have children, but Jeff explains that the poorer women are, the more children they usually have.

Moadine tells Terry that soon they will be brought around the country to meet more women and to let other women meet him, Van, and Jeff. More importantly, the men are to teach the women about life outside of Herland. Van notes that Herlandians have little to no knowledge of geology, geography (outside of their own country), anthropology, and history (aside from their own). However, Herlandians do have a deep understanding several different sciences (like botany and chemistry). Van is also surprised to discover that knowledge is so openly and widely shared in Herland that “what one knew, all knew, to a very considerable extent.” In fact, Van notes that the women there have a higher level of general intelligence than Americans enjoy. The men are asked to share their knowledge with groups of middle-aged women, but it is a long time before they are invited to talk to younger women.

Terry impatiently asks what the women plan to do with him, Van, and Jeff. Moadine calmly explains that she and the other women want to learn more about the outside world, and they want to teach the men about Herland. Terry asks why he and the other men are being kept shut up in the fortress, so Moadine explains that it is a question of safety. Rather pleased with this answer, Terry reassures Moadine that they won’t hurt any of the young women. However, Moadine explains that they are actually concerned for the men—because it is a society of mothers, if one of the men does accidentally hurt a child or young woman, the older women might hurt the men. As Moadine explains, the children are at the center of Herlandian culture and every choice the adults make is made with the children in mind.

*This conversation about poverty and motherhood highlights one of the biggest problems in American society: women’s lack of reproductive control. The lack of reproductive control contributes to generational poverty as mothers bring more children into the world than they can adequately care for and those children go on to share their mothers’ poverty as adults. Part of the reason Zava and the tutors don’t know what poverty is, is because they do have reproductive control and that has helped them eliminate poverty in their community.*



*The high level of general intelligence in Herland is more evidence of their unity. As an egalitarian society, not only do the women equally distribute food, work, and resources, but they also do the same for knowledge. Because of this, there are no divisions on the basis of intelligence.*



*Terry initially takes Moadine’s comment about not letting the men out yet as a compliment, because he believes it is a tacit acknowledgement that he might have a certain power over the beautiful young women—they might be helpless in the face of his dashing charm and surrender themselves to him just as women in America have. Moadine’s statement that it is actually Terry and the other men who are in danger effectively flips the script and casts the men as potentially helpless and weak (conventionally feminine qualities) and the women as strong (or masculine).*



To the reader, Van explains what motherhood means to the Herlandians. After the trauma of losing their men 2,000 years before and the sudden development of parthenogenesis, Herlandian women became preoccupied with developing the best possible society for the benefit and preservation of their descendants. Recognizing the importance of cooperation, the women learned the skills necessary to take care of their physical well-being (carpentry, weaving, farming, etc.). However, they also soon learned that if each woman continued having five children, the small country would become overfilled and cease to meet the needs of the women and children. Rather than fighting each other for land and resources, the women sat down together, decided how many people the country could support, and agreed to limit their population to that number.

Van explains that motherhood has a more complex meaning in Herland than it does in America, where motherhood is characterized by helplessness and an inability to adequately control reproduction. In Herland, mothers are “Conscious Makers of People,” and maternal love is more like a religion than an instinct. Included in this love is a sense of sisterhood because the women of Herland are closely related. Van notes that while American women become consumed with the love and care they have to provide to their own children, the women of Herland direct their love and care to *all* of the children.

After reading that the Herlandians decided to limit their population, Van asks Somel to explain how they do it. Somel explains that motherhood is considered sacred and each woman is only allowed to have one child. There are, however, very special exceptions made—a woman may be allowed to have more than one child as the highest honor the state can give an individual. The women who have more than one child are called Over Mothers. Van asks how the women prevent pregnancy, saying that they “surely” don’t kill the unborn. At this, Somel turns ghastly pale and Van realizes just how anxious he is not to let the women of Herland think ill of American women. He tells her that infanticide is rare, something only criminal women do.

*This passage shows that the reason the women of Herland are so cooperative and unified is because of their common motherhood. They all experience the same kind of selfless love and devotion that is associated with motherhood, so it makes sense for them to use this as a basis for working together to make all their children’s lives better. Because of this system, what benefits one child benefits all children equally. Furthermore, the continued willingness of all women make personal sacrificing (limiting how many children they have) contradicts Terry’s belief that women are naturally quarrelsome and incapable of working together.*



*Motherhood in Herland is a conscious choice (hence the term “Conscious Makers of People”), not something that is forced upon them. Because of this, Herlandians see motherhood as a positive thing, while American mothers largely experience it as a burden that they have little to no control over. Furthermore, motherhood in America is divisive (mothers focus on their own children, separating themselves and their families from others) whereas in Herland it is unifying (love is given to all children by everyone).*



*Somel has the same reaction to learning about abortions and infanticide in America as she does to learning that nursing calves are removed from their mothers. This highlights that Herlandians believe all forms of motherhood—whether human or animal—are sacred and important. The existence of abortion and infanticide in America is further proof to Somel that motherhood is not revered as highly in the world outside Herland.*



Somel goes on to explain that, centuries before, Herlandians realized that when a woman is about to conceive, she goes through a period of exaltation. The women learned that if they direct their energy toward physical and mental work at this time, they can defer conception until they are ready to have their one (and usually only) child. Somel says that she thinks the reason the children of Herland are so deeply loved by everyone is because no woman has enough of her own children. Van grapples with how pitiful this seems, but Somel assures him that the women still have an outlet for their love by taking part in caring for all the children. Additionally, limiting population growth has allowed the Herlandians to perfect the art of educating children to embody the egalitarian and sisterly spirit of Herland and contribute to its progress.

*Working for the good of the community not only helps women defer pregnancy but also gives them an outlet for all of the love they have to give. The women naturally reproduce five times, but by only doing it once, they are driven to spend more time caring for others. This increases the sense of community throughout Herland because all of the women enjoy helping each other and their children.*



## CHAPTER 7: OUR GROWING MODESTY

Jeff, Terry, and Van prepare to take their first tour of the country to teach the younger women about life outside of Herland. Terry bemoans the fact that there are no razors they can use to shave their beards. Jeff points out that the women in Herland don't seem to grow any facial hair and Terry sneeringly points out that this is the only truly feminine thing about them. When the men leave the fortress, they go with their tutors. Although Jeff and Van are very close with their tutors, Terry struggles with Moadine. Van senses that Moadine sometimes laughs *at* rather than *with* Terry. Van also shares that he began losing respect for Terry during their time in Herland. Despite Terry's popularity with both men and women in America, in Herland his intense masculinity seems to stand out as a fault rather than a virtue.

*Terry is representative of ultra-masculinity, so by seeing faults in Terry, Van is also beginning to see faults in prescribed masculinity more generally. Terry seems unnatural in Herland because it is a country free from the socially constructed gender roles of American culture. This is also why Moadine seems to laugh at Terry: he seems too exaggerated to be natural or real. But because everyone in America conforms to their prescribed gender roles, Terry is perceived as virtuous and normal there.*



One day when Terry, Van, and Jeff are introduced to a large group of women, Terry asks if they all only have one name. Moadine says that many women have more than one name and that these second names are typically descriptors (such as wise or great) that they earn. Terry asks if they have surnames passed down from mother to child. Moadine tells him that they see no need for family names because everyone is descended from the same source. Van asks why individual mothers don't want to pass on their names to their children for identification purposes. Moadine and Somel explain that they keep careful records tracking lineage and each individual knows their genealogy back to the First Mother, but questions why the entire community would need to know which child belongs to which mother. To Van, this highlights another difference between "maternal and [...] paternal attitude[s]."

*In this instance, "paternal attitude[s]"—in other words, masculinity—is characterized as possessive. Men just assume that people want to show ownership of those inferior to them, and children are considered inferior to their parents. Because of this, the men think it would be natural for a mother to give her child a special name that tells everyone else the child belongs to her. "Maternal" attitudes, however, are the opposite—they have no desire to show ownership over a child, especially when that child grows up and is able to show their own worth by contributing to the community.*



Terry asks if there are enough names for each child to have her own and Moadine says that there are enough for each living generation. Van notes that this, as with every other Herlandian institution, highlights their “reasonableness.” In his research into the country’s records, Van is astonished by the obvious effort each generation makes to improve upon the practices of the previous generation. Van, knowing that if he asks about this conscious effort to improve then the tutors will ask him how things are done in America, decides not to comment on it because he won’t be able to show that America’s way is better. Even though Terry maintains his belief that Herlandian culture is inferior to America’s, Jeff and Van experience the growing sense that Herland has some distinct advantages.

Van, Jeff, and Terry quickly learn not to comment on certain Herlandian practices and characteristics because they know it will lead to questions about conditions in America that might be embarrassing to answer. Van says the food supply in Herland is a prime example of this. He explains that centuries ago, after the country was completely cultivated, the Herlandians estimated how many people could comfortably live off the food the land could supply and chose to limit their population to stay within that number. Furthermore, they developed the view that the country as a unit belongs to everyone equally and continue to think of the entire group as a community. Instead of limiting their sense of time to individual lives, they consider and plan for future generations. Accordingly, every plant serves a function: to produce an abundance of food for years to come.

Because the women are so skilled at determining the truth about social conditions in America, Jeff, Van, and Terry tacitly conceal as many details as they can. Terry is angry about this and says that the women can’t understand a man’s world, but Jeff questions whether American life—with all its poverty, wars, and disease—is truly better than the peace and health in Herland. Terry insists that Herland must have its faults, which calls to Van’s mind the speculations he and the other men made about what Herland would be like. He notes that they initially expected frivolity, submission, pettiness, and jealousy, but found practicality, inventiveness, and unity. Still, Terry insists they will find out Herland’s faults soon enough.

*In this context, “reasonableness” is synonymous with practicality—the women abide by a system that simply works (making sure there are enough names for every member of the living generation to have their own) rather than complicating it by trying to embellish it. In American society, however, many things are unnecessarily complicated, such as the use of surnames that can change (especially if one is a woman and gets married).*



*In Herland, people look beyond the limits of their individual lives. This is the opposite of American culture, in which most people work solely for their own success and ambition. Because Americans work for their own lives, there are numerous divisions and what works for one person or group of people doesn’t necessarily work for others. This, Van suggests here, is the reason America is not as socially progressive as Herland is.*



*American society is characterized by its divisions, which is why there are wars and poverty. These are also the things that make it a “man’s world”—it offers men opportunities for adventure, domination, and personal glory. The men predicted that Herland would be characterized by division (pettiness and jealousy) and believed that it would be proof of the country’s inferiority to America. But if division is a token of inferiority, then it would follow that America is in fact inferior to Herland, which is a highly unified community.*





Curious about the possible faults of Herland life, Van asks Somel what she believes these faults are. Somel admits that everyone has their faults, but also that their standard of perfection seems loftier than it used to be. Somel says that one of Herland's earliest endeavors was to eliminate bad qualities by asking women with negative qualities not to have children. The women in question would often agree not to have children, but those who did were not allowed to educate them. Van is initially horrified, but Somel explains that only those who are fit for motherhood (which is most of them) educate their children. All mothers, of course, are happy to allow the most capable women teach their children because it is the best thing for them.

*This passage highlights the importance of looking at a question from multiple perspectives. Van views the idea of separating children from their mothers to be educated as simply wrong, but by sharing the perspective of the mothers, Somel shows how it can be seen as a virtue; an act of selfless love done to give the child the best possible life. Indeed, it would be more selfish for an incapable mother to keep her child always with her rather than allowing another woman to educate the child.*



## CHAPTER 8: THE GIRLS OF HERLAND

Terry is delighted to be invited, along with Jeff and Van, to deliver a lecture to groups of young women and girls. When they stand up before the first group of girls to deliver a brief summary of world history, the men look for Celis, Alima, and Ellador, but are unsuccessful. After the men deliver their first lecture, Somel asks them if the girls can meet them and ask questions. Terry eagerly dives into the group of girls prepared to sweep them off their feet, Jeff is ready to worship them all, and Van is eager to observe and learn from them. Terry soon offends many of the girls with his compliments and “too-intimate glances,” but Jeff and Van prove popular with most. Afterward, Terry is annoyed by his unpopularity and says that the group was made up of boys, not girls.

*Even after spending months with their tutors and learning about Herlandian culture, Terry's first interaction with groups of young women highlights how little he's actually learned. He has yet to accept that masculinity is not revered in Herland and thus inadvertently offends many by coming on too strong. To him, the only way to explain this is by calling the women boys and thus unfeminine.*



Jeff, Van, and Terry continue delivering lectures, eventually reuniting with Alima, Celis, and Ellador. Soon, the men begin courting the three—Jeff falls madly in love with Celis, Van and Ellador grow closer, and Terry and Alima begin a tumultuous relationship characterized by frequent arguments. Van learns from Somel that as soon as the women of Herland saw the men's plane, they recognized the possibility of integrating them into the society and again becoming a bi-sexual civilization. Reports of the men were being sent out all over the country the whole time they were kept in the fortress, but very few women had shown an interest in starting a relationship with one of them. All of them, however, immediately became interested in learning about the world the men came from.

*Even though all of the women of Herland have an intellectual interest in Jeff, Van, and Terry, few of them feel any desire to have a romantic and/or sexual relationship with them. This further highlights how important learning is to the Herlandians and how unimportant the possibility of romance is. In fact, because there have not been any men in Herland in so long, the women have no conception of what romance is. This echoes Jeff's earlier comment that because there are no men in Herland, there are no romantic adventure stories.*



Somel tells Van that his popularity is due to the fact that the women believe he seems more like them. Van is initially offended that he's being compared to women, but soon remembers how different the women of Herland are from Western conceptions of womanhood. Recognizing this, Somel explains that she understands that she and the other Herlandians don't seem like women but asks if there aren't characteristics common to all human beings as "People." This, Somel explains, is why the women like Van—he is "more like People." Jeff, on the other hand, is too gallant and doesn't treat the women like the self-sufficient, strong people they are, and Terry is unable to buy the women's esteem with jewelry and trinkets.

Van describes his budding relationship with Ellador, saying that they began as friends and enjoyed talking with, teaching, and traveling with each other. Over time, however, the platonic feeling between them gradually transforms into romantic love. Ellador, Alima, and Celis, it turns out, had been the first to see the men and had taken the greatest care to guard their plane, and it was understood throughout the country that the three women had a special claim on the men. However, the courtship between the three couples is not easy because of "the lack of any sex-tradition." For instance, when Jeff tells Celis that women shouldn't have to carry anything, she becomes confused and asks why. Looking around at the strong women working nearby, Jeff is unable to say that it's because women are the weaker sex like he would in America.

Jeff tells Celis that elsewhere in the world, people believe that motherhood is enough of a burden for women and so they shouldn't have to take on any others. Celis calls this beautiful, but Alima asks if men carry everything everywhere. Terry tells her not to take everything so literally and asks why she doesn't want to be revered and taken care of. Alima points out that the men don't like it when she, Celis, and Ellador take care of them. Terry grumpily tells her that that's different but is unable to explain why.

Van and Ellador discuss everything openly together to smooth the way for when "the real miracle time" comes. They are able to help Jeff and Celis understand, too, but Terry refuses to listen. Madly in love with Alima, Terry wants to "take her by storm," which nearly ends their relationship entirely more than once. Van explains to the reader that sweeping a woman off her feet when all she's been taught to value and look forward to is "the one Event" is a simple thing that Terry had mastered in America. When he tries it on Alima, however, she is disgusted and it is weeks before she allows Terry near her again. The more Alima turns Terry down, however, the more intensely he wants her.

*Through Somel's statement that the women of Herland prefer Van to his companions because he treats them like "People" (meaning "equals"), Gilman reveals what American women want, as well—to be treated with equality and recognized as men's equals. They do not want deference (which Jeff shows) or condescension (which Terry shows), but just to be accepted (which Van does).*



*In this context, "sex-tradition" means gender roles. Because American heterosexual relationships are defined by gender roles, things are simple and easy, at least on the surface—each individual has a certain set of rules and expectations to follow. But in the relationships between the American men and the Herlandian women, there are no rules; they are creating something new by themselves. This has the potential to result in either intensely happy relationships if the couples can meet each other's needs, or devastatingly bad ones if the couples cannot compromise and find common ground.*



*In this passage, Alima, Celis, and Ellador make it known that they do not want to be revered or treated as weak, but rather treated as equals. This harkens back to Somel's comment to Van that the women all prefer him because he does treat them as equals, giving them respect rather than condescension or undue reverence.*



*What Van means by the "real miracle time" is the period when either Alima, Celis, or Ellador will feel that exultation that indicates their bodies are ready to conceive. This is when it will be acceptable to have sex. To "take [Alima] by storm" means that Terry wants to completely overpower Alima in a show of superiority and dominance. The "one Event" American women look forward to is marriage; Van implies that because it is what they most look forward to, it is easy to convince them to surrender themselves to any man who promises to marry them.*



Jeff, Van, and Terry try to prepare Alima, Celis, and Ellador for their weddings, but must explain the importance of the ceremony to all the women. Terry looks forward to marriage, saying that the women “have never been mastered.” Van tells him not to try to “do any mastering,” but Terry laughs him off. All three men struggle to help the women understand Western views of marriage and the concept of “home,” because all the women know is their deep love for each other and their country. Van notes that the women love the country because it gave them a happy life, but, more importantly, because it’s where their children will grow up and learn. All the “surrendering devotion” Western women give their families, Herlandians give to each other and their country—for example, by eradicating childhood illness and perfecting the art of childhood education.

To “master” a woman, by Terry’s use of the word, is to force her into a position of inferiority and submission. This foreshadows the climax of the story when Terry does try to “master” Alima by attempting to rape her. The men have often complained that Herlandian women aren’t traditionally feminine, but their version of femininity can actually be most clearly seen in the “surrendering devotion” they give to their country. If this devotion was shown to individual men, it would be easily recognized as femininity. But because it is not geared towards pleasing men, it seems unusual.



## CHAPTER 9: OUR RELATIONS AND THEIRS

Van writes that while the women of Herland experience intense feelings of sisterhood with one another, the men entered the country hoping to inspire “proper” feelings in them. However, whatever “sex-feeling” exists between the couples translates as friendship in the women’s minds. While the women think it’s natural to spend a lot of time with the men, they struggle to understand the concept of home. Terry explains that men like to keep their wives in their home, prompting Alima to ask what work wives do. Terry says the wives must care for the children and direct the servants, leading to a discussion about what women who have servants do for work. The men try to explain, but Ellador says it’s difficult to understand and that she’d like to see it for herself one day. Van says she will.

The “sex-feeling” that Van describes can be defined as lust or sexual desire. Because the women of Herland have gone so long without living alongside men (and are presumably not attracted to other women), they no longer recognize what lust feels like. Instead, they assume any positive feelings they have for anyone are indications of friendship and camaraderie. The “proper” feelings Van, Jeff, and Terry hope to inspire include sexual desire (provided it is desire for their own husbands and nobody else). The men see this as “proper” because they, as the husbands, are the primary beneficiaries.



One night after a fight with Alima, Terry angrily rails against the lack of any excitement in Herland. He complains that the women have neither interesting vices nor virtues, which makes both Jeff and Van angry with him. When Jeff says that the women have plenty of virtues, Terry insists that they have none of the modesty, patience, or submissiveness that makes a woman appealing. Irritated, Van tells Terry to go make up with Alima and be happy again, but Terry goes on about how little there is for a man to do because the whole country is “an everlasting parlor and nursery.” When Van argues that the country is also a home, Terry grows angrier and tells him there’s not a single home there and that he prefers being in a place where there’s “Something Doing,” adding that in Herland everything is already done.

As an American man, Terry believes his rightful and natural place is wherever there is “Something Doing” (this means adventures to be had or obstacles to be overcome). Because Herland seems like one giant “parlor and nursery,” it is closer to the women’s domestic sphere. Interestingly, although a parlor and a nursery are both important rooms in a home, Terry doesn’t think that indicates that Herland itself is a home. In Terry’s mind, the concept of “home” also implies that he can retire to it to fulfill his desires. Because Alima won’t do this, Herland does not seem like a home to Terry.



In a narrated aside, Van notes that Terry wasn't entirely wrong—the Herlandians were no longer in a stage of development, but rather in a state of peaceful prosperity that only needed to be managed instead of overcome. Van likes this because he enjoys studying the sociology of the Herlandians and Jeff likes it because he has such a deep love of peace, but Terry—the ambitious, energetic, adventurous Terry—is bored by it. There is no jealousy or poverty or war, so there is no drama in Herlandian life. This, however, is good for the Herlandian children, who know peace, prosperity, and safety from the very beginning. The children are treated with unwavering kindness, respect, and patience by everyone, and everyone helps the children grow and learn about the world around them. Van compares this to the lives of American children, who are carefully secluded within the home.

Van also notes that there are two life cycles in Western culture: one for men in which they prepare for an active public life, and one for women in which they prepare to get married and have children. In Herland, however, there is only one life cycle and all children look forward to taking part in the national life. To this end everything about Herlandian life is geared towards educating and caring for the children. In fact, Van notes that the Herlandian language was changed over time to make it easier for children to learn. Van is amazed that the women had the foresight and initiative to do this and accepts it as evidence of the fact that women *can* naturally develop these positive qualities—they are not exclusively masculine characteristics.

Van says that one of the most impressive elements of Herlandian culture is the care every member of society shows to the children. All the women in Herland treat the children with unwavering kindness and patience. They are so well taken care of that Van says he never heard a child cry in Herland unless they took an unusually hard fall; and in these cases, every adult that heard the child cry would run to help. The women carefully design the environment in Herland to make it not only safe, but beautiful and interesting for their children to explore. As a result, all the children are uniformly happy and look forward to the day they'll be old enough to work for the good of the nation, too. This, according to Van, challenges his long-held belief that if life is too easy, it is not enjoyable.

*Because the entire country of Herland is a giant home, Herlandian children do not need to be secluded but rather are universally loved and cared for by all the adults. Herlandians are quite literally a giant family, having all originated from one source that they can trace themselves directly back to. This also helps eliminate division, which Terry regrets because he loves the excitement of taking sides and trying to win.*



*Prescribed gender roles in America mean that only boys are taught to prepare to have an active public and social life, which also means that only boys feel any strong connection to the state as a whole. Gilman suggests that this is part of the reason Americans don't enjoy the same sense of unity as Herlandians, all of whom are taught to believe that they are equally important parts of the larger whole.*



*Not only do Herlandians make sure their society functions well, but this passage highlights how important the people believe happiness is. By making their children happy, adult Herlandians inspire those children to do the same for the next generation. Because Van was taught from his early childhood that if things are too easy then he won't enjoy life, he is bewildered by this part of Herlandian life—it is clear proof that what he was taught is not necessarily correct. More importantly, this way of thinking doesn't just affect Van as an individual—it also makes life in America unnecessarily difficult rather than happier.*



One day, Van asks Somel to explain Herland's theory of education. She explains that women in Herland seek to teach their children by appealing to the child's natural appetite for learning without forcing or overstimulating them. As children grow, the women help them develop their individual talents in addition to general knowledge. All Herlandians enjoy learning even as adults, and so they are always seeking new information and ideas. This in turn helps them develop new and better ways of teaching the next generation, continually adding to the pool of general knowledge that all Herlandians share. They also develop new educational games from one generation to the next that are fun for women of all ages. Above all, Herlandian education helps foster the sense of sisterhood and unity that characterizes their culture.

*Cooperation in Herland is not limited to relationships between adults, but also extends to relationships between adults and children. This is different from American culture, where children are treated as inferiors who aren't equal until they grow up and begin contributing to the rest of society. Because there is a sense of cooperation between adults and children (shown by how adults appeal to what is natural in children rather than actively trying to mold them into something unnatural), the children grow up to value respect and equality as adults, as well.*



## CHAPTER 10: THEIR RELIGIONS AND OUR MARRIAGES

It takes Van a long time to begin to understand Herlandian religion. It is apparent to him that motherhood is considered sacred, but it is only after he falls in love with Ellador that he takes an active interest in her religion. Ellador asks Van to explain his religion (Christianity), so he explains the concept of a "Dominant Power" and universal brotherhood. This pleases Ellador, as does the concept of the Virgin Mary giving birth, but she is confused by Van's account of the devil and Hell. In fact, Ellador runs to a temple for comfort after Van tells her that some people believe unbaptized babies go to Hell. To Van, this highlights just how foreign negative ideas like Hell and the devil are to the women in Herland.

*This is another example of how seriously Herlandians take motherhood, and it also highlights their struggle to understand why other cultures don't view it the same way. If Ellador were to accept the idea that unbaptized babies can go to Hell (in other words, be punished), then it would go against everything she knows and feels in her own heart as part of her religion, which considers motherhood and the relationship between mother and child sacred. From her perspective, the belief that babies might be punished completely violates human nature and makes Christianity's God seem more like a villain than a positive force.*



Ellador explains that Herlandians believe in a "Mother Spirit" that is essentially a magnified version of their own motherhood. Because of this, the women feel as if they are always being supported by this spirit. Furthermore, as Ellador also explains, they do not believe in an eternal punishment or have a Herlandian equivalent of Christianity's Hell; in fact, they do not believe the Mother Spirit punishes anyone, but instead tries to help them be better. The Mother Spirit is also considered an "Indwelling Spirit" rather than an actual being (Ellador is mildly puzzled by the idea that Christianity's God wears clothes and is pictured as a person). Ellador is also confused by the idea that Christians hold on to such ancient ideas and rules while also changing and progressing in almost every other aspect of their lives.

*Herlandian religion is closely tied to motherhood and giving birth, so the emphasis on the importance of progress and renewal seems particularly fitting. Herland undergoes a constant pattern of renewal or a sort of rebirth—they frequently change their practices and beliefs to improve their society. Each generation enters a newer, better world than the one that preceded it. This is why Ellador is so confused about the lack of progress or change in Christianity.*





Ellador explains that Herlandian religion centers on a “Loving Power” and that qualities such as patience and courtesy are part of their basic code of conduct. While they maintain a connection to this Loving Power, they do not engage in daily rituals for worship, although there are some national celebrations. Furthermore, they consider progress, dedication to their children, care of their land, and health part of their religion. Some women work in the temples to provide help and advice to those who seek comfort or have questions. After hearing this, Van excitedly praises the religion for being so practical and comforting. However, he is taken aback to learn that Herlandians don't believe in eternal life after death. Ellador is puzzled by this idea and says she thinks it's foolish. When Van explains Heaven and the peace found there, she tells him Herlandians want the same, but for their earthly world.

Jeff, Van, and Terry are unwilling to share details about the evils of life outside of Herland with Celis, Alima, and Ellador, even though the men accept them as a necessary part of their culture. Instead, they press the subject of marriage with the women. The men worry about how little they can give the women, but Terry insists that they can give Celis, Alima, and Ellador their surnames. Although the women are willing to do this to please the men, they question the reason for it. Terry tells Alima that it will show everyone that she's his wife. Alima asks Terry what a wife is, and he explains that “A wife is the woman who belongs to a man,” prompting Jeff to eagerly explain that husbands also belong to their wives. The group discusses the practice of giving women new surnames after their marriage, which Alima says sounds unpleasant.

Celis tells the men that they are loved just for themselves, without having to give anything for it. Shortly thereafter, the three have a large triple wedding. The entire country is excited to take this new step and everyone talks about the glories of fatherhood. Terry balks at this and says the women think of nothing but motherhood, that the men will have to “teach ‘em!” Jeff and Van worry about Terry's intentions, especially because of how strong-willed Alima is. Terry, however, tells them not to interfere with his marriage. On the day of their wedding, Somel shares her excitement with Van, telling him that the entire country views the wedding as an event that officially links them with the rest of the world.

*Religion in Herland is not just a personal, internal belief, but also an outward practice. They honor their Mother Spirit by embodying certain values that promote kindness and equality. This in turn promotes unity in Herlandian society. Essentially, the qualities Herlandian religion promotes are not entirely different from Christianity; the difference is in how the two religions are practiced, as seen in how different America—which was widely considered a Christian nation in the 20th century but was nonetheless fraught with poverty and conflict—is from Herland.*



*Jeff, Van, and Terry feel as if they as men must give Celis, Alima, and Ellador something to mark their marriage. However, the thing they want to give them is a surname, which actually indicates that the women will have given themselves to the men. This is shown by Terry's statement that a wife takes her husband's name to indicate that she is a wife and therefore “belongs” to someone. Although Jeff tries to explain that husbands belong to wives, as well, it is notable that only the wife is expected to take someone else's name as a sign that they belong to someone else.*



*The entire country celebrates the three marriages because, to their thinking, the nation of Herland is linking itself to the rest of the world instead of just linking Celis to Jeff, Alima to Terry, and Ellador to Van. Terry's excitement, however, is rooted in his belief that marriage will justify whatever means he uses to “teach” Alima. By this he means to make her submissive and conform to the traditional feminine role of wife.*



## CHAPTER 11: OUR DIFFICULTIES

Marriage proves more difficult to navigate than Jeff, Van, and Terry initially thought. Van says he and Ellador discussed what marriage would be like before their wedding but he is ultimately surprised by just how much he took for granted. He notes that in America, what a woman thinks marriage will be like doesn't matter once she takes a husband. However, the men soon learn more about the differences between mindsets in America and those in Herland. While they prepared for their marriages, the men assumed that they would be able to persuade Ellador, Celis, and Alima to adopt their beliefs about marriage. However, they find that these predictions and beliefs don't matter any more than an American woman's initial predictions about her marriage matter.

The trouble between the newlyweds has little to do with a lack of love and more to do with a lack of understanding. Jeff, Van, and Terry want their new wives to focus on housekeeping duties and activities that the men have been taught are "inherently appropriate" and pleasurable to women. However, the women have been taught to focus on higher duties (duties to the country and each other). Terry is often furious with Alima, but Jeff readily adopts Celis's Herlandian ideas. Van takes a middle ground, being neither as lustful as Terry nor as chivalrous as Jeff. Terry rants about the fact that the women don't know how to be wives (which, of course, they don't, because 2,000 years stand between the present and the last time men existed in Herland) and hates the fact that all the women think about is fatherhood and motherhood.

After their marriages, Celis, Alima, and Ellador return to work immediately. With no work of their own to do, Jeff, Van, and Terry often go with their wives to the **forest**. Still, the men yearn for private time with their wives as couples. This yearning, however, is not reciprocated. When Van tries to talk to Ellador about it, she becomes confused and reminds him that they are alone in the forest together and frequently eat and talk alone together. Van acknowledges this, but to the reader admits that what is missing is "possession."

Van tries to explain to Ellador that there is also a higher form of love to experience in their marriages separate from creating children. Ellador is puzzled by this and explains that there are birds who love their partners, but never mate except when it's the right season. Exasperated, Van tries to explain that birds are a lower form of life than people and asks Ellador what birds can possibly understand about the love they share. Van ecstatically seizes Ellador's hands, but she simply gazes into his eyes and begs him to be patient because she and the other Herlandians are first and foremost mothers; as such, Ellador explains, they "have not specialized in this line."

*Traditional Western gender roles are flipped in the marriages between the American men and Herlandian women. Instead of the men defining the marital relationship, they are compelled to allow their wives to do it. However, this does not necessarily have to be a negative thing. The egalitarian spirit that characterizes all of the relationships in Herland would presumably extend to these marriages—all the men have to do is let go of the idea that they must be superior to their wives and simply accept equality instead.*



*Left to navigate their new marriages without the help of gender roles to give them direction, the men must either adapt or fail. Herland is a female-dominated society, making Van, Jeff, and Terry minorities and stripping them of the power to define what marriage should be the way they would in America. Terry's anger at Alima foreshadows his marriage's failure while Jeff and Van's gradual acceptance of Herlandian culture proves to be key in the success of their marriages.*



*Van not only wants to "possess" Ellador herself (although he is gradually letting go of this desire), but he also wants her presence in the way that he expects a wife to be present. If they have a home that is their own, then Van might be able to keep her in it the way American wives are kept in their homes.*



*The "line" Ellador mentions and the higher form of love Van tries to tell her about both involve having sex for pleasure rather than just for procreation. The Herlandians, however, place a strong emphasis on practicality, which is why Ellador struggles to understand why one would have sex without it serving a tangible, important function. In Ellador's mind, she and Van can get plenty of pleasure from each other's company, and so there is no need to have sex without another, practical reason. Because of this, she will not simply submit to his desires.*



Van tries to explain how this higher love between spouses can stimulate them to produce more creative work. Ellador asks him if he means that married people “go right on doing this in season and out of season” without considering children. With a hint of bitterness, Van explains that they do, because married couples are not just parents, but also two people who love each other deeply for their entire lives. Ellador enthusiastically admits that it is a beautiful idea that people do for pleasure what Herlandians generally believe only has a single purpose. She praises American culture on these grounds, noting that the people there must be invariably happy and productive. They both silently consider Ellador’s words until Ellador tells Van he must bring her to America one day.

In a narrated aside, Van tells the reader that he doesn’t have a lot of experience with falling in love, but what little he does have doesn’t quite compare with what he found in his marriage to Ellador. Van soon finds himself experiencing a profound calm feeling with Ellador that he used to believe could only be attained one way. Almost without his noticing, Ellador can distract him from what initially seems like “an [...] imperative demand.” The results, according to Van, are surprising: what he once believed was a physical necessity is, after all, a psychological one. Over time, his feelings change, and the beauty of his wife becomes “an aesthetic pleasure, not an irritant.” At one point, Ellador experiences a “strange new hope” about dual parenting, but simply becomes a “good comrade” again when the feeling passes.

Ellador never leaves Van to dwell on his difficulties, but always tried to help divert his thoughts. There are distractions that can be deployed that hold Van’s attention until his desires simply go away. Van notes that in America, women are kept as different from men as possible. When men tire of the masculine world, then, they turn to the feminine world and enjoy the company of women. Whenever Ellador senses that Van is craving that feminine refreshment, she gives him too much of her “de-feminized” company instead of heightening his desire by withdrawing. Still, Van enjoys Ellador for herself so much that he is glad to be with her on any terms.

*Both Van and Ellador go silent after Ellador’s speech about how wonderful Western marriage must be, but for different reasons. Ellador continues thinking about how productive and happy married American men and women must be if what Van says about the role of sex in their lives is true. Van, however, is suddenly confronted with how untrue it all is—he knows that American husbands and wives are not uniformly happy together, nor are they actually more productive because of their sex lives.*



*The “imperative demand” Van describes is his sexual desire. Because Ellador believes she should only have sex with the intention of creating a child, she will not sleep with Van unless she feels the special exultation that indicates her body is ready to conceive. This is the “strange new hope” she feels at one point, but the mood passes because she and Van are unsuccessful in trying to conceive. When Van says Ellador’s beauty becomes a “pleasure, not an irritant,” he means that he comes to appreciate that just because she’s pleasant to look at, it doesn’t necessarily make his sexual desire for her harder to cope with.*



*When women in Herland feel their bodies prepare to conceive a child, they can defer conception by directing their energy and attention elsewhere. Ellador uses this same idea to distract Van, to make it easier for him to defer the gratification of his sexual desires until the proper time (when Ellador is ready to conceive).*



While Van and Jeff find more and more happiness with Ellador and Celis, Terry's experience with Alima is much different. To the reader, Van explains that he simply never understood Terry's true character until coming to Herland and is ashamed of what he found. Terry and Alima's marriage turns sour and one day, in a fit of rage, Terry tells Jeff that there was never a woman who didn't "enjoy being mastered." Jeff angrily leaves Terry and even Van is disturbed by his words. Alima refuses to be alone with Terry, but this only heightens his desire for her. So, one night, Terry hides in Alima's room and tries to rape her. Alima calls for help before any serious harm is done, Moadine and some other women intervene, and Terry is arrested. The women of Herland are shocked and repulsed by Terry's behavior. As a result, the Herlandian court decides Terry must leave Herland.

*Terry seems to genuinely believe that women like being "mastered." By this he means that they like being forced into submission. He tries to force Alima to be more submissive by trying to rape her, an act which would of course strip her of all her power and make her feel the helpless sense of inferiority that Terry wants her to feel. However, Terry fails to account for the fact that Alima is not submissive and therefore will not enjoy being victimized. Unlike what Terry expects from American women, Alima fights back and the Herlandian community fights with her by expelling Terry.*



## CHAPTER 12: EXPELLED

Van writes that even though all the men meant to return to America eventually, they don't like the idea of being kicked out of Herland for a crime. Terry is furious and kept under guard in a private set of rooms. He argues that the women in Herland don't know the first thing about sex, and Van observes that what Terry really means is that the women don't understand his brand of masculinity. Van himself now views masculinity in a new light and Jeff has been "thoroughly Herlandized." Moadine keeps watch over Terry while preparations for leaving Herland are made—Ellador and Van will go with Terry. Jeff, however, privately says he wouldn't dream of bringing Celis to the dirty streets of America and tells Van he must tell Ellador what it's really like. Van realizes there is something to this and decides to be more honest with Ellador about America.

*Van, Terry, and Jeff all resent the idea of having to leave Herland in disgrace, although it is really only Terry who is required to go. The sense of disgrace, however, is felt by all three men because they know that Terry's actions will be interpreted as possibly indicating what masculinity and manhood are like in the rest of the world. Furthermore, Van is caught in the awkward position of having to make Ellador understand the bleak social conditions of American society after spending so much time trying to convince her of its virtues.*



Van tells Ellador she must prepare herself to be somewhat shocked by the appearance of American cities, which are not as clean as Herlandian ones. Ellador persists in believing that life in America must be much more exciting and fulfilling than life in Herland, saying that the Herlandians have done what they could with one sex, but that America must be far better because it is a bi-sexual culture. Even when Van tries to explain to her the existence of corruption, insanity, and disease, Ellador overlooks it. As for himself, Van notices that he now considers Herlandian life—with all its health, peace, and prosperity—normal and thinks of life elsewhere as abnormal. Above all, Ellador wants to see what marriage and women outside of Herland are like. Still, Van begins to dread what will happen once Ellador sees the rest of the world.

*Van predicts that Ellador will experience intense culture shock and even bewilderment when she finally sees America, just as Van, Jeff, and Terry were astonished to discover the reality of Herlandian culture. However, Ellador will not be pleasantly surprised, but rather disillusioned. Van's desire to make her understand this reveals his own latent hope that she will decide to stay so that he, too, has a reason to stay.*



As the time to leave draws near, Van recognizes more and more of the defects of American culture and society. Van realizes that he, Jeff, and Terry felt like they missed the larger part of life when they entered Herland and discovered that there really were no men. More importantly, they assumed the women felt the same way. What Van and Jeff have come to realize, however, is that a man's world means little to Herlandians. When the three American men think of manhood and manliness, they picture men everywhere doing the world's work and improving everything, whereas when they think of women, they simply think of the gender. For Herlandians, this is reversed: when they think of womanhood, they think of doing the world's work; when they think of men, they simply think of the gender. Just telling the women that things are different elsewhere doesn't alter the Herlandians' beliefs about womanhood.

One of the transformations that Jeff and Van (but not Terry) go through in Herland is that they begin to see women "not as females, but as people." Because the Herlandians have no concept of Western "marital indulgence," they struggle to understand why Terry attacked Alima the way he did. Because sex is inextricably bound with ideas of motherhood, Ellador struggles to understand why women would want to do it without intending to create a child and calls it unnatural. Even when Van tries to explain it as a way to show love between married couples, Ellador struggles to understand and asks him to continue being patient with her—to her, and others, the process of conception is holy and it must stay that way.

Celis reveals that she is pregnant. Ellador is momentarily jealous but tells Van that it's better that she's not pregnant and asks Van if they can wait to try for a baby until it's safe and their travels are over. Although somewhat stung by this, Van says that he wants Ellador with him no matter what and will let her decide when they try to conceive. To the reader, Van admits that Ellador's companionship is enough to live on. He struggles to explain what Ellador's love means to him. Van admits that men in general say some great things about women but also think that they are "limited beings—most of them." Van describes how men honor women for certain qualities but dishonor them by violating their virtues. As Van explains, women are valued only as long as they stay in their place—the home.

*Not only do Jeff, Van, and Terry find themselves in a more traditionally feminine role in their marriages (having to allow their wives to take control in order to sustain the marriages at all), but they also feel as if they are perceived the same way women typically are in America. In other words, the men are now merely thought of in terms of their gender rather than as important members of society. This is a unique opportunity for each man to reconsider their long-held beliefs about women. Terry's great mistake was in refusing to adjust his beliefs to reflect the reality that surrounds him in Herland.*



*Van's statement that he and Jeff see women "not as females, but as people" harkens back to Somel's words when she explained that Herlandian women like Van because he seems more like "people." In Herland, Gilman uses the word "people" to eliminate sex-based terminology that she believes highlights perceived differences that are then used to justify the subjugation of women in American society. The gender-neutral term "people" establishes both men and women as equals who have more commonalities than differences.*



*Van says that women are "limited beings" (in this context, he means American women, not Herlandian ones) but does not quite point out that it is men who limit what kind of lives women can lead. In his own marriage, Van lets Ellador set the boundaries, thus giving her the power to limit what life he can lead, at least regarding sex. However, there is still equality—in return for letting Ellador control their sex life, Van gets to stay married to her, which is something that has become increasingly important to him. Their relationship began with friendship, which means there was always some tendency to equality and which helps make it easier to create an equality-based marriage.*





Over time, Van begins to understand that Herlandian women are different than American women—they cannot be treated as inferiors because they are not shy or weak but must be treated as equals. Both Jeff and Van accept this after their marriages, but Terry does not. Consequently, Van and Jeff have happy, comfortable marriages while Terry’s falls apart.

Shortly before their departure, Van tells Ellador that if she wants to stay then he will fly Terry down and then come back to her. However, she insists on leaving with him to see the world. During this time, Terry grows angrier and angrier at the women. Still madly in love with Alima, Terry yearns to see her, but discovers she has left that part of the country to avoid him. To Van, Terry complains of the way Alima fought back when he tried to “master” her, calling it an indecent move. Noting the irony in this, Terry smiles and says he just wants to get her alone again. However, she never comes to see him as the day for his departure approaches.

A council of the wisest women in the land present information they gathered from the men—not just what the men told them, but what they studiously avoided talking about during their captivity—to Ellador. They explain to her all the conclusions they have come to about the outside world, including the worst parts of it. After the council talks to Ellador, Jeff and Van are asked to come into the room. Somel and Zava are there and they ask if they are correct in thinking that despite the world’s progress, disease and violence run rampant. Jeff and Van confirm the truth of this. The tutors say that, given this confirmation, the men must swear not to tell anyone where Herland is until Ellador has returned—and then, the Herlandians will only agree to let in more outsiders if Ellador presents a positive report of the outside world. They agree and Terry, Ellador, and Van leave Herland together.

*The success of Jeff and Van’s marriages is due to their willingness to adapt to their wives’ expectations—the same way American wives are expected to adapt to their husbands’ expectations. Again, gender roles are reversed, but the changes in Van and Jeff highlight that gender roles are not actually defined by nature or biology—they can be adjusted or even eliminated, and doing this can lead to happiness.*



*Although Terry has finally reached the point where he is willing to admit that Alima may have been somewhat justified (he shows this by recognizing the irony of saying it was wrong of her to fight while he was trying to rape her), he remains unrepentant. This highlights the fact that nothing about his experiences or life in Herland has truly transformed him. Presumably, when Terry returns to America he will slip right back into his former role of popular lady’s man.*



*Having learned all they can from the men, the women of Herland come to the conclusion that their own small country is better off maintaining its isolation. By doing this, they prevent the same corrupting influences (war, disease, and—on another level—the toxic masculinity that Terry represents) from destroying all the work they’ve put into perfecting their own culture. Still, as is characteristic of Herlandians, they look forward to Ellador’s return because it is a chance to learn even more about the outside world—if only to use this information to guard themselves against it.*





## HOW TO CITE

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