Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HARRIET JACOBS

As described in her narrative, Harriet Jacobs was born a slave in South Carolina and eventually escaped to New York, where she was reunited with her two children. While working as a nurse in the Willis family (named the Bruces in this narrative) Harriet began to write about her life, encouraged by her friend Amy Post, a noted Quaker abolitionist. In 1861, just as the Civil War was starting, she published *Incidents* under a pseudonym, Linda Brent. As the book became popular, Jacobs began to give lectures and returned to the South to organize food and housing for escaped slaves and black refugees from the war. By the end of the war, she had concentrated her efforts on building schools to educate freed slaves and their children. She continued this work in the decades after the war alongside her daughter Louisa, who had trained as a teacher. After the Civil War, *Incidents* fell out of print; because it was written under a pseudonym, scholars believed it to be a novel. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist historian Jean Fagan Yellin proved it was in fact a memoir and brought it and its author back into the public eye, making it one of the most well-known slave narratives.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Slavery existed in America from the 17th to the mid-19th centuries. By facilitating the cheap production of cash crops like cotton and tobacco, slave labor allowed the United States to become economically successful. Although the vast majority of plantations using slave labor were situated in the South and slavery was banned in most Northern states by the beginning of the 1800s, much of the nation still depended on and benefited from slavery, as raw materials produced by slaves were manufactured in Northern factories, and industries from banking and insurance to shipbuilding profited by upholding the system of slavery. In the decades before the Civil War, movements for the abolition of slavery became increasingly popular in the North, especially as the United States began to expand westward and new states had to decide whether to ban or allow slavery. At the same time, the 1850s were marked by advances for proponents of slavery, like the Fugitive Slave Law, which allowed the recapture of escaped slaves from states in which slavery was illegal, and the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* decision, which stated that no African American could have citizenship or legal rights in the US. In 1861, the conflict erupted into the Civil War, leading to the abolition of slavery in 1865. Despite its official end, the legacy of slavery persists in the racism and discrimination experienced by African Americans today.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The American slave narrative is a genre of literature that describes slavery from the point of view of its victims. Although such narratives were recorded from the 16th to the 18th century, they were especially popular in the decades prior to the Civil War, when abolitionists used them to generate popular condemnation of slavery. Published in 1845, fifteen years before *Incidents*, the *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* is the most famous work in this genre. Slave narratives are still being published today: In 2018, historian Deborah Plant published *Barracoon*, a collection of author Zora Neale Hurston's interviews with a former slave. Besides slave narratives, Jacobs's era saw the rise of anti-slavery fiction, such as the famous *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe that portrayed the injustices of slavery.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*
- **When Written:** 1850s
- **Where Written:** New York
- **When Published:** 1861
- **Literary Period:** Antebellum American
- **Genre:** Memoir, slave narrative
- **Setting:** Antebellum America
- **Climax:** Linda's escape from North Carolina
- **Antagonist:** Dr. Flint, slavery
- **Point of View:** First-person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

North Star. For about a year, Harriet Jacobs operated an anti-slavery reading room in the same building as Frederick Douglass's abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*.

Holding Her Own. While she was working on *Incidents*, Jacobs wrote to anti-slavery author Harriet Beecher Stowe for literary advice, but Beecher just asked to use elements of Jacobs's story in her own novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Jacobs refused permission and eventually succeeded in publishing her narrative herself.

PLOT SUMMARY

Linda Brent is born into slavery, but because her father works outside of his mistress's house as a carpenter, she grows up in a happy family home with her parents and her younger brother

William. She also lives near her grandmother, who buys her own freedom when Linda is young. When Linda is six, her mother dies and Linda goes to live with the family's mistress, who treats her kindly and teaches her about religion. Six years later, the mistress dies; Linda hopes that she will be freed in her will, but instead the mistress bequeaths her to her young niece, and Linda has to go live with the Flints.

Life in the Flint household is very different from anything Linda has known before. She and her brother have to work very hard, they have little to eat, and Mrs. Flint is unkind to them and often beats her slaves—she doesn't even let Linda go to her own father's funeral. Linda's grandmother tries to provide for her family and keep the children's spirits up, but it seems that trouble is brewing—Linda's brother William and her young uncle Benjamin are both chafing at the new restrictions in their lives, and meanwhile Dr. Flint has begun to sexually proposition Linda and threaten her that she has to do whatever he wants, because she belongs to him.

Some time after this, Benjamin runs away from his master. He is caught and thrown into the city jail, where he languishes for months before being sold to a slave trader. Linda's grandmother tries to cobble together money to buy him, but before she does so Benjamin runs away again, eventually reaching safety in New York. Grandmother continues to save up money, hoping to purchase the freedom of some of her other children. She eventually manages to buy and free her son, Linda's uncle Phillip.

Linda has tried to make her life in the Flint household bearable, but as Dr. Flint's sexual interest in her becomes obvious, Mrs. Flint takes out her jealousy on her powerless slave. Mrs. Flint interrogates Linda about her interactions with her husband and forces her to sleep in her own room, where Linda fears she might one day kill her. Nevertheless, Dr. Flint is unashamed and frequently berates Linda for her failure to "obey" him. Linda says such situations are typical of Southern culture, where it's normal for male slave owners to have many illegitimate children with female slaves, and for their wives to exact revenge on those unwilling mothers.

When she's fifteen, Linda falls in love with a free black carpenter, who wants to marry her. However, Dr. Flint refuses to concede to the marriage or to sell her to the carpenter. Moreover, Linda is afraid to have children with the carpenter because they would legally belong to Dr. Flint and be under his power. Furious that she has fallen in love with someone else, Dr. Flint threatens to kill her or throw her in jail; eventually, fearing that he will exact retribution on the carpenter, Linda breaks off her courtship. She channels her energy into caring for William, and begins to plot an escape from slavery for him.

Linda breaks away from her own narrative to describe the cruel punishments that are rampant and accepted under slavery. For example, one man in her city locks a runaway slave inside a cotton gin until he dies, and goes completely unpunished. Slavery is especially pernicious to young girls, who are subject not only to physical but sexual violence, and have no legal or practical means to protect themselves and their chastity from men who are unashamed to have illegitimate and enslaved children. For reasons like this, slavery is degrading to white society as well as unjust to its victims.

Dr. Flint begins plans to build Linda a **cottage** of her own outside the town. Knowing that without his wife in the vicinity she will be completely powerless, Linda becomes desperate and takes action. She accepts the advances of another white man, Mr. Sands, thinking that he will give her some protection against Dr. Flint and preferring to give herself to a man rather than to "submit to compulsion." Even though she has no other options, she feels deeply ashamed of sacrificing her sexual purity. She keeps her decision a secret even from her grandmother, until she becomes pregnant. When she announces her impending motherhood to Dr. Flint, he is enraged and runs her out of the house. Her grandmother is angry with her as well, saying that "I had rather see you dead" than an unwed mother. However, she takes her into her house and provides a refuge from Dr. Flint, who leaves her there for the duration of her pregnancy.

Midway through her pregnancy, Linda becomes very sick and delivers her baby prematurely. She has often wanted to die because of the hardships of her life, but now she knows she has to stay alive for the baby, and she wills herself to get well. Dr. Flint visits often, reminding her that her son belongs to him and sending her sexually explicit letters. Linda names her baby Benjamin (Benny), after her escaped uncle.

Linda continues to live in her grandmother's house and eventually gives birth to a daughter, Ellen, with Mr. Sands. She begins to attend church meetings organized for slaves, but becomes disillusioned when the pastor simply lectures attendees about obeying their masters, saying that the Bible commands them to do so. Once, a worship leader even laughs at a mother who is distraught after her children have been sold away from her. Linda comes to feel that the practice of Christianity in the South is essentially hypocritical, just another tool to exert control over slaves. Dr. Flint is very active in the Episcopal church, but he continues to urge Linda to live a sinful life with him.

Because she still refuses to sleep with Dr. Flint, Linda is sent away from the city to Dr. Flint's plantation, where she works as a housekeeper, getting the house ready for the arrival of Dr. Flint's new daughter-in-law. She takes Ellen with her, but the young girl becomes sick and distressed by harsh plantation life and Linda sends her back to her grandmother. Separated from her children, Linda frequently thinks about attempting to escape, but grandmother talks her out of it. Finally, Linda learns that both her children are going to be sent to the plantation to be "broke in" and she runs away in the night.

For some weeks Linda hides at the house of an unnamed friend.

Dr. Flint sends patrols to search for her all over the city; once, they arrive at the friend's house and she has to hide in the swamp, where a snake bites her. Eventually, Linda's grandmother confides in a white woman who has been friendly with her for years. The woman agrees to hide Linda in her own house and try to find an escape route to the Free States. The woman sends her cook, a woman Linda knows named Betty, to fetch her, and she hides in her attic for months. Meanwhile, Linda hears that William and her children have been thrown into jail, in order to coerce her into revealing herself.

In order to get the children away from Dr. Flint, Mr. Sands purchases them, as well as Benny. They are taken back to Linda's grandmother, where they can live in safety. However, Dr. Flint is still searching for Linda and a better hiding place needs to be found. Uncle Phillip builds a concealed crawlspace in Linda's grandmother's shed, and Linda is conveyed there. There's no room to stand up or walk, and it's completely dark and airless until Linda bores a few holes in the wall. She can see her children playing in the yard but never talk to them. As the months pass, Linda's limbs begin to stiffen, and she often gets sick. Her relatives sneak up to the shed at night to treat her.

Linda stays trapped in this hiding place for seven years. At some point, Mr. Sands gets elected to Congress; before he leaves for Washington, Linda has a secret meeting with him and makes him promise to free their children as soon as possible. Mr. Sands takes William with him to Washington and later on a trip to the North, and is very pleased with his attentiveness as a servant. However, in Boston William runs away. Mr. Sands returns bringing a new bride but without Linda's brother.

Dr. Flint begins threatening to reclaim the children, saying that the sale contract was not legal. Mr. Sands decides to send Ellen north to live with his cousin; he tells Linda that he has freed her and she will be able to go to school, but the cousin writes a letter to Linda's grandmother saying that Ellen has been "given" to her as a servant. Linda is desperate to get her children out of the hands of both men.

Some time after Ellen's departure, a family friend named Peter finds a way for Linda to escape on a ship bound for Philadelphia. At first, Linda's grandmother convinces her not to go, and they give the place to another fugitive slave in the area, Fanny. However, just before the boat leaves someone spots Linda in the shed and she has to escape quickly. After an emotional farewell to her grandmother and Benny, she and Fanny sail away from North Carolina. At first, she doesn't trust the captain and the sailors, but they prove kind and gentlemanly and the women arrive in Philadelphia safely, where they stay with a black pastor and his family for some days.

Linda soon proceeds to New York, where she stays with a contact from the South and quickly seeks out Ellen. She finds that her daughter has not been sent to school as promised, but works as a servant and is anxious to come and live with her mother. Mr. Sands's cousin, Mrs. Hobbs, reiterates that Ellen has been "given" to her. In order to be near her daughter, Linda finds a job as a baby nurse for a white woman, Mrs. Bruce. Her new employer turns out to be kind and sympathetic, as well as fiercely opposed to slavery. She offers to bring Ellen into her house as well, but Linda is scared of offending the Hobbs family because they know about her status as a fugitive slave.

Dr. Flint visits New York, trying to discover Linda's whereabouts. Without telling Mrs. Bruce that she is a fugitive, Linda goes to stay in Boston for some weeks. Meanwhile, her grandmother puts Benny on a ship heading north and he is reunited with his mother. He goes to live with William, now in Boston, while Linda works for Mrs. Bruce.

During the summer, Linda accompanies Mrs. Bruce and her child on a vacation to the countryside. When she gets back and goes to visit Ellen, she finds that Mrs. Hobbs's brother, Mr. Thorne, is visiting. He's from the city of her birth, and probably knows that she has run away, so Linda is very worried to be discovered by him. A few days later, Ellen tells her anxiously that Mr. Thorne has written to apprise Dr. Flint of Linda's whereabouts. Linda escapes from the city with Ellen and goes to Boston, where she finds a job sewing and lives with her two children.

In the spring, Linda is saddened to find that Mrs. Bruce has died. Mr. Bruce wants to take his daughter to meet her mother's relatives in England and asks Linda to come as her nursemaid. Eager to make more money to support her children, she agrees. She's astounded to find little evidence of racial prejudice in England, where she's always allowed to eat at the same table as her employer. Even though she sees many poor people, it's clear that their lot is much better than that of American slaves because they are free and can get an education and improve their circumstances.

Two years later, Ellen prepares to go to boarding school, where she trains as a teacher. Linda knows she must tell her daughter about her illegitimate paternity, and does so with a sense of shame. However, her daughter replies calmly that she's always guessed who her father was and doesn't care about him at all, saying "all my love is for you."

After her daughter departs, Linda returns to New York to work for Mr. Bruce's second wife, the new Mrs. Bruce, and her baby daughter. Around this time, new laws are passed allowing slave owners to forcibly recapture escaped slaves from free states. Linda feels increasingly unsafe, and hates to go outside even for walks with the baby. Soon, her family warns her that Dr. Flint is making another trip to New York. She confides in Mrs. Bruce, and her employer sends her to hide with a friend in New England for the duration of his visit.

After this latest scare, Dr. Flint dies. Linda feels she should forgive her old abuser, but she can't bring herself to feel sad about his death. Moreover, she is still in danger because his daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Dodge, are still pressing

a claim on her. Soon they too arrive in New York and Linda has to go into hiding again. Mrs. Bruce offers to buy Linda and free her, but Linda feels morally opposed to the idea of paying for the freedom to which she is already entitled. However, her employer secretly sends a lawyer to negotiate with the Dodges and succeeds in purchasing her. Linda's grandmother lives long enough to hear about her freedom, but dies soon after.

Linda feels that an enormous weight is off her shoulders, and she's now free to live as she likes. She is still striving to earn enough money to buy a home for her children, but she is much happier and more content than she once was. While it's "painful" to recall her life as a slave, doing so also brings "tender memories," like her time with her beloved grandmother.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent – Harriet Jacobs is the author of the narrative. As its protagonist, she takes on the name Linda Brent in order to avoid recognition after its publication. Born into slavery in North Carolina, Linda is forced to work for Mrs. Flint, a vicious and self-centered mistress, and Dr. Flint, who constantly sexually harasses her. In order to avoid rape at the hands of Dr. Flint, Linda has an affair with another slave owner, Mr. Sands, and bears two children, Benny and Ellen. Eventually, fearing that her children will be sent to work on the Flints' plantation, she runs away and manages to reunite with her children in New York, where she ends the narrative just as she's becoming an activist for abolition. Linda is an extraordinarily determined and perseverant young woman with a strong sense of her own rights and moral duties. Even though it often seems impossible to evade Dr. Flint, she resists him at all costs, both because she doesn't want to "submit to compulsion" at any time and because she feels it's her Christian duty to safeguard her sexual purity. Likewise, Linda is a devoted mother with strong feelings of duty towards her children and an insistence on her rights as a mother, even though she sees those rights ignored by slave owners every day. When she has to sacrifice her chastity by having an affair with Mr. Sands, she suffers deep feelings of shame, but with the help of her daughter she eventually puts these feelings behind her and realizes that she's not accountable for the sexual abuse she suffered as a teenager. Linda uses her story to bring attention to the specific predicament of enslaved women whose ability to fulfill sexual standards and concerns as mothers are constantly violated by slavery. In doing so, she frames the issue in terms of the erosion of valued social mores like chastity and motherhood, and makes her argument more appealing to her Northern middle-class audience, proving herself a shrewd as well as deeply evocative writer.

Grandmother – Linda's grandmother and the matriarch of her family. An elderly but energetic and hardworking woman, Grandmother is so prominent in the community that she even has the respect of some white people. When Dr. Flint proposes to auction her, a white woman buys her and sets her free. Grandmother uses her new status to save up money to buy her son, Phillip, and to protect Linda and William in any way she can. Although she's a woman of strict religious principles and is appalled when Linda becomes pregnant out of wedlock, she provides her a refuge from Dr. Flint, and later hides her in a crawlspace for seven years. Grandmother is a source of strength and principle for Linda, who always depends on her judgment; at the same time, her insistence on making the best of the family's situation in the South contrasts with Linda's determination to escape and involvement in activist circles after her escape. At the end of the narrative, Grandmother dies; the tranquility of her death and her faith that she will meet God in heaven is reflective of the sincerity of her religious beliefs, as opposed to the hypocrisy of Christianity as practiced by slave owners.

Dr. Flint – Linda's owner and the narrative's chief antagonist. A wealthy doctor, plantation owner, and respected figure in the community, Dr. Flint is also an unscrupulous sexual predator. As soon as Linda becomes a teenager, he begins to harass her and proposition her sexually; not bothering to conceal his desires from Mrs. Flint, he leaves Linda vulnerable to her jealousy and retribution as well. Throughout the narrative, Dr. Flint tries to get Linda to sleep with him through both bribes and coercion, but she refuses to do so. Their long standoff shines a light on the particular vulnerability of female slaves, who have no defenses against sexual abuse. Dr. Flint's moral bankruptcy and complete disregard for Christian principles contrasts with Linda's strength of character, disrupting contemporary stereotypes that saw white people as "civilized" and slaves as "primitive." Moreover, his behavior shows how slavery dehumanizes even those it ostensibly benefits. At the end of the novel, Dr. Flint dies; while Linda rarely expresses a desire for revenge on her captors, she admits that she finds it impossible to feel any sadness at this event.

Mother – Linda's mother, a slave. Mother has a lot of trust in her mistress, whom she sees as comparatively benign, and whom she hopes will free her children. However, the mistress leaves Linda to the Flints after her death. This disappointment of Mother's hopes argues that no relationship between slave and slave owner can be positive or mutually beneficial in any way.

Father – Linda's father. Although he is a slave, he works independently as a carpenter on the condition of paying his mistress a certain amount of money each year. Because of this arrangement, Linda spends the early years of her childhood comparatively unaware of her enslavement. Father strives to impart dignity and self-respect to Linda and William, and to combat the degradation caused by slavery; for example, he tells

them that they should always obey their parents above their mistress, even though doing so is against the law. Father dies during Linda's first year of living with the Flints.

First Mistress – The unnamed mistress of Mother and, during her early years, Linda. Mother and the mistress have an unusually close relationship, and at her deathbed the mistress promises to take care of her children. She takes the young girl under her wing, teaches her about religion, and treats her so kindly that Linda says she doesn't even realize she's a slave. However, on her death she doesn't free the girl but leaves her to the Flints, plunging her into a decade of trouble. The mistress's pious and kindly attitude contrasts with her actual behavior, and Linda uses this character to point out that people who make an outward show of religiosity often lack the moral strength that should come with such devotion.

Mrs. Flint – Dr. Flint's wife and Linda's mistress before her escape. Mrs. Flint is a harsh and pointlessly cruel mistress; she refuses to give even leftover food to her slaves, and she makes Linda go barefoot in the snow because the noise of her shoes bothers her. Linda points out the ironic contrast between her weakness when it comes to household work and her strength in inflicting violence on people who are powerless against her. Mrs. Flint is particularly aggressive towards Linda because of her husband's obvious sexual interest in her, and inflicts psychological and physical violence on her despite Linda's obvious lack of responsibility for the situation. Meanwhile, Mrs. Flint's inability to earn respect from her husband or convince him to sell Linda reveals her own powerlessness in her marriage, a position that Linda argues would be ameliorated if slavery did not exist. As the narrative progresses, Mrs. Flint emerges as deeply unhappy with her lack of control in her own marriage, but channels her despair into extreme vindictiveness towards the people that are powerless against her.

Mr. Sands – A slave owner who expresses sexual interest in Linda and whom she eventually accepts as her lover, in order to distance herself from Dr. Flint. Linda's relationship with Mr. Sands causes her deep shame, as it forces her to break the religious principles to which she's been loyal all her life. Mr. Sands is much more humane than Dr. Flint; she describes him as much kinder and less threatening, and he helps protect her from her master's wrath. At the same time, he takes notably little interest in the well-being of his children or paramour. While Linda sees Ellen and Benny as the center of her existence, he only visits them when he wants a diversion. He does buy the children from Dr. Flint after Linda runs away, but he's hesitant to free them after doing so and sends Ellen to live with his cousin Mrs. Hobbs, who is neglectful and claims that she owns the girl. Later, Ellen tells Linda that during a period of time when she lived with Mr. Sands, he never played with her or hugged her as he did his white children. Even though Linda's relationship to Mr. Sands is positive compared to her interactions with other slave owners in the city, it's seriously compromised by the huge imbalance of power that slavery causes. Moreover, Mr. Sands's apathy as a father contrasts sharply with Linda's dedication as a mother, and argues the necessity for black women to be able to legally protect their own children.

William – Linda's brother, two years younger than her. The siblings are very close; when he's bullied by the Flints' sons, around his age, he always comes to Linda for comfort and advice. Later, after Linda runs away, Dr. Flint jails William along with Ellen and Benny, and he takes good care of the children. After being bought by Mr. Sands, William accompanies his new master on trips to the North, where he seizes the opportunity to run away. Leaving a note expressing his refusal to purchase the freedom to which he is already entitled, he shows his strong character and deep sense of justice. Later, he reunites with Linda and her children in New York and helps support the family.

Benjamin – Grandmother's youngest son. Although Benjamin is Linda's uncle, he's only a few years older than her, and grows up alongside her and William. He's impetuous and independent-minded, and from his boyhood chafes at his status as a slave. As a young man, Benjamin runs away, is recaptured, and manages to escape again. Grandmother is distraught to lose her youngest child, even if it means he's gained his freedom; her sadness shows the extent to which slavery fractures families, even when escape is possible.

Phillip – Grandmother's son, and Linda's uncle. Although most of Grandmother's children are sold away from her, she manages to purchase Phillip's freedom. As a free man, he becomes a respected figure in the black community; he's very resourceful and helps hide Linda in the shed after her escape. Linda is surprised to see that the city newspaper publishes an obituary for him upon his death, a privilege almost never extended to African Americans.

Ellen – Linda's daughter and second child with Mr. Sands. As a young girl, Ellen is sent to New York to live with Mr. Sands's cousin, Mrs. Hobbs. Although she's supposed to go to school and live with the family, she's actually treated like a servant and poorly fed and clothed. She proves a collected and loyal daughter, warning her mother when Dr. Flint is coming to the city and leaving the Hobbs family as soon as possible. Ellen also helps her mother overcome her shame at having conceived children out of wedlock; when Linda confesses the secret of her paternity, she calmly replies that she doesn't care who her father is, as her love for her mother is unchanged. Ellen's response helps her mother realize that she's not responsible for the sexual abuse she endured as a teenager, and characterizes the bonds between mothers and children as more important than romantic relationships.

Benny – Linda's son and first child with Mr. Sands. Benny's birth gives Linda, exhausted and overwhelmed by years of Dr. Flint's harassment, a reason to live and a new sense of determination

to escape slavery. He grows up to be a stalwart and intelligent boy; for example, although Linda doesn't tell her children she's hiding in the crawlspace, he deduces it for himself and keeps watch over the yard so that no one gets too near her refuge. Benny is purchased and freed by Mr. Sands and travels to New York to be reunited with his mother. He apprentices with a shipbuilder, but when his colleagues learn he's mixed-race, he loses his job and joins a whaling expedition instead.

The Boat Captain – The captain of the boat on which Linda and Fanny escape North Carolina. At first Linda mistrusts the captain, feeling that he might try to sell her to a slave trader for money or harass her during the journey. However, he turns out to be an honorable man and conveys her safely to Philadelphia.

Peter – A slave and family friend of Linda's, who finds a way for her to escape on a ship heading towards Philadelphia. Linda is grateful that Peter takes huge risks to secure her freedom, even though he knows it will bring no benefit to him. In one of the narrative's most affecting passages, she contrasts his strength of character with the fact that legally, he's not even considered a person.

Mrs. Hobbs – Mr. Sands's cousin. He sends Ellen to her in order to get her out of the South. Although Mr. Sands assures Linda that he has legally freed Ellen, Mrs. Hobbs claims that he has "given" the girl to her; Linda is afraid to challenge her, as she knows about her status as a fugitive. Mrs. Hobbs doesn't send Ellen to school, and she provides her with inadequate food and clothing. Her unscrupulous behavior is evidence that exploitation of black people isn't limited to states in which slavery is legal, but exists across the nation and will go largely unpunished until slavery is abolished.

Mr. Thorne – Mrs. Hobbs's brother, a native of the North Carolinian city in which Linda grows up. Mr. Thorne is a careless alcoholic who is constantly in debt, and while visiting the Hobbs family he sexually harasses Ellen, showing that sexual abuse of female slaves is widespread and accepted among white men. After seeing Linda in the Hobbs house, Mr. Thorne apprises Dr. Flint of her whereabouts, forcing her to go into hiding.

Mrs. Bruce – Linda's first employer when she begins working as a free woman in New York. Having spent years in the service of a cruel family, Linda is astounded by Mrs. Bruce's kind and sympathetic attitude: she makes special accommodations when Linda's limbs, weak from years of hiding, cramp too much to climb upstairs, and assists her when she needs hide during Dr. Flint's visit to the city. Mrs. Bruce is an Englishwoman, and her nature convinces Linda that British society has managed to evade the racism that pervades America.

Young Mrs. Bruce – Mr. Bruce's second wife, whom he marries after the death of the first Mrs. Bruce. Linda returns to nurse her young baby and finds that, like her predecessor, she is a kind and generous employer as well as a fierce opponent of slavery. She helps Linda hide from Dr. Flint twice, and eventually makes arrangements to buy her freedom. The independence Mrs. Bruce demonstrates contrasts sharply with the lack of agency Linda observes in Southern wives like Mrs. Flint. The contrast between these two marriages suggests that the abolition of slavery increases white women's moral and practical status within their own marriages.

Emily Flint / Mrs. Dodge – Dr. Flint's daughter. Emily is Linda's legal owner, as her first mistress bequeaths her to the girl in her will. Although Linda cares for Emily diligently as a child, Emily is determined that she won't escape slavery; she sends her coercive letters in New York and eventually travels to the city with her husband in a failed attempt to recover her. While she's a minor character, she seems to have inherited her mother's vindictive and self-centered nature.

Nicholas Flint – Dr. Flint's son, who operates and lives at the family's plantation. Nicholas is much like his father, even making sexual advances on Linda; for this reason, Dr. Flint is jealous of him and tries to keep him away from the city. Linda presents this twisted dynamic between father and son as an example of the way slavery irrevocably perverts family dynamics.

Aunt Nancy – Linda's aunt and Grandmother's daughter. Strong and perseverant like her sister, Aunt Nancy's opinion is respected by the entire family. Yet, unlike her sister, she spends her entire life enslaved by the Flints, who don't even give her a day off for her wedding and force her to work so hard that each time she becomes pregnant she miscarries the child. When Linda first moves to the Flints' house, she sleeps next to Aunt Nancy, and the older woman is able to protect her somewhat from Dr. Flint's advances. After Linda's escape, she relays information from the Flint household to Grandmother. At her deathbed, the Flints patronizingly praise her as a loyal servant, while Linda privately observes that she's a quiet but deeply subversive woman.

The Carpenter – A young free man with whom Linda falls in love as a teenager. The carpenter offers to buy Linda's freedom, but Dr. Flint won't allow her to be sold and threatens to kill him. Her courtship with the carpenter represents the virtuous and respectable life that Linda wants and could have easily lived if not for slavery.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Sands – Mr. Sands's wife. A minor character, she acknowledges her husband's illegitimate children and offers to adopt Benny, but Linda refuses, worrying that she will treat him as a slave or sell him away when she gets bored of him.

Aggie – A slave in Linda's North Carolina community and friend of Grandmother, whose several children are all sold away from her. Aggie is Fanny's mother, and helps her hide after her escape; she also encourages Grandmother to be happy about William's escape to freedom, rather than mourning his loss.

Fanny – A slave in Linda's city in North Carolina, who escapes her masters and hides with her mother, Aggie. Linda finds out about Fanny's predicament when Benny glimpses her one day, and helps make arrangements for the woman to escape with her.

Mr. Durham – A black pastor that Linda meets upon arriving in Philadelphia. He and his wife, Mrs. Durham, host her for some days before she moves on to New York, and she admires their good education and refined, middle-class way of life.

Mrs. Durham – Mr. Durham's wife, who Linda also meets upon arriving in Philadelphia. The couple host her for some days before she moves on to New York, and she admires their good education and refined, middle-class way of life.

Mr. Bruce – The husband of Linda's two employers in New York, Mrs. Bruce and the young Mrs. Bruce. Mr. Bruce plays little role in the narrative, and his absence underscores the independence and agency of his wives.

Mr. Dodge – The husband of Emily Flint, Dr. Flint's daughter. An unscrupulous spendthrift, Mr. Dodge goes to New York to try to recapture Linda, but the young Mrs. Bruce convinces him to sell her for a low price, as he needs money quickly to pay off his debts.

Luke – A slave in Linda's city with a particularly cruel invalid master, who whips him constantly even though he depends on him completely for survival. Linda runs into Luke after they have both escaped to New York, and presents his case as evidence of the universal degradation slavery causes.

Mr. Litch – A particularly vicious slave-owner who kills one of his slaves, James, by locking him a cotton gin.

Reverend Pike – A pastor who leads services for slaves in Linda's city. He attempts to use Christianity to indoctrinate slaves and convince them that slavery is a righteous institution; in fact, he convinces Linda of the inherent hypocrisy of slaveholders who practice Christianity.

Fred – An elderly slave whom Linda teaches to read, in order that he can read the Bible. His quest represents the meaningful engagement with Christianity that exists more often among slaves than slave holders.

Miss Fanny – An elderly white woman, and the sister of Grandmother's mistress. When Grandmother's mistress dies and Dr. Flint proposes to sell her, Miss Fanny buys her at auction for a low price and emancipates her. She also tries to protect Linda after she gets sent to the plantation.

Young Mrs. Flint – Nicholas Flint's young wife, for whom Linda works briefly on the plantation. Even though the young woman is the plantation's mistress, Linda pities her because she knows her marriage will soon dissolve as a result of Nicholas Flint's infidelity and immorality.

The White Woman – a long-time acquaintance of Grandmother's, who bravely agrees to hide Linda in her house after she escapes from the Flints, thus preventing her from being recaptured.

Jenny – A slave of the white woman who hides Linda, Jenny deduces her mistress's secret, thus forcing Linda to leave the house. Later, Jenny snoops around Grandmother's house as well; fear that she has seen Linda causes the family to send her north on a ship.

Mary – The first Mrs. Bruce's daughter, for whom Linda cares as a nanny.

Isaac and Amy Post – Two Quakers with whom Linda spends a year. Although she doesn't mention it here, it's Amy Post who encourages Jacobs to write and punish her memoirs.

James – A slave of Mr. Litch, who tries to escape but is recaptured and killed by being locked inside a cotton gin.

Betty – The cook of the white woman who hides Linda; a brave and loyal friend, she brings food to Linda, keeps her apprised of the latest news, and makes sure she remains undiscovered.

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.

THE DEHUMANIZING EFFECTS OF SLAVERY

Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* tells the autobiographical story of one woman's journey from slavery to freedom. Over the course of her memoir, in which she tells her story under the pseudonym Linda Brent, Jacobs broadly critiques slavery and its harmful effect on a society's morals. While many of the slaves around Jacobs are good people of strong character, their owners and the legal system refuse to recognize these qualities, instead depriving them of the most basic protections and rights accorded to white people. Moreover, by participating in the dehumanization of others, slave owners forfeit their own humanity, losing their moral impulses and functioning according to cruelty and fear. Ultimately, Jacobs argues that slavery comes at a huge cost not just to the material and psychological well-being of slaves, but the moral character of slave owners as well.

In Jacobs's narrative, the strong characters of the slaves she lives among contrast starkly with their inability to access even the most basic human rights. Linda often discusses the positive character traits displayed by members of her family and community. Her Grandmother is a stalwart woman with a hard work ethic, who manages to buy the freedom of some of her

children; after Linda's parents die, Grandmother raises her and imbues her with strong moral convictions. Friends like Aunt Nancy and Betty risk themselves to help Linda hide from Dr. Flint, and a slave named Peter helps her board a ship to Philadelphia even though there's no possibility of escape for him.

Linda contrasts the bravery and kindness of these people with their legal status and treatment at the hands of white society. One night, a drunken raiding party searches Grandmother's **house** and paws through her neat tablecloths, saying "white people ought to have them." Even though Grandmother's dignified and unafraid demeanor highlights their own boorishness, they can't conceive of her as a human woman with the right to furnish her own home. Similarly, when Linda marvels at Peter's ingenuity in devising an escape method for her, she breaks off to reflect that this kind and intelligent man is "a chattel…liable, by the laws of a country that calls itself civilized, to be sold with horses and pigs."

At the same time, she speaks of slaves who are "so brutalized by the lash" and oppressed by the conditions of slavery that they can't live according to moral dictates – for example, she says, some men are so terrified of their masters that they "will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters." While slave owners use behavior like this as justification that black people are "inferior" and deserve to be enslaved, Jacobs asserts that it's actually a result of slavery and an argument against it.

Besides being demonstrably unjust to its victims, slavery "deadens the moral sense" in the people who practice it. Linda punctuates her narrative with descriptions of cruelties that masters impose on their slaves, often simply to enjoy their own power. She cites Mr. Litch, who locks up a runaway slave in a cotton gin until he dies, and an invalid man who whips a slave who takes care of him and ensures his survival. Abuses like these characterize their perpetrators as having lost touch with any shred of human empathy. Jacobs often refers to slave owners, particularly Dr. Flint, as beasts or "fiends disguised as men," suggesting that they forfeit their humanity by participating in the ownership of other humans.

Jacobs also shows how slavery corrupts the most basic and socially valued instincts, like respect for the bonds between mother and child. Under slavery, it's considered acceptable for white men to father children with their slaves, but not to acknowledge them or set them free. Rather, they often sell their own babies away from their mothers; Linda's paramour, Mr. Sands, shows little concern for their children, although it's in his power to free them. Here, slavery excuses the practice of having children out of wedlock (which Jacobs and her contemporaries condemned as immoral) but discourages the natural love that parents should feel for their children.

For women, as well, slavery causes the erosion of what were considered natural impulses. Jacobs includes a jarring scene in which a mistress, herself a mother, jeers at the deathbed of a dying slave and insults her mother. Because this woman has been corrupted by slavery, she loses the respect for motherhood which Jacobs and her readers would have considered essential to the character of all women. In this scenario it's the dignified slave mother, treated by society as less than a full person, whose humanity emerges much stronger than that of the white woman.

Like many abolitionists and authors of slave narratives, Jacobs points out the clear injustice of slavery and condemns slave owners for participating in a social evil. However, she also extends this stance by arguing that owning slaves impugns people's most basic moral character and compromises their actions in every area of life.

SEXUAL VIRTUE AND SEXUAL ABUSE

In her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs uses the pseudonym Linda Brent to describe her own upbringing as a slave within a white **household**. In doing so, she focuses on the vulnerability and moral predicament of black women who are powerless against the sexual abuses of white men. Linda wants to fulfill contemporary norms of feminine chastity and respectability; moreover, she wants to present herself as a proper young woman in order to gain respect and sympathy from her audience. However, under the conditions of slavery this proves impossible: Linda is subjected to constant harassment from her lustful master, Dr. Flint, and to gain protection from him she eventually has an extramarital affair and two children with another white man, Mr. Sands. While Linda often expresses shame and remorse for these decisions, by emphasizing her lack of alternatives she argues that it's unfair to impose the same sexual principles on enslaved black women and free white women.

Throughout the narrative, Linda takes pains to establish her moral character and to emphasize her adherence to contemporary ideals of female sexual virtue. Linda grows up under the care of a strict and religious grandmother, and she speaks highly of the "pure principles [she] instilled in me." As a teenager Linda is courted by a free carpenter and hopes to marry him, thus creating a respectable future for herself and her children. Even when describing the sexual abuse she suffers from Dr. Flint, Jacobs refers to it obliquely, saying that her master harasses her with "words that scathed ear and brain like fire" and leaving the reader to infer exactly what he's saying. Similarly, when Linda becomes involved with another white man in order to gain protection from Dr. Flint, she never speaks explicitly about sex; instead, she describes her choice by saying that "I shall be a mother" soon, couching her actions in terms of maternity, which is seen as much more respectable than female sexuality.

Once free, she seeks to present herself as a virtuous and

respectable woman. For example, when she arrives in New York she's outraged when a porter proposes to convey her and her belongings through the city in his open-backed truck, which she sees as inappropriate and immodest. In situations like these Jacobs emulates the Victorian prudishness of white society; she does so both out of serious moral conviction and in order to emphasize her similarity to her white female readers, whom she wants to view her as a fellow woman instead of a slave.

However, as Linda's conflict with Dr. Flint and relationship with Mr. Sands shows, it's impossible for enslaved women to fulfill ideals of sexual purity when they're powerless against predatory white men. Young women of her time are supposed to be ignorant in all matters of sex (a quality which Linda evokes with her oblique discussion of the subject) but Linda says that "the influences of slavery" have allowed Dr. Flint to "pollute [her] mind with foul images" and "made [her] prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world." Linda stands her ground admirably against Dr. Flint, but he constantly tells her that she "was made for his use, made to obey his command in *every* thing." In the eyes of the law, this is completely true – Linda has no recourse against him, and it's only with luck and vigilance that she evades rape.

In order to gain some protection from Dr. Flint, Linda accepts the advances of another white man, Mr. Sands. This decision saves her from rape and gives her some extremely limited agency in her choice of sexual partners, but it also requires her to sacrifice the sexual virtue that is so important to her. Linda speaks of this decision in drastic terms, calling it "a plunge into the abyss," but she also contrasts her situation to that of free women, "whose purity has been sheltered from childhood" and "whose homes are protected by law." As a slave, she has no option to "keep myself pure."

While Linda initially expresses remorse about this part of her life, she eventually concludes that black women should not feel ashamed for failing to live up to the standards of a system that actively oppresses them. When first describing her liaison with Mr. Sands, Linda says it "fills me with sorrow and shame"; appealing to her reader, she asks "ye happy women" not to "judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely." While she understands that she has no alternatives, she speaks of this decision as a severe moral failing on her part. However, as she grows older Linda begins to take a less critical view of her moral qualities. When a friend in the North says that people might treat her with "contempt" if they knew her children were illegitimate, she responds that "God alone knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me." Implicitly, she refuses to hold herself accountable to standards that, for slaves, are impossible to fulfill.

Later, when her daughter Ellen is setting off to boarding school, Linda forces herself to disclose the secret of her paternity, expecting the girl to be disappointed in her. Instead, Ellen says, "I never think any thing about my father. All my love is for you." This compelling moment of acceptance and understanding from her daughter shows Linda that, in the eyes of those who matter, her moral character is untainted; she doesn't need to feel accountable for the sexual abuse she endured as a girl.

Throughout the novel, Jacobs emphasizes the "wrongs, sufferings, and mortifications" that are specific to enslaved women. Her focus on the sexual abuse she and others endured is a political stance and an argument against slavery; but it's also a personal exploration of the impossibility of fulfilling moral codes without personal autonomy, and the account of a journey from shame towards empowerment and self-respect.

MOTHERHOOD AND FAMILY

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs argues for abolition by detailing the impact of slavery on families in the Southern community where her alter-ego, Linda Brent, grows up. Slavery deprives black mothers of their legitimate rights over their children, who may be sold away or otherwise harmed at any moment; it also creates discord and moral decline among white families whose patriarchs are likely to father children by enslaved women. Jacobs uses the universality of maternal feeling and the vulnerability of enslaved mothers to incite condemnation of slavery. At the same time, her love for her children is also the most empowering experience of her life, driving her to escape slavery and build a new life for her family – ultimately demonstrating much more agency and independence than is socially acceptable for women of her time.

Observing the community around her, Linda frequently discusses the tendency of slavery to erode both black and white families. The integrity of enslaved families is constantly under threat, as children or parents could be sold at any moment; Linda references mothers who see their children sold away from them one by one. Moreover, the bonds that should bind children to parents are compromised by the necessity of obedience to slave owners. For example, Linda's father once chides her brother William for answering their mistress's command instead of his own, saying that he should always obey his father first; however, it's functionally impossible for either father or son to prioritize the interests of their family above the demands of slave owners.

Moreover, the happiness of white families is disrupted by the male habit of fathering illegitimate children with enslaved women. Jacobs describes the consternation of wives who see "children of every shade of complexion" and know they are the siblings of her own babies. Evaluating the disastrous in her own household, Linda concludes that Mrs. Flint would have been much happier without slavery, because she could live without fear of her husband's flagrant infidelity.

In describing her own relationship with her children, Benny and Ellen, Linda emphasizes that enslaved women share the

feelings and concerns of all mothers, and thus should have the same rights to protect and care for their children. In Jacobs's world, motherhood is the goal of every woman's life; women have few rights but can gain some respect and status through their role as mothers. By contrast, becoming a mother makes Linda even more vulnerable than before. Not only can Dr. Flint harm or sell her, he can do the same to her children.

Linda emphasizes her love for her children, saying that "when I was most sorely oppressed I found a solace in [Benny's] smiles." this links her to her audience of white, often female readers, and encourages them to view her and other enslaved women as possessing "a mother's instincts" and "capable of feeling a mother's agonies." However, she also constantly points out the stark disparity of their positions. For example, in describing a New Year's celebration she addresses an imaginary free woman, saying that her children are "your own, and no hand but that of death can take them from you," and compares her to "the slave mother…watching the children who might be torn from her the next morning." Juxtaposing these two realities, she argues against slavery in terms of its disregard for the traditional, valued bonds of motherhood.

Although becoming a mother exposes Linda to more worry and pressure, it also proves to be a highly empowering experience. Linda has often wanted to escape slavery, but she never actually attempts to do so until she becomes a mother. It's the threat that her children might have to work on the plantation that gives her the courage to run away. After she arrives in New York, Linda is motivated by the necessity of earning enough money to make a home for her children, without ever depending on another man; it's this necessity that keeps her strong and determined even when Dr. Flint sends people to find her.

Although Linda's children are the fruit of an extramarital affair for which she feels much shame, it's they who help her finally move past this period of her life. Telling her mother that "all my love is for you," Ellen validates her mother and allows her to come to terms with the hardest part of her past.

In the last chapter, Linda says that "my story ends…not in the usual way, with marriage" but with freedom and reunification with her children. At this point, she's implicitly disowning the idea of marriage altogether and embracing a new paradigm of female independence. Although she has invoked traditional maternity tropes throughout the narrative, at this point motherhood is encouraging her to pursue a progressive and less conventional way of life.

Throughout the narrative, Jacobs illustrates the harmful effects of slavery on both white and black families. She uses the universality of her maternal feelings to appeal to the reader and create sympathy, but motherhood also leads her to cultivate an independent lifestyle that was highly unconventional in her time.

CHRISTIANITY

In her autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs describes the youth of her alter-ego, Linda Brent, as a slave in the American South. The narrative often meditates on the existence of slavery within a society that purports to fulfill Christian principles. Linda observes the hypocritical Christianity practiced by her owners and the white community, who use religion as a justification for slavery. At the same time, she describes the sincere religious convictions that allow slaves to preserve dignity and strength even in the midst of constant degradation. In doing so, Jacobs affirms her own Christian faith while arguing that religion can be used to excuse evil just as easily as to promote justice.

Linda observes that her owners and much of the white community around her use Christianity to increase their social status and consolidate power over their slaves. Early in the narrative, Linda recalls that her first mistress taught her the Christian commandments to "love thy neighbor as thyself" and to treat others as she wants to be treated. However, the mistress's religious commitments don't stop her from leaving Linda to the Flints in her will, plunging her into decades of turmoil. Linda concludes that "she did not recognize me as her neighbor"; the mistress's piety has enabled her to feel righteous without alerting her to the injustice of owning slaves.

Linda notes ironically that Dr. Flint frequently goes to church and always donates to the collection box, but the devout image he cultivates in this way has no bearing on his willingness to own slaves and his predatory behavior towards Linda. This hypocrisy is characteristic of many slave-owning men in the narrative. Another time, Linda and some friends begin to attend services organized for slaves by the local Methodist church. The pastor, Reverend Pike, reads from a Biblical text that urges servants to obey their masters, and during his sermon harangues the assembled group to work harder and faster, because God sees their "laziness." Here, the church establishment is actively mobilized to give legitimacy to the institution of slavery.

At the same time, Christianity is an enormous source of emotional strength for Linda and other members of the black community. In one particularly disturbing incident, Linda describes a white woman jeering at the bedside of a slave who is dying while giving birth to her master's illegitimate child; she says that there is no heaven for "the like of her and her bastard," but the woman responds calmly that "God knows all about it, and He will have mercy on me." In this situation, religious faith allows the slave to respond to these appalling insults with calm resolve, and to meet her death with tranquility.

As she grows up, Linda is guided by her grandmother's strict religious teachings. It's her emphasis on the importance of chastity that makes Linda so determined to stand up to Dr.

Flint. One of the narrative's most touching moments comes when Linda and her grandmother pray together before her escape; in this case, Christianity cements their bond and gives them courage before a decisive action.

Although Linda at first feels she's violated the precepts of religion by having an illegitimate affair, she later says that "God alone knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me." Here, her sincere faith helps her cope with the social stigma of unwed motherhood; for Linda, Christianity is not about gaining social status but maintaining her dignity and self-respect in the face of constant oppression.

Because she lives in an extremely religious society and is a devout Christian herself, Jacobs invokes Christianity throughout her narrative. For her, religion provides moral support and the promise of divine justice, which is particularly important given that society offers no such things to people like her. However, even as she extols the virtues of Christianity, she is highly critical of people who use Christianity not for personal growth or to help others, but for the self-serving end of justifying slavery.

WOMEN

In her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs chronicles her alter ego Linda Brent's quest for freedom. In the process, she gives a deft analysis of the social dynamics of slave-owning households, especially the interactions between enslaved women and white women. In many instances, white "mistresses" behave with appalling cruelty towards female slaves, often out of jealousy or worry that the slaves are sexually attracted to their husbands. Jacobs condemns this behavior, and the demonstrated lack of empathy for sexually abused slaves, while also suggesting that it partly stems from the white women's powerlessness in their own marriages. Ultimately, Jacobs argues that both black and white women stand to benefit from the abolition of slavery and could further their own interests with mutual cooperation.

Jacobs gives many accounts of the particular abuse doled out to slaves by white mistresses, often in retaliation for their husbands' infidelities. In response to the widespread practice of male slave owners fathering children with their slaves, most wives don't confront their husbands – over whom they have no real control – but take out their anger on the slaves, who are blameless. Jacobs describes instances in which white women encourage their husbands to sell off illegitimate children, thus punishing slave mothers for their own abuse.

Mrs. Flint can't reprimand her husband for his obvious pursuit of Linda, so she takes out all her frustration on the powerless slave: she makes Linda go barefoot in the snow, forces her to sleep on the floor of her own room where Linda fears she might one night kill her, and berates her endlessly. Remarkably, Linda feels empathy for Mrs. Flint, knowing that "she felt her marriage vows were desecrated and her dignity was insulted" by her husband's actions. However, she points out that Mrs. Flint has no corresponding empathy for her: "she pitied herself as a martyr…but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery" in which Linda is living. Linda's analysis of this situation shows that Mrs. Flint would probably be happier in a world without slavery; however, given her characterization of her mistress it seems impossible she will overcome her deep-seated racism and anger to realize this herself.

By describing a few exceptions to this pattern of abuse, Linda provides a vision of cooperation between black and white women for their mutual benefit. Linda says that although slavery "deadens the moral sense, even in white women, to a fearful extent, it is not altogether extinct." She knows two white women who have pressured their husbands into freeing their illegitimate children. By displaying the "superior nobleness" of their character, these wives gain increased "respect" from their husbands and "confidence took the place of distrust" in the marriage. Their behavior contrasts with that of Mrs. Flint, who shows the pettiness of her nature and earns her husband's scorn by abusing Linda.

Another foil to the Flints comes from the Bruces, a couple for whom Linda works in New York. A proponent of abolition, the young Mrs. Bruce exercises great autonomy in her marriage, making decisions about her children independently and eventually acting to purchase Linda's freedom by herself. Moreover, there's never a hint of improper advances from Mr. Bruce, even though such behavior is considered normal in the South. Here, Linda has achieved a position of comparative security and respect, and the Bruces enjoy a comparatively egalitarian marriage.

However, it's important to note that these situations are few and far between, and usually take place in the North, where they are facilitated by the abolition of slavery. While Jacobs envisions an alternate paradigm by the end of the narrative, the bulk of her energy is devoted to protesting the unjust one that currently exists.

It's important to note that Jacobs was writing for an audience largely comprised of white middle-class women, whom she wants to join her cause. As such, while she criticizes the behavior of female slave owners, she is careful not to condemn white women as a group, to point out the advantages they would gain with the end of slavery, and to warn them of possible consequences should slavery become more acceptable in the North. Her exploration of this subject reflects the painful necessity – common to many slave narratives of her era – of balancing the exposure of terrible injustice with a fairly flattering appeal to her target audience.

SYMBOLS

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

HOUSES AND HOMES

Traditionally, houses evoke security, family, and tranquility – but for Linda and those around her, this is often an empty promise. In the narrative, houses often fail to provide security to their inhabitants or even serve as the sites for corrupted family dynamics. As a child, Linda feels secure and happy in the home of her first mistress but that security is destroyed when the mistress bequeaths her to the Flints instead of freeing her on her death. The Flint household is the setting of Linda's sexual persecution by Dr. Flint and her abuse at the hands of Mrs. Flint. It's a trap rather than a refuge for her, and it also symbolizes the decay of family cohesion among the Flints themselves, who are completely self-serving and vindictive towards each other as well as to their slaves. Linda frequently invokes the uncomfortable household dynamics that arise due to the presence of illegitimate mixed-race children, who are both sources of marital dispute and victims of cruel abuse. Grandmother's house is then a place of limited safety for Linda, who flees there after becoming pregnant and raises her children within its bounds. Yet even though this is a home with positive associations, it's not secure: after the failed Nat Turner rebellion, white search parties tear the house apart and mock Grandmother for daring to own nice silverware and tablecloths. Moreover, when Linda is forced to hide in the crawlspace for seven years, even this house becomes a prison, emphasizing vulnerability to oppression rather than safety from it.

Linda's fixation on houses that fail to protect their residents or that conceal degraded family dynamics argues that slavery prevents the possibility of domestic happiness and safety for everyone in the community, not just slaves. It's important that Harriet Jacobs wrote in the mid-19th century, when the "cult of domesticity," or emphasis on the importance of the home, was extremely popular. By using this rhetoric, she's tapping into well-known tropes and universal values in order to argue against slavery, and to establish her own credibility as a writer. By the end of the narrative, Linda is happy to be free, and looks forward to one day establishing a home for her children. Her hopeful but tempered tone shows the advantages that freedom brings to domestic life, but warns that such advantages are only secure when slavery is abolished completely.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Thrift Editions edition of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* published in 2001.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's Word: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), First Mistress

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

After her mother's death, Linda goes to live with her mother's mistress, who is very kind to her: she gives her only light work, teaches her to sew, and instructs her in religion. Because of the mistress's special interest in Linda and general piety, the family hopes she will free the young girl at her death; instead, she bequeaths Linda to the Flints.

In the first chapters of the book, Linda presents and then debunks the illusion of positive relationships between slaveholders and slaves. The mistress seems to treat Linda like one of her family, but her will shows that she's not actually capable of treating Linda as an equal human being. Linda's relationship with the first mistress is less overtly cruel than but still as dehumanizing as her relationship with the Flints.

Moreover, here Linda shows that slaveholders preach and promote Christian doctrines while failing to practice them on the most basic level. Slaveholders' disregard for Christian precepts, as well as their use of Christianity to justify slavery, is a phenomenon that will recur throughout the book. Linda's characterization of slaveholders as fundamentally un-Christian is an expression of her own sincere faith, as well as a shrewd tactic to incite disapproval of slavery among an audience which was probably very devout.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ I spent the day gathering flowers and weaving them into festoons, while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me. What cared my owners for that? He was merely a piece of property. Moreover, they thought he had spoiled his children, by teaching them to feel that they were human beings. This was blasphemous doctrine for a slave to teach…

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Mrs. Flint, Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

A year into Linda's life in the Flint household, Linda's father dies, but Mrs. Flint forbids her from leaving her household tasks to go see his body. It's through cruelties like this that Linda begins to truly understand her status as a slave. She often contrasts the Flints to her first mistress, who was much kinder to her; yet her ironic observation that the Flints refuse to see her as a "human being" echoes the first mistress's inability to recognize her as a "neighbor." In this sense, she uses this incident to show that the Flints and her first mistress share a fundamentally dehumanizing conception of slaves, regardless of their different behavior.

It's also interesting that Linda uses the word "blasphemous" to describe the Flints' conception of father's behavior. In their eyes, it's contrary to divine will for slaves to think of themselves as "human beings," but Linda will eventually argue that it's slaveholders, not slaves, who pervert Christian commandments for their own ends. This passage thus contributes to the characterization of the Flints as intensely hypocritical Christians.

> When my grandmother applied for him for payment he said the estate was insolvent, and the law prohibited payment. It did not, however, prohibit him from retaining the silver candelabra, which had been purchased with that money. I presume they will be handed down in the family, from generation to generation.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Dr. Flint, Grandmother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Several years earlier, Grandmother had given a loan to her mistress to buy housewares, including an ornate candelabra; after the mistress's death she asks Dr. Flint, the executor of the will, for her money, but he refuses to give it to her. Dr. Flint is capitalizing on the fact that, as slaves have no legal rights, slaveholders are not bound to honor any contracts with them. Grandmother appears to have thought well of and trusted in her mistress, but by neither repaying the loan nor compelling her heirs to do so, the mistress has clearly taken advantage of her. Incidents like this show that even ostensibly positive relationships between slaves and white people are corrupted by the huge power imbalances enforced by slavery.

The image of the candelabra being passed "from generation to generation" is also intriguing. It implicitly argues that, especially in slave states, inherited wealth is inherently predicated on slavery and requires the impoverishment of slaves; accordingly, it suggests that, along with wealth and heirlooms, guilt and complicity for slavery descends through generations as well. This has become an important issue in the 20th and 21st centuries, as historians have begun to examine the extent to which America's economic prosperity (and inequality) is dependent on slavery and to discuss the moral implications of this dependence. By anticipating this discussion, Jacobs proves herself a prescient and progressive thinker.

> The girl's mother said, "The baby is dead, thank God; and I hope my poor child will soon be in heaven, too."

"Heaven!" retorted the mistress. "There is no such place for the like of her and her bastard."

The poor mother turned away, sobbing. Her dying daughter called her feebly... "Don't grieve so, mother; God knows all about it; and He will have mercy upon me."

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In this disturbing passage, Linda describes a young slave dying while giving birth to her master's illegitimate child. While the girl's mother sobs at her bedside, her mistress stands by, jeering at her. The mistress says that, having conducted an extramarital affair, the slave will be barred from heaven; but the dying girl says that God will understand her troubles and forgive her. Here, Linda begins to illustrate the cruel and destructive dynamics between white women and their slaves; like Mrs. Flint, the mistress is angry and humiliated that her husband has been unfaithful, but since she can't stop his behavior, she takes out her jealousy and rage on a powerless slave. Linda views this psychological torture and lack of empathy as almost more

pernicious than the outright violence that slaves often suffer.

Just as importantly, the slave's comment to her mother prefigures Linda's own thinking when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Although she initially suffers feelings of shame, she eventually concludes that slave women can't be held responsible for their sexual purity when they have no power to protect it; she will later express her confidence that God will understand what she's lived through and forgive her. Both Linda and the slave described here use traditional religious rhetoric to express radically progressive views on female sexuality and sexual abuse, showing how religious devotion and women's empowerment can coincide.

Chapter 3 Quotes

But to the slave mother New Year's day comes laden with peculiar sorrows. She sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might die before the day dawns. She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from her childhood; but she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of a mother's agonies.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In this brief chapter, Linda contrasts the New Year's celebrations of free and enslaved families. First, she asks her (female) reader to imagine her own celebration in her cozy home, where she can relax among relatives and rejoice in her children, never worrying they could be sold or harmed. Then, she evokes the feelings of slave mothers who fear that annual auction day in the morning. Linda contrasts the security that homes provide for free families with the vulnerability and lack of shelter that all slaves experience, whether or not they have a physical house. She's playing on ideals of domesticity, extremely important in her era, to increase sympathy for slaves.

Moreover, Linda creates a bond between enslaved and free women based on the shared experience of motherhood. While highlighting the differences in their situations, she emphasizes that they share the same feelings towards their children. By showing that slaves share in the universal concerns of motherhood, she's combatting the constant campaign of dehumanization in which slaveholders are engaged in order to make slavery seem acceptable. While it should seem obvious to a modern reader that enslaved mothers have the same "instincts" as free ones, Jacobs is taking a radical stance for her era.

Chapter 4 Quotes

For my master, whose restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night, seeking whom to devour, had just left me, with stinging, scorching words; words that scathed ear and brain like fire. O, how I despised him! I thought how glad I should be if some day when he walked the earth, it would open and swallow him up…

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Dr. Flint

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

As Linda becomes a teenager, she endures increasing abuse from Dr. Flint, who has taken a predatory sexual interest in her. The way Linda describes these lewd advances is very important. She never reveals the content of his "words" or refers explicitly to sexual harassment; by writing modestly and demurely, she's presenting herself as compliant with contemporary ideals of feminine chastity, which prevent women from discussing or even knowing much about sex. This lays the groundwork for the argument she will eventually make: that enslaved women aspire to fulfill sexual standards but are prevented from doing so by the immoral conduct of their masters. While slaveholders try to present slaves as lacking in moral sense or unable to adhere to social standards, Linda shows that it's actually slave holders who disregard these standards and display a complete lack of morality.

Linda's description of Dr. Flint's "restless, craving, vicious" character "roving" around is also telling – it characterizes him as sinister and demonic, more like a dangerous animal than a man. His repeated attempts to exploit her sexually are a denial of her humanity and her right to self-determination. Here, Linda shows how his behavior actually makes him into something inhuman. Throughout the novel, Linda will argue that slavery is not just an act of injustice towards slaves but also the cause of increasing moral depravity among slaveholders.

Chapter 5 Quotes

He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of...But he was my master. I was compelled to live under the same roof with him ... He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Dr. Flint

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Linda describes the increasing intensity of Dr. Flint's sexual harassment and her attempts to fend him off, despite her complete lack of legal power. She continues to describe him as inhuman, calling him a "vile monster" here – in doing so, she draws attention not only to her own trials, but the consequences of Dr. Flint's behavior on his character. In contrast, she presents herself as clinging to social norms and ideals of feminine chastity: it's she who tries to live by "pure principles," not Dr. Flint, and she who tries to shield herself from "unclean images," or improper knowledge of sex. Because she's trying to fulfill these norms, she argues, she deserves the social rights that protect the chastity of free white women.

Linda also plays on the idea of domesticity by remarking that she's "compelled to live under the same roof" as Dr. Flint. The home is supposed to be a safe place for women, in which their modesty is protected from the corrupting influences of the outside world. Linda shows that under slavery, such domestic refuges cannot exist for slaves or white women, as infidelity and sexual transgressions start to dominate life in the Flint household.

If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave. I know that some are too much brutalized by slavery to feel the humiliation of their position; but many slaves feel it most acutely, and shrink from the memory of it.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout this chapter and many successive ones, Linda emphasizes that her suffering at the hands of Dr. Flint is not an isolated incident but an example of a general trend – in fact, she's lucky that because she lives in the city and is somewhat shielded by Grandmother, Dr. Flint is prevented from actually raping her. In broadening her lens, she creates a strong connection between slavery and sexual licentiousness, which was completely unacceptable in her era.

Moreover, she strives to create a link between enslaved and free women based on a mutual concern for sexual integrity, just as she did earlier by invoking the shared experience of motherhood. Most women of her era share a set of attributes and concerns, like beauty and the desire to remain chaste – their lives are so different not because of inherent qualities, but because of the unnatural imposition of slavery.

Chapter 6 Quotes

She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Mrs. Flint

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

As Dr. Flint's sexual harassment of Linda grows more and more obvious, Mrs. Flint becomes increasingly upset. She forces Linda to tell her everything he's done, and the young girl willingly acquiesces, hoping that she'll gain some protection from her mistress. Linda can see that the older woman feels genuine despair at the humiliating state of her marriage, and she pities her; Linda's ability to empathize with a person who has continuously persecuted her contrasts starkly with Mrs. Flint's inability to feel "compassion" for her. As her ineffectual attempts to mitigate

her husband's behavior show, Mrs. Flint is fairly powerless in her marriage; but she could have at least tried to screen Linda from Dr. Flint's advances. Her behavior at this moment represents a lost opportunity to act with some moral integrity.

Linda argues that such fraught and destructive interactions between mistresses and slaves are common but, especially after she escapes, she presents some positive relationships between black and white women, for example the trust she places in the white friend who hides her, or her friendship with both Mrs. Bruces. Linda uses the narrative both to critique current social dynamics and offer a vision of better ones in the future.

❝ The young wife soon learns that the husband in whose hands she has placed her happiness pays no regard to his marriage vows. Children of every shade of complexion play with her own fair babies, and too well she knows that they are born unto him of his own household. Jealousy and hatred enter the flowery home, and it is ravaged of its loveliness.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

In the first half of this chapter, Linda discussed the prevalence of sexual abuse of enslaved women and its harmful effects on those women's lives. Now, she shifts focus to show how this form of exploitation harms white women as well: she argues that no woman can be happy in an environment that allows her husband to be flagrantly unfaithful to her, and to bring up his illegitimate children alongside her own. Implicitly, Linda argues that living in such proximity to sexual promiscuity threatens their own modesty. The logical conclusion from such an argument is that it would benefit mistresses to protect enslaved women as much as possible – but as is evident through Linda's relationship with Mrs. Flint, slaves are more likely to become the victims of their mistresses' rage. Again, Linda evokes the image of a tranquil and safe home and shows how it is threatened by slavery – however, this time she explores the subject from the perspective of white wives, rather than enslaved women.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Some poor creatures have been so brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters. Do you think this proves the black man to belong to an inferior order of beings? What would *you* be, if you had been born and brought up a slave…

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Linda shows how slaveholders enforce ignorance among their slaves and then use that very ignorance as evidence that they are less worthy than white people of freedom. The image she creates of a father too afraid to defend his family from assault is a particularly appalling example of the consequences of a life lived in ignorance in fear, but Linda argues it is just that: the result of a terrible environment, *not* a demonstration of inherent qualities. In this sense, the passage is similar to other instances where she argues that it's the conditions of slavery, not the fundamental characters of black people, that prevent enslaved women from fulfilling ideals of feminine chastity. The idea that, under slavery, people aren't able to live up to their best moral impulses should seem extremely obvious to the modern reader; the fact that Jacobs has to argue it so intensely testifies to the prevalence of extreme racism in her era.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ I can testify, from my own experience and observation, that slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks. It makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Linda gives an overview of cruelties that take place on the plantations around her cities. She describes not only physical violence but psychological and sexual crimes, from men who sell their own illegitimate children to slave

traders to women who conceive babies out of wedlock with slaves. Linda usually focuses on the manner in which slavery dehumanizes its black victims, but here she characterizes slaveholders as dehumanized as well, in that they seem completely lacking in moral impulses.

Moreover, she argues that slavery is inherently threatening to domestic life and makes cohesion and tranquility among families impossible. In this sense, she's appealing to the self-interest of her readers, especially white women. She argues that the more acceptable that slavery becomes in the North, and the more states in which it becomes legal, the more likely it is that their family lives will suffer as well.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ But O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished I too could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws…

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Linda describes a monumental action she takes in order to protect herself from Dr. Flint – she begins an affair with another slaveholder, Mr. Sands, and soon becomes pregnant with her first child. Having extramarital sex of her own volition is a huge breach of social conventions and Linda's personal principles, inherited from Grandmother; she has to reconcile this choice with the chaste and modest character she's been presenting thus far. She does this by explaining quite logically that her only choice was rape at the hands of Dr. Flint or consensual sex with Mr. Sands; her master has already prevented her from following the "correct" path, which was marriage to the carpenter, whom she loved.

Linda appeals directly to her reader here again, saying that she's not any less chaste than they are – simply more vulnerable and unprotected by the law. She forces the reader to acknowledge that she too could be reduced to such a choice, creating an uncomfortable link between them even as she has just confounded the reader's expectations.

❝ I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do…Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Linda excoriates herself for her sexual choices in this chapter. For a modern reader, somewhat removed from the rigid sexual standards of the 19th century, this may seem troubling and confusing to read – after all, Linda was living in terrible circumstances and she acted quite logically in order to protect herself. It's unclear exactly how much of her self-criticism here stems from her own religious beliefs and how much from the necessity of presenting herself as a respectable, and therefore credible, writer.

Linda seems to be voicing a very conservative viewpoint here, but she departs from that viewpoint by noting that slave women can't fulfill society's expectations of chastity when they are unprotected by law and custom. As the narrative progresses, Linda will become much more emboldened in voicing this viewpoint. When Reverend Durham suggests that people might think less of her if they knew about her past, she responds not with shame but outrage, suggesting that she's developing a more sympathetic attitude towards herself.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ You must forsake your sinful ways, and be faithful servants. Obey your old master and your young master…if you disobey your earthly master, you offend your heavenly Master. You must obey God's commandments.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Reverend Pike

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

After the failed Nat Turner rebellion, slaveholders start organizing religious meetings for the slaves, which they hope will discourage them from further insurrection. When Linda attends one, she's unsurprised to find that Reverend Pike lectures on a Biblical passage exhorting servants to obey their masters. In his sermon, he lectures the slaves condescendingly on their "laziness" and bad habits; furthermore, he makes a direct connection between the authority of slaveholders and the authority of God.

It's clear that such services are self-serving perversions of Christianity, seeking to indoctrinate slaves and reinforce power structures rather than encouraging moral development or real piety. It's particularly ironic that the pastor links Jesus, who is supposed to have no moral flaws, with slaveholders, who generally emerge as morally bankrupt. Episodes like this contribute to Linda's argument that slaveholders' practice of Christianity is inherently hypocritical.

❝ There is a great difference between Christianity and religion at the south. If a man goes to the communion table, and pays money into the treasury of the church, no matter if it be the price of blood, he is called religious.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Linda makes the distinction between "Christianity" – sincere religious devotion – and "religion" – the practice of certain rituals in order to consolidate social status. Slaves like Grandmother emerge as representatives of the former, seeking to uphold moral codes despite their oppressive circumstances and sustaining themselves through difficult periods with religious faith. People like Dr. Flint, who unapologetically tells Linda that he goes to church in order to stop people from gossiping about his interest in her, represent the latter. Throughout the narrative, slaveholders like Dr. Flint argue that slavery is in line with Christian values and cherry-pick Biblical passages with which to defend the institution. By showing that slaves are often the most genuine practitioners of Christianity and highlighting the religious hypocrisy of their masters, Linda refutes this argument and uses Christianity to argue for abolition instead.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Linda is dismayed to find that her second child is a girl. She hates to think that her daughter will be exposed to the same sexual persecutions that she has endured. This causes her to reflect on the ways in which slavery is uniquely difficult for women, namely because of the additional sexual abuse they face. With arguments like this, she aligns her narrative with the burgeoning feminist movement and encourages her readers to feel linked to her through the shared experienced of womanhood, rather than distanced by race. Jacobs's ability to speak – fairly candidly, given the restrictions of her era – for the particular situation of female slaves is one reason for this narrative's historical importance. This is one of the few primary sources documenting sexual abuse of female slaves. It's also remarkable that Jacobs is able to anticipate intersectional feminism, a concept which was not yet articulated in her own day.

Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ We knelt down together, with my child pressed to my heart, and my other arm round the faithful, loving old friend I was about to leave forever. On no other occasion has it ever been my lot to listen to so fervent a supplication for mercy and protection. It thrilled through my heart, and inspired me with trust in God.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Benny, Grandmother

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

After seven years of hiding in a cramped garret in Grandmother's shed, Linda is forced to take action and

make a quick escape after an acquaintance spots her. Before she leaves, she kneels in her room to pray with Benny and Grandmother, savoring her last moments in the only home she's ever known. This scene juxtaposes the family's deep love and the home they've created with each other with the uncertainty and risk that awaits in the world outside. Linda uses this moment of domesticity to show that, for slaves, home life doesn't actually provide meaningful security and protection.

Moreover, it's important that Linda feels close to God and confidently voices her trust in Him just as she's about to escape. As she's shown before, slaveholders try to convince slaves that God intended them for bondage, but for Linda, moments of genuine interaction with the divine come when she's liberating herself from slavery. Here, she reimagines Christianity as a force for abolition, rather than a perpetrator of slavery.

Chapter 30 Quotes

❝ Yet that intelligent, enterprising, noble-hearted man was a chattel! Liable, by the laws of a country that calls itself civilized, to be sold with horses and pigs!

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Peter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

After she runs away from the Flints, Linda relies on a family friend, Peter, to keep her hidden and eventually facilitate her departure from the city. Even though Peter has no hope of running away himself and no familial connection to Linda, he takes serious risks on her behalf and proves himself ingenious in finding an escape route. As she's about to leave him, Linda contrasts his strength of character with his legal status in society, equal to that of an animal. This is one of her most arresting protests against the dehumanizing effect of slavery on its victims.

Here, Peter emerges as a foil to slaveholders like Dr. Flint. Peter's exceptional goodness and intelligence goes unrecognized by society; in contrast, Dr. Flint is viewed as a learned man and pillar of society, but Linda describes him as a demon and shows how slavery has completely corrupted his morals. Moments like this link the legal and social dehumanization of slaves with the moral dehumanization of their owners.

Chapter 31 Quotes

❝ I replied, "God alone knows how much I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me. If I am permitted to have my children, I intend to be a good mother, and to live in such a manner that people cannot treat me with contempt.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Mr. Durham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

Once Linda arrives in Philadelphia, she's taken in by a black preacher, Reverend Durham, and his family. Linda confesses her past and sexual transgressions to the preacher, who is sympathetic and polite but warns that other people may disrespect her for her actions. Linda used to dread social condemnation and felt she deserved it, but her response here shows how her views have evolved over the course of her life. She's now much firmer in her belief that enslaved women can't be expected to uphold sexual standards, and she feels that, given the situation, her conduct was acceptable. Here, she's starting to take a much more tolerant and empowering view of her own sexuality.

At the same time, she continues to emphasize her respectability. She frames her affair in terms of motherhood (a feminine ideal) rather than sexuality (a feminine taboo) and affirms her hope to fulfill social standards in her future life. For the rest of the narrative, Jacobs will balance an increasingly progressive view of female sexuality with an endorsement of conventional mores, allowing her to appeal to traditional readers while also arguing fiercely for the interests of enslaved women.

Chapter 36 Quotes

❝ I did not discover till years afterward that Mr. Thorne's intemperance was not the only annoyance she suffered from…he had poured vile language into the ears of [Grandmother's] innocent great-grandchild.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Mr. Thorne, Ellen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

During the time that Ellen lives with the Hobbs family, Mrs. Hobbs's brother Mr. Thorne comes to visit. Mr. Thorne is eager to see Linda and Ellen and professes a great attachment to Grandmother; but Linda informs the reader that he simply came to her to borrow money when he didn't want to admit his drunken and spendthrift ways to his parents. Moreover, despite his "respect" for the family, he starts to sexually harass Ellen; this is curtailed only when Linda discovers that he has informed Dr. Flint of her whereabouts and has to escape the city. While slaveholders may view themselves as having positive or even cherished relationships with slaves, Linda's analysis shows that these relationships are always corrupted by power imbalances and exploitation.

Even though Linda has escaped from the South, she's not able to truly protect her daughter from the sexual degradation she experienced. Her fugitive status makes it difficult for her to demand Ellen's release from the Hobbs household or otherwise advocate for her rights. In moments like this, it's clear that slavery's effects persist even in the technically free states of the North, and Linda uses them to show that Northern readers are not just bystanders but complicit in the injustices of slavery.

Chapter 39 Quotes

❝ I thought that if he was my own father, he ought to love me. I was a little girl then, and didn't know any better. But now I never think any thing about my father. All my love is for you.

Related Characters: Ellen (speaker), Mr. Sands, Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

Before Ellen departs for boarding school, Linda resolves to confess her sexual past to her daughter. She starts to explain the harassment she suffered from Dr. Flint and her resulting decisions, but Ellen stops her, saying that she already guessed that Mr. Sands was her father while staying with him as a child. Moreover, she affirms that this knowledge does not affect her love and respect for her mother. The unconditional love that Ellen displays here makes this arguably the narrative's most compelling and touching passage. Her declaration that she never thinks about her father elevates Linda's role as a mother and rewards her dedication to her children.

At the same time, Ellen's statement implies a radical extension of Linda's views on female sexuality. Linda has argued that enslaved women shouldn't be expected to fulfill the same mores as free women, but Ellen suggests that these mores really don't matter – her mother's failure to live up to them has no bearing on her character or their relationship. Linda can't say things like this outright without compromising her respectability in the eyes of her readers, but by couching her ideas in the language of filial devotion, Ellen can get away with it.

Chapter 41 Quotes

❝ Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage….The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own.

Related Characters: Harriet Jacobs / Linda Brent (speaker), Ellen, Benny

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

In one of the narrative's last passages, Linda sums up her accomplishments and her hopes from the future. She has achieved her main goal, freedom, but she still faces many obstacles in building a life for her children. Here, she reminds the reader that the battle for racial equality doesn't end with legal freedom but must strive against the discrimination and poverty that will persist after the abolition of slavery.

Although Linda normally endorses traditional mores, in this passage she digresses somewhat, measuring her life not by marital happiness, but the attainment of freedom; for a woman of her time, this is a daring claim to make. This assertion also informs her use, throughout the narrative, of the language of domesticity. Until now, homes have largely symbolized the conventional female roles and domestic tranquility that are inaccessible to slave women. Coming just after Jacobs's light dismissal of marriage, the "home of my own" seems to symbolize independence not just from slavery but also from wifely deference. In her final passages, Jacobs fuses the old concepts of domesticity and motherhood with new concepts of female self-sufficiency, imagining a world in which women are free to guide and protect their children without the interference of men.

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 ONE: CHILDHOOD

Linda Brent is born into slavery, but she "never knew it" for most of her childhood. Her father is a carpenter who works independently of his mistress in exchange for paying her a certain sum per year, and Linda lives with her parents and her younger brother William in a "comfortable **home**," unaware that she is a "piece of merchandise who can be taken away at any time.

In the first passage, Linda's nostalgia for her childhood and comfort that she derives from her childhood home contrasts with the lack of protection it actually affords her, thus setting up a tension between the value of family life and the threats posed to it by slavery.

Linda is also under the care of her grandmother, a strong and determined woman. The illegitimate daughter of a planter, Linda's grandmother was freed at her father's death and set off with her mother for St. Augustine; however, they were recaptured and sold back into slavery. Working hard and gaining the respect of her owners, she bakes and sells crackers in her scant free time in order to leave some money for her children. She even makes enough to give her mistress a loan when she needs it. However, when the master dies, her children are divided among his own and she sees many of them sold away.

Grandmother's story exemplifies the betrayals and humiliations slavery inflicts upon even those who try to accustom themselves to life within the system. Grandmother legally acquires her freedom as a young girl, and later serves her owners apparently without resentment, but this doesn't improve her life or those of her children. These misfortunes will help convince Linda that it's useless to live by the "rules" of slavery, and imperative to escape it altogether.

When Linda is six, her mother dies. Her mother's mistress – the daughter of Grandmother's mistress – has always been kind to her, and promises on her deathbed that nothing bad will happen to her children. She takes Linda into her own **house**, giving her only light work to do and teaching her to read the Bible and sew. Linda says that such happy times can't last long for an enslaved child.

Just as in her own childhood home, Linda remains blissfully unaware of her enslaved state at the mistress's house. This creates a tenuous parallel between life among her family and life in the mistress's service, but Linda will soon show that the two aren't equivalent at all.

When Linda is twelve, the mistress dies. Linda is old enough to worry about what will happen to her, and her family hopes that the mistress has been kind enough to free her in her will, in honor of her mother. However, Linda notes, "the memory of a faithful slave does not…save her children from the auction block."

Here, Linda is referring to Grandmother's "faithful" service, which doesn't prevent her owners from selling her children. She argues that even an apparently peaceful coexistence between slaveholders and slaves is just a veneer concealing an inevitably exploitative relationship.

In her will, the mistress gives Linda to her five-year-old niece, Emily Flint. The family's hopes are dashed, and it's bitter to remember that the same woman who taught Linda to "love thy neighbor as thyself" didn't actually "recognize [Linda] as her neighbor." Thinking about it now, Linda tries to forget about the "act of injustice" and remember the mistress's kind behavior towards her. Along with Linda, several of Grandmother's children are separated among the mistress's relatives, despite her long faithfulness.

Throughout her narrative, Linda will employ Biblical quotations to point out the hypocrisy of slaveholders who claim to be Christians. This helps her appeal to a highly religious audience and refute the argument, promoted by pro-slavery advocates, that the institution is somehow divinely ordained and sanctioned.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NEW MASTER AND MISTRESS

Along with William, Linda moves to the **house** of Dr. Flint, Emily Flint's father. Both children are resistant to their lot as slaves, partly because their father has always instilled in them the "feelings of a freeman," for example saying that it's a person's father, not his mistress, who has the "strongest claim upon his obedience." Grandmother tries to cheer up the children, but they are demoralized by the cold and unkind treatment they receive in the Flint house.

Although Linda's home doesn't provide her with material security or protection from being sold, life with her parents instilled a sense of self-respect and dignity that will sustain her and William through terrible experiences and eventually inspire them to escape.

A year later, Grandmother delivers the sad news that Linda's father has died. Grandmother tries to comfort her by saying that God has saved her parents from "evil days to come," but Linda's "heart rebelled against God" for taking her relatives. Mrs. Flint refuses to let Linda go to see her father's body, and instead makes her spend the day arranging flowers for a party. The Flints feel that Linda's father has spoiled her by teaching her to feel like a "human being." Linda sees her father buried the next day.

Linda's feelings of grief for her father are compelling and simple, creating a link between her and the reader through a universal experience. This recognition of shared humanity contrasts starkly with the Flints' conviction that their slaves are not actually humans with feelings and rights. Here, Linda juxtaposes her obvious humanity with her society's refusal to recognize it.

Linda and William are both more depressed than ever; when she tries to comfort her brother by saying they might earn money to buy themselves, he says he doesn't want to pay money for his own freedom. Meanwhile, they barely get anything to eat because Mrs. Flint is so stingy with food for her slaves. Linda relies on Grandmother to provide her with good meals and clothes.

Both Linda and William will always resist the idea of buying their freedom, a step which seems to concede they aren't already entitled to it. For them, moral concerns of dignity and justice are important as the material security that freedom provides.

To add insult to injury, when Grandmother's mistress dies, Dr. Flint, her executor, refuses to repay Grandmother the loan she once gave his mother-in-law. He also refuses to honor a provision in the woman's will freeing Grandmother, and instead decides to sell her. He wants to do this privately, because Grandmother is well-known in the community and people will object to the sale of an old woman; however, Grandmother ascends to the auction block so her case is known to the public. Everyone is shocked, and an elderly friend of Grandmother's dead mistress, Miss Fanny, buys her and sets her free.

Linda frequently presents disastrous relationships between enslaved and white women, notably her own with Mrs. Flint. However, Grandmother has a few friends who are white, one of whom even hides Linda after her escape. Because Grandmother is now free, she can interact with white people on a more equal basis and form relatively respectful relationships. Linda presents these friendships as a vision of future coexistence, but it's clear that this vision is predicated on freedom, and can't come to pass if slavery exists.

"Like many southern women," Mrs. Flint is too lazy to run her own household but very energetic when it comes to whipping her slaves. Although she attends church every Sunday, after she comes home and eats dinner she spits in the leftovers so that the slaves won't eat them. Meanwhile, Dr. Flint whips or humiliates the cook every time he doesn't like a meal: once, after the dog becomes sick, he makes her eat dog food, and many times he separates her from her nursing infant for an entire day.

Linda prasies the female role of nurturing mother, but Mrs. Flint abandons this role by turning her house into a place of cruelty and violence – she also actively prevents other women, like the cook, from fulfilling maternal roles. While her actions explicitly impact her slaves, Linda will show how such behavior also causes moral degradation and impugns the character of families like the Flints.

Linda once sees Dr. Flint tie up and whip a slave from his plantation who offended him by accusing him of being the father of his wife's child; later, he sells husband and wife to a slave trader. Linda recalls another case in which a slave from a neighboring household is dying while giving birth to her master's illegitimate child; her mistress stands over her and jeers like "an incarnate fiend," telling her she deserves to die.

This is one of the most disturbing scenes of the narrative. Rather than feeling sympathy for the sexually abused slave or linked to her by shared motherhood, the mistress completely disregards their shared humanity. In turn, her behavior makes her emerge as inhuman, as Linda's description of her as a "fiend" hints.

The slave's mother comforts her, saying she and the baby will soon be in Heaven, but the mistress says that "there is no such place for…her and her bastard." The dying woman tells her mother not to react to these taunts, saying that God will take pity on her.

The mistress's harsh, self-serving concept of Christianity contrasts with the dying slave's sincere faith, and the dignity it gives her.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SLAVES' NEW YEAR'S DAY

Linda describes the practice of hiring-day, which takes place on January 1. Many slave owners rent their slaves to different owners each year; hiring day is always a time of anxiety, because it can separate slave families or subject them to a cruel master. All the slaves know which planters are best to work for and try everything to get in their employ.

Explaining the mechanics of slave life, Linda focuses on its destructive effect on family structure, appealing to her readers' sense of the fundamental importance of family.

Linda imagines the New Year's celebrations of "you happy free women," who are able to relax with people they love and kiss their children, from whom no one can legally separate them. She contrasts this with the anxiety of slave mothers, who spend the last night of the year watching their children in sorrow, knowing they may be sold or hired away from them in the morning. While such a woman might be ignorant and "degraded" by her condition, she still has "a mother's instincts" and feels "a mother's agonies."

Linda juxtaposes the feelings that all mothers share with the circumstances that elevate free mothers and oppress enslaved ones. It should feel painfully obvious to read that enslaved mothers love their children just like free ones, but Linda is using fundamentally important concepts like motherhood to compel free readers to identify with the plight of slaves.

One hiring day, Linda witnesses a mother's seven children sold away from her at once. The slave trader can't even tell her where they're going, as he'll sell them wherever they make the most money. The woman prays for God to kill her. Slave owners also try to dispose of elderly and "worn out" slaves on hiring day, selling them to anyone who will pay a few dollars.

Describing an elderly slave as "worn out," Linda highlights the extent to which slaves are treated like inanimate objects. This gives the lie to arguments slaveholders will make later that their slaves are considered part of the family.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SLAVE WHO DARED TO FEEL LIKE A MAN

As the years pass, Grandmother manages to buy a small home by making and selling preserves and bread. She tells her enslaved children and grandchildren to "pray for contentment," but Linda and her youngest son Benjamin reject this argument, feeling that it can't be "the will of God" for them to languish in slavery.

Religion enables Grandmother to endure slavery; but for Linda and William, it's an inspiration to assert their rights and eventually make their escape.

Grandmother can't help Linda with the new oppression she's now facing. Dr. Flint, "whose restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night," has begun to harass Linda constantly, telling her that she must "obey his command in every thing" and "surrender" her will to him. One afternoon, as she's trying to decide what to do, William approaches her, upset because Dr. Flint's son, Nicholas, bullies him constantly and threatens to whip him when William, who is stronger, beats him up.

It's clear that Dr. Flint is beginning to sexually harass Linda, but she will never explicitly reveal what he's saying to her and what he's demanding. She's using the propriety of her language to present herself as fulfilling the ideal of feminine modesty, even though her circumstances make it increasingly hard to do so.

Linda counsels William to be "good and forgiving," but she knows that she herself does not feel forgiving towards Dr. Flint and she knows that it's in their "God-given nature" to "question the motives of those around" them, rather than accepting their actions.

Linda toggles between feeling that religion demands her to forgive her abusers and believing that it empowers her to demand her own rights. By the end of the narrative, she will be strongly advocating the latter approach.

In February, Grandmother has just bought Linda a badly-needed pair of shoes. However, the shoes' noise bothers Mrs. Flint and she forbids Linda to wear them again. Linda has to run a long errand barefoot in the snow and she goes to bed sick, thinking she will die in the night and her mistress will be glad to get rid of the "little imp." Her only consolation is that she loves young Emily Flint; it seems the little girl loves her as well, but Linda wonders if her feelings are really true.

Mrs. Flint frequently describes Linda as a monstrous or inhuman creature, such as an "imp" – this reflects her conviction that Linda is somehow uncivilized and less than human. However, Mrs. Flint's behavior clearly shows that it's she who is inhumane. This contradiction will persist throughout the narrative.

One day, William comes to Linda telling her that their Uncle Benjamin has impetuously gotten in a fistfight with his master, an offense that can lead to great punishment. That night Linda meets Benjamin at Grandmother's house; he says that he's running away before he can be punished. Linda warns him about all the disasters that can befall runaways, but he tells her this is better than being treated like a "dog." Benjamin flees the city aboard a ship, but the captain sees his description in an advertisement for runaway slaves, arrests him, and sends him back to the city jail.

Uncle Benjamin is Linda's first inspiration to take her life into her own hands and aspire to run away. However, he also demonstrates to the reader all the perils that await slaves who try to escape – here, he's brought back into slavery and faces unknown punishments. Even if he did manage to escape, he would be cruelly sundered from the family that is obviously central to his life.

At night, the family sneaks into the jail to visit Benjamin. Grandmother is deeply distressed to see her son in prison; she tells him to trust in God, but he says it's impossible for a hunted man to think about God. At the moment of capture, he thought about throwing himself into the river, but remembered his mother and decided against it. Despite her entreaties, he refuses to beg his master's forgiveness.

Benjamin's irreverent comment here hints that Christian doctrine, as presented by slaveholders to slaves for their own purposes, rings uncompelling and false. Linda will eventually arrive at a Christian faith that incorporates and values her humanity and love for her family.

To punish his insolence, the master keeps Benjamin chained in jail, where he's covered in vermin. Grandmother has to sneak him food and new clothes. After three months, a slave trader buys him with the intention of selling him in New Orleans. Grandmother starts saving up money and writing to friends in New Orleans, but before she does so, Benjamin makes another escape attempt. He's delayed in Baltimore for three weeks and even spotted by a white acquaintance, but the man keeps his secret and helps him find a safe route to New York.

As is the case when her other children and grandchildren face problems, Grandmother has to fulfill maternal roles and provide for her family without any of the respect or protection that is accorded to free mothers. Moments like this help create the sense that slavery violates the sanctity of motherhood.

Once Benjamin has reached New York, he meets up with his brother Phillip, who is there on business for his mistress. He encourages Phillip to escape and join him, but Phillip is reluctant to leave Grandmother alone. Benjamin says she should use her savings to buy Phillip and, if possible, Linda. After he and Phillip bid farewell, the family never hears from Benjamin again.

For Uncle Benjamin and for many slaves, there's a trade-off between escape and family. Linda will undertake the complex project of attaining her freedom without losing her children, showing the unique problems that enslaved mothers face.

When Phillip brings this news to Grandmother, the old woman is sadder at losing Benjamin than she is happy about his freedom. Eventually, she purchases Phillip for eight hundred dollars. That night mother and son sit around the hearthstone, proud of each other for securing their independence. The family says to themselves, "he that is *willing* to be a slave, let him be a slave."

This is a potentially troubling passage, because it seems to suggest that slaves are responsible for securing their own freedom – when, as Linda shows, this is impossible most of the time. What she's probably trying to do is convince the reader that slaves possess moral determination and dignity, even if she ignores for a moment the obstacles they face in achieving freedom.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE TRIALS OF GIRLHOOD

During her first years at the Flint **house**, Linda is treated like a child, and sometimes allowed to share "indulgences" with the Flint children. Now that she is fifteen, though Dr. Flint starts to "whisper foul words in my ear," trying alternately to persuade and coerce her into submitting to him. He attempts to "corrupt the pure principles" Linda has learned from Grandmother, and although she tries to ignore him, she's trapped in his house and she's his legal property.

Slaveholders often try to argue that slaves are essentially primitive and lack morals, but Linda flips this script: she learns strong moral principles from Grandmother and those principles are challenged by Dr. Flint, a prominent and educated white man. Ultimately, Linda and Grandmother will emerge as far more morally upright than any of the Flints.

This is the case for all slave girls, who are powerless against the "insult…violence, or even death" perpetrated by "fiends who bear the shape of men." Mistresses should protect young girls in such cases, but they are often consumed by jealousy. All young girls who grow up as slaves become "prematurely knowing in evil things," seeing that their mistresses hate particular slaves or that the most beautiful women attract unwanted attention by men. While some women "are too much brutalized by slavery to feel the humiliation of their position…many slaves feel it most acutely." Everyone in the **house** knows what is happening to Linda, but no one can do anything against it.

Here Linda begins to discuss the widespread prevalence of sexual abuse of enslaved women, and the extent to which it is accepted by "respectable" society. In particular, she shows how it violates contemporary norms of female modesty and chastity. Young girls who should be ignorant of sex become "prematurely knowing" and women who want to protect their chastity are prevented from doing so. Linda asserts the desire of enslaved women to fulfill these norms, and thus their entitlement to the protections accorded to free women.

Linda wants to go to Grandmother for advice, but she's both terrified of Dr. Flint's rage and ashamed of mentioning the subject before the old and pious woman. Nevertheless, Grandmother's prominent position in the community protects Linda; Dr. Flint is too afraid of the old woman to harm Linda overtly. She knows that her situation would be hopeless if she lived on his plantation.

Even though it's clearly not her fault that she's enduring sexual abuse from Dr. Flint, Linda feels ashamed of it for a long time. One of the reasons she strives to present herself as proper and modest is to argue that she doesn't "deserve" to be harassed – something which should be obvious to the modern reader, but wasn't in her own era.

Once, Linda sees two children playing together: a white girl and her slave and illegitimate sister. The two are laughing together now, but Linda knows the white girl will grow up beautiful and uncorrupted until her wedding day, while the slave will be forced to drink from "the cup of sin." Linda wonders why "ye free men and women of the north" don't take action on these issues.

Throughout the narrative, Linda portrays corrupted and bitter relationships between white women and enslaved women. Moments like this show the lost possibility for empathy or coexistence. By calling out directly to her readers, Linda forces them to feel responsible and involved in the story.

CHAPTER SIX: THE JEALOUS MISTRESS

Linda would rather her children grow up paupers in Ireland, where they can pursue a morally righteous life, than as slaves whose "wish to be virtuous" is treated as a crime.

This statement hints at Linda's conviction that no matter what bribes Dr. Flint offers her, no material gains can be worth the loss of her dignity.

Mrs. Flint has understood her husband's character for years, and could use this knowledge to protect her slaves, but she has only suspicion and anger towards them. She watches her husband constantly, but he finds ways to get to Linda undetected, for example sending her inappropriate letters once he finds out she can write, or forcing her to fan him while he eats and to listen "to such language as he saw fit to address to me."

Mrs. Flint and Linda share the same goal – for Dr. Flint to stay faithful in his marriage – but rather than recognizing this, Mrs. Flint blames Linda for her husband's crimes. Linda presents her anger and jealousy as emblematic of interactions between mistresses and female slaves.

Mrs. Flint becomes more and more angry at her husband. In order to get Linda alone, Dr. Flint decides to move his youngest daughter's crib into his own suite of rooms and force Linda to sleep there as well (prior to this Linda had slept near Aunt Nancy, gaining some protection by the woman's presence). When Mrs. Flint finds out about this, she forces Linda to swear truthfulness on a Bible and questions her about her husband.

Dr. Flint's blatant attempt to force Linda to sleep in his room demonstrates his lack of respect for both her and his wife, as well as Mrs. Flint's powerlessness within the marriage. Linda argues that slavery impugns the status of white wives within their own homes – a warning to white women that it's not in their interest to support the institution.

Linda tells the truth, feeling sad for the obvious grief and humiliation Mrs. Flint displays. However, she knows that while the woman "pitied herself as a martyr" she can't feel anything "for the condition of shame and misery" in which Linda lives. Linda knows Mrs. Flint will never be kind to her, but she hopes for some protection. Indeed, the mistress forces Dr. Flint to abandon his new sleeping arrangements.

Although she's the one suffering most, Linda is able to empathize with Mrs. Flint's despair in her marriage; however, the older woman is not able to feel anything for the teenager vulnerable to rape in her own home. Even though they share the same concerns, Mrs. Flint still can't conceive of Linda as a human being.

Instead, Linda has to sleep in Mrs. Flint's room. Linda is often terrified to find the older woman leaning over her while she sleeps or whispering in her ear; she even begins to worry that one night she'll be killed. Sometimes Mrs. Flint confronts Dr. Flint with the evidence of his crimes, but he simply responds that "you tortured [Linda] into exposing me." It's clear that Mrs. Flint, decades younger than her husband, has no idea how to resolve the situation, and Linda pities her, knowing that Dr. Flint is the father of eleven slaves.

Obviously Dr. Flint's advances are not limited to Linda but represents a larger pattern of abuse and infidelity. By openly flouting his marriage and making his home a site of sexual licentiousness, Dr. Flint forfeits his claim to respectability in Linda's eyes. Through moments like this, she shows her readers that slavery brings moral and sexual degradation into the home.

Suspecting what's going on, Grandmother tries to buy Linda, but Dr. Flint always refuses, saying that she rightly belongs to his daughter. Linda says that his scrupulousness in this matter is ironic due to his total lack of moral conscience. Dr. Flint often threatens to sell Linda away from the city, or tells her that she's ungrateful for the care he's given her. He tells her that he will "make a lady of" her if she submits to him.

Dr. Flint tries to dangle some sort of social advancement in front of Linda, but she feels that this is no substitute for true respectability, which is defined by her chastity.

The terrible situation Linda is describing is typical of many Southern homes. She can't believe that Northerners cooperate with this brutality by hunting fugitive slaves and permitting their recapture. It's also astonishing that they permit their daughters to marry planters, only to discover their illegitimate "children of every shade of complexion" playing with their own. Such households are almost always corrupted by immorality and jealousy.

In this passage, Linda asserts that even if they don't actively participate in slavery, Northerners make themselves complicit by tacitly condoning it. This is a very strong claim upon her readers, but it also appeals to their self-interest by showing the ways in which slavery corrupts white families as well as destroying black ones.

There are a few exceptions to this trend. Linda knows two wives who pressured their husbands into freeing their illegitimate children and, by "displaying their superior nobleness" of their character, earned their husbands' respect and improved their marriage.

Taking action on behalf of slaves, Linda argues, is not just a good deed but a mechanism of improving one's status within one's own marriage.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE LOVER

It's irrational for slaves to fall in love, when separation and disaster is always at hand. As a teenager Linda doesn't understand this and she falls in love with a freeborn carpenter, who wants to marry her. However, she's worried that marital happiness is impossible for her. Dr. Flint refuses to sell her; although Mrs. Flint would be happy to be rid of her, she thinks that slaves have no right to their own attachments.

It's often Mrs. Flint who displays the most baldly dehumanizing beliefs about slaves – for example, that they're not expected or entitled to fall in love. Linda combats these beliefs by frequently reiterating, as she does here, that slaves have the same feelings as everyone else.

Linda goes to a white friend of Grandmother's, explains her situation, and asks her to convince Dr. Flint to sell her to the carpenter. The woman does so but fails, and Dr. Flint is enraged with Linda for falling in love with another man, acting as if she's insulted him personally and saying that if she ever gets married it will be to one of his slaves. Linda points out that the carpenter loves her for her virtue, and is thus more worthy than her master; Dr. Flint suddenly strikes her.

Displaying a bizarre mindset, Dr. Flint tries to convince Linda that she's being unchaste by refusing his advances, even though she's trying to create a respectable life and marriage for herself. Moments like this argue that slavery completely perverts Southerners' understanding of important moral and sexual standards.

Dr. Flint reminds Linda that he can do whatever he wants to her, and she retorts that he might be able to, but he has no rights over her. Enraged, he threatens to send her to jail and lectures about all the ways he's tried to "make [her] happy." He closes by threatening to shoot the carpenter if he ever sees him at the house.

Dr. Flint's apparently sincere belief that he wants Linda to be happy demonstrates his conception of her as less than human – if he really thought of her as a person like himself, it would be impossible to conclude that forcing her into a sexual relationship would make her happy.


For two weeks Dr. Flint doesn't speak to Linda, but she's scared and oppressed by his malicious watchfulness. Eventually, he informs her that he's going to Louisiana soon and plans to take her with him. Linda is worried, but she doesn't think he'll go through with it. In fact, only Nicholas Flint goes to Louisiana and Dr. Flint won't send Linda with him because he's jealous of his own son's advances on her.

That Dr. Flint is tacitly competing with his son over Linda demonstrates the twisted family dynamics to which slavery gives rise. Not only does their behavior create discord between father and son, it also brings sexual issues into the home, which was considered unacceptable in Linda's era.


Once, Dr. Flint catches Linda speaking to the carpenter in the street; at home he taunts her, asking when her wedding will be, and then screams curses at her. Linda can see that there's no way to resolve the situation. Even if she married the carpenter as a slave, Dr. Flint would still be able to harass and exploit her, as the law gives husbands no way to protect enslaved wives. Moreover, any children they had would belong to Dr. Flint. Linda encourages the carpenter to go to the Free States, where he can have a better life, and he eventually leaves.

This is a really disturbing passage, showing how Linda's simple desire to have a home with a man she loves makes her vulnerable to persecution by a sadistic master. It's also important that even if she could get married, she wouldn't have any of the social protections accorded to married free women. It's impossible for her to fulfill ideals of respectability when her society doesn't allow her to do so.

The only consolation left in Linda's life is her close relationship with William. Even that bond is not secure, though—she worries that Dr. Flint will sell him away to punish her. They often talk about escaping, but it's hard to make plans when Linda is so sharply watched; moreover, Grandmother is very opposed to escape, thinking it too dangerous.

Bonds between siblings should be a source of emotional comfort, but at this time they're an additional cause of anxiety for Linda.

CHAPTER EIGHT: WHAT SLAVES ARE TAUGHT TO THINK OF THE NORTH

Slave owners often tell lies to prevent slaves from wanting to run away. One man tells Linda that he's seen her runaway friend literally dying of starvation in New York and begging to return to slavery; later, Linda meets the same friend and finds that she has never "thought of such a thing." However, many slaves believe stories like this, having never known any life other than the one they live currently.

This depiction of the North is obviously untrue, and shows how slaveholders both enforce and exploit the ignorance of their slaves. This is similar to the way in which they twist Christian principles so that they appear to support slavery.

Linda says it's imperative to teach slaves about the importance of liberty and dignity—values their masters strive to conceal—but impossible to do so when the Free States allow fugitives to be thrown back into slavery, making their freedom completely insecure.

Just as it's impossible for Linda to fulfill sexual standards without any social standing or protection, it's hard for any slave to act solely by moral principles within a system that penalizes them for doing so.

Linda continues that under the conditions of slavery, it's nearly impossible for people to develop the moral compass that they could as free men. For example, some men "have been so brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters," but this is because of their environment, not their innate nature. Linda challenges the reader, asking "what would you be" if raised in similar circumstances.

This is a very powerful passage. Linda often encourages her reader to identify with slaves by calling up positive links, like maternal love. Here, she compels the reader to acknowledge that their own moral development is predicated on freedom and privilege, and acknowledge that they too would succumb to the pressures of oppression.

Southerners often say terrible things about Yankees, even though Northerners often cooperate with them by hunting down and returning fugitive slaves. Northerners are not accepted into the South unless they vocally profess support for slavery, and even then they aren't respected. As if to compensate for this, Northern transplants often become the worst masters.

Here Linda presents Southerners not only as perpetuating slavery in their own states but trying to force it on others. This plays on contemporary anxieties about new states in the American West, in which abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates were fighting for dominance.

Such people justify their actions by saying that God intended black people for slavery, but this contravenes the Biblical principle that all people are "of one blood."

Quoting directly from the Bible, Linda firmly rebuts the possibility that it can be used to justify slavery.

Many slaves have some idea that people in the North are against slavery and even working to end it, but their knowledge is very confused. One woman tells Linda a rumor that the "Queen of 'Merica" is arguing with the president for the freedom of the slaves.

Linda intends this woman's beliefs to serve not as a personal flaw but as an example of the enforced ignorance in which most slaves live.

CHAPTER NINE: SKETCHES OF NEIGHBORING SLAVEHOLDERS

Linda describes some of the other slave owners in the city, and the violence they inflict on their slaves. One planter, Mr. Litch, devises grotesque punishments like tying a man under a piece of roasting meat, so that drops of fat continuously fell and burned him. Mr. Litch doesn't give his slaves enough to eat and encourages them to steal from the neighbors; he frequently murders his slaves, but is so wealthy he never faces punishment.

It's evident that Mr. Litch takes pleasure in implementing these "creative" punishments. He's not only dehumanizing his slaves by treating them worse than animals; by failing to show any moral compass, he's forfeiting his own humanity as well.

Linda says that "cruelty is contagious in uncivilized communities." A neighbor of Mr. Litch punishes a slave by forcing him to spend a winter night outside and naked.

The idea that the ills of slavery can easily spread is calculated to appeal to readers wary that its effects may soon be felt in the North.

One female slaveholder whips her slaves "with the might of a man." On her deathbed, she forbids any of her slaves from looking at her after she's died, but one maid sneaks into her room and slaps her dead face. She's later discovered and sold to Georgia.

In this case, the slaveholder's behavior means that she contravenes feminine roles – something Linda presents as reprehensible, and which she avoids doing herself.

A slave named James tries to escape his cruel master but is recaptured; his master punishes him by flogging him and locking him inside a cotton gin, where there's no room to sit up or turn around. The man dies of his wounds and is partially eaten by rats before being discovered. No one comments on his cruel death, because masters are allowed to do whatever they want to slaves. James's master is a "highly educated" man considered a "perfect gentleman" and a devout Christian, although "Satan never had a truer follower."

This is a truly disturbing episode, and it shows how Southern society has perverted religious doctrine to endorse and justify actions that are obviously sinful. Remarking on the master's high status in Southern society, Linda casts doubt not only on his behavior but on the twisted social mores which enable him.

Exceptions to this trend are rare. Linda knows one young woman who owned a woman and six children, whom she treated very kindly. When the young woman becomes engaged, she offers to free the slave family, but they decide to stay with her, having been well-treated for so many years. Soon, the new husband sells many of the children and rapes the eldest daughter, who gives birth to his illegitimate child. The young woman is devastated to see that "her own husband had violated the purity she had so carefully inculcated." Although she tries her best to shelter the other daughters, many of them suffer the same fate. Linda concludes that the husband would have been a better man, and the wife much happier, without slavery.

Here, Linda argues that even the rare and relatively benign mistress cannot shield slaves from the system that oppresses them – nor can she save her own marriage from corruption. In passages like this, Linda argues that abolition is a moral imperative not just from the slaves' perspective but in order to foster and preserve strong marriages.

In fact, the "all-pervading corruption produced by slavery" is so great that Linda can hardly describe it. No matter how kindly raised a slave girl is, she will eventually succumb to the atmosphere of "licentiousness and fear" created by her masters, whom it's impossible to resist.

Linda reiterates that personal principles – like her own – are not enough to fight the degradation of slavery. At a certain point, society must insure that individuals are free to act on their best moral impulses.

Meanwhile, the sons of slave owners grow up believing it's completely acceptable to sexually abuse slave women, and even their daughters become corrupted by the rumors they hear or arguments they observe. Sometimes, white women become sexually involved with enslaved men; this is considered scandalous, and any children they have are killed or sent away.

Slavery is not just destructive for marriages but becomes a pernicious influence on children. Here, Linda shows how slavery prevents white women from existing peacefully within their most socially valued roles: wife and mother.

In short, slavery is "a curse" to white families as well as black ones, destroying their happiness and moral integrity. However, almost no slave owners are concerned with "the widespread moral ruin" that attends their way of life.

Linda both sums up the moral degradation caused by slavery and casts serious doubt on the moral status of slaveholders, who don't care about these problems at all.

CHAPTER TEN: A PERILOUS PASSAGE IN THE SLAVE GIRL'S LIFE

Dr. Flint contrives another plan to bring Linda under his will: he informs her that he's building her a **house** of her own, outside the town. By this point many people are gossiping about his conduct and Mrs. Flint's jealousy, so he hopes to isolate Linda and protect himself from scandal. Linda promises herself that she will never go to this house, but she doesn't know how she can combat him.

Homes are supposed to represent familial tranquility and social respectability, especially for women; however, Dr. Flint's proposed cottage symbolizes the abandonment of these ideals.

Addressing the reader, Linda says that she has to relate a shameful time of her life "which I would gladly forget if I could." She can't pretend that she didn't know what she was doing or the sinful nature of her actions, as the conditions of slavery had made her "prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world." In fact, she takes action with "calculation."

Linda excoriates herself throughout this chapter for voluntarily entering an extramarital relationship. This is troubling for the modern reader, who should understand that Linda is acting to remove herself from an untenable situation. However, she has to explain to her audience and personally grapple with her failure to fulfill sexual norms.

Still, Linda appeals to "ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood" not to judge her. If she wasn't enslaved, she could have married the carpenter and lived chastely for her entire life. As it is, she has to choose between two hateful actions, and she feels "as if I was forsaken by God and man."

While Linda criticizes herself, she also makes clear that her actions were predicated by the conditions of slavery and her sexual vulnerability within the system.

As it happens, after hearing about Dr. Flint's conduct, another slave owner, Mr. Sands, become interested in Linda, writing sympathetic letters to her. His behavior is flattering and he's much kinder and more refined than Dr. Flint. She begins to feel that it's "less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion" and she would rather be involved with a single man than a married one. Linda acknowledges that there might be "sophistry" in her thinking, but as a slave it's impossible to make choices purely based on morality.

At this point, Linda has to choose between an overtly abusive relationship and a somewhat voluntary one. Although Mr. Sands does give Linda some protection from Dr. Flint, his behavior is still exploitative – both as a slaveholder who has infinitely more legal and social power than a slave, and as a man whose reputation suffers no damage for an extramarital relationship, while Linda's is destroyed.

When Linda sees Dr. Flint actually start building the **house**, she knows she can exact revenge and gain some protection by becoming involved with another man. Perhaps Mr. Sands will even buy her; if she has any children, Linda is determined that Dr. Flint won't be able to control them and sell them. Because of all these considerations, she embarks on an affair with Mr. Sands. "The painful and humiliating memory" will stay with her forever, but in reflection on her actions she feels "that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standards as others."

While Linda's affair with Dr. Sands is technically consensual, it's extremely unequal and not positive in any way. It's appalling that Linda has to engage in a relationship against her inclinations, and forfeit the chaste reputation which means so much to her, just to gain some limited protection from her persecutor. From this predicament, Linda's assertion that slave women can't fulfill the same sexual norms as free women proceeds logically, and seems especially compelling.

As the months pass, Linda is still very anxious, especially because she knows Grandmother will be enraged to find that she's "degraded" herself. But when Dr. Flint triumphantly tells Linda the **house** is finished, she takes pride in informing him that she's having a child with another man.

It's important that Linda couches her affair here not in terms of sexuality – seen as unacceptable in women – but in terms of motherhood, which is highly valued.

Fearing Dr. Flint's retribution now that she's confessed, Linda goes to Grandmother's **house**. Soon Mrs. Flint arrives, screaming at Linda and accusing her of having a child with her husband. Grandmother is furious; she tells Linda that she's "a disgrace to your dead mother" and throws her out of the house.

Although Linda is always respectful and loyal towards Grandmother, she will eventually depart from her strict views on sexuality, coming to a more nuanced and tolerant understanding of her own actions.

Linda doesn't know where to go, so she walks aimlessly for a few miles and collapses against a tree trunk before continuing on to the house of a family friend, where she stays for several days. At last, Grandmother comes to fetch her; Linda tells her about all the abuse that led to her recent decision and begs for her forgiveness. Grandmother holds Linda's head and comforts her, calling her "poor child."

It's important that, as Linda prepares to become a mother, she's most supported by the maternal figure in her own life. Motherhood emerges as something that has the potential to bind women together regardless of their differences, and allows them to relate to each other independently of men.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE NEW TIE TO LIFE

Linda goes **home** with Grandmother, who talks to Mr. Sands and extracts his promise to care for their child. Dr. Flint comes to the house as well, castigating Linda for turning up her nose at him, accusing her of behaving like a "criminal," and reminding her how badly he could punish her. However, Mrs. Flint has forbidden her from returning to the house, so she gets to stay with Grandmother.

Linda will spend the next several years living with Grandmother. The house will become a refuge for her, and it's the place where she learns how to be a mother. At the same time, it's completely vulnerable to incursions like Dr. Flint's, which emphasizes the family's lack of security and self-determination.

Although this is a welcome reprieve, Dr. Flint comes to the house often, demanding that Linda reveal the father of her child and forbidding her from having any further contact with him. When she says that she's thankful to have a child with a man she doesn't "despise," he threatens to kill her for her "ingratitude" and says he will never sell her to anyone. This dashes Linda's hopes that he will sell her to a slave trader, who would then sell her to Mr. Sands.

Although Linda has managed to get herself out of the Flint house, Dr. Flint continuously reminds her of his legal ability to control her. Eventually, Linda will conclude that Mr. Sands's protection is not enough to liberate her from Dr. Flint, motivating her to escape.

Uncle Phillip returns to the city from a business trip, but Linda is saddened and ashamed to see him. She feels that Grandmother was right when she said long ago that her parents have been spared the "evil" of the future. As her pregnancy progresses, she becomes sick and weak, and eventually delivers the baby prematurely, almost dying in the process. Linda has often wished to die, but now she knows she must stay alive for her son and prays to get better. Dr. Flint continues to visit, ostensibly treating Linda but really reminding her that her son belongs to him.

Due to enslavement and Dr. Flint's constant persecutions, Linda has often felt that life isn't worth living. Even though having a baby makes her more vulnerable – Dr. Flint can hurt her child as well – it's also empowering in that it gives new purpose to her life. The necessity of protecting her children will help Linda make her most daring decisions and advocate for her rights.

By this time, Dr. Flint employs William as a physician's assistant. William is adept and competent in his tasks, and Linda is proud of him. Dr. Flint observes their close relationship and tries to taint it by forcing William to deliver his salacious letters to her, but Linda reassures her brother that she doesn't blame him. When Dr. Flint summons Linda to the house and berates her, William has to stand by and watch, powerless to help his sister. Once, becoming annoyed with William, Dr. Flint sends him to the city jail and threatens to sell him. However, he finds it's impossible to run his practice without him and soon brings him back.

As Linda had anticipated, Dr. Flint attempts to use her closeness with William against her, but he's unable to disrupt their bond with embarrassments or threats. This testifies to the moral strength of Linda's family attachments and forms a stark contrast with the dynamics within the Flint family, which are characterized primarily by discord and jealousy.

Linda's baby boy, Benny, grows older and stronger. Whenever she's "most sorely oppressed" she takes comfort in watching him smile and sleep, but she "could never forget that he was a slave" and sometimes even wishes he will die and be spared a life of pain. Mr. Sands visits occasionally to see his son; he offers to give Benny his surname, but Linda knows such an action carries no legal weight and would simply enrage Dr. Flint further.

Linda's feeling that her son may be better off dead – a drastic sentiment to hold as a mother – testifies to the utter bleakness of a life lived in slavery. At the same time as she has these fatalistic thoughts, caring for Benny gives Linda the strength to go on living her own life.

CHAPTER TWELVE: FEAR OF INSURRECTION

Soon after, Nat Turner's rebellion breaks out and quickly fails. Men from the city and country assemble to respond to what they perceive as the threat of mass rebellion. Most of the slaves are ignorant of what's going on but because she can read, Linda knows that terror and punishment is about to descend on them. She knows that the **houses** will be ransacked by "country bullies and the poor whites," who hate to see black people living comfortably or neatly, as Grandmother dies. In anticipation, she cleans the house and watches soldiers assemble in the roads outside.

Nat Turner's rebellion was a slave insurrection organized by Nat Turner in 1831. The rebels killed about fifty people before being captured and executed, but the event gave rise to fears of mass slave rebellion and hundreds of slaves were killed by white mobs in the aftermath. Although Linda prepares to encounter violence quite calmly, for her this symbolizes another violation of the home that is so important to her, yet so vulnerable.

Occasions like this are exciting for lower-class whites, who don't have slaves of their own and enjoy exerting their racial privileges, without reflecting that the powerful slave owners also keep them trapped in "poverty, ignorance, and moral degradation." In the furor, terrible crimes are committed against innocent people: women and children are whipped without pretext, **houses** are robbed or destroyed, and women are especially vulnerable to rape.

In this passage, Linda reflects that the system of slavery primarily benefits a handful of rich slaveholders; yet most white Southerners support it because it confers a sense of privilege upon them. As is the case with relationships between mistresses and female slaves, lower-class whites disregard their own interests out of deep-seated racism.

The next day, a band of white men "rudely" march into the **house**, turning over all the furniture and pawing through Grandmother's possessions. They even open and eat the preserves she makes to sell. Opening her trunk of valued bed linen and tablecloths, one of the men suggests she's stolen them and says, "white folks oughter have 'em all." Linda also comes under suspicion when the men find some letters addressed to her, but by this time she has spotted a white acquaintance outside and asked him to stand inside the house, thus gaining some protection.

The mob's rudeness and vulgarity contrasts with the dignity and poise that Grandmother and Linda display. This passage protests against a society that confers benefits on people that disregard conventions of respectability, while deeming people who fulfill those conventions unworthy even of owning nice tablecloths.

Although the "captain" of the band threatens to burn the **house** and whip the inhabitants, they don't suffer any material damages. However, as the night draws near the men get drunker and more violent. Linda is afraid to look out the window, but she sees men dragging people down the road at gunpoint, including an old minister and his wife. It's amazing that such "rabble" presume to be "administrators of justice." In the next days, patrols search black homes in the countryside and even worse atrocities are committed, to people who haven't even heard of Nat Turner.

Although slaveholders claim that they impose order and morality on inherently primitive slaves, moments like this show that it's they who are truly uncivilized. Slavery is not only completely unjust to black victims but causes and rewards the violation of all social norms. Jacobs probably focuses so much on this aspect of her argument because it's calculated to appeal to white Northern readers.

When Turner is captured, the terror abates somewhat. Imprisoned slaves are returned to their masters, but visiting between plantations is forbidden and slaves are not allowed to meet for church services. Instead, they stand in the galleries of white churches. After the white congregation has taken communion, they come down to get theirs, and the priest tells them that "God is your Father, and all ye are brethren."

It's galling to hear the pastor refer to slaves as "brethren" after the mob violence to which they've been subjected, which would not be allowed if society considered them equal or even truly human.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE CHURCH AND SLAVERY

Some time after the rebellion, local slaveholders decide that the slaves should attend religious services "to keep them from murdering their masters." Linda is invited to attend a new Episcopal service for black people. Reverend Pike, the pastor, reads from a text that states "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters…as unto Christ." In his sermon, he calls the congregants "rebellious sinners" and harangues them for shirking work and drinking alcohol, saying that God will punish them.

While Linda often quotes the Bible's insistence on equality and dignity, Reverend Pike chooses to lecture on a passage that seems to reflect his pro-slavery beliefs. Linda suggests that by conflating slaveholders with Christ, he's bordering on sacrilege, as Christ is supposed to be completely without sin and slaveholders are known for their iniquitous deeds.

Everyone is "amused" by the sermons and they return for a few more Sundays but eventually get bored and switch to Methodist services, which are full of singing and dancing. Linda feels that these people are more "sincere" Christians than the "sanctimonious" Reverend Pike.

In passages like this, Linda emphasizes the malleability of Christianity – it can be followed sincerely or twisted to serve self-serving agendas. Thus, it's important for individual worshippers to analyze the ideas with which they are presented, rather than simply accepting them.

Once, Linda attends a Methodist service and sits next to a mother who is broken-hearted, having just seen her youngest daughter sold away from her. The service leader is the local constable, who trades slaves and is frequently employed by other slaveholders to whip disobedient slaves. When he asks her what's wrong, she shares her grief, saying that "I've got nothing to live for now" and praying to die. Linda sees that while other congregants are crying in sympathy, the constable is trying not to laugh. He tells her that the sale of her daughter is the "dispensation of [God's] divine will." The slaves begin to sing a hymn; Linda says that, hearing them, one might almost think them happy people.

This is a truly appalling episode. The fact that the worship leader can't empathize with the simple, universal grief of a mother who has lost her children shows his utter inability to conceive of her as a human. It's impossible to cultivate sincere faith within an atmosphere that denies slaves such basic respect. Accordingly, Linda will develop her faith independently, rather than accepting the ideas presented to her by white clergymen.

At one point, the Episcopal clergyman leaves and is replaced by a pastor who is much kinder to the black community, holding meetings expressly for them in which he sincerely discusses Biblical texts and treats them as "human beings." Soon, the white parishioners become disgruntled, resenting the energy and respect he devotes to these meetings. When the pastor's wife dies, he frees their five slaves and leaves the town.

Even though there are individual clergymen sympathetic to the plight of slaves, they can't advocate in the face of social hostility. After a certain point, Linda argues, it's impossible to reform a system through individual effort within that system.

Linda becomes friends with an elderly slave, Fred, who has recently joined the Baptist church and wants to learn to read. She warns him that this is now against the law, but he is serious about his intent and proves a quick learner, reading the Bible after a few months of study. Linda says that there are thousands of people "thirsting for the water of life" like Fred and forbidden, by law, from accessing it. She points out the hypocrisy of sending people to teach "the heathen abroad" but forbidding black people in America from learning to read.

Fred's sincere desire to learn from the Bible, rather than to appropriate passages for his own use, contrasts with the behavior of clergymen like Reverend Pike. The fact that slaveholders try to prevent this meaningful engagement with the Bible means that they themselves are violating the Christian principles they urge on people elsewhere in the world.

Linda says that missionaries should "talk to American slaveholders as you talk to savages in Africa," alerting them of the sinfulness of selling children, abusing young women, and disobeying God by harming their brethren. Whenever religious readers raise such subjects in the South, they are ostracized and driven away. Often, clergymen visit the South feeling that slavery is morally wrong, but allow themselves to be persuaded otherwise by slaveholders who invite them to luxurious plantations and show them the dwellings of favorite slaves, who are intimidated into expressing contentment in their lot. These men then return to the North and defend the institution, knowing nothing of the moral depravity it actually causes.

Southerners are accustomed to regarding their own society as the norm and questioning the practices of other cultures. Linda warns against this normalization of slavery, saying that it should be treated as a pernicious violation of norms. Linda is employing tropes of "civilized" and "uncivilized" societies, traditionally used to disenfranchise people of color, to empower them instead – at least, those who are living in America.

It seems to Linda that there is an important divide between "Christianity and religion" in the South. For example, Dr. Flint is religious and always donates money to the church, but "the worst persecutions [she] endured from him were after he was a communicant." He openly admits to her that he joined the church to shore up his social position and put an end to gossip about his character. Gallingly, he encourages Linda to join the church as well.

Here, Linda draws a fundamental distinction between religion as used for social advancement and as practiced out of sincere faith. While this distinction isn't unique to the South, it's worth noting because it allows slaveholders to see themselves as moral people even as they commit blatant moral crimes against slaves.

In response to this, Linda says she would be happy "if I could be allowed to live like a Christian." Dr. Flint says that the best way for her to be virtuous is to obey him, and she retorts that this isn't what the Bible says. He explodes, raging at her that she has no right to tell him what she wants and doesn't want.

Linda sees the Bible as a vehicle towards empowerment, but Dr. Flint considers it a tool of domination.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: ANOTHER LINK TO LIFE

Because of Mrs. Flint's antipathy towards her, Linda is still living in Grandmother's **house**. Dr. Flint frequently visits and scolds her for "lowering herself" by her involvement with Mr. Sands. She doesn't care about his opinion, but she deeply regrets that she no longer has a chance at a "respectable" life. In order to scare Linda, Dr. Flint sometimes threatens to sell her son.

Dr. Flint believes that Linda has demeaned herself by refusing to obey him, but he doesn't seem to understand that for her, a coercive sexual relationship with him is the most demeaning prospect of all. Dr. Flint's concept of the most "respectable" life for Linda is predicated on his belief that she has no right to agency or self-determination.

Soon, Linda gets pregnant again. When she tells Dr. Flint, he becomes enraged and, in revenge, cuts off all her hair, in which she takes a lot of pride. He starts coming to the **house** every day to hurl insults at her; Grandmother tries to defend her, but only inflames his anger.

Dr. Flint's ability to harm Linda physically in her own house demonstrates the essential fragility of domestic life for slaves.

Linda gives birth to a baby girl. She despairs at finding out her baby's gender, being convinced that slavery is "far more terrible for women" than for men. Soon after her labor, Dr. Flint arrives at the **house**, commanding Linda to stand before him and insulting her until she faints at his feet. He hurries out of the house before Grandmother catches him abusing her. Linda feels that, if not for her children, she would want to die.

Motherhood is supposed to be the most fulfilling and respected aspect of a woman's life. However, Linda is filled with doubt because she knows she can't protect her daughter, and is susceptible to abuse even during this physically vulnerable to time. Moments like this show how slavery devalues and punishes even motherhood.

Grandmother is determined to have the children christened, even though Linda knows Dr. Flint would forbid such a thing. While he is on a business trip, they sneak into the church to perform the ceremony. Linda imagines her mother bringing her own children for baptism; she was a faithful married woman, and had no reason to be ashamed. Linda is glad that she's not alive now.

Linda's loving behavior and determination to fulfill religious norms contrasts with her extremely self-critical attitude. The reader understands that Linda is doing the best she can in this situation, but she won't accept this conclusion until much later.

The children are christened Benjamin (Benny) and Ellen; Linda gives them the surname of her father, who derived it from his own father, a white man. She's humiliated that she can't give her children a husband's surname. In honor of the occasion, Linda's father's former mistress gives Ellen a gold necklace, but Linda soon takes it off, not wanting her daughter to wear any kind of chain.

Linda feels she's betrayed her parents with her marriage, but she also suggests that her father was conceived in an extramarital relationship – which, like hers, may not have been entirely voluntary. Her comments here hint at the complicated genealogies of slave families, and the extent to which their heritage is the result of sexual abuse and coercion.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: CONTINUED PERSECUTIONS

To free Linda from Dr. Flint's continued harassment, her family and friends try to buy her again, commissioning a trader to negotiate with her master. However, Dr. Flint assumes the trader is working for Mr. Sands and refuses to sell her. He sneers at Linda, deriding her for her desire to live with another man, and tells her that "no human being…can take you out of your slavery."

Dr. Flint's taunt here shows that he considers slavery immune to human intervention, as if it's some sort of natural or divinely ordained institution. In fact, he will soon be proved wrong – a series of brave human beings do help liberate Linda from slavery.

When Linda responds sharply, Benny runs up and throws his arms around his mother, as if to protect her. Dr. Flint throws him across the room and Linda worries he has killed the child, but Dr. Flint grabs her and prevents her from running to him. Hearing her scream, someone else runs into the room and Dr. Flint releases her; she rushes to Benny and checks that he's still breathing.

This is the first depiction of Dr. Flint's interaction with the children, and it demonstrates not only appalling brutality towards a young boy but an absolute disregard for Linda's right to protect her children. Just as women can't fulfill sexual standards under slavery, they can't properly protect their children.

One night, a slave whom Dr. Flint has sold to a trader that day is spending the night with Linda's family before leaving. Dr. Flint arrives at the house and orders her away, but she's no longer his slave and she ignores him, acting "the conqueror" for once. In retaliation, Dr. Flint begins hitting Linda until Grandmother, hearing the struggle, rushes in and scolds him to go back to his **house** and "take care of your wife and children."

Grandmother makes a link between Dr. Flint's thuggish actions in her house and the state of affairs in his own – which, given his continuing obsession with Linda, is probably not good. He's not only preventing Linda from taking care of her children but neglecting his own as well.

Dr. Flint jeers at Grandmother, accusing her of "sanctioning" Linda's extramarital relationship. She retorts that he should start praying so he can "wash the dirt off [his] soul" before he dies. Linda feels guilty for the stress and disruption that her presence has caused in Grandmother's life. She wonders if the old woman is impatient or anxious for her to leave, but she's always sympathetic and never displays such feelings if she has them.

Dr. Flint continually tries to usurp the moral high ground, which is ironic given that he's the primary agent of moral corruption in Linda's life. Grandmother's tranquil self-confidence here is remarkable – although she often feels ashamed of herself now, Linda will eventually assume her calm faith as well.

Dr. Flint leaves her alone during the winter but resumes his visits in the spring, becoming enraged and jealous any time she's not home when he arrives. He tries to bribe Linda, telling her that her children can be "free" and her life easy if she agrees to live in a **cottage** he will build her. He's offering her "a home and freedom," and he says she should abandon her obstinate ways and surrender to him.

The "freedom" that Dr. Flint presents is just material advantage, and has nothing to do with self-determination. His ability to use this word to describe what he's offering shows his total inability to conceive of Linda as a person with agency. The morally iniquitous "home" he presents contrasts with Grandmother's house, in which Linda is able to preserve her morals and dignity.

Linda immediately rejects the offer. Calmly, Dr. Flint says that if she doesn't obey him, he will send her and the children to work on the plantation. He gives her a week to think about it. Linda is unsure what to do—she knows Dr. Flint will never actually free her children, but if she goes to the plantation she will be isolated from her family and even more powerless than before.

Dr. Flint presents his cottage as a reward and the plantation as a punishment, but for Linda they are much the same – in either case, she would be completely under her master's power and isolated from the family that protects her. These are two houses that completely lack the tranquility and moral purity that Linda associates with a real home.

Moreover, Linda fears that she will experience abuse from Nicholas Flint, who runs the plantation; knowing his son's character, Dr. Flint has always kept her out of his way before. She decides that she must "save my children" or "perish in the attempt." In the meantime, she tells Dr. Flint that she is willing to go to the plantation. Enraged, he tells her that Benny will be sent to the fields and Ellen will be sold as soon as possible.

As Linda starts to think about escape, she couches her plans in terms of saving her children. It's possible that she doesn't want to appear too brash and unfeminine to her readers, but it also shows that becoming a mother confers new courage on her. She thus presents a very active and independent version of motherhood, progressive for her time.

Trying to intercede, Grandmother visits Dr. Flint, reminding him how well she has served his family, even nursing Mrs. Flint along with her own children. She again offers to buy Linda, but Dr. Flint rebuffs her, telling her that Linda must go to the plantation "for [her] own good." Linda knows that she must now fight alone, bolstered by her "woman's pride" and "mother's love."

Being a woman – and now a mother – has made Linda particularly susceptible to Dr. Flint's abuse. However, she's starting to treat these traits not as weaknesses but as strengths. While Linda portrays the particular vulnerabilities of enslaved women, she never presents them as weak.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: SCENES AT THE PLANTATION

Linda leaves the next morning, accompanied by Ellen but leaving Benny, who is sick, with Grandmother. At the plantation, she has to leave Ellen with the kitchen slaves and work as a housekeeper, preparing the plantation house for the imminent arrival of Nicholas Flint's new bride. Ellen is upset by the sudden changes in her life and often cries herself to sleep. Nicholas brags to the neighbors that he will disabuse Linda of her "town notions."

While Linda was able to somewhat preserve the integrity of her young family in the city, it's impossible to take care of Ellen in the same way here. Linda has to sacrifice her own maternal concerns in order to facilitate the happiness – or at least the housekeeping – of another family.

Linda works hard, not wanting to seem "too much of a lady." Every day she sees Nicholas beat other slave children, while their mothers stand by powerless. She feels it would be better for Ellen to die than live like that. One day, Ellen sobs in the yard the entire time Linda is working. Eventually the little girl runs away, and Linda later finds her sleeping under the raised foundation of the house. Later, she learns that Nicholas Flint found a snake under the house just that afternoon.

Nicholas's appalling behavior towards the children and the incident with the snake characterizes the plantation as a place of lurking and imminent danger, especially for slave families. This starkly contrasts with the rosy image slaveholders like to put forth, in which slaves are safe and content with their lot in life.

The next day, Linda sends Ellen back to Grandmother without asking permission. She doesn't get in trouble because she's been such an efficient housekeeper for the past week.

Even though Dr. Flint is trying to crush Linda's sense of autonomy, she won't concede that anyone else has the right to control her children.


After three weeks on the plantation, Linda sneaks out at night to visit her children, walking quickly and fearfully back to the town. Grandmother lets her in and the whole family gathers, crying to see her. She looks over her sleeping children and Benny wakes up, telling her he's happy that they haven't "cut off your head at the plantation." On the way back, she hears patrols riding through the night but manages to hide behind a tree.

This scene compellingly evokes the simple desire of families to be together, but the secrecy and patrols demonstrate the unique difficulties that enslaved families face. Throughout the narrative Linda juxtaposes the universal feelings and concerns that slaves share with the ways in which slavery disregards and threatens them.

After another week, Nicholas's great aunt visits the plantation. This woman, Miss Fanny, is the one who bought Grandmother at auction and freed her; in subsequent years she's often visited Grandmother, and the old women like to sit around sewing and remembering old stories. Mrs. Flint hates that people from her family associate with Linda and Grandmother, but fortunately Miss Fanny has an independent fortune and can do what she wants.

The evident respect which Miss Fanny displays for Grandmother, and Linda's kind feelings towards her, make her a marked contrast to Mrs. Flint. Moments like this offer a vision of more empathetic and cohesive relationships between white and black women – but unfortunately, they're a rarity in this narrative.

Linda is happy to see Miss Fanny, especially when the old woman confides that she's visited specially to check on her and see if she can help her in any way. She tells Linda that she will never "feel any peace" about her and Grandmother until they are dead and gone to Heaven. Linda tells the old woman to not worry about her, concealing that she's in the midst of planning an escape not to death, but freedom. She knows that she could escape by herself, but she mostly wants freedom for her children, and she's trying to devise a plan to get them out as well.

Linda has often shared Miss Fanny's wish that she might die soon – however, as a mother she's gained the will to live. Linda often states that enslaved mothers need social protections, but she also shows that motherhood is an extremely personally empowering part of her life, which helps her draw on previously unknown strengths.

After six weeks the house is ready for the new bride, and Linda receives permission to spend that Sunday with her family. She goes to Grandmother's **house**; the calm day contrasts with her turbulent mind, as she's wondering if she'll ever spend a day like this at home, surrounded by her family, again. She visits her parents' graves and promises to save Ellen from the trials she's endured.

Grandmother's house has often represented the only calm and security of Linda's life. It's natural that, as she starts to think about leaving, visiting it should excite feelings of uncertainty and loss.

Again, Linda feels shame that she hasn't managed to be as pure and virtuous as her mother. But as she passes the slaves' meeting house, destroyed and decrepit after Nat Turner's rebellion, she seems to hear her father's voice telling her "not to tarry" until she is free. Her faith in God is renewed and strong.

For a long time, Linda has thought of herself as betraying and disappointing her parents. Now, she's able to evoke a sense of approval and take strength from their memory – showing how her criticism of her own sexuality is beginning to wane.


Linda's plan is to hide with a friend for a few weeks, until Dr. Flint gets tired of searching for her. She predicts that Dr. Flint will worry about the children disappearing as well, so he will sell them to Mr. Sands. Linda is packing her things when Grandmother comes into the room, sees what she's doing, and scolds her for worrying an old woman and leaving her defenseless babies alone.

Linda feels that her first duty as a mother is to free her children – even if doing so involves substantial risk. On the contrary, Grandmother sees motherhood as mitigating the cruelty of slavery as much as possible without taking risks to escape it.

She says Linda should not depend on Mr. Sands for anything but "stand by our own children, and suffer with them till death." Uncertain, Linda promises to stay for now. When the children climb into Linda's lap, Grandmother pets them and accuses Linda of not loving them as she does.

While Linda derives her strong maternal feelings from Grandmother, she will eventually move away from the older woman's passivity and embrace a more decisive vision of motherhood.

Linda returns to the plantation, and soon the bride arrives. The slaves are excited, hoping the young Mrs. Flint will be a good mistress, but Linda has heard bad things about her character and knows that new wives like to assert their position through displays of cruelty. The new bride is beautiful and eager to see her new home; Linda pities her, knowing that "soon clouds would come over her sunshine."

Here, Linda contrasts young Mrs. Flint's unfettered power over the slaves with her lack of power in her own marriage, which will soon go the way of Dr. Flint's. It's unsurprising that this combination leads to the degradation of character and cruel behavior towards slaves.


At dinner Linda has to wait upon Dr. Flint and Mrs. Flint, who are visiting. She hasn't seen her old mistress for five years, and the woman seems happy to see her humbled and serving at the table. Dr. Flint forces her to run dozens of errands during the course of the dinner.

Even though it's Dr. Flint who has really betrayed and harmed his wife, she blames Linda and takes out her feelings on her – possibly because she has much more power over the young woman than over her husband.

Linda starts working as a maid for the young Mrs. Flint. As she expected, the bride soon displays her authority over the slaves. She oversees weekly distribution of the slaves' meat allowance, where different amounts are given to each man, woman, and child. When an elderly man arrives to collect his meat, the mistress takes it away from him and says that slaves who can't work should eat grass.

Through actions like this, the young Mrs. Flint contravenes expectations of docile and nurturing female behavior. In moments like this, Linda plays on her readers social expectations to encourage condemnation of slavery on the basis that it jeopardizes social mores.


After a week, the older Mrs. Flint visits the plantation for a private conference with the young Mrs. Flint. Linda assumes that they're talking about her, and Mrs. Flint is urging her to be kept on the plantation at all costs. As she leaves, Linda hears her instructing her daughter-in-law to send for Linda's children tomorrow. Later, a white neighbor that Linda knows confirms that they are bringing the children in order to tie her to the plantation. Linda knows she needs to act immediately.

It's not the hard work Linda is subjected to on the plantation, or the humiliation of waiting on the Flints, but rather her children's safety that finally prompts her to act. By framing her decisions in this way, Linda presents herself as centered around her children, thus increasing her respectability and credibility among her readers.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE FLIGHT

That night, knowing she must escape, Linda finishes her chores so distractedly that Nicholas scolds her. She waits for the family to go to sleep and sneaks out a window, rushing towards Grandmother's **house**. When she gets there, she finds a family friend and explains the situation; the friend predicts that once she's run away, the Flints will want to get rid of her children and be willing to sell them.

Grandmother's house has always been a place of security for Linda. However, as an escaped slave, no house can provide her with true security or keep her safe from the sweeping legal authority of slaveholders searching for runaways.

Before leaving the **house** to hide with a friend, she looks over Benny and Ellen, who are sleeping. They are truly defenseless, with a mother who can't protect them and a father who is "kind" but not devoted to them as she is. Bidding farewell, she runs into the night until she reaches the house of a friend where she will hide.

Here Linda points out Mr. Sands's apathy about his children's well-being. This both criticizes slaveholders who don't care about their illegitimate children and elevates her own role as a mother – she's not just a nurturer but the children's only protector.

In the morning, Nicholas Flint interrogates Grandmother about Linda's whereabouts; Dr. Flint is enraged to hear about her escape and searches Grandmother's entire **house**, as well as every ship heading north. Linda wants to send Grandmother a message, but the town is so closely watched that she can't. Dr. Flint posts advertisements everywhere containing a physical description of Linda and promising a reward to anyone who captures her.

Linda's precarious situation at this moment emphasizes the extent to which her entire society is mobilized to prevent a slave's escape – thus suggesting that slavery can't be resolved by individual efforts but only the mobilization of another society (the Northern states) to abolish it.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: MONTHS OF PERIL

The search lasts longer than Linda expects, and she begins to think she'll never be able to leave the town. Once she hears patrols so close to her friend's house that she runs into the swamp, staying there for hours. That night a reptile bites her and the wound becomes infected, preventing her from running if it becomes necessary.

Throughout the lengthy process of her escape, Linda experiences a lot of physical suffering – however, she rarely dwells on it, preferring to discuss the psychological and emotional consequences of life as a fugitive slave.

Dr. Flint has threatened Linda's family and urged her to return to him, but she is determined not to. At this point, Grandmother turns to a white woman she has known for a long time, and who has been visiting her in this time of crisis. The woman says that she will hide Linda in her **house** until there's a possibility of sending her north, but that her name must never be mentioned, as it would ruin her husband's social position.

Like Miss Fanny, this is an example of a white woman intervening against the system of slavery – at considerable risk to herself. It's interesting that these situations usually arise through Grandmother's friendships, which she can cultivate because she is free. Empathetic and respectful relationships between black and white women can only arise under conditions of freedom.

Grandmother gets word to Linda, telling her to be ready. On the specified night her friend Betty, the white woman's cook, comes to collect her. In the **house**, she's given a small attic room; only Betty and the mistress will know about her presence, and they will care for her every day. Linda praises them both for their "Christian womanhood."

In slaveholders' society, Christianity is thought to promote slavery; Linda says that true Christians oppose it. Likewise, women are thought to be weak and helpless; Linda says that womanhood is expressed through brave deeds like this one.

Linda hopes that Dr. Flint will sell her children soon, but he seems to want revenge more than money. He throws William, Aunt Nancy, Benny, and Ellen into the city jail and tells Grandmother that she will never see them again until Linda comes back. Thinking of her children in jail, Linda wants to go to them, but she knows she can do nothing for her family as a slave. She even receives a note from William urging her to stay strong and keep hiding. Betty often visits them, bringing food and telling Linda how eager they are to see their mother.

Even though Dr. Flint is trying to tear apart Linda's family, everyone remains stalwart and selfless towards each other. William reassures his sister to escape even though doing so won't help him, and Linda exposes herself to capture and violent punishment in the hope that her children will escape Dr. Flint's influence forever.

At some point Ellen gets measles and is taken to Dr. Flint's **house** to recover, but she screams and cries so much while she's there that Mrs. Flint soon sends her back to jail. Linda is proud of her daughter for her instinctual loathing of the Flint household, but she also hears that Mrs. Flint is threatening to sell her to a sugar plantation as soon as she's found.

Ellen's instinctual loathing of the Flint house underscores Linda's many suggestions that it is an inherently unwholesome and corrupted place – exactly the opposite of what a home should be.

To frighten Linda, Dr. Flint falsely tells Grandmother that he knows where she is and will soon capture her. Worried, Betty has Linda hide in a trap door under the kitchen for the entire day, until his threat proves to be a false alarm. Another day, Linda is even more frightened to hear Dr. Flint's voice in the house while she's sitting in the attic. She imagines that he's searching the **house** and is terrified when the door to her room opens; but it's only the white woman, who tells her that Dr. Flint has just come to borrow money from the family in order to go to New York and search for her. They both laugh at the thought of this expensive and fruitless search.

While Dr. Flint marshals money and legal authority to search for Linda, she relies on her family and friends to fight against him. The fact that the legal system is aligned against the logical and compelling concerns of families is another indication that it is deeply flawed and in need of serious change.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: THE CHILDREN SOLD

Of course, Dr. Flint returns from New York having failed in his quest. Mr. Sands again tries to buy the children, sending a slave trader to offer good prices. At first Dr. Flint rejects the suggestion, but he needs money and at the last minute agrees to sell them, as well as William.

This is exactly the outcome that Linda has hoped for – by freeing herself from slavery she has managed to improve her children's lives, while remaining with the Flints would have kept them powerless.

In order to avoid suspicion from Dr. Flint, the trader pretends to take them out of the state. William is put in chains and Aunt Nancy and Grandmother say goodbye to the children as if they'll never see them again; seeing the children in the trader's cart, Grandmother feels that the trick is too real and faints in anxiety.

Grandmother's anxiety reminds the reader that, even though the family wants Mr. Sands to buy the children, he's still a slaveholder and, as such, not entirely trustworthy. Belonging to him is still a long way from being free.

The Flints think that the trader has left town, but he actually stops a few miles away and releases William, Benny, and Ellen to Uncle Phillip. He seems to think that the deception is a good joke, and congratulates William on improving his lot in life, saying that trading slaves is "a bad business for a fellow that's got any heart." Having heard Linda's story, he's helped in Mr. Sands' plan without even charging a fee.

Evoking this complex character – a slave trader who is becoming ambivalent about his work – Linda shows that not even all white Southerners are satisfied with slavery, encouraging her readers not to blindly trusts its defenders and pro-slavery propaganda.

William and the children return to Grandmother's **house**, where the family has a clandestine but joyous celebration, giving thanks to God. Mr. Sands visits briefly to see his children's happiness.

Mr. Sands's brief visit stands out against this moment of family happiness – it shows how distanced he is from his children, regardless of having bought them.

Meanwhile, Linda is sitting in the attic, alone for the night. She hears a band playing a folk song outside her window and to her anxious mind it sounds like "the moaning of children." For a minute, she thinks she sees the shadows of Benny and Ellen on the floor, and she becomes convinced that something bad has happened. The next day, she hears a housemaid mention that her children have been sold to a trader but are rumored to still be in town; she's desperate to know what's really going on.

The family's reunion contrasts starkly with Linda's loneliness and isolation right now. For the rest of the narrative, she'll try to figure out a way to build a new home for her children – suggesting that the abolitionist movement can't just be about procuring freedom or helping escapees, but creating a world in which all black families can live in security.


After hours of suspense, Betty sneaks into the attic smiling joyfully, telling her that her children and brother now belong to Mr. Sands. Thinking how angry Dr. Flint is going to be, she laughs.

Betty's joy in defeating Dr. Flint contrasts with Linda's continued worry over her children.

Dr. Flint visits Grandmother in a fury, threatening to kill her and Phillip if he finds out they're helping Linda. Grandmother is unmoved, knowing how much his power over her family has been reduced. For Linda, this is a "season of joy and thanksgiving"; no matter what happens to her, she knows that at least her children will escape from slavery.

Right now, Linda believes that her children are completely safe in Mr. Sands's hands. However, she will eventually change her mind about this and conclude that he will never feel as strongly for his illegitimate children as for his white ones.


CHAPTER TWENTY: NEW PERILS

Dr. Flint has Uncle Phillip arrested, trying to charge him with helping Linda. Mr. Sands works to have him released, as there is no proof, but in the meantime Linda again hides under the kitchen. Walking over her, Betty mumbles about the news of the day, ostensibly talking to herself, so Linda can stay updated. Dr. Flint has all the **houses** in town searched, even the one in which Linda is hiding. Even after Uncle Phillip is finally released from prison, her family is closely watched.

Dr. Flint's ability to invade even the white woman's house shows the extent to which slavery, and the legal defense of it, imperil the security and domestic comfort of all homes. This is one of the many ways in which slavery emerges as detrimental to tranquility of the entire society.

Linda knows she must find a new hiding place. She's stayed here longer than intended, and she knows it's "a source of perpetual anxiety" for the white woman hiding her. Moreover, one morning she hears a housemaid named Jenny trying to enter her room. While she doesn't have the right key, Linda feels she must know something unusual is going on, and Betty says that she's always been untrustworthy. Linda decides to leave that night. She never again sees the woman who risked herself to hide her.

One of the especially distressing aspects of slavery is its ability to turn even slaves against each other – for example, Jenny could expose Linda in hopes of a reward. While Linda is upset and frightened, she never blames Jenny personally, standing by her previous statements that it's almost impossible to act solely on one's moral impulses under slavery.

Linda has arranged to meet her Uncle Phillip, but she doesn't know if she's escaping or going to hide somewhere else. Betty gives her some clothes and expresses hope that she'll soon be in a free state. When she leaves the house she finds Peter, a longtime friend, waiting for her. In a boat, he rows her out to a swamp where she must stay until Uncle Phillip constructs a hiding place for her. In the swamp Linda is soon covered in mosquito bites, and she has to beat off snakes with a stick.

Linda and especially Betty are hopeful about escape right now, but her improvised hiding place in the swamp starts to dampen her spirits. This moment of physical hardship foreshadows the years-long struggle she will endure before being able to finally escape to the North.

After another day in this hellish environment Peter decides that she must go home. Linda disguises herself and darkens her face with charcoal and they walk openly through the streets of the town. Peter tells her to enjoy the walk, as she won't have another opportunity for a long time.

Linda's physically daring act of walking through the streets contrasts with her actual lack of freedom, and heightens the sense of bondage and danger in which she lives.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: THE LOOPHOLE OF RETREAT

Outside Grandmother's **house** is a small shed, which has a tiny garret between the joists and the pointed roof. Phillip has constructed a trap door for access into the garret, which is barely more than a "hole" with no room to sit up and no vents for light or air. Linda has a mattress to sleep on, but it's so cramped she can barely turn over and mice constantly run across her bed. However, in the morning she's comforted by hearing the voices of her children outside.

The garret in which Linda will spend the next years is another "house" that doesn't fulfill the expectations of a home. Homes are supposed to be refuges that enable their residents to live moral and productive lives, but the garret is more like a trap, from which it's impossible to emerge at all. Moreover, while it does give Linda some security, it also constantly reminds her of the danger in which she and her family live.

The garret is uncomfortable and depressing, but Linda says she would easily choose living here over living in slavery. Even though her life as a slave was "comparatively devoid of hardships"—she's never worked on a plantation or been severely punished—it's worth any struggle to escape.

As she does when Dr. Flint offers to build her a cottage, Linda makes clear that material advantages can never compensate for a lack of freedom.

At night, the family brings Linda food and keeps her company, but she's completely alone during the day. She crawls around the garret for exercise; one day she finds a nail and bores tiny holes in the wall, through which she can get some fresh air. Peering through them, she can see her children playing in the yard and people walking through the street—even Dr. Flint.

Even though Linda is technically at home with her family, as a fugitive she's largely isolated from them – this physical and emotional distance underscores the often-insurmountable impediments slavery places on family life.

Soon after this, Dr. Flint goes to New York again, believing he's discovered some new clue. When he returns, Benny (who doesn't know where Linda is) sees him in the street and tells him he wants to see his mother. Dr. Flint threatens to cut off his head.

Dr. Flint's violent response to a child's most basic and understandable desire shows that he doesn't really see Benny as a child – or a person – at all.

Linda gradually gets used to reading and sewing in the feeble light. However, life in the garret continues to be difficult—in the winter she's freezing, and her feet get frostbite. People in the city have a habit of stopping to gossip in the street, and she often hears people talking about her and speculating that she's in the free states. Dr. Flint often tries to bribe Benny and Ellen into divulging their mother's whereabouts, but Ellen says nothing, and Benny tells him he thinks his mother is in New York.

This is one of the first chapters in which Benny and Ellen start to display characters of their own – it's important and saddening that their mother can only observe their development from afar, rather than participating in or guiding it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, Linda sews new clothes as presents for her children. Her thoughts are with the plantation slaves who fear separation on hiring day, which arrives just after the holidays. She hears Benny telling a friend that Santa Claus has brought his presents because his mother is away, and wishes desperately that she could be close to him and tell him where she is.

Throughout this period of her life, Linda's physical proximity to her children contrasts with her emotional distance from them, showing the extent to which slavery imperils not just physical security but intangible bonds between mothers and children.

Linda relates the regional Christmas custom of the Johnkannaus. These are groups of male slaves from the plantations, who dress in bright costumes and fake horns and go around the neighboring houses beating drums and singing songs. Everywhere they go they get some money or rum, and they use the proceeds to stage an enormous party. All the children wake up early to witness the spectacle.

Even though the whole society seems to enjoy participating in cultural rituals originating with slaves, they can't conceive of the people who perform these rituals as actually sharing their humanity. Moments like this emphasize the moral contradictions inherent to slavery.

This Christmas, Grandmother invites the town constable over; in the course of the meal she shows him the entire house and invites him to look at everything, ostensibly in pride over her housekeeping but really to avert suspicion that she's hiding Linda. He's accompanied by a free black man who does "mean work" for the slave holders and tries to pretend to be white. Linda despises this man even more than the constable, who is often cruel to slaves but not hypocritical about his origins.

Like the housemaid Jenny, this is a former slave who has turned against his own people. Through such anecdotes Linda points out how slavery encourages hypocrisy and moral degradation in all members of the society.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: STILL IN PRISON

As spring unfolds, Linda becomes impatient with hiding, but her family has been unable to find any safe route of escape. She's angry to be trapped in the airless and boiling hot garret while Dr. Flint is free to enjoy the summer nights. Sometimes she worries she will die in the garret, but time passes and she sees autumn and another winter.

Linda's bitter comparison of herself with Dr. Flint emphasizes her innate confidence in her own rights and humanity – it's remarkable that she's so strong in these feelings, given that her environment constantly contrives to rob her of them.

Looking out her window, Linda sees many scenes of local slave life. Once she sees a woman trudging by in despair; Grandmother tells her that she's just given birth to a child who looks exactly like her master, and his wife has had them both sold to a slave trader. Another time she sees a slave running desperately away from the police; her mistress has ordered her to be whipped and she eventually jumps in the river and drowns herself. Episodes like this occur frequently and publicly, yet politicians like Senator Brown persist in telling Congress that slavery is "a blessing to the slave."

Linda shows the reader that the wrongs of slavery are public and widely understood – it's not simply a matter of private and unobserved abuse like that which she receives from Dr. Flint. This helps her make a direct attack on senators who pretend slavery is a positive thing, characterizing them as actively lying rather than simply ignorant.

The second winter is especially difficult for Linda. Her limbs stiffen in the cold and she even sometimes loses the ability to speak; at times she's delirious and at risk of exposing herself by shouting. The family tries to treat her, but they're obviously unable to get her real medical care. When William finally devises a way to make a fire for her, she's so happy that she cries.

Although Linda doesn't often dwell on the awful conditions in which she lives, her severe sickness emphasizes him. While she has technically escaped from slavery, in no sense is she living a fulfilling or happy life.

Moreover, Linda feels helpless when her family encounters problems. One day, she sees a dog attack Benny in the yard but is unable to come to his assistance. Moreover, Grandmother becomes seriously ill herself and Linda is unable to take care of her. Mrs. Flint won't let Aunt Nancy leave her house to take care of Grandmother, but to avoid seeming lacking in "Christian charity" she pays a visit herself and gets Dr. Flint to treat the old woman. Linda is terrified to have him so close at hand.

Just as when Dr. Flint threw Benny across the room and prevented Linda from going after him, his incessant searching makes it impossible for her to perform her maternal duties now. Dr. Flint is responsible not just for the live she lives under slavery but the things she endures after her escape.


As Mrs. Flint leaves, she notices Benny's wound and announces her wish that the dog had killed the boy, so she could deliver the news to his mother. Fortunately, Grandmother's fever breaks shortly after this and there's no cause for the doctor or his wife to return.

This is a shocking statement, showing that the moral corruption of slavery has caused Mrs. Flint to abandon even a nurturing attitude towards children, which was considered essential to women of her time.


CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: THE CANDIDATE FOR CONGRESS

Despite Dr. Flint's aggressive activism against him, Mr. Sands is elected to Congress that summer. This makes Linda nervous—he still hasn't freed the children, and if he dies, they will belong to his heirs.

Mr. Sands's foot-dragging with regard to his offspring's freedom shows that he doesn't really love them as children, but considers them property.

The night before he leaves, Linda descends stiffly into the shed. Mr. Sands stops at the **house** briefly to see the children and, taking a risk, Linda calls out from the shed. Appearing to ignore her, he walks into the street, and Linda worries that his children have become "of little consequence" to him. However, he was just trying to avoid suspicion by stopping too suddenly and soon returns; he's astonished to find that she's hiding so close to home.

Here, Linda's feelings of mistrust are somewhat overturned, as Mr. Sands displays concern for her well-being. However, for much of the narrative his intentions towards her and the children are hard to interpret, and Linda is prevented from trusting him by her knowledge of the complete power he has over her family.

Linda tells Mr. Sands that she's not asking for any help for herself, but she wants him to free the children. He promises to do so and hurries away. Linda is so weak from inactivity that Grandmother has to help her back into the garret. The family is starting to worry that she will be permanently crippled, and Linda feels that if not for her children, she would be happy to die.

Linda's businesslike interaction with Mr. Sands right now shows that her relationship with him was never about pleasure or fulfillment, but merely a means of protecting herself and her children. In this way, she presents herself as a respectable mother, rather than a woman engaging in an extramarital affair.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: COMPETITION IN CUNNING

In order to mislead Dr. Flint further, Linda writes him some letters which she entrusts to Peter to take north and post from New York. She also writes a letter to her grandmother asking to have her children sent to her in Boston, knowing that Dr. Flint will probably see it as well. She's grateful that Peter is willing to risk himself for her in this way.

The selflessness of characters like Peter, who have nothing to gain from helping Linda, contrasts with the maniacal selfishness of Dr. Flint, who takes pleasure from harming her.

Grandmother is troubled when she finds out what Linda has done, thinking it will backfire on them in some way. Linda also confides in Aunt Nancy so that she can report the Flints' reactions; her aunt hopes the trick will work, saying that she doesn't mind being a slave as long as she can help Linda and the children to freedom.

Both Grandmother and Aunt Nancy are fairly resigned about their own lives; however, while Aunt Nancy is a proponent of her niece's actions, Grandmother worries that they will harm the family rather than helping it.

When Dr. Flint receives the letter, he comes to Grandmother's **house** in triumph. He sees this as an opportunity to lure Linda south again, and says that Uncle Phillip should go to see her and promise that Dr. Flint will free her if she returns home peaceably. He promises Ellen, who has heard his blustering, that she will see her mother soon. Grandmother is terrified, worried that he will send someone to find her and discover the trick.

Dr. Flint's belief that he can trick Linda into returning South – to be demonstrated in many letters until the end of the narrative – shows his severe underestimation of her intelligence, as well as of the moral value that freedom holds for her.

Uncle Phillip refuses to take on this task, making the excuse that the North is full of abolitionists who won't let Linda return south. Dr. Flint brags that he has written to the mayor of Boston, asking him to look for Linda. Linda has to reassure Grandmother that the mayor won't waste his time hunting down escaped slaves.

The fact that Dr. Flint can and does enlist Northern politicians in hunting down Linda emphasizes the extent to which the North is complicit in perpetuating slavery, even if it is ostensibly opposed to the system.

It's a relief to see Dr. Flint convinced that Linda is not in the area, as it takes some pressure off her family. Feeling slightly more secure, Grandmother lets Linda walk around in the shed at night so that she can recover some of the strength in her limbs. It worries her to know that, should she ever have to escape quickly, she can't run.

The fact that Linda is losing the use of her limbs emphasizes both the physical and psychological captivity in which she's currently living. While she has escaped from slavery, she certainly hasn't arrived at freedom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: IMPORTANT ERA IN MY BROTHER'S LIFE

Linda pines greatly for William, who has gone with Mr. Sands to Washington. After the legislative session, he accompanies him on a trip to the North. Mr. Sands has promised to free William but never specified a date, and Linda wonders whether he will try to escape. However, Mr. Sands writes to Grandmother praising William's faithfulness and saying that although abolitionists have tried to "decoy him away," he has remained loyal.

Mr. Sands's naïve belief that William can't or won't escape of his own accord, only with prodding from abolitionists, suggests his own belief in the moral rectitude of slavery, regardless of the ways in which he's helped Linda. This makes it impossible for Linda to rely on him as a friend or, more importantly, as a father.

Mr. Sands announces that he's returning to the South with a new bride. The family is eager to see William, but no letters from him arrive. Grandmother prepares an enormous homecoming meal, but Mr. Sands arrives in the city without William. He sends a servant to tell Grandmother that he has, in fact, run away with help from abolitionists. Still, Mr. Sands is confident that he will soon come back, as life in the North cannot be better than life with him.

Here, Mr. Sands is demonstrating tremendous arrogance and severely misapprehending William's character. Even though he might be a kinder master than Dr. Flint, he's still just as incapable of seeing his slaves as humans who logically desire freedom just as he does.

Grandmother is distraught rather than happy, thinking that she'll never see William again. Linda is jealous that her brother is free while she is trapped, although she berates herself for being selfish. Moreover, she's worried that Mr. Sands will be annoyed at the money he's lost with William's escape and take revenge by refusing to free the children.

The fact that William's escape may bring retribution on his family makes clear that abolitionists can't just work to help a few slaves escape – they must create a society that protects the integrity and security of entire black families.

One afternoon, Linda hears Benny and Ellen asking Grandmother if they will ever see their mother again or live with her. Ellen says she doesn't even remember what her mother looks like. Suddenly, an elderly neighbor named Aggie comes into the yard; seeing that Grandmother is anxious, she asks what's wrong, and Grandmother says that William has run away.

It's terrible for Linda to hear that her own children are so distanced from her – however, later in the novel she will see that they are loyal and loving despite their long separation, demonstrating the remarkable cohesion of many enslaved families despite all the obstacles they face.

Aggie is overjoyed to hear this news, and tells Grandmother she should fall on her knees and pray. All of her children have been sold away, and she will never know where they are. At least Grandmother knows that William has escaped. Linda admires this woman's ability to take pleasure in William's triumph even amidst her own woes, and vows to be less selfish.

Linda combats slaveholders' depictions of slaves as lacking in morals by presenting moments of incredible unselfishness, like this one. Aggie is akin to Peter in her impulse to help others even when doing so confers no benefits on her.

Soon the family gets a letter from William, saying that although Mr. Sands is a kind master, he has always wanted to be free, and that he will try to earn enough money to bring his family north and create a home for them.

William's logical discontent with his bondage to Mr. Sands and desire to be free contrasts completely with Mr. Sands's understanding of their relationship.

Mr. Sands tells Uncle Phillip that William left brazenly; he even saw him carrying his trunk away, but William claimed he was having it repaired. Mr. Sands blames the corrupting influence of the abolitionists and still feels sure William will return.

Mr. Sands's delusional inability to imagine William running away unaided shows that, no matter how much he likes William or thinks of him as a good servant, he can't conceive of him as a full person with agency.

Much later, William tells Linda what actually happened: he doesn't need abolitionists to tell him about freedom, and he decided to run away independently, knowing that Mr. Sands might decide not to free him at any time in the future. He conscientiously refrained from taking any money or belongings when he left, and Linda says that while slave holders call him a "base, ungrateful wretch," they would have done the same thing. Mrs. Flint is heard to say that she's glad Mr. Sands has been outwitted by the slaves, and she hopes he will sell the children to a speculator in revenge.

William's escape from slavery is courageous and upstanding. He's even tried to comply with the moral demands of the South – he hasn't taken anything from Mr. Sands, despite having worked for him without pay for years. The fact that slaveholders see this as a misdeed rather than an act of bravery again shows their fundamental inability to recognize slaves' humanity.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: NEW DESTINATION FOR THE CHILDREN

Mr. Sands has brought a wife back from the North, and Mrs. Flint threatens to inform her that he's been involved with an "artful devil" and has two illegitimate children. Before she has the chance to do so, Mrs. Sands runs into Benny on the street and remarks on his good looks; Mr. Sands confesses that he is the father, but his wife is understanding, and asks to see the children at their **house**.

Mrs. Sands seems to be a contrast to Mrs. Flint, in that she's unconcerned by her husband's sexual past and feels kindly towards his children. However, just like her husband, she will emerge as complicit in the system of slavery even though she is less emblematic of its cruelties.

Grandmother is anxious at this development but has to agree to the request, as the children are still not free. Mrs. Sands's sister, who is visiting, likes Ellen so much that she offers to adopt her; Mrs. Sands wants to adopt Benjamin. When Linda learns of this offer, she is distraught. She knows that it seems good for her children to be raised by prosperous families, but she also knows "how lightly slaveholders held such parental relations." Even if they were informally adopted, the children could be sold at any time. She's determined to see them formally emancipated.

Mrs. Sands and her sister see themselves as doing a good deed; however, they are treating the children more like pets than people, and seem to assume that Linda has no interest in mothering them herself. By refusing this offer, Linda reaffirms that motherhood is at the center of her being and that the integrity of her family is much more important than material advantages for her children.

Grandmother visits Mr. Sands, reminding him that Linda is still very much alive and does not want to see her children adopted. He says that Linda may "decide their fate" as she wants. Apparently, he has in fact freed the children, but Dr. Flint is now trying to claim that as they legally belonged to his daughter, *his* sale of them was not actually valid.

It's odd that Mr. Sands has freed the children without telling Linda, and even stranger that Dr. Flint is trying to claim them after selling them. This shows that Linda can't feel truly tranquil about her children's status until she gets them out of the South.

For her safety, Mr. Sands suggests sending Ellen to live with his cousin in Brooklyn, where she can go to school and be taken care of. It's a good arrangement, but Linda still feels as if her children are caught between two masters. On the way to New York, Ellen is to accompany the Sands family as a nursemaid to Mrs. Sands's new baby. Linda hates to think of her among strangers, working as a servant for her own sister.

Even though Mr. Sands is comparatively kind to Ellen, it's clear that he doesn't care about her as much or see her as equal to his white daughter through marriage. By casting doubt on his commitment as a father, Linda emphasizes the importance of her own role as a mother, and shows that she will need to be not just nurturing but active and protective.

Linda is desperate to see Ellen face-to-face before she departs. Her family warns against it, since Ellen is so young and may be incapable of keeping the secret, but Linda is sure that her character is strong. In the dead of night, she descends from the garret and goes into Ellen's room. At first the girl is shy and confused, but then she embraces Linda and says how much she and Benny have missed her. She is scared to leave her family and live among strangers, and she wants Linda to come with her.

Ellen's eagerness to see her mother and live with her again is touching. It shows that, although the family has been separated for such a long time, their fundamental bonds remain central and intact.

Linda reassures Ellen that some day they will all live together again in the North. Mother and daughter nestle in bed all night long, not knowing if they will ever be reunited again. When Linda has to go back to the shed at dawn, Ellen kisses her and promises never to tell her secret. In the morning she hears the girl responding with perfect composure when the neighbors express their hope that she'll find her mother in the North.

Like Linda, Ellen has to mature quickly in order to face the obstacles that slavery presents her with. Although Linda is proud of her daughter's character, she also wishes that she could enjoy a more natural and secure childhood.

When the Flints find out that Ellen has been sent away, they are very disgruntled. Mrs. Flint says that Mr. Sands has shown bad character by acknowledging his enslaved children, and says that taking Ellen away is an act of theft from her daughter. Linda is astounded that she thinks it moral for her daughter to "steal my children" but not for Mr. Sands to take care of his own.

It's ironic that Mrs. Flint believes Mr. Sands has violated social norms by acknowledging his children, while Linda believes he's failed them by not taking adequate care of them or trying harder to get them to the North.

Linda goes weeks without hearing anything about Ellen. Grandmother sends letters to Washington and Brooklyn, but no one responds. Linda feels betrayed by Mr. Sands, who had once spoken to her "protectingly and persuasively" but has now "broken and cast away" his obligations to her. She remarks that many Southern Congressmen have enslaved children but wish to ignore them as much as possible out of fear for their reputation.

It's disturbing that Mr. Sands is so unconcerned with keeping Linda apprised of her daughter's whereabouts – it shows a lack of respect for her concerns as a mother. Linda both criticizes this behavior and hints at its prevalence in society. Referencing the Congressmen, she encourages the reader to apply the lessons of this book to real life.

After six months a letter arrives from Mr. Sands's cousin, Mrs. Hobbs. She says that she will send Ellen to school, but adds that her cousin "has given her to me" as a maid. Linda is confused and disturbed—she doesn't actually have any proof that Mr. Sands has freed Ellen, and it's possible that he has actually given her to this woman. She tries to remind herself of Mr. Sands's good character but remembers grimly that "slavery perverted all the natural feelings of the human heart."

This confused situation points out how dependent Linda is on Mr. Sands for her children's safety, and how unreliable he is as a father. It's bitterly ironic that while Linda, despite being enslaved, has managed to be a loving and energetic mother, Mr. Sands is an apathetic father even with his huge advantages.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: AUNT NANCY

Linda breaks away from her own narrative to relate the story of Aunt Nancy's life. At the age of twenty, she got married to another slave, but her marriage has no legal standing. She normally sleeps outside Mrs. Flint's bedroom, in case the mistress needs her; she doesn't even get to leave her post on the night of her own wedding.

Just as the Flints treated Linda's desire to marry with derision, Mrs. Flint clearly feels that Aunt Nancy isn't entitled to enjoy milestones like marriage that are considered central to the lives of white women.

Mrs. Flint and Aunt Nancy become pregnant at roughly the same time, but Aunt Nancy still has to sleep on the floor, run errands in the middle of the night, and take care of her mistress's babies. As a result, all of her children are born prematurely and die. Eventually, fearing that she will die as well, the Flints let her sleep in an outbuilding.

Juxtaposing Mrs. Flint's life with Aunt Nancy's, this passage shows how the economic advantage of the slaveholding family is predicated on the destruction of the enslaved family.

Aunt Nancy is in charge of the Flint **house**. Although she behaves meekly, she always encourages Linda to escape and save her children, frequently visiting the shed to encourage her. Everyone in the family relies on her for good advice and accepts her counsel.

While Grandmother urges passivity on Linda, Aunt Nancy encourages her to behave differently than her elders.

Six years after Linda starts living in the shed, Aunt Nancy becomes deathly ill and Grandmother returns to the Flint **house** to nurse her last daughter. Even the Flints are touched by the obvious bond between mother and daughter, although Mrs. Flint is overcome with "shock" at losing her best servant. Dr. Flint reminds Grandmother how much Aunt Nancy loved his children and tells her that he wishes Linda would forget about past wrongs, return, and take her place as housekeeper. Grandmother points out that it was he who "drove Linda away."

The Flints feel that they are mourning Aunt Nancy's death – but really, they're just upset at the loss of a good servant. Slaveholders often claim to see slaves as part of their family, but these ostensibly positive relationships are actually predicated on the denial of the slave's humanity and agency.

Linda is devastated to hear of Aunt Nancy's death, although Uncle Phillip assures her she died happy. Linda reflects bitterly that Mrs. Flint "rendered her poor foster-sister childless, apparently without any compunction" and forced her to work without ceasing for her entire life. On a sudden whim, she requests to have Nancy buried in the family's burial ground, at the foot of her own plot. However, the minister reminds her that she has to consult Nancy's family; when they politely refuse the offer, she sighs that she is "so *used* to sleep with her lying near me."

Mrs. Flint's desire to have Aunt Nancy buried at her feet suggests a delusional conviction that the enslaved woman was happy with her life and considered herself fulfilled by grueling servitude. Beliefs like this serve to characterize slaveholders as beyond moral entreaty – in order to change the system, someone from the outside (in this case, the North) must intervene.

The family buries Aunt Nancy in a plain but dignified funeral, which even the Flints attend. Linda says that the image might seem like "proof of the attachment" between master and slave, but doesn't do justice to the cruelties Aunt Nancy has endured and which Linda is still enduring. Grandmother especially finds it hard to recover after this blow, and Linda hates to think that she is causing her even more anxiety.

This passage testifies to the tendency of society to sweep the injustices of slavery under the carpet, even as they exist in plain view. The Flints' show of grief contrasts with Grandmother's sincere depression and difficulty in overcoming this tragedy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: PREPARATIONS FOR ESCAPE

All in all, Linda spends seven years in the miserable garret, all the time dreaming of escape, worrying about recapture, and longing for her children. After Ellen leaves, she becomes especially impatient and distressed. Moreover, in the stormy weather she and her bedding are frequently soaked with water. However, whenever she mentions the possibility of escape to Grandmother, the old woman becomes worried and upset.

Although Grandmother has been a sustaining force throughout Linda's life, right now she's holding her back from the one thing that will save her life – escape to the North. In her protective but brave mothering style, Linda will assimilate Grandmother's principles but move past her reservations.

Meanwhile, Linda has recently found out that an acquaintance, Fanny, run away in order to avoid being sold, and is hiding with her mother Aggie next door. Benny happened to catch a glimpse of her and told Grandmother, who warned him never to speak of it again, and he has kept the secret well.

This coincidence emphasizes that Linda's story is not unique, but rather part of a larger narrative of families trying to stay together and help each other escape.

One night, Peter arrives at the **house** and tells Linda that he's found a way for her to escape to the North on a ship. She has two weeks to decide what to do. Uncle Phillip urges her to go and even talks Grandmother into the plan. Linda gets ready for the journey and promises that once she arrives in the North, she will write Dr. Flint asking to be sold to Grandmother. The old woman wants to die knowing that her granddaughter is legally free; privately, Linda resolves not to pay any money for the freedom to which she's entitled.

Grandmother is thinking about the practical concern of obtaining Linda's freedom, while Linda is more worried about the injustice of paying for it. Here, as in the rest of the narrative, Linda emphasizes that escaping freedom isn't just about improving one's life materially but refuting the system's constant dehumanization.

Just before the intended departure, the ship on which Linda is supposed to escape is detained for several days. At the same time, a recaptured fugitive slave is killed gruesomely (this is James, whose case Linda =described earlier). Frightened, Grandmother persuades Linda not to go. She tells Peter to give the spot on the ship to Fanny instead, and he approaches Aggie without letting her know that Linda is still hiding in the area.

Grandmother is behaving somewhat illogically here – Linda may not have another escape opportunity for a long time, and her discovery could lead to the family's ruin. Again, Grandmother's extremely cautious outlook as a mother figure contrasts with Linda's more daring attitude.

Once Fanny is aboard the ship the weather turns bad and it stays docked for several days, to everyone's consternation. On the third day Grandmother calls Linda out of the attic; she's panicking about the likelihood of Fanny being discovered, and Linda has to calm her down. Just then, the housemaid Jenny appears, ostensibly looking to buy some crackers from Grandmother. It's unclear if she's actually spotted Linda, but they have to act as if she has.

Grandmother has always supported Linda and told her what to do, but now Linda has to take on the dominant role in the relationship. This moment of generational role reversal is typical in many families, but in theirs it's complicated by the additional pressures of slavery and escape.


Uncle Phillip says that Linda must get on the boat with Fanny. Informed about the emergency, Peter rushes to the wharf and finds the ship setting off; he rushes aboard and tells the captain that he needs to bring another woman on the ship. After some confusion and a bribe, the captain agrees to wait until Linda arrives that night.

Here, Peter is repeatedly exposing himself to risk, even though he's not hoping to escape himself and Linda isn't even part of his family. His selflessness contrasts starkly with the selfish behavior of slave owners like Dr. Flint.

Linda passes the day in anxiety, hoping that Jenny doesn't have time to go to the Flints before she leaves. She asks for Benny to be brought to the shed and he confesses that he's always suspected she was hiding there and knew for sure once she spent the night with Ellen. He's always tried to keep children from playing too near the shed and kept watch for Dr. Flint. Linda is amazed and proud of his intelligence and maturity.

Just as Linda has to start caring for her grandmother emotionally, Benny has astutely observed his mother's vulnerabilities and done his best to protect her. This touching moment between mother and son evokes a sense of continuity and strength within Linda's family – a remarkable feat, given that slavery constantly works to tear families apart.


Linda explains that she is going north and that if Benny is good, God will reunite them soon. As they are embracing, Grandmother comes in, bringing some money for Linda to take with her. She takes Linda's hand and the family kneels to pray, holding one another. Linda has never felt so earnest and trusting in her prayers. All too soon, she departs with Peter, leaving home forever.

Here, Linda evokes family and Christianity – key concepts through which she's appealed to the reader – and links them explicitly to freedom. This is part of her general tactic of showing that popular social values are consistent with abolition, not slavery.



CHAPTER THIRTY: NORTHWARD BOUND

At the wharf, Linda bids farewell to Uncle Phillip and Peter; she's grateful that her friend has risked so much for her, and deeply upset to think that such an "intelligent, enterprising, noble-hearted man" would remain a slave for the rest of his life in a country that claims to be "civilized." Linda boards a dinghy, accompanied by sailors who believe she is traveling to her husband in the North.

It's interesting that Linda uses the word "civilized" here, as throughout the narrative white Southerners characterize slaves as less than human, or "uncivilized." Linda encourages the reader to question this narrative and stop taking for granted that they and their society are inherently "civilized."

Fanny is amazed to see Linda arrive in the cabin, and she has to explain her whereabouts for the last years. The captain warns them not to cry too loudly or attract undue attention, but says they can come on deck when no other ships are around. The two women share their anxieties, but while Linda is hopeful about seeing her children again, Fanny knows that hers, sold to other plantations, are lost forever.

Linda is escaping with the hope of saving her children and reuniting her family – but Fanny's painful story highlights the fact that, for many slaves, escape means losing the possibility of seeing one's family again.

The voyage proceeds without issue, but Linda can't help mistrusting the captain and sailors. It's completely within their power to turn around and sell them; the women have to trust completely in their honor. However, the captain's "friendly and respectful" character is somewhat reassuring; he tells her that his brother is a slave trader, but he has always disliked the institution. Linda's spirits soar when they reach the Chesapeake Bay and becomes clear that she won't be caught.

Linda has no specific reason to dislike the captain, but given her lifetime of experience with powerful white men and her lack of legal rights compared to him, it's logical that she doesn't trust him. Moments like this demonstrate that even with "respectful and friendly" white people, open and equal relationships are impossible under the social conditions of slavery.

By the time the ship arrives in Philadelphia, Linda feels that the captain could not have treated her better if she was a white woman. She and Fanny watch the sun rise for the first time in a free state; they are relieved to escape slavery but also feel isolated and adrift without their families.

Until now, Linda's chief worry was keeping her family intact and protecting their home. Now, she has to build an entirely new home and find a new community.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: INCIDENTS IN PHILADELPHIA

When they arrive at the harbor in Philadelphia, the captain finds a "respectable looking colored man" and asks him to assist the women in finding the train to New York. The man turns out to be a pastor, Reverend Durham; he treats Linda like an old friend and offers to host her in his house and find Fanny a place to stay as well. Linda gratefully bids farewell to the sailors and the captain.

Throughout the rest of the narrative, Linda will fall in with religious and activist groups in the North. While she doesn't speak explicitly of her later life's work here, moments like this foreshadow her future as an abolitionist – and an author of a slave narrative.

Linda is curious to travel through such a large and busy city. Mrs. Durham welcomes her into her home and impresses Linda with her high level of education and refined manner. Linda envies her security in her **home** and her knowledge that her children are protected by law.

At first, Linda thinks that black people in the North have completely equal rights – however, she will quickly see that the situation is more complicated.


After dinner, Mr. Durham takes Linda for a walk. She tells him her entire story, even confessing that she has two children out of wedlock. He is very sympathetic but tells her not to be so truthful everyone, as people might "treat you with contempt." Stung, Linda says that God understands her trials and he will forgive her; as soon as she can, she intends to be a good mother and live respectably.

This is an important moment – Linda has often criticized herself about her sexual past, but it's clear she's overcoming her feelings of shame, and no longer feels that her extramarital affair prevents her from leading a good life or being a good person. Again, her feelings of empowerment are connected to her strong sense of maternal duty.


Later in the evening, an abolitionist friend of the family arrives, eager to meet Linda. They ask about her escape but are cautious not to inquire about her marital status or the father of her children; Linda appreciates their consideration. After some consultation, Linda decides to stay with the Durhams for a few days until someone can escort her and Fanny to New York.

The frankness with which Linda describes her sexual abuse and affair with Mr. Sands contrasts with her timidity here. Moments like this highlight her journey from feeling ashamed of her past to realizing it's not her fault and wanting to share her story with others.

That night, Linda goes to bed a free woman for the first time. Hours later she wakes up to fire alarms; when a fire breaks out in her own city, the slaves and free black people always have to fill the fire engine with water and bring buckets. She assumes they will have to get dressed and go out, but Mrs. Durham's daughter tells her that there is no such custom here.

In Philadelphia, Linda learns that her responses to every new event are no longer necessarily dictated by her race. Her feelings of safety here contrast with the fear that returns after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Laws, when she's living in New York.

The next day, Mrs. Durham shows Linda Philadelphia's busy markets and takes her to an art gallery where some portraits of her children are hanging. Linda has never seen paintings of black people before, and she's amazed. She is grateful to the other woman for displaying no judgment or censure, even though she know about Linda's unusual past.

Portraits of the Durham children seem like a small detail, but they demonstrate a recognition of the humanity of black children at least on the part of the artist and his viewers – something Linda has never seen at this public level in the South.

After five days, a friend accompanies Linda and Fanny to New York. She discovers that they have to travel in the second-class compartment, as the first-class ones are only for white people. Linda is saddened to see "how the north aped the customs of slavery." The car is full of crying babies and men smoking and drinking; "coarse jokes and ribald songs" abound, and Linda finds the atmosphere "sickening."

This scene is an abrupt contrast to the previous – showing that, although strong and respected black communities exist in the North, institutional racism is still prevalent. Linda's strong objections to the atmosphere in the train heighten her characterization of herself as "respectable" and adherent to conservative norms of behavior.


CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: THE MEETING OF MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

In New York, Linda and Fanny are overwhelmed by the confusion of the train station. An untrustworthy cab driver proposes to drive them through the city in the back of a cart, which Linda finds unsuitable, and only with great difficulty do they manage to reclaim their trunks from him and find a better conveyance. Fanny goes to a boardinghouse while Linda seeks out a friend from the south, who is going to help her find Ellen.

Again, Linda is trying to demonstrate her respectability – but she also shows that, because she and Fanny are treated so much less respectfully than white women, it's impossible for them to fulfill expectations of polite female behavior. Passages like this both assert Linda's rights to be treated a certain way and criticize their inability to access these rights.


The friend takes Linda to Brooklyn, where another black woman from their area is living. On the street, she recognizes a teenager who used to live near her family but came north years ago. She's shocked to find that the younger girl accompanying her, whom she barely recognizes, is Ellen. Mother and daughter embrace eagerly, but Linda is disturbed to see that Ellen looks shabby and neglected.

Linda's reunion with her daughter is overshadowed by her immediate observation that all is not well with the girl. Her sharp eye is a testament to her motherly instincts, but this moment also highlights how, by being separated from her children for so long, Linda is prevented from acting on those instincts and fulfilling her role as a mother.

Ellen has to run an errand for Mrs. Hobbs, but she tells her mother to come to the **house** the next day. In the morning Linda writes to Mrs. Hobbs, wondering how to present herself to the family without revealing that she's just escaped from the South and has been sheltered by her family. She decides to say that she's just arrived from Canada, reassuring the reader that she detests "subterfuges" and never lies except when it's unavoidable.

Ellen's neglect and her anxiety about her errand already hint that Mrs. Hobbs isn't the caring figure Linda had hoped for. In turn, this reflects badly on Mr. Sands, who has neglected his duties as a father by placing Ellen with an untrustworthy family or failing to specify how she should be treated.

Mrs. Hobbs cordially invites Linda to the **house**, and she's able to speak further with her daughter. Ellen says that she's been treated well, but it's obvious she's fibbing and she's anxious to live with Linda as soon as possible. She hasn't been sent to school and can barely read, although she's nine. Linda hates to think of how long it will be before she has enough money to make a home for Ellen.

Although Ellen is safe in the Hobbs house, it's clear that this is not a home that supports or cares for her – making it another example of households that, because of slavery and racism, don't live up to ideals of domesticity.

As Linda prepares to leave, Mrs. Hobbs tells her "coolly" that Mr. Sands has given Ellen to her daughter, as "a nice waiting maid when she grows up." Linda doesn't respond, but she's furious at the woman's disregard for her motherly claim on her daughter. She knows that Mr. Hobbs has recently lost most of his fortune, and she suspects that they are preparing to return to the South and want to keep Ellen as a valuable slave. She concludes that Mr. Sands has broken his promise to free the children.

It's galling that, after all Linda's effort, her daughter seems to be living out her own early life – in bondage to a young girl with an unscrupulous family. Mrs. Hobbs's deceitful behavior and concern for her daughter's future wealth contrasts with Linda's legitimate concerns and grievances as a mother.

Feeling it necessary to legally free herself as soon as possible, Linda writes to Dr. Flint and Emily Flint asking him to sell her to Grandmother. She also seeks out William, who has moved to Boston. When she arrives in that city, however, she finds that he's working on a whaling expedition. Returning to New York, she finds a letter from Dr. Flint reiterating his refusal to sell her unless she returns to the South first.

For the rest of the narrative, Dr. Flint will continue to attempt to trick Linda into returning South. His persistent belief that she will fall for these ruses shows his inability to understand that she's an intelligent human being.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: A HOME FOUND

After a difficult search for employment without references, she's hired by a British woman, Mrs. Bruce, as a nursemaid for her young baby, Mary. Mrs. Bruce turns out to be an exceptionally kind employer—for example, when Linda's legs, still recovering from her time in the garret, swell too much to climb upstairs, she rearranges the house so she can work on the ground floor and pays for her medical care. At first Linda doesn't reveal her fugitive status because she's so used to white families betraying her; however, she soon becomes comfortable sharing "intelligent conversation" with Mrs. Bruce and exploring her library in her leisure time.

Linda's mutually respectful relationship with Mrs. Bruce is a direct contrast to her interactions with most white women in the South, especially Mrs. Flint. While the difference is partly due to Mrs. Bruce's character, it's also important that it takes place in the North, where Mrs. Bruce has less power over her employee and Linda feels more secure in her rights. Mrs. Bruce's British nationality also plays into Linda's later conclusion that Britain is inherently less racist than America.

Mrs. Bruce suggests that Ellen come to live at her **house**, but Linda is afraid to offend Mrs. Hobbs, who could easily apprise Dr. Flint of her whereabouts. Still, she's very unhappy with Ellen's situation— Mrs. Hobbs now demands that Linda pay for her shoes and clothing, and she refuses to let her stay with Mrs. Bruce in order to see an eye doctor to solve a chronic illness. Linda believes that this refusal stems from Mrs. Hobbs's fear that she will take her daughter away.

Mrs. Hobbs is not only neglectful of Ellen but directly prevents Linda from caring for her as she wants to. Moments like this show how slavery – even in states where it doesn't legally exist – subverts the role of motherhood, which Linda and her readers would have considered the most important part of a woman's life.

Altogether, this is both a "sweet and bitter time." When holding Mary, whom she loves, Linda recalls the infancy of Ellen and Benny. One day, looking out the window, she sees a man in a sailor's uniform and realizes it's William. She rushes down to embrace him, and the siblings rejoice to be reunited again as a family—Linda says that their bond is even stronger because it has been "formed by suffering."

Linda's ability to love the child she's caring for contrasts with Mrs. Hobbs's refusal to see Ellen as one of her own children, as Mr. Sands promised, or even to care for her as a child at all.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: THE OLD ENEMY AGAIN

After some time, Linda receives a letter supposedly written by one of the young Flint sons. He encourages her to come home, where will be "reinstated in our affections" and greeted with "tears of joy." Moreover, he apprises her of Aunt Nancy's death (not realizing that Linda was there when it happened), saying that she showed the family how to live a faithful and "Christian life" and how to die tranquilly. The letter concludes by saying that Dr. Flint will agree to sell Linda if she returns. Linda suspects the letter is actually written by Dr. Flint, with whose handwriting she is familiar.

Linda's portrayal of Aunt Nancy's death is diametrically opposed to the narrative put forth in this letter – it affirms her desire to escape and her outrage at the injustice of life under slavery. To her, Nancy exemplified Christian values through her selflessness and bravery in helping her fugitive niece. Contrasts like this show the enormous discrepancies between narratives of slaveholders and slaves – making clear the necessity of first-hand accounts like this one.

Soon afterwards, she receives another letter from a family friend, warning her that Dr. Flint is again coming north. Without telling Mrs. Bruce why, Linda goes to Boston for two weeks, writing to Grandmother that if she sends Benny north, he should go to Boston. One morning she wakes up to a knock on the door and finds her son, just arrived. Linda says that no one except another slave mother could imagine the joy she feels.

On this occasion, Linda highlights the universality of maternal love and the uniqueness of her own feelings, given the huge obstacles she's faced in arriving at this reunion. She thus creates a link with her reader while compelling them to truly appreciate her story.

Chattering away, Benny asks when Ellen is going to come live with them. He's been to see her in Brooklyn on the way north, and she looked sad. Linda spends the day buying her son clothes and hearing about the journey.

Benny's innocent questions remind Linda and the reader of the many obstacles remaining before she and her children can live together peacefully.

Meanwhile, Dr. Flint visits New York and tries to learn where Linda is, but is unsuccessful. As soon as she knows he's left, she returns to her job, leaving Benny with William in Boston. She enjoys her work and feels very secure in the Bruce household; but as summer approaches and she has to take Mary for daily walks, she becomes afraid that one of the many Southerners living in the city will recognize her. She says that both "snakes and slaveholders" are more troublesome in hot weather.

Linda's reference to snakes recalls her disastrous episode in the swamp, just after she ran away. This connection makes clear that, because the North doesn't adequately protect fugitive slaves, she's still in the midst of the escape she began so many years ago – she hasn't, as she assumed when she reached Philadelphia, arrived at definitive freedom.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: PREJUDICE AGAINST COLOR

For the summer vacation, Linda accompanies the Bruce family on a cruise to Albany. At tea, all the white maids eat with their charges, but when Linda sits at the table she's immediately scolded—by a black waiter, no less. Linda refuses to leave unless the captain demands it, but no one brings her any tea. The next morning, at a hotel in Troy, the landlord requests that Linda eat breakfast with his family in order to avoid seating her among the guests. Linda is displeased to find Saratoga full of Southerners, and feels anxious until they depart.

When she first arrived at the Durham house, Linda was astonished at the ostensibly egalitarian society in which they lived. Now, she sees that her first impressions were naïve. Moments like this hint at the battles that will remain after the abolition of slavery – and, although she didn't know it, the discrimination that would persist more than a century later.

On another vacation that summer, Linda is staying in a hotel with the Bruces. At dinner, she brings Mary to a special table where nurses are seated with the children; however, the waiter tells her that she can't sit down but must stand behind the baby's chair and feed her. Linda refuses to eat at the table and Mr. Bruce has the baby's meals sent to their rooms, but after a few days the white waiters refuse to serve her because she's black.

The Bruces' outrage at Linda's treatment and willingness to help her stand up to the hotel staff differentiates them from most of the white people in the narrative – but it still doesn't help Linda that much when she's facing a large and implacable institution.


The landlord tells Mr. Bruce that Linda is creating a problem, because the black servants of other guests will be dissatisfied that they aren't being treated like she is. She feels that these servants "ought to be dissatisfied with themselves," for allowing themselves to be humiliated like this. After she asserts her case for a few days, everyone gets used to it and behaves more respectfully; she feels that if all black people would behave like this it will eventually lessen the general prevalence of discrimination.

As in an earlier moment after Grandmother buys Phillip's freedom, Linda promotes the idea that a person is personally responsible for convincing people to treat them equally. In a way, Linda is urging black people to turn to activism as she will shortly do, but she's also implicitly contradicting other arguments – such as her central belief that black women can't be responsible for their sexual purity under slavery.


CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX: THE HAIRBREADTH ESCAPE

Returning to New York, Linda visits Ellen. She knows that Mrs. Hobbs's Southern brother, Mr. Thorne, is visiting so she stays in the kitchen. However, he wants to greet her, and Mrs. Hobbs insists she go upstairs. Mr. Thorne is a drunken spendthrift who has often borrowed money from Grandmother and professes great attachment to her; Linda does not respect or trust him, but he greets her very cordially and wishes her good luck.

Like Dr. Flint occasionally does, Mr. Thorne tries to present a narrative of closeness between his family and Linda's. However, Linda astutely points out that any relationship they had was based on exploitation and misdeeds, and thus no genuine closeness can exist.

Ellen never complains about her situation, but Linda can tell she's unhappy. Questioning her one day, she finds that since Mr. Thorne has arrived, Ellen has been forced to buy and serve liquor every day. Years later, she discovers that Mr. Thorne has "poured vile language" into Ellen's ears, despite his professed respect for Grandmother.

Right now, Ellen is reliving Linda's early years in the Flint household. While Mrs. Hobbs is less overtly cruel than Mrs. Flint, she's still completely failing Ellen as a maternal figure – and Northern society, which doesn't guarantee Linda's rights over her children, is enabling her.

One Sunday when Linda goes to visit her daughter, Ellen reveals that she's found a torn-up letter from Mr. Thorne to Dr. Flint, saying that as a "patriot [and] a lover of my country" he has the duty to apprise him of Linda's location. When Ellen and the Hobbs children put the pieces together and showed Mrs. Hobbs, she confronted her brother, but he's already mailed a copy, and soon leaves New York.

Mr. Sands encouraged Linda to trust the Hobbs family, but they have now behaved unscrupulously towards Ellen and jeopardized Linda's freedom. Again and again, he proves remiss in his duties as a father, while the family's survival depends on cooperation and closeness between mother and children.

Linda is frustrated to leave a good job and disrupt her plans for her children, all because of her continued vulnerability. Linda confesses to Mrs. Bruce that she's a fugitive; the kind woman consults two lawyer friends, who advise going north immediately. She stays with a friend from Mrs. Bruce until William arrives to take her to Boston. Mrs. Hobbs, who feels guilty about her brother's actions, lets Ellen return to her mother—albeit without any warm clothes. Seeing the girl's sorry state, Mrs. Bruce gives her some of her own shawls and hoods.

Mrs. Bruce's generous nature and immediate sympathy contrast with the fact that Mrs. Hobbs doesn't even apologize for putting Linda's life in danger. Not only are positive relationships between black and white women impossible under slavery, they're also unlikely in environments like the Hobbs household, where slavery is considered acceptable or normal.

Linda, William, and Ellen board a steamboat towards Boston. Normally, black passengers are not allowed to sit inside the cabin but have to spend the entire journey on the deck. Linda is anxious to sit inside, both to avoid Ellen catching cold and to stay unobserved. She pleads with the captain and the stewardess, who eventually make an exception, perhaps inferring that she's a fugitive.

Although Linda is often discriminated against in public places, sometimes she gains sympathy and aid for her fugitive status. For her, the North isn't characterized by an unequivocal embrace of freedom but constant tension between abolitionists and sympathizers with slavery.

Arriving in Boston, Linda feels happier and safer than ever before—even better, she's finally reunited with both her children. Telling Mrs. Hobbs that Ellen must stay with her and go to school, she sets up **house** with a friend and works as a seamstress throughout the winter.

Although Mr. Thorne has tried to hurt the family, he's actually enabled Linda to recover custody of her daughter – she manages to turn the machinations of slaveholders to her own advantage.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN: A VISIT TO ENGLAND

In the spring, Linda is saddened to learn that Mrs. Bruce has died suddenly. Mr. Bruce decides to take Mary to see her English relatives and hires Linda to care for her during the journey. Leaving her children with friends, she sets off for London, where no one questions her right to sit by her employer at dinner. That night, she feels the sensation of "pure, unadulterated freedom" for the first time. She's proud that Mary behaves well among the children of her father's friends.

The trip to England is eye-opening for Linda. It's the first time she's been able to feel truly secure in her freedom, and it's an opportunity for her to put her intelligence and observational skills to work. At the same time, it's painful that she constantly has to work among other families and leave her own children when she's longing to build them a permanent home.

Traveling into the country, Linda sees families who work in the fields for pitiful wages and live in tiny, "primitive" cottages. Despite this poverty, their lives seem better than "the condition of the most favored slaves of America." Their homes are small but protected by law and no one can break apart a family or abuse vulnerable women without incurring punishment. Many charitable campaigns are working to educate these people and give them more opportunities; no one is forbidding them to learn to read.

Linda's egalitarian presentation of England doesn't take into full account the country's terrible class stratification, or the fact that the British were busily engaged in racist colonial projects all over the world. However, it does emphasize that recognized and unalienable freedom is more important than any material advantage.

Moreover, Linda receives "strong religious impressions" in England, where the genuine faith and humility of the clergymen she meets contrasts starkly with the "contemptuous" manner with which American pastors treat slaves and their firm defense of slavery. During her entire time in England, Linda never experiences the slightest instance of discrimination—in fact, she almost forgets that racial prejudice exists until she returns to America.

Here, Linda argues that the intent and manner in which Christianity is practiced determines its validity. This is both a critique of Christian doctrine as employed in the South and a hope for a more inclusive and progressive church.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT: RENEWED INVITATIONS TO GO SOUTH

As the ship approaches New York, Linda finds herself fearing her own country. She finds Ellen making strides in her education, but Benny absent. He had been apprenticed to learn a trade, but when the other apprentices learn that he's mixed race they abuse him until he leaves the job and embarks on a whaling voyage. Linda cries at this news, wishing she could have been there to protect him.

Linda brought her children to the North so they would have more opportunities, but they still face significant discrimination. Her efforts as a mother are inadequate to provide for them without social safeguards and legal rights.

Soon after this, Linda receives a letter from Emily Flint, now married and called Mrs. Dodge. She reiterates her refusal to sell Linda, as she has always been very "attached" to her, but says that Linda can return south and find a kind home with her and her new husband, and perhaps eventually purchase her freedom. Feeling insulted by the letter's false promises, Linda does not reply.

Emily's "attachment" to Linda is like her mother's attachment to Aunt Nancy – a relationship entirely predicated on exploitation and the inability to recognize the slave's rights or humanity. It's a marked contrast to the sincere friendship existing between Linda and the deceased Mrs. Bruce.

Even though it might give her more peace of mind, Linda rejects the idea of trying to buy her freedom from Mrs. Dodge. She wants to invest her earnings in a home for her children, not pay the Flints after having given them years of her labor. She knows that she could be legally recaptured, and that Mrs. Dodge might even be able to sue for her children, but she doesn't think it's a serious concern. Linda reminds the reader that she made these decisions before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law—she trusts, perhaps too much, that Massachusetts will preserve her freedom and protect her.

It's important that Linda puts these philosophical concerns over her safety – freedom isn't just about physical security; it's about the right to make decisions affirming one's own humanity. While the North allows her to do this now, the imminent passage of the Fugitive Slave Law – requiring Northerners to turn in escaped slaves – equates to a negation of her humanity by a society that claims to value freedom.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE: THE CONFESSION

After two years of living in Boston, William offers to pay for Ellen to attend boarding school. Linda hates to part with her, but knows it's important that she get the best education possible. Now that Ellen's departure is at hand, she resolves to explain to her the circumstances of her birth. She dreads her daughter's judgment, but doesn't want her to hear the story from someone else who doesn't understand the situation.

At this point in her life, Linda is still caught between shame and understanding of her own past. Not only is she worried about her own character, she wants her daughter's family to be a source of pride and support, not something that alienates her from others.

The night before Ellen leaves, Linda begins to tell her how Dr. Flint had "driven [her] into a great sin," but Ellen embraces her and tells her to stop speaking. She has already deduced that Mr. Sands is her father, and she says "he is nothing to me. All my love is for you." Throughout the months Ellen spent with the Sands family in Washington, he never spoke to her or hugged her as he did his white children. Now, she says, she never thinks about him. Linda is thankful that her secret has not "diminished the affection of [her] child."

Ellen's unconditional acceptance of her mother is possibly the narrative's most touching – and radical – passage. Dismissing her father, she elevates the role of motherhood and sharply criticizes men who don't fulfill their obligations. Moreover, she argues that Linda's decisions are nothing to be ashamed of. Cultivating her aura of respectability, Linda can't take this feminist stance, but she can voice it through her daughter.

Some weeks after Ellen departs for school, Linda receives a letter from William inviting her to join him in establishing an abolitionist reading room in Rochester. She eagerly assents, but after a year the project fails. Linda spends the next year with Isaac and Amy Post, Quakers and "practical believers in the Christian doctrine of human brotherhood."

Although Linda doesn't mention it here, her short-lived reading room operated out of the same building as Frederick Douglass's blossoming newspaper. Moreover, Amy Post is an abolitionist who later encourages Linda to record and publish this very narrative.

CHAPTER FORTY: THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW

William decides to move to California and takes Benny with him. Ellen is flourishing at school; everyone is very kind to her, especially when they discover that her mother is a fugitive slave. Meanwhile, Linda returns to work for Mr. Bruce, who has remarried and had another baby. The young Mrs. Bruce is a woman of "excellent principles" with a "hearty dislike" for slavery, who proves a loyal friend to Linda.

The new Mrs. Bruce proves equal to her predecessor when it comes to supporting and respecting Linda. Again, her behavior contrasts with that of white women in the South, especially Mrs. Flint.

Around this time, the abolitionist movement suffers a blow in the form of the Fugitive Slave Laws, which empower anyone to recapture escaped slaves and return them to the South. Many families leave the city altogether; others are torn apart when one spouse finds out that the other is a fugitive. The passage of this law is one of the reasons that William moves to California and Linda, fearful for her safety, goes out as infrequently as possible and always uses back roads—she's enraged that she has to sneak around like this in a "city calling itself free."

The Fugitive Slave Law was presented as a compromise between the increasingly embittered North and South, but Linda shows that it's actually an abandonment of the values supposedly so important in free states. Slavery is a matter on which compromise is equal to complicity.

In the street one day, Linda meets a former slave from her own city, Luke. This man had a particularly cruel master—although he was an invalid who relied completely on Luke for survival, he whipped him every day, often summoning the constable to carry out the punishment when he lacked strength. Linda is overjoyed to see he's escaped, but worried that he's not truly free, even in New York. He reassures her that he ran away not from his master but from a speculator, who's unlikely to come looking for him.

Linda juxtaposes Luke's terrible life under slavery with the risks he continues to run as a fugitive in the North. In allowing him to be returned to the South, she implicitly suggests, Northerners are not just allowing slavery but proving themselves complicit in Luke's beatings.

Luke tells Linda that he plans to go to Canada. Before his escape, he cleverly obtained some money from his master by hiding some bills in an old pair of pants, which he then asked to have as a hand-me-down. Linda says that this anecdote is "a fair specimen of how the moral sense is educated by slavery," but she does feel Luke deserves the money, given how much work he's done unpaid.

Probably in the attempt to impress her readers with slaves' scrupulous honor, Linda is holding herself and Luke to extremely strict standards. Many modern readers would agree that Luke is certainly entitled to reparations, given the years of abuse and hard labor he's suffered.

Again, Linda receives warning that Dr. Flint knows she's in New York and is trying to capture her. She confides in the young Mrs. Bruce, who immediately rallies to her aid. She even suggests that Linda take her baby on her escape from the city; carrying a white child will render her less suspicious, and if she's caught, her capturers will have to return the child, and Mrs. Bruce might be able to advocate for her release.

Both Mrs. Bruce and Linda prove themselves active and daring mothers – they understand how the necessity of caring for children can make them vulnerable, but they also see how this status can be turned to their advantage.

One of young Mrs. Bruce's relatives scolds her for risking herself this way, but she says she'd much rather pay a fine or go to prison rather than have Linda "torn from my **house**." Linda goes to New England, where she stays briefly with a senator who knows Mrs. Bruce; but the man is so frightened of the fugitive slave laws that he sends her to hide in the countryside for a month, after which she returns to New York.

Mrs. Bruce's attitude ensures that her home really is a place of security. Although her independence and daring contravenes her society's ideals of femininity, she is living up to Linda's ideal of domesticity.


CHAPTER FORTY-ONE: FREE AT LAST

Even though Dr. Flint has gone, Linda continues to feel anxious. Meanwhile, it's clear that Grandmother is approaching the end of her life. Through a friend she writes to Linda that she hopes they will meet in heaven, "where sorrow and parting from my children will be no more." She exhorts her granddaughter to be a good mother and teach her children Christian values. Linda wishes there was some way to see her grandmother before her death, but she knows it's impossible.

Christianity remains central to her until until the end of Grandmother's life, and helps her die with dignity and tranquility. The way she practices her faith contrasts with the use of Christian doctrine by slaveholders to deny slaves dignity and freedom.

Shortly after this, Grandmother writes again to Linda telling her that Dr. Flint is dead, and hoping he has reconciled himself with God. Linda remembers all the ways he's defrauded and betrayed Grandmother and admires her forgiving response to his death. She herself feels no more kindly towards him now; he is just as "odious" in death as he was in life.

While Linda derives her religious principles from Grandmother, they also inspire her to demand justice rather than helping her endure misfortune. Her faith is oriented around empowerment, rather than resignation.

Linda is still in danger, as she receives word that Mrs. Flint is encouraging her daughter to recapture her former slave, and Mrs. Dodge's husband is an impoverished merchant who wants to sell her for quick cash. Linda always scans the newspapers for new arrivals in the city's hotels, and one day she sees that Mr. and Mrs. Dodge have arrived in the city. Linda goes to stay with friends of young Mrs. Bruce; just after she leaves the house, mysterious messengers begin to arrive, asking about her whereabouts.

The new danger in which Linda finds herself emblematizes the drastic effects of the Fugitive Slave Laws. While Dr. Flint would have been legally unable to return her to the South, the Dodges are now empowered to capture her by force – making the North, in fact, just an extension of the system of slavery.

Linda sends a friend to visit the Dodges in their hotel, ostensibly to ask after his family in the South. Mr. Dodge immediately begins questioning him about Linda's whereabouts, but the friend says he doesn't know where she is and that she refuses to buy the freedom to which she's already entitled. Young Mrs. Bruce encourages Linda to leave the city, but she stubbornly refuses, tired of running away. Outside, she hears church bells ringing and thinks of the hypocrisy of preaching the Bible's message while allowing the practice of slavery.

Linda has usually criticized Christian doctrine in terms of its application in the South, but now she sees religious hypocrisy in New York as well. The growing parallels between North and South show that the Northern reader can't view slavery as a distant social ill, but rather a highly contagious form of evil.

Soon, Ellen convinces her mother to leave the city and the two travel to New England. Young Mrs. Bruce writes her proposing to resolve the situation by buying Ellen's freedom herself, but Linda is reluctant to accept the offer—she hates to treat herself as "an article of property," even in order to secure her freedom. Despite her equivocations, Mrs. Bruce begins negotiating with Mr. Dodge to sell Linda and abandon his claims on her children. She soon writes Linda triumphantly that her freedom has been secured and she can now come home.

It's sad that, even after her escape to the North, Linda has to surrender her moral concerns in order to obtain her freedom and safety. However, it's a testament to Mrs. Bruce's character that she uses her privilege in this situation to empower Linda, rather than betraying or exploiting her.

Linda is astounded to find that she has been "sold" in the supposedly free city of New York. She imagines that people of the future will be shocked to see sale contracts existing in this Northern state, so late in the nineteenth century. Even though she treasures her freedom, she hates looking at the document that bought it for her.

Linda wants her Northern readers to understand their proximity to and complicity in the system of slavery, in order to spur them to concrete action against it.

Nevertheless, Linda feels relieved that she will never have to hide or escape again. Young Mrs. Bruce receives her with tears of joy and Linda remembers the efforts of her father and Grandmother, who tried to buy her without success and who would take pleasure in her triumph now.

Even though she's so distant from her family, by thinking of her freedom as the fulfillment of a family goal, Linda is able to preserve her feelings of closeness to them.

Grandmother lives long enough to hear of Linda's freedom before her death. Soon afterward, Uncle Phillip dies as well. Linda is surprised to see his obituary published in the newspaper—normally, such privileges are reserved for white people.

The quickness of her relatives' deaths emphasizes that, for Linda, the official acquisition of freedom marks a complete break with her former life in the South.

Linda concludes that "my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage." She rejoices that Benny and Ellen are safe both from slaveholders in the South and "the white people of the north." She still longs to establish a home of her own, where she can live with her children, but for now she's content to remain in the employment of young Mrs. Bruce, who has been such a loyal and generous friend. Remembering and writing about her experiences as a slave is very painful, but she's consoled by memories of her moments with Grandmother, which are like "light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea."

Although Linda has always endorsed traditional modes of femininity, here she steps away from them to close her narrative. Contrasting freedom with marriage, she suggests that she's not just legally emancipated but independent of all the men who have exploited her. Linda's maternal role is central to her being, but her concept of motherhood is active, independent, and empowering – thus, she melds traditional values with her own empowered attitude.

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