

The Invention of Wings



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SUE MONK KIDD

Sue Monk Kidd grew up in Sylvester, Georgia. She graduated from Texas Christian University with a B.S. in Nursing and practiced as a nurse into her thirties. Kidd then began to take writing courses at Emory University and Anderson College, then published in the Christian magazine *Guideposts* and wrote three books regarding her spiritual journey. Kidd's first novel, [The Secret Life of Bees](#) (2002), focuses on life in the South during the Civil Rights Era and became a literary sensation, spending more than two years on the New York Times Bestseller list. *The Invention of Wings* returns to Charleston, Kidd's hometown for many years, to examine racial relations in the Antebellum South. Kidd now lives in southwest Florida with her husband and serves on the Writer's Council of Poets & Writers, Inc.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Toward the end of the antebellum years in the South, activists began touring the country advocating for abolition to free the slaves. This movement gave rise to women like Sarah and Angelina Grimké, who wrote passionate pamphlets and rousing speeches in defense of the essential human rights of slaves. These efforts soon turned to the issue of gender equality as backlash to the visibility of women in the abolition movement rose. William Lloyd Garrison published a newspaper called *The Liberator* that published letters and treatises advocating freedom for the slaves. In the novel, Sarah becomes a Quaker minister in order to better speak out against slavery. The Quaker religion became synonymous with the abolitionist cause, as many Quakers formed part of the Underground Railroad – safe houses that helped escaped slaves reach freedom in the North. The slave revolt in Charleston that Handful joins in was also a real event, planned by the actual Denmark Vesey in Charleston in 1822, as slaves took inspiration from the successful Haitian rebellion of 1803 that liberated Haitian slaves from their masters through intense bloodshed. Revolts like this one gained support from slaves in protest against their treatment, though almost all were either ended before they began or failed in execution. These efforts, both peaceful and violent, continued until the Civil War in 1861 that ended slavery in America for good, though the fight for true equality between the races is in many senses still on-going today.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Invention of Wings is a work of Historical Fiction that details

daily life in a specific time and place as it explores sexism and racism in the American South, much like works such as [The Help](#) by Kathryn Stockett (also another white author writing, somewhat controversially, in the voice of a black character). It also encompasses years of growth and historical change similar to [All the Light We Cannot See](#) by Anthony Doerr or [The Blue Door](#) by Ann Rinaldi. With its focus on a powerful female friendship complicated by the disparate circumstances of the two women, *The Invention of Wings* also is similar to works like [My Brilliant Friend](#) by Elena Ferrante or [Their Eyes Were Watching God](#) by Zora Neale Hurston.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Invention of Wings
- **When Published:** January 7, 2014
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Charleston, South Carolina 1803-1838
- **Climax:** Sarah returns to her Charleston home, despite the ban due to her abolitionist pamphlets, and manages to sneak her former maid, Handful, to safety in the North.
- **Antagonist:** Oppression in American Society
- **Point of View:** First person limited, from the perspectives of Sarah and Handful

EXTRA CREDIT

Inspiration. Kidd first learned of the historical figures Sarah and Angelina Grimké at an exhibit of Judy Chicago's artwork called "Dinner Party" that celebrated women's contribution to history. Kidd could not believe that she had never heard of these sisters from Charleston, though she had lived in the South Carolina city for many years, and decided to dedicate a book to the Grimké contribution to the abolitionist and women's rights movements.

Recurring Concepts. *The Invention of Wings* deals with the same themes as Kidd's first best-seller [The Secret Life of Bees](#) – racial dynamics and feminism in the American South. Kidd has said in interviews that she feels constantly led back to these issues after her childhood in Georgia during the Civil Rights Era.



PLOT SUMMARY

The novel opens from Handful's perspective, as she retells an African legend of people who could fly but lost their wings once they were taken to America. Handful knows the legend isn't

true, but loves the idea anyway. Handful, so named for her small size at birth, is a slave for the Grimké family living in Charleston, South Carolina in 1803. Handful usually helps her mother, Charlotte, with the sewing, but she is given to Sarah Grimké to be Sarah's maid for Sarah's eleventh birthday. Sarah describes her earliest memory of a slave getting whipped, an experience which caused Sarah to start to stutter. Sarah does not want to own Handful (called Hetty by the Grimkés) and even tries to set Handful free, but Sarah's parents refuse to honor that wish. Handful does poorly as a lady's maid, but Sarah keeps Handful as safe from her mother's wrath as possible. Charlotte makes Sarah promise to help Handful get free some day.

On Easter Sunday, the Grimkés go to the Anglican church and Sarah begins to truly notice how mistreated the slaves are in the city. Fed up, Sarah decides to teach the slave children the alphabet at their Sunday school, but is reprimanded for breaking the law against teaching slaves to read. Back at home, Charlotte is caught stealing green silk from Mary Grimké and is punished by tying her leg up for hours. Sarah defies her mother and brings Charlotte a basket of medicine. Handful accepts it gratefully, but with a new wariness about her white masters.

Sarah applies herself to studying her brother Thomas' law books and covertly begins to teach Handful to read. The two girls get closer, as Sarah admits to Handful that she has chosen a **silver button** to remind her of her ambition to become a lawyer, and Handful tells Sarah to call her Handful instead of Hetty. Handful practices her letters by writing in the ground and signs her name, but one of Sarah's younger sisters finds the words and tattles on Handful. Sarah's father, John Grimké, punishes Sarah by refusing to let her read any books not fit for a lady, and sentences Handful to one whip lash. Sarah is absolutely heartbroken at the loss of her studies and Handful is even more worried as her mother's behavior gets more and more rebellious. Sarah asks her mother for the privilege of being her newest baby sister's godmother to soothe the loss of her dream to be a jurist. Sarah throws away her silver button, but Handful secretly rescues it. Handful makes a new start for herself by making herself a "spirit tree" using **red thread** that she once stole from Sarah.

Six years later, Handful and Sarah's godchild Nina help Sarah get ready for a society ball. Sarah dreads these occasions, as she's ill at ease in high society, but this night she meets Burke Williams, who becomes the first man that Sarah falls for. Handful feels further from Sarah than ever, now that Sarah's attention is filled by Nina and Burke, so Handful busies herself helping her mother with the **quilt** that Charlotte has been sewing her entire life. Charlotte herself is distracted by a new relationship with Denmark Vesey, a free black man in Charleston who wants to empower the slaves and inspires Charlotte to begin saving to buy freedom for herself and Handful. The Grimkés leave Charleston to attend Thomas'

wedding (and keep Sarah away from the merchant-class Burke) and Handful takes advantage of the absence to sneak into the library and read the price of her mother and herself: 1,050 dollars. This discovery forces Handful to see her own self-worth – far higher than any amount of money.

When the Grimkés return home, Burke begins courting Sarah in earnest. Handful finally meets Denmark Vesey, but resents his condescending tone towards slaves who bow and scrape to white masters. Sarah receives an exciting proposal of marriage from Burke just as her father's job as a judge embroils the family in an impeachment case due to biased sentences. John Grimké is acquitted, but his health is badly compromised. Meanwhile, Handful finds out that her own mother is pregnant with Denmark's child. Sarah, dizzy with love, plans for her wedding until Thomas tells her that Burke is actually engaged to three other women, and has simply been courting Sarah to convince her to have sexual relations with him before they are legally wed. The Grimkés break off the engagement and Sarah retreats into isolation, prompting Handful to give Sarah back her silver button.

In town the next week, Charlotte is accosted by a white guard for refusing to step into the mud to let a white woman walk by unsoiled. The guard tries to arrest Charlotte, but Charlotte runs and disappears. Handful grieves the loss of her mother with such fervor that Sarah realizes how silly she has been to treat Burke's betrayal as a tragedy. Sarah pledges never to marry and begins to devote herself to the news of abolition that she hears from the North. Handful wakes herself up from her grief-stricken stupor by finishing her mother's quilt.

In 1818, six more years later, Sarah has given Handful back to her mother (Mary), and Handful takes care of all the sewing for the Grimké family now that Charlotte is gone. Handful joins the African Church as a way to connect with other slaves in the city who are planning to rebel, while Sarah joins the Presbyterian Church in an attempt to find a religion that better fits her abolitionist leanings. Handful is arrested by the guards for attending the revolutionary church and suffers an accident in the horrific Work House punishment that leaves her with a life-long limp. Sarah is aghast that her mother allowed this to happen to Handful. Sarah and Nina try to help Handful, but Handful can no longer bear being friends with white women when white people continually treat her so poorly.

Sarah's mother, angry at the motherly bond between Sarah and Nina, sends Sarah north with John to try to improve John's health. Once in a private resort on the New Jersey shore, Sarah's father admits both that he does not plan to get better and that he truly agrees with Sarah about the evil of slavery. He dies in the North and Sarah writes home to say that she will not be returning immediately. Back in Charleston, Handful visits Denmark Vesey and tells him that her mother was carrying his child when she disappeared. Handful finds out that Denmark and his wife actually helped Charlotte get away those years

ago, but have no idea where she is now. Handful begins to sneak out the way her mother used to, though she acts obedient in front of Mary, even sewing her an incredible mourning dress.

Sarah finally takes a boat back home and meets a Quaker man named Israel Morris who gives Sarah a book about the Quaker faith, with the promise that Sarah will write him once she finishes it. Sarah tries to adjust back to life as a spinster in Charleston, but cannot stop thinking of Israel Morris. Handful is worried about being sold in the wake of John Grimké's death, but Mary keeps her on for her sewing ability. Sarah falls into a depression that is only broken when Thomas comes and forces her to argue against the prospect of freeing slaves to send them back to Africa. Sarah finally gains the courage to write Israel to ask how to become a Quaker and hears a "Voice" tell her to "Go North."

Two years later, Sarah lives with Israel Morris, his children, and Catherine, Israel's sister who cares for the house now that Israel's wife has passed. Sarah misses Nina and Handful, but throws herself into becoming a true Quaker. Yet Catherine thinks it is improper that Sarah lives with a widower for whom she clearly has feelings. Catherine brings her concerns about Sarah to the Quaker elders, where only Lucretia Mott (the lone female minister) defends Sarah, and Israel is forced to ask Sarah to leave. Back in the south, the Grimké household has become a horror for the slaves now that Sarah is gone and there is no one to keep Mary in check. Handful escapes to Denmark's house every chance she gets and gives her all to the rebellion efforts, as they continue to recruit more slaves in the area.

Handful gets even more involved in Denmark's plan to rise up against the white masters by stealing two bullet molds for the Black army, using the natural invisibility of women slaves to sneak into the guard house. Nina writes to Sarah about how unbearable life has been in Charleston these days and Sarah decides to return home. Sarah's new Quaker look catches attention, but not as much as the news that the slaves are planning a revolt. Sarah becomes a pariah by defending the slaves in public, and realizes that she must go north again. Handful finds out that one of the house slaves that Denmark recruited has betrayed them to the white masters. The guards thwart the plans before they can come to fruition, and Denmark and the other leaders are put to death with strict orders that no one is to mourn them.

In 1826, Charlotte returns to the Grimké house with Handful's 13-year-old sister, Sky. They had run away from another plantation where Charlotte was punished harshly for all her small rebellions, but Handful is glad to see the same revolutionary spark in Charlotte's eye when she sees the quilt that Handful finished. Sarah is now staying with Lucretia Mott, and is surprised to receive a letter from Handful telling of her mother's return. The news sparks Sarah's desire to become a Quaker minister and fight against the injustices that women

like Handful and Charlotte face.

Sky does not fit in to the house slave life at the Grimkés, getting in constant trouble until she is given charge of the garden to keep her from being sold. Charlotte, though weak, gives Handful hope by working on more quilt squares. In Philadelphia, Sarah wears her silver button despite the Quaker distaste for fancy decorations, spurred on by Lucretia's radical ideas. Sarah receives news that Nina plans to marry a Presbyterian minister, then is shocked to hear Israel come and propose to her. Though Sarah loves Israel deeply, she has to reject his offer in order to focus on her goal of becoming a minister. Handful finally gets some good news, as Charlotte reveals that she has been saving money from odd jobs for years. There is almost \$500 hidden in Charlotte's quilt.

For the next year, Sarah writes letters to Nina, sharing news of her life in Quaker Philadelphia and hearing about Nina's scandalous rebellions to the Presbyterian church in Charleston. Sarah is disheartened at the lack of racial equality she finds in even abolitionist circles, but is heartened when she hears that Nina has broken off her engagement and is coming North to live with Sarah.

Moving forward to 1835, the Grimké slaves now suffer under the hand of Mary Grimké and Mary's eldest daughter, also named Mary (Little Missus). Charlotte passes on, as peacefully as possible given her situation. Sarah and Nina cause an uproar when they sit in the "colored" pew one Sunday meeting. Backlash of anti-abolition sentiment has been growing, but Nina and Sarah inspire each other to keep resisting these mobs. Yet they are expelled from the Philadelphia Quaker meeting when Nina publishes a letter in the well known abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. Left without a home, the sisters go to stay in secret at the house of two black Quaker women and continue writing anti-slavery pamphlets to send South. They catch the attention of William Lloyd Garrison and Elizur Wright, the editors of the most well-known anti-slavery movements. Elizur invites the two women to join a series of lectures against slavery in New York. Sarah is terrified to take this on, with her speech impediment, but Nina encourages her and the sisters accept.

Handful manages to get a hold of one of the pamphlets Sarah wrote, and is completely amazed by the words. Sarah and Nina speak to huge crowds in New York, supported by Theodore Weld even when other members of the Anti-Slavery Society are scared by the outcry against abolition. As Nina and Sarah continue to tour giving speeches, Nina begins to start a romance with Theodore. Yet Sarah and Nina are soon blasted in the press for their unladylike behavior and some members of the Anti-Slavery Society ask the sisters to stop speaking in order to keep their pro-feminist ideas from distracting from the fight against slavery. Sarah and Nina insist that they can fight for the rights of both women and slaves.

Handful reaches her breaking point when the younger Mary

finds Charlotte's quilt and calls it ugly. Handful writes to Sarah that she and Sky will be escaping soon by any means possible. Sarah receives the letter at the reception of Nina's wedding to Theodore, heralded as the "abolition wedding." Sarah is happy to think that Handful and Sky are coming North, imagining them living with the two Quaker women who offered the sisters shelter. Sarah goes back to Charleston, ignoring the ban that the city has placed on her for her anti-slavery notoriety, to do whatever she can to help Handful. Sarah is scared for Handful, and wants Handful to wait for her to try asking Mary to grant Handful freedom. Handful is skeptical but agrees, though she is not surprised when Mary only agrees to free Handful and Sky upon her death. Handful is unwilling to wait a single day more and plans to leave as soon as possible with Sky. Handful and Sarah come up with a plan to repurpose the Grimké women's mourning clothes to hide Handful and Sky as ladies in mourning. Dressed in black dresses, with black veils over powdered faces, Handful and Sky manage to slip past guards on a boat to the North as Sarah carries Charlotte's quilt in her luggage.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hetty Handful Grimké – One of the novel's two protagonists, Handful (called Hetty by her white masters) is a slave of the Grimké household who is given to Sarah as a maid. As Sarah and Handful become friends, Sarah teaches Handful to read. Handful is intelligent and takes advantage of her ability to read to broaden her world even as she remains enslaved. Handful takes after her mother Charlotte, never accepting the rhetoric of slavery that continually tries to steal her self-worth. When Sarah goes North, Handful becomes the head seamstress for the Grimkés and begins to act on her rebellious tendencies, using **red thread** as a reminder of her desire for freedom. Handful joins the group of slaves planning revolt under the leadership of Denmark Vesey. Handful never gives up on finding her freedom, and makes sure that she and her half-sister Sky reach freedom in the North after Charlotte's death.

Sarah Grimké – The novel's other protagonist, based on the real historical figure (1792-1873). The daughter of a wealthy land-owning family in Charleston, Sarah stands out for both her ambition to be a female jurist and her fight against the slavery that gives her family such a privileged life. Sarah becomes friends with her maid, Handful, teaching her to read even though it breaks the law. Sarah promises to help Handful reach freedom, starting a journey that leads Sarah go North and become a Quaker who speaks out against slavery across the nation. Sarah continually chooses her professional and abolitionist ideals above the traditional goals of a high society lady, never marrying Israel Morris in order to focus on

becoming a Quaker minister. Despite huge criticism, Sarah never lets go of her principles of equality for both women and slaves. With her sister Nina, Sarah becomes one of the leading abolitionists.

Angelina (Nina) Grimké – Sarah's youngest sister and godchild (and also a real historical figure). Nina is more headstrong and outspoken than Sarah but shares Sarah's passion to speak out against slavery. After causing numerous scandals in Charleston, Nina moves North and joins Sarah as a Quaker. The two sisters join the abolitionist movement where Nina meets and eventually marries the prominent abolitionist Theodore Weld, while never losing her fiery spirit and intense devotion to fighting for equality for slaves and women.

Charlotte Grimké (Mauma) – Handful's mother and the main seamstress for the Grimké family. Charlotte is intensely determined to achieve freedom for herself and Handful, rebelling in every small way she can against their lives as slaves and making sure that Handful knows her self-worth outside of being a slave. When not busy with her life **story quilt**, Charlotte works on the side to save money to buy freedom for herself and Handful, then disappears for good when she gets pregnant with the child of Denmark Vesey. Charlotte and her daughter Sky come back to the Grimkés' house after living on a plantation and running away as many times as they are able. Charlotte dies before she reaches freedom, but leaves Handful with the drive and money to allow Handful to go North with Sky.

Denmark Vesey – A free black man living in Charleston, based on a real historical figure. Denmark won his freedom by winning the lottery, and uses his autonomy to inspire other slaves to rebel against the white masters. Charlotte falls in love with Denmark and has a baby with him. Denmark never meets his daughter, Sky, as he is put to death for the planned slave revolt before Charlotte and Sky return to Charleston.

Mary Grimké (Mother / Missus) – Sarah and Nina's mother. She is a harsh mistress to her slaves, and a stickler for propriety and status in the upper echelons of Charleston society. Though horrified by the actions of her daughters, Mary stays loyal to them as family. Mary is never swayed by any of the arguments her daughters make against slavery, believing wholeheartedly in the mistaken ideas of racial superiority.

John Grimké (Father) – Sarah and Nina's father, a prominent judge in Charleston who is ruined by accusations of bias in his sentences. Before his death of a wasting disease, John admits to Sarah that he too believes slavery is wrong but was never brave enough to speak out against it or give up his privileged lifestyle.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sky – The daughter of Charlotte and Denmark Vesey, and Handful's half-sister. Sky is wild and outspoken, more vocally

rebellious than most of the house slaves at the Grimké house. Handful worries about Sky and ultimately runs away with Sky to keep her from being punished continually for her spirit.

Mary Grimké (Little Missus / Mary Jr.) – Sarah and Nina’s oldest sister. True to her namesake, Mary follows all of her mother Mary’s rules for Charleston ladies. Mary moves back to the Grimké house after her husband dies and treats the Grimké slaves as poorly as Mary Sr. does.

Thomas Grimké – Sarah’s older brother, who wants to study theology but must study law to please his father. Thomas supports Sarah’s desire for education, but ultimately does not stand up for Sarah’s beliefs or her equality as a woman.

Anna Grimké – Sarah’s younger sister.

Eliza Grimké – Sarah’s younger sister.

Frederick Grimké – Sarah’s older brother.

Goodis – A footman and general slave for the Grimké family. Goodis gets his name from being the “goodest” of his siblings and quickly falls for Handful once he is bought by the Grimkés, eventually becoming Handful’s lover.

Aunt-Sister – The cook for the Grimké family.

Binah – The nursery maid for the Grimké family.

Sabe – The Grimké family stable master.

Tomfry – The Grimké family butler, who is loyal to Missus to a fault but has compassion for the other slaves.

Hector – The Grimké family butler after Tomfry leaves, a harsh man who seems to enjoy punishing the other slaves.

Rosetta – An older slave of the Grimké family, who works as a maid but often plays at physical weakness to get time for herself.

Phoebe – A maid for the Grimké family, Aunt-Sister’s daughter and Lucy’s sister.

Eli – A slave of the Grimké family.

Lucy – A maid for the Grimké family, Aunt-Sister’s daughter and Phoebe’s sister.

Snow – The carriage driver for the Grimké family.

Prince – A slave for the Grimké family.

Mariah – A slave for the Grimké family.

Cindie – A slave for the Grimké family.

Minta – A slave for the Grimké family, Mary (Missus)’s maid. Minta and Sabe are sweet on each other.

Reverend Brown – The pastor at the African Church that the slaves of Charleston form to have a place for themselves.

Burke Williams – The son of a silver merchant in Charleston, Burke asks for Sarah’s hand in marriage only to break her heart by revealing that he has other girlfriends and is only interested in the physical aspects of a relationship.

Lucretia Mott – The only female minister at the Quaker meeting that Sarah attends in Philadelphia. Lucretia offers Sarah support and inspiration in both her abolitionist and feminist efforts.

Israel Morris – A warm, intelligent Quaker man who introduces Sarah to the Quaker faith. After the passing of his wife, Rebecca Morris, Israel asks for Sarah’s hand in marriage, but Sarah turns him down in order to focus on her calling as a Quaker minister.

Catherine – Israel Morris’ unmarried sister who lives with Israel after Rebecca’s death to care for the children. Catherine primly objects to Sarah’s presence in Israel’s house, but warms to Sarah once she sees that Sarah is genuine in her faith.

Rebecca Morris – Israel Morris’ first wife, the epitome of the good Quaker woman who dedicates her life to good works and caring for her children.

Becky Morris – Israel Morris’ young daughter, named for her mother Rebecca.

Sarah Mapps Douglass – A young black Quaker woman who offers Sarah and Nina a place to stay once they can no longer live with the Morris family or Lucretia Mott.

Grace Douglass – A black Quaker woman at the meeting Sarah attends in Philadelphia.

William Lloyd Garrison – The editor of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* who published one of Nina’s letters and pushes Sarah and Nina into a more prominent position in the abolition movement.

Elizur Wright – The founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society who invites Sarah and Nina to give lectures against slavery.

Theodore Weld – A prominent member of the American Anti-Slavery Society. He supports Sarah and Nina’s right to speak as females. He eventually marries Nina.

John Greenleaf Whittier – A close friend of Theodore Weld and a leader in the abolition effort.

Mrs. Whittier – John Greenleaf Whittier’s mother, who allows Sarah and Nina to stay with her.

Jane Bettelman – A Quaker woman who takes offense at Sarah’s flashy style of dress and feminist leanings as she works toward becoming a female minister.

Samuel Bettelman – A Quaker man who takes offense at Sarah’s efforts to become a female minister.

Madame Ruffin – Sarah’s teacher, who forces Sarah to learn etiquette and womanly skills instead of studying law.

Reverend William McDowell – A Presbyterian minister who captures Nina’s heart when she lives in Charleston, but disappoints her with his inaction against slavery.

Reverend Hall – The main pastor of the Anglican church in Charleston who refuses to let Sarah teach black children the

alphabet.

Reverend Gadsden – Another pastor of the Anglican church in Charleston.

Ned – One of the top lieutenants of Denmark Vesey’s rebellion.

Rolla – One of the top lieutenants of Denmark Vesey’s rebellion.

Gullah Jack – One of the top lieutenants of Denmark Vesey’s rebellion.

Peter – One of the top lieutenants of Denmark Vesey’s rebellion.

Susan – Denmark Vesey’s wife.

Mr. Drayton – One of the upper class planters in Charleston.



VOICE AND SILENCE

Kidd explores the power of a person’s voice, and the many ways that people find to speak out in a world that consistently tries to silence them. From the beginning of the novel, one of the horrors of slavery is that nobody speaks of it, using silence as a way to protect white innocence in the face of black suffering. Kidd advises breaking that silence as a way to undermine this oppression, as Sarah learns to express her voice against slavery despite any personal cost to herself. Sarah, though a woman with little power of her own, uses her ability to read and write in order to fight for equality. By teaching Handful to read, Sarah also gives Handful the tools necessary to express her own voice, through letters and written passes that give Handful more freedom though she is a slave. Eventually, Sarah is able to literally speak out against slavery as part of an anti-slavery lecture circuit, though polite society is scandalized by women speaking in public (and Sarah faces another, more personal obstacle in her speech impediment—she has a stutter). Yet every time men try to silence Sarah’s voice, she continues to use writing as a way for her opinions to be heard.

Beyond literacy, Kidd explores other ways that characters can find their voice. Charlotte “writes” her life story into a **quilt**, witnessing all the pain she has felt as a slave as well as all the joy she has found as a human. This quilt gives Handful strength and inspiration to keep fighting against slavery after her mother is no longer there to encourage Handful with words. Through letters, pamphlets, quilts, and speeches, Kidd’s characters continually let their voices be heard to battle the silence that perpetuates oppression. By using their voices in support of a fairer world for all, Sarah and Handful insist on their own power in a world that would rather they remain silent.



EQUALITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

In *The Invention of Wings*, Kidd advocates for equality of both race and gender, two causes that Kidd sees as supporting each other rather than distracting from one another. Kidd takes an intersectional approach to equality, where all the many parts of a person’s identity (race, sex, gender, economic class, etc.) are taken into account when considering the ways that a person is oppressed or privileged. While Sarah, a wealthy white woman, faces very different struggles from a free black man like Denmark Vesey, both Sarah’s and Denmark’s experiences are very different from the oppression confronting Handful, as an enslaved black woman. Kidd asserts the ability of equality movements to take all of these considerations in mind, indeed deeming it impossible to fight for true equality in one of these areas while ignoring injustices in another.

Kidd’s argument for intersectional equality is made more potent by the kind of radical (for the time) equality she upholds



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.



FRIENDSHIP

The central focus of the novel is the friendship between Sarah and Handful, despite the different worlds these two women come from. As they grow older, Sarah and Handful show each other sides of life that each would never have seen in the slaveholding South – fostering in both the unshakeable belief that white and black people are equals and all deserve freedom. Yet, beneficial as this connection is, Kidd does not pretend that their friendship is easy or uncomplicated. Both Sarah and Handful must overcome prejudices—like Sarah’s guilt as a slave owner and Handful’s pain as a slave—in order to truly support and care for one another. As the years go by, Sarah and Handful endure seasons of distance from and sacrifice for each other, while never losing sight of the great worth of their friendship.

Kidd uses this friendship to showcase the way that personal relationships can lead to the change and growth of policies and laws that help all people. Sarah and Handful use their friendship as evidence that peace and equality between white people and black people is both possible and necessary. The two women bring this knowledge to other important friendships, such as Sarah’s bond with her younger sister Nina or the Quaker minister Lucretia Mott, or Handful’s alliance with Denmark Vesey or her own half-sister, Sky. Together, Sarah and Handful build a community that works to free the slaves and create a world where their complex friendship would not need to be hidden.

in the novel. Sarah speaks in favor of not just freeing the slaves, but reaching true equality between whites and blacks that overturns racial discrimination and segregation. Likewise, Sarah fights for women to not just have the same legal rights as men, but also the same opportunities and dreams of a fulfilling career outside of marriage and family. Kidd recognizes the importance of these two positions, showing characters like Handful who immediately embrace equality as the natural right of all humans, as well as characters like Sarah who need more time and evidence to be persuaded to that position. Through it all, Kidd documents the racial and gender equality that Sarah and Handful encounter in the novel, always maintaining that these women deserve equality in the fullest sense of the word.



THE EVILS OF SLAVERY AND THE NECESSITY OF RESISTANCE

The Invention of Wings spends significant attention on the true horrors of the everyday life of a slave, exploring the ways that slavery harmed black people, as well as the lesser known (and less extreme) injuries that the institution of slavery caused to white people in the American South. Through a focus on the experience of urban Southern slaves, Kidd gives attention to the unconscionable pain that slaves faced beyond the evils of plantation slavery (the kind usually depicted in historical fiction). Handful and her family undergo intense physical and emotional pain at the hands of their white masters, scenes of trauma that force harsh examination of these injuries as the first step towards acknowledging the historical pain of slavery and giving an opportunity to begin healing these wounds. Even those who benefit economically from slavery, such as the slave-owning Grimké family, suffer the psychological damage of slavery, as the practice sows distrust, apathy, bitterness, and weakness of mind and body in the members of the Grimké family.

With all of the evils of slavery on display, Kidd turns to the numerous ways that slaves resisted their treatment, from civil disobedience to active violence. Slaves such as Handful, Charlotte, or Rosetta feign unintelligence or disability to avoid certain labor, reclaiming their time and their personhood away from their masters. Most slaves even have an alternate name that denotes their true identity rather than the identity that the masters give them. Apart from this everyday resistance, Handful also feels called to join the violent rebellion planned by Denmark Vesey, a movement that gave many slaves hope of freedom despite the deplorable circumstances of their lives. White people too, of course, must resist slavery not just because they are the ones responsible but also as a way to keep their own principles and self-worth intact, as shown by Sarah's depression when faced with the injustice of every slave's life before she begins to actively protest slavery. Kidd brings to light not just the terrible effects of slavery on everyone involved, but also the importance of resisting and overcoming

slavery in order for all people to achieve and maintain self-respect.



BELONGING AND RELIGION

As *The Invention of Wings* follows Sarah and Handful's lives, it also explores the places that these two women search for belonging. Sarah's journey for true belonging in adulthood closely follows her search for a religion that upholds all of her principles and values. Rejecting the Anglican beliefs of her family, Sarah follows first Presbyterianism and finally Quakerism as she attempts to find a religion that satisfies her spiritual needs as well as her belief that religion must do more than uphold social structures that harm slaves and women. Yet though Sarah identifies strongly with Quaker theology, she cannot fully belong to this community without rejecting her own Southern heritage or her feminist concerns. Eventually, Sarah learns that a religious community cannot (and perhaps should not) overshadow one's own personal faith. For her part, Handful finds spiritual belonging in the Fon traditions of her mother, rather than the Anglican church of her white masters or African churches that offers freedom to slaves. By staying true to her roots, Handful too finds a personal faith that is more important than belonging to a faith community.

Beyond religious belonging, Kidd also considers belonging in terms of family and social class. Handful is nominally a member of the Grimké family, though as a slave she receives none of the social benefits that the Grimké name carries. Sarah, though a blood member of the Grimké family, feels incredibly out of place in the high-class planter society that the Grimkés are a part of. Both Handful and Sarah must search outside the definitions of blood family in order to find their own families to belong to. Handful forms a family with the other slaves at the Grimké house after her mother disappears, and then accepts her half-sister Sky and Sky's father Denmark Vesey as full members of her own family when her mother returns. Sarah forms a small family within the Grimké line with her sister and godchild, Nina, to the point where Nina calls Sarah "mother" for much of Nina's childhood. Sarah must accept that, though she will always feel an affinity for Charleston as her birth place, she and Nina truly belong in the North where they can fight freely for abolition. Meanwhile, Handful and Sky too leave their slave community in order to find a place in the North where they can live as free black citizens. The family that each woman has formed as the novel developed helps them belong securely in these new homes.



SYMBOLS

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



SARAH'S SILVER BUTTON

As a young girl, Sarah decides to use a **silver button** as a symbol of her dream to become a jurist,

despite the impossibility of a woman having such a career in this time period. Sarah wants to be a jurist so that she can influence laws that will improve conditions for slaves. When Sarah's father tells Sarah that this dream will never come true, Sarah throws the button in the fire, showing how she has given up on her ambitions. Yet Handful saves the button from the ashes, stating that the support of other female friends is necessary for any woman to succeed. Handful gives the button back to Sarah at her lowest moment, reminding Sarah of her once passionate ideals and giving her the strength to continue fighting for equality.

Sarah keeps the button hidden for many years, as she is not yet ready to admit her radical ambitions to the world. When Sarah lives in Philadelphia and decides to become a Quaker minister, Sarah finally openly wears the button to show her brave commitment to abolition and racial equality. The presence of the button keeps Sarah from giving up on her goal to help the slaves by taking the easy road of marrying a Quaker gentleman, and it gives Sarah courage when she faces her fears and gives public lectures about the evils of slavery. Though Sarah never becomes a jurist, the silver button keeps her on a path towards working for equality for all people.



RED THREAD

Handful first steals **red thread** from Sarah as a young girl, in a small rebellion against the many

limits on her life as a slave. From then on, red thread becomes the symbol of the revolutionary spirit of the slaves. Handful continues to steal it, evoking the way that every moment of rebellion must be "stolen" from the white masters who own the slaves. Handful also makes the red thread stand for the literal spirits of the slaves, by wrapping a tree in red thread to make it a "spirit tree" that will keep her soul and her mother's soul safe no matter what harm comes to their bodies. Thread also allows Charlotte and Handful to sew, working on their **quilts** as their method of telling their own stories. With the red thread, Charlotte and Handful can control some aspect of their lives in a world that otherwise takes all agency away from slaves. The bright red color hints towards the incredible passion and vibrancy of Handful and Charlotte's spirits.

By the end of the novel, Handful uses red thread to remind herself that slaves are every bit as human and worthy as white people. She marks Denmark Vesey's grave with red thread after he is executed for planning a slave revolt. When Sarah comes back for the last time to help Handful and Sky escape North, Handful compares Sarah's hair to red thread as a way to show that Sarah truly understands the spirit and equality of slaves.



CHARLOTTE'S QUILT AND BLACK TRIANGLES

Charlotte is the seamstress for the Grimkés, but she also uses sewing to assert her own autonomy. Charlotte sews a **story quilt** that tells the experiences of her life as a slave. This quilt gives Charlotte a voice in a world that constantly tries to silence slaves and women (and particularly female slaves). Using this quilt, Charlotte can take back some agency to share her specific perspective no matter what other people may say about the proper place of Black women. The quilt gives Charlotte hope to keep fighting for a better life, and later gives Handful the same inspiration when Charlotte disappears. Handful finishes the quilt for her mother, completing the story that Charlotte wants to tell that teaches Handful about her own background and history. Handful takes strength from the quilt to continue rebelling against slavery the way her mother did.

A prominent feature of the quilt's design is black triangles, which stand for blackbird wings. The wings symbolize Charlotte and Handful's desire to fly free from the boundaries of their lives as slaves. The imagery of freedom as blackbird wings follows through the novel at each turn when Handful confronts the limits placed on her life. Handful covers the quilt she sews for Denmark Vesey with black triangle wings to symbolize the hope she places in the slave revolt to reach freedom. Yet the revolt fails and Handful imagines that the birds have died the next time she sees the quilt. Still, Handful keeps her hope for freedom alive and continues to sew black triangles on quilts, adding more to her mother's quilt when Charlotte returns. Though Charlotte passes on before reaching freedom, Handful and Sky take Charlotte's quilt, with all the black triangles on it, to the North when they escape to freedom.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *The Invention of Wings* published in 2015.

Part 1 Quotes

☞ I was shrewd like mauma. Even at ten I knew this story about people flying was pure malarkey. We weren't some special people who lost our magic. We were slave people, and we weren't going anywhere. It was later I saw what she meant. We could fly all right, but it wasn't any magic to it.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), Charlotte Grimké (Mauma)

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Charlotte tells Handful a legend about their ancestors who had wings in Africa, but lost those wings when they came to America. Handful always knew that this story wasn't strictly true, but she did not fully understand the metaphorical meaning behind this story until she was an adult. Kidd uses flight as a symbol for freedom, the ability to make one's own choices for his or her life. Handful's ancestors had this ability, but lost their autonomy when they were forced into slavery in the United States. It seems as though Handful and her family's lives are hopeless, with no chance of ever getting their freedom back or even leaving the house where they are slaves. Yet as Handful grows, she sees the ways that she and her mother can still resist their treatment. Handful knows that she and her family can still fly, by choosing never to let go of their own self-worth in the face of oppression. Calling back to the title, Handful needs to "invent" her wings—that is, find ways to take back her freedom by asserting herself and her personhood to the world.

☞ Don't let her fall anymore. That's the prayer I said. Missus told us God listened to everybody, even a slave got a piece of God's ear. I carried a picture of God in my head, a white man, bearing a stick like missus or going round dodging slaves the way master Grimké did, acting like he'd sired a world where they don't exist. I couldn't see him lifting a finger to help.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), John Grimké (Father), Mary Grimké (Mother / Missus), Charlotte Grimké (Mauma)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

After Charlotte is caught with a piece of stolen green silk, she is forced to spend an hour with her leg tied up in such a way that if Charlotte drops her leg, a rope will choke her. This cruel punishment takes place in the yard, in full view of all the other slaves – including Charlotte's daughter Handful. Handful watches her mother in horror and winces when Charlotte falls, as Kidd once again zeroes in on the true pain of life as a slave. Yet Handful seems to have

accepted this pain to some extent, seeking only to minimize her mother's distress instead of wishing it away completely. Rather than praying to God that Charlotte's punishment would be ended early, or that the white masters would have compassion, Handful simply prays that Charlotte will not fall again.

Aside from increasing the pathos of Charlotte's punishment, Handful's prayer also points to the ways that the white slave holders use religion to uphold their way of life. Handful recognizes that the white masters care very little for the slaves' welfare, and she assumes that their white God cares just as little. White ministers often use the Bible to admonish the slaves to be obedient, ignoring any injustice that the slaves might suffer in the process. Handful knows that white people will never admit that she exists as a person, much less offer her compassion or mercy. Any help that Handful needs, she will have to demand for herself.

☞ People say love gets fouled by a difference big as ours. I didn't know for sure whether Miss Sarah's feelings came from love or guilt. I didn't know whether mine came from love or a need to be safe. She loved me and pitied me. And I loved her and used her. It never was a simple thing. That day, our hearts were Pure as they ever would get.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), Sarah Grimké

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Handful acknowledges the complex levels of the friendship she shares with Sarah. Sarah legally owns Handful, introducing a power dynamic where Handful can never be Sarah's equal and they cannot have a traditional friendship with degrees of give and take. Sarah might be motivated by guilt to treat Handful better than she would really like to, as offering kindness to Handful allows Sarah to assuage her conscience at her family's part in the horrific lives that slaves often lead. And for her part, Handful might be staying close to Sarah for the advantages that Sarah can give Handful in the house, rather than real affection for Sarah. Sarah's position as a white woman can shield Handful from the worst punishments of the other Grimké women and can give Handful access to beautiful things that Handful would never otherwise have seen. Though Handful knows there are mitigating factors in the bond between herself and

Sarah, she still believes that there is a pure foundation to their relationship. As children, Sarah and Handful can connect on a “pure” level that they will never be able to reach as adult women.

“...I remembered the oath I’d made to help Hetty become free, a promise impossible to fulfill and one that continued to cause me no end of guilt, but it suddenly rang clear in me for the first time: Charlotte said I should help Hetty get free any way I could. Turning, I watched her carry the lantern to my dressing table, light swilling about her feet. When she set it down, I said, “Hetty, shall I teach you to read?”

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker), Charlotte Grimké (Mauma), Hetty Handful Grimké

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Sarah previously promised Handful’s mother, Charlotte, that she would help free Handful someday, even though her first attempt to emancipate Handful failed. Sarah remembers this oath many times as she grows closer to Handful, but is unable to think of anything to help Handful until she opens up her own definition of “freedom.” Sarah still cannot legally or physically free Handful from a life of slavery, yet Sarah *can* give Handful the necessary tools to free Handful’s mind from slavery-imposed ignorance. Sarah knows that teaching any slave to read is a rebellious act, having already been chastised for teaching the slave children the alphabet at Sunday School. The ability to read (and write) give slaves the opportunity to broaden their world beyond the plantation or house where they work, and also negates the argument that slaves deserve their position because they are not as intelligent as their white masters. Teaching Handful to read is one step closer to helping Handful free herself, just as important an act in the long run as freeing Handful in body alone.

“Every girl comes into the world with varying degrees of ambition,” she said, “even if it’s only the hope of not belonging body and soul to her husband. I was a girl once, believe it or not.” She seemed a stranger, a woman without all the wounds and armature the years bring... “The truth,” she said, “is that every girl must have ambition knocked out of her for her own good. You are unusual only in your determination to fight what is inevitable. You resisted and so it came to this, to being broken like a horse.”

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké, Mary Grimké (Mother / Missus) (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Sarah confesses her true desire to be a jurist, but her family just laughs and completely rejects this dream. When Sarah goes to her room, Mother follows to give some comfort, though Mother’s advice is decidedly not what Sarah wants to hear. This is Sarah’s first experience of how deeply the inequalities between men and women run in Southern society. Mother makes it very clear to Sarah that the only feasible path for her future is becoming a wife and mother. Anything else will only lead to more pain, as Sarah’s headstrong spirit will inevitably be broken by society’s rules. Sarah thinks that she and her mother are nothing alike, and that her mother only ever wanted to be a homemaker. Yet Mother actually identifies with Sarah’s lost ambitions, admitting that she too had big dreams as a young girl. In becoming a respectable member of adult society in Charleston, Mother had to let go of any sense of self. Mother suggests that even the idea of not belonging completely to one’s husband is a foolish dream for a woman, as power belongs completely and irrevocably to men. In some sense, women in the high society South were property in the same way that slaves were, though these white women obviously had far more comfortable lives.

Part 2 Quotes

☞ Night after night, I endured these grand affairs alone, revolted by what *objets d'art* we were and contemptuous of how hollow society had turned out to be, and yet inexplicably, I was filled with a yearning to be one of them.

The slaves moved among us... without being seen, and I thought how odd it was that no one ever spoke of them, how the word *slavery* was not suitable in polite company, but referred to as *the peculiar institution*.

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Once Sarah comes of age to join society, she is forced to go to dances and balls at the houses of all the elite families of Charleston. Sarah compares the other women to *objets d'art*, French for art objects, pointing out how no one expects these women to do anything more with their lives than look beautiful. Sarah feels out of place at the party, marked by her ambition to be more than an empty-headed pretty face. Yet critical as Sarah is of the limits on women's lives, she still has a twisted desire to be one of these effortlessly beautiful women. Sarah can see how much easier her life would be if she were content to find a husband and live out her days as a committed wife and mother.

Sarah is also marked out by her insistence on speaking about the injustices she sees in society. The role of women is one thing that society in Charleston refuses to talk about, but the bigger issue couched in silence is that of slavery. Sarah describes how "polite" society can't even say the word "slavery," even though all of their wealth and privilege is due to the slaves that work their land. Calling slavery "the peculiar institution" makes it into a curiosity that all Southerners happen to live with, rather than a monstrous practice that is essentially the foundation of their privilege. The taboo against talking about slavery also gives slavery more power, making it harder to imagine any other way to live in the South. It's easier for the white planter to ignore the injustice they live with every day when nobody speaks of it. Yet Sarah cannot ignore injustice, and therefore cannot live comfortably in Southern society.

☞ Goods and chattel... We were like the gold leaf mirror and the horse saddle. Not full-fledge people. I didn't believe this, never had believed it a day of my life, but if you listen to white folks long enough, some sad, beat-down part of you starts to wonder. All that pride about what we were worth left me then. For the first time, I felt the hurt and shame of just being who I was.

... When mauma saw my raw eyes, she said, "Ain't nobody can write down in a book what you worth."

Related Characters: Charlotte Grimké (Mauma), Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker)

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Handful sneaks into Master Grimké's library to find out the price to buy freedom for herself and her mother. Though she is initially pleased that their prices are relatively high, Handful later realizes that any monetary price at all far underestimates the worth of a human soul. Handful's shame and embarrassment at knowing her price is another example of the evils of slavery. The Grimké's slaves are even listed after the Grimké's other possession, as if the humans that they own are not even the most important objects in the Grimké's eyes. Though Handful rejects the idea that slaves are not as human as white people, it is hard for her to live surrounded by those ideas without feeling some of their effects. This psychological damage is yet another injury that slaves must bear, one that is perhaps even more harmful than the physical punishments that constantly threaten them. Handful is saved from falling into despair and depression by her mother's unshakeable faith in their worth as human beings. Charlotte never forgets the importance of resisting all the ways that slavery marks their lives, and tells Handful that her price can never be written down by anyone.

☞ She'd immersed herself in forbidden privileges, yes, but mostly in the belief she was worthy of those privileges. What she'd done was not a revolt, it was a baptism. I saw then what I hadn't seen before, that I was very good at despising slavery in the abstract, in the removed and anonymous masses, but in the concrete, intimate flesh of the girl beside me, I'd lost the ability to be repulsed by it. I'd grown comfortable with the particulars of evil.

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker), Hetty Handful Grimké

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 115



Explanation and Analysis

When the Grimké family returns a day earlier than expected from a month in Belmont, Sarah catches Handful taking a bath in Sarah's copper tub – a privilege a slave would never be allowed to take in the presence of white people. Sarah is at first angry, but later reflects on the event and calls Handful's bath a baptism, metaphorically giving Handful a new life where she is no longer a slave unworthy of comfort and riches. Handful is not planning a revolution at this point, a word that connotes punishing the white people for their poor treatment of Handful all her life. This bath is simply a way for Handful to assert her personhood, and her right to have all the things that white people have. Handful is not looking for black people to be superior to white people—she is just attempting to find a world where black people are treated as valuable and fully human.

At first Sarah cannot believe Handful's audacity at using her beautiful things, surprising even herself with her anger. Sarah had thought that she truly believed in equality between the races, a principle that should translate into Sarah happily allowing Handful to share in all of her own fine things. Yet Sarah has not fully escaped the influence of society, surrounded by people who consistently perpetuate the idea that black slaves are naturally inferior to white people. Kidd recognizes how easily people can fall back on the bad ideologies of their family and childhood, even if – like Sarah – they rationally know that these principles are wrong. Living with slavery every day, it is all too easy for Sarah to simply accept this institution as the way the world is. Sarah has to put in effort day after day to free her mind from the worldview of slavery, so that she can work to free the slaves from their own chains.

☞ With the reverend praying a long, earnest prayer for our souls, I took my leap. I vowed I would not return to society. I would not marry, I would never marry. Let them say what they would, I would give myself to God.

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 143


Explanation and Analysis

After years of struggling to fit in to society's rules for proper womanly behavior, Sarah is finally burned too badly by a fake engagement with Burke Williams. After Burke's lies are revealed, Sarah retreats from the society parties where she was meant to find a husband. Her mother and sisters encourage her to continue going to these events, but Sarah chooses to spend her time out of the house at religious lectures and readings. Sarah here makes the momentous decision that she will reject the societal role of women completely. Sarah has turned an important corner, as rejecting marriage is already a scandalous decision for a woman of her stature. Becoming a spinster is a failure in her family's eyes, but it is a huge victory for Sarah personally. Though she is not yet arguing for complete equality for women, she now sees how society's boundaries for women can be avoided. Sarah can no longer look for belonging in her family or the other rich men and women of Charleston. Sarah must create a new place where she belongs.

☞ There were ten good-size squares. I spread them out cross the frame. The colors she'd used outdid God and the rainbow. Reds, purples, oranges, pinks, yellows, blacks, and browns. They hit my ears more than my eyes. They sounded like she was laughing and crying in the same breath. It was the finest work ever to come from mauma's hands.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), Charlotte Grimké (Mauma)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis



After Handful's mother disappears, Handful goes against her mother's wishes and looks at the quilt that Charlotte has been sewing for two years. This quilt is Charlotte's finest work as a seamstress, not just for the techniques and skill used in the applique, but for the story that the quilt tells. No matter how many wonderful things Charlotte sews for the Grimkés, her finest work will always be this quilt that she sewed for herself. Handful describes the vitality and life that the quilt encompasses, explaining how it involves more senses than just her eyes with the colors that leap off the

fabric. Charlotte's life has been hard, and there are scenes of brutal physical and emotional pain told on those quilt squares. But Charlotte's indomitable spirit turns that anguish into something beautiful. Though there is intense pain, like Charlotte crying, there is also intense joy, like Charlotte laughing. The quilt is a way for Charlotte to take control of her life, asserting that she has a perspective on these struggles and triumphs that deserves to be told.

Part 3 Quotes

☝ "Forgive you for what, Sarah? For following your conscience? Do you think I don't abhor slavery as you do? Do you think I don't know it was greed that kept me from following my conscience as you have? The plantation, the house, our entire way of life depended on the slaves." His face contorted and he clutched at his side a moment before going on. "Or should I forgive you for wanting to give natural expression to your intellect? You were smarter than even Thomas or John, but you're female, another cruelty I was helpless to change."

Related Characters: John Grimké (Father), Sarah Grimké (speaker)

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Sarah goes north with Father in an attempt to improve his health, but Father admits that he never expected to return to Charleston. On his deathbed, Father admits that he always agreed with Sarah's beliefs about the injustices committed against slaves as well as the injustices against white women, but he felt unable to do anything to help. For Father, these issues were too big for any one person to affect. Father is not strong enough to give up his privileged life in order to fight for what is right. And while Father certainly could not have changed Sarah's femaleness, he could have decided to support Sarah's desire to express her intellect anyway. Instead of risking his status, money, or safety in society, Father decided to stay silent his entire life. If Sarah wants to avoid the same fate – and even the same wasting disease that takes her father's life – she must gather the courage to boldly speak out against the cruelties of racism and sexism in her life.

☝ The axe didn't fall on me. Didn't my Lord deliver Handful? The axe didn't fall on Goodis either, and I felt surprise over the relief this caused me. But there was no God in any of it. Nothing but the four of them standing there, and Mariah, still on her knees. I couldn't bear to look at Tomfry with the hat squashed under his arm. Prince and Eli, studying the ground. Binah, holding her paper fan, staring at Phoebe. A daughter she'd never see again.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), Phoebe, Binah, Goodis

Related Themes:  


Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

After the death of Master Grimké, some of the slaves are sold as per the directions in Master Grimké's will. Handful describes the feelings of relief she has that she was not sold, mixed with the heartache that she feels for the other slaves that are being sent from their home. The slaves are treated in some ways as "part of the family," as they are given the Grimké name and spend every day contributing to the Grimké household. Even more than that, the slaves that belong to a particular white family form a sort of family with each other. Handful does not particularly like some of her fellow slaves, but still can't bear to think of Tomfry or Mariah leaving for good. Even the slaves' blood families are subject to the whims of their masters. Mother and daughter, like Binah and Phoebe, can be separated for life with no way to fight against this cruelty. Handful is aware of these risks, especially after the disappearance of her own mother, yet she cannot stop herself from growing close to Goodis. Their friendship is a source of comfort to Handful, yet is edged with pain at the idea that Goodis could be taken from her at any moment. This moment highlight another source of pain for slaves, as well as the importance of belonging to a family.

☝ How does one know the voice is God's? I believed the voice bidding me to go north belonged to him, though perhaps what I really heard that day was my own impulse to freedom. Perhaps it was my own voice. Does it matter?

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

Sarah's religious fervor and her focus on the beliefs of the Quaker religion eventually lead her to hear a "Voice" telling her to "Go North," despite the impracticality of doing so as an unmarried woman. Sarah at first wrestles with this pronouncement, uncertain if she should take on the risk and the scandal involved in traveling alone. Yet the more she thinks about it, the more she decides that this is something that she must do no matter the potential consequences. Sarah has spent significant portions of her life searching for a religion that she can belong to, rejecting the Anglican faith of her family because of the Anglican support of slavery, and rejecting the Presbyterian faith for its limits on women. Quakerism's radical ties to abolition and the possibility of female ministers calls deeply to Sarah. Yet in the end, Kidd asserts that Sarah does not need to find a religion that fits her beliefs—Sarah instead just needs to find the strength to follow her own principles and passions. This voice telling her to go north might be God's or it might be Sarah's own subconscious. Either way, Sarah has to follow her heart in order to find a fulfilling life and fight for her principles.

rebellion and the Book create a place where slaves can come together as people who will receive the same rights as any white person.

Yet while the community of believers promises to free the slaves, it ignores the further oppression of women. Handful is not allowed to sign the book because she is female. Though women like Handful and Denmark's wife, Susan, contribute just as much to the rebellion efforts – providing food and even stealing arms for the men – their actions are not recognized publically the way the men are. Handful is just as committed to Denmark's vision of freedom as any of the men are, ready to sign her name in blood or risk her life to obtain a bullet mold. The slave movement is a huge step forward for racial equality, but Kidd does not lose sight of the ways that Denmark's revolution still needs to address gender equality.

☝ "I drew myself up, glaring at their angry faces. "...What would you have the slaves do?" I cried. "... If we don't free them, they will free themselves by whatever means."

Part 4 Quotes

☝ "The Lord has spoken to me," he cried out. "He said, set my people free. When your name is written in the Book, you're one of us and you're one of God's, and we'll take our freedom when God says, Let not your heart be troubled. Neither let it be afraid. You believe in God, believe also in me..." ...My name wasn't in the book, just the men's, but I would've put it in there if I could. I would've written it in blood.

Related Characters: Denmark Vesey, Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 224-225

Explanation and Analysis

As Denmark Vesey's slave revolt gains more followers, Denmark uses biblical rhetoric to help sway potential converts to their side. He justifies any insecurities that slaves might have about rising up against the "natural order" of black inferiority that is pushed in the Anglican Church. Denmark builds a community of the slaves by having them write their names in a Book, echoing the "Book of Life" that holds the name of all those who are saved in the biblical book of Revelation. The call to action, "You believe in God, believe also in me," quotes Jesus Christ, comparing Denmark to a savior for this oppressed people. The

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 253-254

Explanation and Analysis

When Sarah returns to Charleston, her Quaker clothing makes her the target for many white citizens who are nervous about the rumors of slave revolt. As the Quakers are known for being staunch abolitionists, other white Charlestonians accuse Sarah of helping the slaves rise up against their masters. Sarah, for once, does not stay silent in order to protect her place in the status quo of society. Though she still has her stammer, evidenced by the ellipses in her speech, Sarah fights against her speech impediment to speak up for the slaves' right to be free. She is not in favor of the potential violence that a slave revolt could bring, but she brings up the important question of what other options the slaves have after years of oppression at the hands of white citizens. Sarah's questions refuse to let the white citizens act like victims; they created the circumstances that now force the slaves to use "whatever means" to achieve freedom.


Sarah outburst also works towards true racial equality. Sarah specifically points out that the slaves can free themselves, recognizing that black people are not helpless

without a white savior to come and free them. True equality means more than freeing the slaves; it means allowing black people to assert themselves in their freedom. Sarah's belief in equality means that she has to recognize black people's right to free themselves even when she may be uncomfortable with their methods.

☞ The edict from the judges said we couldn't cry, or say his name, or do anything to mark him, but I took a little piece of red thread from my neck pouch and tied it round one of the twigs on a low, dipping branch to mark the spot. Then I cried my tears and said his name.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), Denmark Vesey

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

After Denmark's slave revolt is crushed, Charleston officials hang Denmark in a secret location and pass an order that prohibits mourning Denmark in any way. Handful ignores these warnings and follows Denmark's wagon from his holding cell in the Work House to a field, where she is the only one to witness Denmark's execution. Though she knows the risks, Handful cannot let Denmark's grave go unmarked. No matter his "crimes," Denmark is still a person who deserves to have a memorial for his death. Handful effectively breaks the silence that Charleston officials used to ignore and shame the slaves who wanted to revolt. Handful marks the grave site with red thread, which Kidd has used throughout the novel to symbolize Handful's spirit and desire for freedom. Handful also deserves the chance to mourn this loss of the dream of freedom. Denmark gave hope to so many slaves that their bondage might end soon, and offered them practical ways to resist their treatment. With Denmark gone, resistance against slavery is a much harder prospect. The red thread shows that Handful is still committed to the dream of freedom despite this heavy blow.

Part 5 Quotes

☞ Mauma's back... She has scars and a full head of white hair and looks old as Methusal, but she's the same inside. I nurse her day and night. She brought my sister with her named Sky. I know that's some name. It comes from mauma and her longings. She always said one day we'd fly like blackbirds.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), Sky, Charlotte Grimké (Mauma)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

Charlotte returns to the Grimké house after 13 years with a half-sister that Handful has never met. Handful writes a letter to Sarah describing these developments. Charlotte has been wounded in many ways by life on the plantation where she was forced to live. Handful sees all the new physical scars left by the harsh punishments on the plantation, as well as noticing how Charlotte has been prematurely aged by her life as a slave. Kidd again details the hardships that slaves face and the incredible evil of this institution.

Yet though Charlotte has been hurt, she has not given up on the dream of freedom. Sky's name is the biggest indicator that Charlotte is still resisting her bonds as much as she can. Handful again remembers the legend about blackbirds that Charlotte told her as a little girl. In that legend, black people had wings – a metaphor for their freedom. Charlotte consistently has faith in a future where black people will fly once more, gaining their freedom back.

☞ "Life is arranged against us, Sarah. And it's brutally worse for Handful and her mother and sister. We're all yearning for a wedge of sky, aren't we? I suspect God plants these yearnings in us so we'll at least try and change the course of things. We must try, that's all."

Related Characters: Lucretia Mott (speaker), Sky, Charlotte Grimké (Mauma), Hetty Handful Grimké, Sarah Grimké

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 275


Explanation and Analysis

Sarah returns to Philadelphia and lives with Lucretia Mott, the only female minister in their Meeting of Quakers. Sarah and Lucretia become fast friends, such that Sarah trusts Lucretia enough to share Handful's letters with her. When Lucretia hears that Handful's mother, Charlotte, has returned as a slave in the Grimké house, Lucretia encourages Sarah to do something to help change Handful, Charlotte, and Sky's circumstances. Sarah is afraid of becoming a female minister, knowing that society will judge her for choosing a path beyond the normal female duties of wife and motherhood. Lucretia acknowledges the sexism that Sarah will face, but reminds Sarah that Charlotte, Handful, and Sky must confront both sexism and racism at every turn. Kidd again references the sky as a symbol for freedom, suggesting that Sarah longs for something more than marriage because it is her responsibility to fight for equality. Sarah has the chance to do more for all women, both white and black, by becoming a Quaker minister who publically speaks out against slavery.

☞ When autumn came, Lucretia and I attended the women's meeting at Arch Street where we found ourselves standing in a crowded vestibule beside Jane Bettelman, who glared pointedly at the *fleur de lis* button I'd sewed at the throat of my gray dress. Granted, the button was ornate and expensive, and it was large, the size of a brooch. I'd freshly polished the silver, so there in the bright-lit atrium, it was shining like a small sun.

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker), Jane Bettelman, Lucretia Mott

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

As Sarah works toward becoming a Quaker minister, she begins to wear her silver button publically despite the Quaker distaste for flashy dress and signs of opulent material wealth. It calls back to Sarah's childhood as a rich, slave holder's daughter – a past that keeps Sarah from belonging completely to her new Quaker community. No matter how committed Sarah is to the principles of the Quaker faith, there will still be people who question her loyalty to the Quakers on the grounds of her appearance. While it would be easier for Sarah to fit into this community and abide by their standards, Sarah refuses to be cowed by

other's judgment. Sarah stays true to herself and her principles, polishing the button until it shines.

Though Sarah's button upsets other Quakers, it is actually the biggest symbol of Sarah's Quaker faith. As a young girl, Sarah decided to use the silver button as a symbol of her desire to become a jurist and work to legally end slavery. After a career in law is proven to be impossible for a woman, Sarah becomes a Quaker in order to fight against slavery. Sarah's position as a female minister is one of the few places that women could actually speak out publically. Sarah's button is a proud symbol of the real actions that Sarah can finally take towards convincing more people to the abolitionist cause and improving the lives of slaves.

Part 6 Quotes

☞☞ “Course, you're tired. You worked hard your whole life. That's all you did was work.”

“Don't you remember me for that. Don't you remember I'm a slave and work hard. When you think of me, you say, she never did belong to those people. She never belong to nobody but herself.”

Related Characters: Charlotte Grimké (Mauma), Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker)

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 303-304

Explanation and Analysis

Charlotte goes out to Handful's spirit tree to collect her spirit before letting go of the hard life she has led. Handful follows her to say one last goodbye to her mother. In that conversation, Handful acknowledges that Charlotte has every right to be tired after a lifetime of working to the bone for the Grimkés. Charlotte rejects that, however, wanting to be remembered for her rebellious spirit rather than her obedience or how well she held up in a life of drudgery. Charlotte's spirit always belonged to herself, even when her body was the property of a white man or woman. That spirit is what truly counts, as Charlotte shows Handful how to maintain resistance to slavery despite all consequences. Charlotte's faith that slaves are fundamentally worthy of freedom inspires Handful to keep working towards her own escape. Charlotte's legacy is not the legacy of a slave who was bound all her life; it is the legacy of a woman who never gave in to the bonds that others tried to force on her.

☛ She was braver than I, she always had been. I cared too much for the opinion of others, she cared not a whit. I was cautious, she was brash. I was a thinker, she was a doer. I kindled fires, she spread them. And right then and ever after, I saw how cunning the Fates had been. Nina was one wing, I was the other.

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker), Angelina (Nina) Grimké

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

When Nina is caught writing inflammatory letters for the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, Sarah and Nina are told to recant their radical views in order to remain a part of the Quaker meeting in Philadelphia. With Sarah's support, Nina refuses to take back the letter. Sarah explains how well the two sisters work together, complementing each other's strengths as activists. Sarah is the brain, cautiously thinking through every plan. Nina is the heart, passionately pursuing abolition at all costs. Sarah furthermore compares them to two wings on a bird, bringing in the bird imagery that Handful has used throughout the book to stand for freedom. Sarah and Nina too need to find freedom, as women who are told to keep their opinions to themselves in order to preserve their place in polite society. Nina, braver (or at least less cautious) than Sarah, shows how each subsequent generation can work towards a more progressive and equal society. Together, Nina and Sarah can fly above those critics, and hopefully help slaves gain wings as well – that is, help the slaves reach freedom and equality.

☛ We'd set down every argument the South made for slavery and refuted them all. I didn't stutter on the page. It was an ecstasy to write without hesitation, to write everything hidden inside of me, to write with the sort of audacity I wouldn't have found in person.

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker), Angelina (Nina) Grimké

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 317

Explanation and Analysis

When Nina and Sarah are forced to leave the Quakers in

Philadelphia, they hole up in the attic of two of the black members of the Quaker community. With nothing else to do, Nina suggests that they write a letter to Southern women and clergy defending the cause of abolition. Sarah comes alive with this idea, finally able to fully speak her mind on the evils of slavery. The written word gives Sarah the freedom to say everything that she stutters and stumbles over in person. Whereas her family laughs off Sarah's ideas about freeing slaves, and the other high-society Charleston elite look at Sarah as a strange failure of a woman because she never married, Sarah can truly come into her own as a writer. On the page, Sarah's female identity does not get in the way of her serious intellectual mind. Sarah herself can let go of the judgement that she expects from others when she is writing and focus on the truth of what she is fighting for.

☛ "How can you ask us to go back to our parlors?" I said, rising to my feet. "To turn our backs on ourselves and on our own sex? We don't wish the movement to split...but we can do little for the slave as long as we're under the feet of men. Do what you have to do, censure us, withdraw your support, we'll press on anyway. Now, sirs, kindly take your feet off our necks."

Related Characters: Sarah Grimké (speaker), Angelina (Nina) Grimké

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 334

Explanation and Analysis



As Nina and Sarah become more famous in the abolitionist lecture circuit, they draw the attention and criticism of people who do not think that women should speak in public. These concerns about the role of women threaten to overshadow the plight of the slaves, leading some of the leaders of the anti-slavery society to ask Sarah and Nina to step back from giving public lectures so that the more conservative members of the anti-slavery society will not split into another group that bans women. Sarah staunchly refuses, on the grounds that women can do more to help slaves when women themselves are not silenced. Sarah furthermore exposes the hypocrisy of the leaders of the anti-slavery society, who profess to believe in the equality of all people but act in ways that suggest that women are inferior to men. Sarah and Nina are just as intelligent as the male orators, and should be allowed to share their passionate rhetoric against slavery. Further, the sisters are

actually more able than some men to argue against slavery due to their childhood surrounded by the evil practice. Kidd addresses how sexism and racism can (and should) be fought simultaneously, as no form of oppression stands entirely on its own.

☛ Small red wafers splotted along Mary's neck. "God has ordained that we take care of them," she said, flustered now, spluttering.

I took a step toward her, my outrage breaking open. "You speak as if God was white and Southern! As if we somehow owned his image. You speak like a fool. The Negro is not some other kind of creature than we are. Whiteness is not sacred, Mary! It can't go on defining everything."

Related Characters: Mary Grimké (Little Missus / Mary Jr.) (speaker), Sarah Grimké

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 351

Explanation and Analysis


When Sarah returns to ask Mother for Handful and Sky's freedom, Mary Jr. takes offense at Sarah's argument that slavery is wrong. The Anglican religion argues that slaves are naturally inferior to white people, and that it is the duty of all good Christians to "take care" of the slaves for their own good. Sarah exposes this rhetoric for what it is: a justification of oppression that allows white people to continue exploiting the labor and lives of black people while maintaining their own sense of innocence and purity. Sarah's vehement denial that God is white and Southern echoes Handful's prayer to the "colored God" earlier in the novel. Handful saw God as white because the only contact with religion she had was the Anglican faith. Sarah now has experience the Quaker beliefs, learning that God is much larger than simply the vision of God that supports the white agenda in the South. Sarah, the most audacious she has ever been, opposes the idea that there is any qualitative difference between white people and black people and that white skin is not the ultimate sign of goodness. Sarah has been working towards speaking out for this radical equality throughout the entire novel, and she finally has the chance to do real good for the slaves of her family by helping Handful and Sky no matter what her mother or sister say.

☛ I watched her fold her few belongings on top of the quilt and thought, This ain't the same Sarah who left here. She had a firm look in her eye and her voice didn't dither and hesitate like it used to. She'd been boiled down to a good, strong broth.

Her hair was loose, dangling along the sides of her neck like silk vines, like the red threads I used to tie round the spirit tree, and I saw it then, the strange thing between us. Not love, is it? What is it? It was always there, a roundness in my chest, a pin cushion. It pricked and fastened.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), Sarah Grimké

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 355

Explanation and Analysis


When Handful decides that she and her half-sister, Sky, are running from the Grimké house for good, Sarah comes back to do whatever she can to make sure that Handful and Sky reach the North safely. Handful notices a marked difference in Sarah, now that Sarah has finally devoted her life to her passion for ending slavery. As a young child, the horror of slavery and her repressed feelings about it caused Sarah such psychological trauma that she stuttered and stammered as she tried to speak. Now Sarah can speak smoothly and clearly because she is honest and forthright about fighting for abolition. Speaking against slavery empowers Sarah just as it also helps the slaves that she advocates for.

Handful also compares Sarah's hair to red thread, which has symbolized Handful's strong spirit and desire for freedom. Now, the reference to red thread acknowledges how Sarah too sees Handful's incredible inner courage and will also fight to help those who are still enslaved reach freedom. At this moment, the bond between the two women is clearer than ever. Sarah and Handful have a deep, complex friendship that forms a solid foundation underneath all of the trials and troubles that they face throughout their lives. Like the stitches in the quilt that Handful sews, Sarah and Handful are bonded together in a way that slavery and injustice cannot break.

●● Sarah put her hand on my arm and left it there while the city heaved away. It was the last square on the quilt... I thought of mauma then, how her bones would always be here. People say don't look back, the past is past, but I would always look back... When we left the mouth of the harbor, the wind swelled and the veils round us flapped, and I heard the blackbird wings. We rode onto the shining water onto the far distance.

Related Characters: Hetty Handful Grimké (speaker), Charlotte Grimké (Mauma), Sarah Grimké

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

As the boat pulls away from the Charleston harbor and takes Handful and Sky towards freedom in the North, Sarah and Handful stand together at the rail and watch the city fade into the distance. Handful calls this moment “the last square of the quilt,” imagining that her journey out of slavery completes her mother’s story quilt. The last square of the quilt shows Handful and Sarah together, able to interact as equals at last. Throughout Charlotte’s life, Charlotte used her quilt to take back her life story from the white masters who try to silence Charlotte’s voice. Handful finally escapes a life of slavery and achieves Charlotte’s dream of a life where her voice is just as strong as anyone else’s voice. Handful keeps Charlotte’s legacy in mind as she moves into her future, keeping her mother’s memory alive. The book ends with the same image of blackbird wings from the blackbird legend in the first chapter. As Charlotte said in the beginning, the slaves did find their wings once again.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

PART 1: NOVEMBER 1803 - FEBRUARY 1805

Hetty Handful Grimké. The novel begins with Handful's "Mauma" (Charlotte), a slave, telling Handful (the narrator) that in Africa people used to be able to fly, but they lost their wings when they came to America. Handful knows this isn't true, but loves the story anyway. It is only when she grows older, she says, that she understands what her mother meant by telling her that she had wings.

Handful is often in trouble with Missus, the mother of the Grimké family (the white masters of Handful and her mother), because she has a bit of a sassy mouth. Though the Grimkés call her "Hetty," her true name Handful comes from her mother because she was so small at birth that she only filled one handful. Handful's mother Charlotte is the seamstress for the Grimkés, and desperately wants to work outside the house for actual pay – something that Missus won't allow.

Instead, Charlotte spends her rare spare time sewing quilts with **black triangles** that stand for wings. Handful helps Charlotte by finding feathers and other things in the yard to stuff the quilts, loving any chance she gets to wear her small thimble, which her mother gave her, when she helps sew.

When Handful works in the yard, she has to be as quiet as possible in order to avoid offending Missus. Noise is on the list of slave sins, under stealing, disobedience, and laziness. Handful gleefully indulges each of these sins whenever she gets a chance. Handful takes a few moments for herself to go watch the sea. But her time is interrupted when Missus calls for "Hetty." Handful goes inside, expecting a beating for some perceived mistake.

Kidd starts the novel with an image of freedom, in the wings that the slaves once had. The legend, besides relating to the novel's title, sets up Charlotte's focus on escaping slavery—that is, getting her wings back. Charlotte passes this legacy of resisting slavery to her daughter, another slave who will eventually have wings.



Handful's true name has two meanings: both Handful's small physical size, but also that she is a handful – hard for the Grimkés to handle or control. The Grimkés are clearly concerned with maintaining power over their slaves, refusing to let Charlotte get paid for her work so that Charlotte will remain dependent. Yet the fact that the Grimkés do not know about Handful's true name shows that the Grimkés may not have as much control as they think they do.



Charlotte's black triangles form wings, showing Charlotte's desire for flight and freedom. Handful is very close to her mother, with a strong bond that is built on sewing. Kidd sets up numerous similarities between Handful and Charlotte.



Handful clearly fears Missus, acknowledging Missus' rules and preparing for a beating when Missus calls her. Yet Handful still risks disobedience, even though she knows the possible consequences. Handful's life is a balancing act of rebelling for her mental sanity and keeping the rules for her physical safety.



Sarah Grimké. Sarah, now narrating, turns eleven and is given her own room for the first time. She is somewhat nervous to leave the nursery, though she is happy to get her own space in a family of ten children. Sarah is the lone bright redhead of the children, and Father's favorite, according to everyone. Sarah idolizes her father, a judge in the South Carolina court and a member of the elite South Carolina planter class. Sarah is more wary of her mother, a woman who rules the house, slaves, and children with a strict hand.

Sarah's earliest memory is of her brother Thomas teaching her to read simple words out in the yard, until the afternoon was interrupted by the whipping of a slave named Rosetta. Sarah is so distraught that she runs away all the way to the ship's wharf. Though Sarah is unhurt, she is left with a stutter that continues to afflict her now. Yet on her eleventh birthday, the stutter has been away for a couple months and Sarah dares to hope she is cured.

Handful. Aunt-Sister, the cook, takes Handful into the kitchen as the house prepares for Sarah's eleventh birthday party. Missus sweeps in and ties a lavender ribbon around Handful's neck. Handful worries that she is going to be sold, but Missus leads a scared Handful into the drawing room and presents Handful to Sarah as a present.

Sarah stammers that she can't accept Handful, making Missus so angry that she screams. Handful is so scared that she accidentally pees on the drawing room rug. Handful expects a slap, wondering if she should fake an epileptic fit the way Rosetta does to avoid punishment, but Aunt-Sister just takes Handful back to the kitchen.

Handful's Mauma comforts Handful as best she can, telling Handful the story of how their ancestors had wings. The next morning, Mauma gives Handful a **quilt** and tells Handful that she must now sleep outside Sarah's door. Mauma warns Handful never to leave her quilt for any reason except Sarah's bell at night, given how suspicious the Grimkés are of their house slaves.

Sarah is the privileged daughter of a slave-owning family, though she does not feel fully comfortable with her family. Different in both looks and personality, Sarah finds comfort with her father, though she should be more attached to her mother according to the social norms of her time and status. Especially in contrast to the close bond between Charlotte and Handful, Sarah's relationship with her own mother is an unhealthy mix of fear and judgment.



This memory reveals Sarah's two passions throughout her life: academic study and abolition. These desires are strange for a white Southern woman who traditionally should only be concerned with finding a husband and raising a family. Society judges Sarah for these interests, silencing her metaphorically just as Sarah's stutter silences her literally.



Missus treats Handful like an object, dressing her as she likes. The ribbon around Handful's neck marks her as an inanimate "present" rather than a person. As a slave, Handful clearly has no rights of her own.



Sarah wants to reject slavery, but is not yet strong enough or courageous enough to voice her opinions. Handful, for her part, is in a much worse and more frightening situation. Here, physical safety must take precedence over mental pride.



Though the book opened with the legend of wings, it takes on more significance here. Handful's humanity has been stripped down, as she was just given as a gift to another person. Charlotte reminds Handful that she will one day have freedom, if she can keep herself safe for now.



Sarah. Sarah wants to give Hetty back to Mother, but Mother just tells Sarah to make peace with their way of life. Sarah feels incredible pity for Hetty, remembering the girl's small size and scared face at the party. Sarah puts those thoughts aside to write apologies to all the guests for ruining the party by refusing her present. Though Sarah is not truly sorry, she writes the letters to try and remain in the good graces of society – already seeing how her unfeminine intellect and ambition marks her as an outcast in Charleston's upper class.

Looking out her window to the slave quarters, Sarah gets an idea. She sneaks out of her bedroom and goes into Father's library to get a piece of Father's legal paper. The library reminds Sarah of how much she wishes she could have a real education, instead of the female education that Madame Ruffin gives her each day. On the legal paper, Sarah writes a certificate of freedom for Hetty. Sarah leaves the certificate on Father's desk and goes to sleep dreaming of Hetty's happiness and Father's pride.

Sarah wakes the next morning with a burst of self-knowledge: she is going to become the first female jurist. Sarah cuts a beautiful **silver fleur-de-lis patterned button** off one of her dresses and puts the button in small box as a symbol of her commitment to this destiny, hoping that God will grant her this future. Yet Sarah's spirits fall when she leaves her room and sees Hetty's freedom certificate torn in two on the floor.

Handful. Handful is uncertain on her first day as Sarah's maid, and becomes convinced that Sarah hates her. Handful tries to start a fire in Sarah's fireplace but only succeeds in smoking out the house. Everyone runs out of the house, convinced it is on fire. Even neighbors come to try to ensure that the blaze won't spread.

When Sarah finally manages to explain that there is no fire, Missus rages and strikes Handful with her cane. Handful falls to the ground. Missus raises her hand to slap Handful, but Handful has a moment of clarity outside of all the commotion in the yard. Handful hears a voice telling her not to stay down, but to get up and look Missus in the face. Handful does, and Missus drops her arm and backs away. The rest of the day is spent airing out the linens as everyone but Sarah looks at Handful with disgust.

Sarah vaguely wants to fight against slavery, but her youth and gender means she is not taken seriously by her family. Sarah tries to fit in with society as best she can on the issue of slavery, both because her life of general comfort depends on it and for fear that her other atypical characteristics threaten her tenuous grasp on this privilege. Kidd already suggests that Sarah will one day have to reject society completely.



Kidd reflects on the unequal education between men and women as Sarah wishes that the law was an acceptable choice for a woman. Though Sarah is not supposed to appreciate law or education, she clearly has an intellectual mind that should not be stifled. Writing is a source of power for Sarah. Sarah feels that she can write Hetty free even if she is not allowed to speak out loud against slavery.



Sarah has chosen a life path for herself that will be difficult – even through her euphoria Sarah recognizes that there will be incredible opposition to a female in this position. Sarah will use the button to keep her commitment strong throughout the trials that await her. Opposition begins immediately as Sarah sees her first attempt at legal action has been rejected.



Sarah's reluctance at having a slave at all reads to Handful as a hatred of Handful in particular. Already, there is a complicated dynamic between the two girls who are forced into close daily proximity. Handful's nerves at this tense relationship contribute to her mistakes, including the fire.



Sarah's stammer again makes it hard for her to stand up for Handful. Handful starts to see that she must demand respect for herself if she is ever going to make her masters accept her fundamental rights as a person. When Handful is clear about her own self-worth, Missus cannot help but treat Handful more like a human being. Yet the institution of slavery means that Missus still has total power over Handful, creating more work for all the slaves.



Sarah. Sarah goes down to lunch after four days of taking meals in her room to protest owning Hetty. Mother asks cuttingly if Sarah found the ripped certificate of freedom. Sarah thinks of appealing to Father again, but gives up. She keeps her **silver button** as a reminder of what she will do some day.

Handful. Handful is still a terrible maid, but she enjoys the small freedoms she can sneak in the house, like staring from the window at the boats in the harbor. The blue water gives Handful a spiritual feeling and she sings verses to it at every chance. Handful misses sleeping and sewing with her mother and often wanders off to sleep with Charlotte in the slaves' quarters, though Charlotte warns her that this will cause trouble.

Sarah. Four months after Sarah is given Handful, Handful does not come in to Sarah's room in the morning. Sarah goes into the yard to look for "Hetty" and watches the slaves do their morning work. Sarah sees Charlotte gathering feathers and goes over to ask where Hetty is.

Before Sarah can stammer any words out, Charlotte shows Sarah a baby owl that Charlotte has been caring for. Sarah tells Charlotte that she tried to free Hetty but was not allowed. Charlotte tells Sarah that she just has to make it up to Hetty in the future. Sarah swears that she will free Hetty one day and goes back to her room. Hetty comes in ten minutes later, and Sarah reads aloud to her from *The Adventures of Telemachus*.

Sarah thinks obsessively about keeping her promise to free Hetty, and dreads seeing Charlotte again at her fitting for a new Easter dress. Charlotte asks if Sarah is going to keep her promise, but Sarah pretends that her stammer is too bad for her to give any answer.

Sarah's first protest of slavery is completely ineffective. Her mother is seemingly her biggest antagonist in terms of fighting for abolition. Still, Sarah is not yet going to give up, as she keeps the symbolic silver button.



Kidd shows the distinctions of urban slavery as opposed to plantation slavery. Handful has the chance to see what freedom might look like because she lives surrounded by free white people, which is both a blessing and a curse. Looking at the ocean nourishes Handful's soul, but also reminds her of her life in slavery. As a slave, Handful cannot even choose to sleep with her mother – much less go to the harbor when she wishes.



It is not clear whether Sarah looks for Handful out of concern for Handful herself, or concern that Handful is not doing her job. While Sarah may not have wanted Handful in the first place, Sarah quickly slips into her position of privilege and gets in the habit of using Handful as a maid.



*Charlotte's baby owl is another example of wings in the novel. As a baby, the owl needs help and nourishment to fly someday—just as Handful will probably need Sarah's help to ever reach freedom. This promise almost immediately affects Sarah's behavior. By reading to Handful, Sarah acknowledges Handful's intelligence and humanity—a subversive act in the culture of slavery. Sarah's book choice of *Telemachus*, the son of Odysseus who traveled with the goddess of wisdom in disguise, suggests that Handful will soon be on an educational journey of her own.*



Sarah is not yet ready to vocally support freedom for slaves. She hides behind her stammer, keeping herself silent and refusing to truly risk her privilege and power to help the slaves.



Handful. The Grimké ladies go to White Point to enjoy the new spring weather, and the slaves at home get ready to give the house a thorough scrubbing. Handful cleans the majority of Sarah's room, then takes a break and starts looking through Sarah's things. She is enchanted with Sarah's books and writing instruments, as well as Sarah's fine dresses. In the back of Sarah's wardrobe, Handful finds a box with a **silver button** inside. Glancing around to make sure no other slaves see her, Handful slips a spool of **red thread** into her pocket.

The Saturday before Easter, all the slaves are gathered in the dining room so that Tomfry, the butler, can investigate a recent theft. A bolt of green silk is gone, finery that Handful cannot even imagine. The slaves are all terrified of being sent to the Work House, a place of horrific punishments in town. Missus promises to be forgiving if the cloth is returned, but Handful is not so sure.

Handful sneaks to her mother's room the night after the cloth is stolen. Charlotte is angry and marches Handful back to the house. Master Grimké catches Charlotte in the house at night, and demands an explanation. Handful, hiding on the stairs, prays for her mother to think of some lie, but Missus comes out of her room before Charlotte can speak. Missus accuses Charlotte of stealing the cloth (because she is returning to the scene of the crime) and orders her maid Cindie and Aunt-Sister to search Charlotte's room.

Handful follows behind the search group, muttering curses no ten-year-old should know and gathering her courage to tell Missus that this was all her fault. Yet when Handful gets to her mother's room, she sees the bolt of green silk on top of Charlotte's quilt frame.

Handful stares enchanted at the beautiful silk while Missus lectures Charlotte about her theft. Missus tells Charlotte that the punishment will be at the house but delayed until after Easter, as Missus is compassionate. Missus leaves and Handful stays with her mother sobbing. Charlotte tells Handful that she isn't mad at her, just mad she got caught. Handful realizes her mother doesn't even want the cloth, she just had to take it to let out some of the pent up energy of living as a slave.

Again, the Grimkés take advantage of their slaves to feed their own privilege. As they play, the slaves work. Handful regards Sarah's fine things with jealousy, giving the silver button particular attention even though she doesn't know the significance the button has for Sarah. Handful decides to take something for herself, choosing red thread as a reflection of her revolutionary spirit.



Theft, which was Missus' most important slave sin, is clearly a big deal. The silk, which is green—the color of jealousy—represents the disparity between the slaves and their masters. Handful trusts nothing that Missus says, always ready for punishment.



Handful feels guilty for getting her mother caught, but still wants her mother to lie so that she herself won't get in trouble for leaving her quilt. Missus forces other slaves to do her dirty work, sending Cindie and Aunt-sister to search Charlotte's room instead of doing it herself. Rather than letting the slaves band together in solidarity against their poor treatment, Missus continually pits them against each other.



Handful has had to mature before her time, a loss of childhood that is yet another casualty of slavery. Handful is surprised to find that her mother was actually the thief, expecting another unfair accusation.



The silk captivates both Handful and Charlotte, offering a touch of beauty to an otherwise harsh life. Even Missus' so-called compassion is another example of mistreatment. Though Easter is a holiday centered on forgiving sins, Missus refuses to forgive Charlotte or show any kind of real "Christian" spirit at all. The punishment is inevitable, though delayed for Missus' own selfish enjoyment of the holiday.



Sarah. On Easter, the Grimkés go to the Episcopal Church. Sarah stammers to Mother that she is looking forward to giving her first lesson at the “Colored Sunday School.” Mary Jr., Sarah’s older sister, mocks Sarah’s stutter but Sarah tries to ignore the teasing. Sarah watches the slaves in the street enjoying the time to chat as they walk to church. Even Snow, the Grimké’s carriage driver, has taken advantage of the Grimké’s time at church to joy ride in the carriage.

The Grimkés get to church and make their way to their pew in the front, as befits their status in Charleston. Sarah looks up to the slave balcony, where the slaves are causing a hubbub. A shoe drops on a lady, knocking her unconscious, and Sarah hears one of the guards beat a slave. Reverend Hall begins his sermon, admonishing the slaves to be obedient to their masters. Sarah is unsure what to think, but a glance at her father’s blank face clarifies nothing.

Sarah goes to a small classroom to give the Sunday School lesson, surprised to find the kids playing in complete anarchy. Her sister Mary Jr. tells Sarah to just let them play, but Sarah gathers the children and begins to teach them the alphabet so that they have a chance of reading the Bible for themselves. The kids joyously join the song and Sarah happily conducts, not noticing Reverend Hall at the door. Reverend Hall asks Sarah what she thinks she is doing, as teaching slaves to read is against the law. Sarah finds this shameful, and stares Reverend Hall in the face in an echo of Hetty’s defiance of Mother.

Handful. The Monday after Easter, Aunt-Sister tells Charlotte that her punishment will be to have one leg tied up for an hour. Tomfry reluctantly ties Charlotte up as Missus watches from the window and the slaves huddle together in the yard. Handful can’t bring herself to look away. Charlotte falls, splitting the skin on her head, then gets up. Handful prays that her mother won’t fall again. Charlotte makes it through the hour without so much as a whimper and Handful thinks that maybe the “colored God” heard her pleas.

At the end of the hour, Tomfry and Aunt-Sister help Charlotte to her bed. Handful gives her water and tries to feed her small bites of food, but Charlotte can’t eat. Handful explains that her mother’s legs eventually recovered, but Charlotte’s spirit was never the same. That day, Charlotte truly began to hate.

Sarah again receives no support within her family, as her sister mocks her stutter and her mother ignores her interest in teaching. The Easter holiday gives the slaves a chance to enjoy themselves, whereas the Grimké family are supposed to piously attend church and better themselves. Though some white citizens take this as evidence that slaves are not properly religious, Kidd suggests that the slaves simply do not respect the Anglican religion that is used to justify their enslavement.



The Grimkés church attendance is an important part of their social life, but not necessarily a pure act of faith. The Anglican religion in general takes on a more social than religious aspect in Charleston. The Reverend uses sermons not to feed his congregation’s spiritual needs, but to keep the slaves in line. Sarah is upset by this, but has no way of knowing if church is truly supposed to be like this, or if her particular church is failing her spiritual needs.



Sarah truly wants to help the black children, imagining the enrichment that the children would get from reading the Bible. Though teaching Christianity is ostensibly the goal of a Sunday School, the Reverend’s anger makes it clear that the school is meant to teach obedience—or only Christianity for white people. Sarah has learned from Hetty how to have courage in the face of unjust punishment.



This painful scene highlights both the physical and emotional evils of slavery. Charlotte must undergo physical torture while Handful is subjected to the mental anguish of watching her mother suffer. Again, Missus keeps her own hands clean of violence, forcing other slaves to act in violent ways. Handful has so little faith in white people and their religious traditions that she imagines an entirely separate God for black people.



While the physical traumas of slavery may heal, the mental traumas are not so easily forgotten. Charlotte, with her newly burning hate, now has a renewed commitment toward reaching freedom by whatever means necessary. The Grimkés punish their slaves to ensure obedience, but it has produced the opposite effect in Charlotte.



Sarah. Sarah spends the day after Easter writing an apology to Reverend Hall for her disastrous Sunday School lesson. There is an unease about the house, which only grows worse when Sarah meets her older brother Thomas for a lesson. Sarah normally loves these educational sessions, but she cannot concentrate today. Thomas misreads Sarah's discomfort and thinks that Sarah has figured out that he doesn't actually want to be a lawyer. Thomas sighs that Sarah should be the lawyer so he can become a minister. Sarah is elated, thinking she has finally found an ally within her family. She promises to do anything to help Thomas study theology, though Father will hear none of it.

Sarah is again forced to write an apology that she does not mean, another example of Mother silencing Sarah's voice and opinions. Sarah would rather use writing for her own purposes, such as becoming a lawyer. Though Sarah feels that her life path is constrained, her brother Thomas also has little choice about his own future. The Grimké's social status seems to create as many problems for the Grimké children as it solves, as the privileges of their life do not outweigh the passions they must give up. But of course, none of these "problems" come even close to those faced by Handful or Charlotte.



Sarah still hasn't seen Hetty all day, so Sarah goes to the kitchen to find her. Normally the kitchen is full of song, which Mother takes as evidence that the slaves are happy. Yet today, it is silent until the slaves begin to murmur about Charlotte's poor state. Sarah flashes back to her memory of seeing a slave whipped and stumbles back through the house, frantically packing a basket with liniment oil, tea, and laudanum.

The slaves keep their true feelings secret from the Grimké's, another example of masters owning slaves in body but not in mind or spirit. Sarah does what she can to mitigate the effects of slavery, but has not yet been able to stop those horrors before they happen.



Mother stops Sarah in the corridor, but Sarah refuses to be stopped. Sarah pushes past her mother, ignoring the shrieks that she is forbidden to leave the house, and walks over to the slave's quarters. Sarah tells Mother that she is going to see about Charlotte, the words coming easily to Sarah for once. Sarah knows that her stammer is gone and walks confidently over to the slave's quarters.

Sarah has now gone against her family in order to stand up for her principles. As soon as Sarah is honest about what she thinks is right – namely better treatment of the slaves as human beings – she is able to speak free of a stutter. This suggests that Sarah's stutter is linked to a fundamental repression of her character.



Handful. That night Charlotte begins to have shaking fits, and then finally sleeps. Handful sleeps too, with strange dreams of flying and sleeping, then wakes to her mother's voice. Charlotte begins to tell a story about Handful's grandmother who first came to America from Africa. When Handful's grandmother got here, she was separated from her family and the stars fell from the sky. Grandmother made quilts using the applique of the Fon people, with **black triangles** for blackbird wings.

Handful is seemingly in tune with her mother's dream of freedom, having her own dreams of flight. The imagery of falling stars also plays into the novel's earlier flight imagery, as the stars' descent to earth is an unnatural reversal of their usual freedom in the sky. Charlotte seems to have also drawn inspiration to strive for a return to freedom from her mother (the way Handful draws inspiration from Charlotte), as grandmother was the first one to use the black triangles as a reminder of freedom.



Handful notices Sarah hiding outside the door, listening to the story too. Charlotte goes on, telling how Grandmother worked the fields and taught Charlotte everything she knew about **quilts**. Charlotte became the family's seamstress and Grandmother started up a "spirit tree," wrapping a tree with thread to give their souls a safe place to live. Grandmother told Charlotte to put leaves and twigs from the tree in a pouch at her neck so that she would always have a piece of her soul with her if she ever left this place.

Quilting gives Charlotte and Handful a way to express themselves and take control of their own stories. The spirit tree too offers a space where slaves can keep their true souls safe from the harmful effects of slavery. No matter what happens to their bodies, Handful and Charlotte's souls will never be enslaved. Sarah overhears this conversation, presumably influencing her view of slaves as well.



Grandmother died when Charlotte was sixteen, and Charlotte was sold to Master Grimké. In the Grimké plantation house, Charlotte met Shanney and married him. Missus brought Charlotte to the Charleston house, refusing to bring Shanney too, but Charlotte was already pregnant with Handful. Shanney died before Handful was a year old. At that point, Charlotte ends her story and goes back to sleep.

The next day, Handful tells Sarah that they appreciated her basket. Sarah puts her book down and hugs Handful. Handful knows that the love between her and Sarah is complicated by guilt and jealousy, but lets herself enjoy what pure love she can.

Sarah. That summer, Sarah asks Thomas to expand their private lessons, but Thomas tells her they have to stop the lessons completely. Sarah refuses to give up on her dreams of practicing law, however, and studies their father's law books by herself. In the mornings, Sarah reads to Hetty or plays string games with her or watches the ships at harbor. The two girls keep their growing friendship a secret.

Sarah reads [Don Quixote](#) to Hetty as Hetty, bored, scratches at mosquito bites. Hetty asks Sarah to tell her about specific words, so Sarah tries to read with more expression to draw Hetty's interest again. Sarah then notices an owl outside the window and remembers her oath to help Hetty become free. Sarah decides to start working on that goal by teaching Hetty to read.

Sarah prepares lessons for Hetty, locking her door and screening the keyhole to avoid any discovery. Hetty picks up the skills quickly, eager to learn and asking about countless words. Hetty practices writing her words with a stick in the yard, but Sarah warns her not to let anyone see. Hetty, annoyed at Sarah's tone, says that she always scrubs out the letters with her foot.

Another evil of slavery lies in the separation of families. Charlotte and Shanney's marriage is not legally official and the two can be easily taken away from each other. Due to slavery, Shanney never met his daughter and Handful never met her father.



The power imbalance inherent to slavery prevents Sarah and Handful from forming an easy friendship, though both girls desperately want to. Still, they are as loyal and kind to each other as possible.



Sarah's intelligence and perseverance are among her greatest assets. She is determined to achieve her ambitions despite all the obstacles put in front of women who want more than marriage and children. Sarah also maintains her commitment to Handful, keeping her passion for abolition in mind.



Sarah thinks that Handful needs the mental escape of a book, significantly reading from a book about a man who rejects society to follow his own moral code, but Handful clearly searches for something more fulfilling. The owl, the same owl that Charlotte nursed, is now able to fly by itself. Seeing it reminds Sarah of her promise, and strengthens her resolve.



Sarah is ready to defy societal convention (and the law) in order to teach Handful to read, but she is aware of the consequences that could arise if anyone else found out. Handful is much braver, willing to face any fallout that comes from practicing this important new skill.



Sarah and Hetty celebrate Hetty's 100th word with a tea on the roof of the Grimké's house. Hetty drinks quickly from the China cup while Sarah watches the Bastille Day festivities in the distant town center. Hetty starts to gather feathers from the roof and Sarah begins to spill every secret she has ever had, including the whipping memory that caused her speech impediment. Hoping to restore a cheerful mood, Sarah also tells Hetty about her dream of becoming a jurist and the **silver button** that she uses to remind herself of that dream.

Hetty admits that she has seen the **button**, and that she knows all about symbols like Missus' cane and her mother's thimble. Hetty even starts to tell stories about her family stories from Africa, their applique and their spirit tree. Hetty even admits that she stole a spool of **red thread** and that her real name is Handful.

Handful. Charlotte starts walking with a limp in front of Missus after the one-legged punishment, though the other slaves grumble about this ploy for sympathy. Charlotte also cleverly tricks Missus into clearing the whole cellar room for a sewing room by pretending she can no longer climb stairs. Charlotte makes the cellar room her personal haven, decorating with any pretty thing she can find. After Charlotte gets the room to her liking, she shows off her riches to the other slaves, making the grumbling even worse.

Handful loves her mother's new room because she can sneak to sleep with Charlotte without leaving the house. Yet Charlotte's sleep is more restless than ever and she carefully locks her door every chance she gets. Handful learns how to sew and helps her mother sew a new quilt covered in **black triangles**. Charlotte rebels in small ways whenever she can, botching sleeves or mis-sewing buttons to cause Missus as much embarrassment as possible. Handful even catches Charlotte breaking china whenever she is in a room alone, or putting dirt in the teapots. Handful warns Sarah about the tea, but otherwise says nothing.

A hurricane threatens to hit Charleston and the slaves ready the house and stables for the storm. The rain hits that night, and Handful sings to herself to distract from the floodwater and the wind. The cellar room floods, ruining all the work Charlotte did on her room. After they finish cleaning up the mud, Handful takes a stick writes a few words and signs her name "Hetty" in the yard. She smears it over with her toe.

While Sarah is focused on the novelty of being on the roof, Handful is just as enamored with the china cup. Though the distance between the two girls still exists, the roof is a place that feels above the oppressive circumstances of the normal world (at least for Sarah). Sarah is able to be honest and vulnerable in a way that she has never been with her family, and she even shares her biggest dream with Handful without fear of judgment. Sarah needs the support and friendship of strong women like Handful if she ever wants to succeed.



Handful understands symbolism, having learned that Missus' cane stands for Missus' control and the thimble stands for Charlotte's ability to sew her own stories. Though the African stories are an important part of Handful's identity, telling Sarah her real name is the most important step in showing Sarah her trust and cementing their friendship.



Charlotte uses physical weakness to gain time for herself. The other slaves see this as selfish, as any work that Charlotte cannot do will only worsen their burdens. Yet Charlotte continues to focus on personal freedom, carving out a space in the Grimké house that is hers alone to control.



Charlotte sews a quilt patterned with nothing but black triangles, showing how she has become focused on nothing but freedom. Though Charlotte's acts of rebellion may seem pointless, they are an important way for Charlotte to assert her agency and personhood in a life that tries to deny her that at every turn. Handful lets her mother take out her aggression on the Grimkés, but shows her friendship for Sarah by warning her about the worst of Charlotte's actions.



An act of nature destroys Charlotte's carefully chosen room, showing how the entire Southern culture seems arranged against black personhood. After the stress and disappointment of the storm, Handful takes back some control over her life by practicing her writing skills.



The yard dries out and Lucy, one of Mary's maids, notices Handful's writing in the yard. Lucy tells Mary and Handful knows that she has been caught. Her name is scored deep into the drying mud of the yard.

Lucy, a fellow slave, betrays Handful. Lucy has been Mary's slave for so long that she is now more loyal to Mary than she is to the other slaves, having internalized the worldview that upholds slavery itself.



Sarah. Two days later, Father calls Sarah in to see him in the library. Sarah nervously walks in to the library, trying to follow the nursery maid, Binah's advice to act brave. Father tells Sarah that she has gravely disappointed him by teaching her slave girl to write. Sarah is aghast that Handful was so careless, but even more upset that her father is so angry. Sarah's stammer returns as she tries to explain her benign intentions, but Father simply lectures her on the dangers of giving slaves the tool they need to incite rebellion.

Father, whom Sarah had originally seen as an ally in her family, now becomes Sarah's judge. Sarah has broken the law, but she thought that her father agreed with her personal moral code. Sarah's stammer returns, leaving her unable to speak up or defend herself or Handful. Sarah is powerless in this interaction with her father.



Father reveals that he is the one who tore up Sarah's certificate of freedom for Handful, destroying all of Sarah's ideas that her father appreciates her anti-slavery views. As punishment for all of these challenges to the Grimké way of life, Father forbids Sarah from setting foot in his library ever again. Sarah is absolutely crest-fallen, even worse when she returns to her room and finds all of the books removed. Binah brings Sarah breakfast and tells Sarah that Handful is getting her own punishment in the yard.

Faced with the realization that her seemingly perfect father upholds the evil rhetoric of slavery and black inferiority, Sarah is heartbroken. Without the books, Sarah also has no way to feed her passion for knowledge. While Sarah's punishment is emotional, Handful's is physical. This again reflects the racist mindset that white Sarah is a rational human and slave Handful is a brute beast.



Sarah runs down the stairs to the yard, ignoring Binah's justification that it is only one whip lash. Sarah sees Handful tied to the post with Tomfry waiting behind her, whip in hand. Sarah screams, "No," and Tomfry turns to her hopefully. But Mother taps her cane on the upstairs window and Tomfry turns back to Handful and brings the lash down on Handful's back.

Binah shows the slaves' mindset that punishment is simply a part of life. Mother again forces other slaves to commit violence, leaving her hands "innocent" of wrong-doing. White masters receive all the benefits of slavery while dealing with none of the harmful aspects.



Handful. Handful heals quickly enough from her lash wound, but notices that Sarah simply wastes away without her books. Handful keeps practicing her letters when she can and figures out new words though the lessons are over.

Mental freedom is more important than physical safety for the girls. Sarah is useless without her books and Handful continues to read even though she now knows the consequences of this action.



Charlotte makes a new baby gown for Missus, who is pregnant with yet another child. When Handful comes down to the cellar to help her, Charlotte brings out a stolen inkwell, quill, and paper, and asks Handful to write a travel pass. Handful is wary of adding to her mother's dangerous rebellions, but writes the pass because she knows that Charlotte will leave without or without the relative safety of the pass.

Charlotte seems to care only about freedom at this point, doing nothing to ensure her own safety. Handful's new skill has an immediate practical purpose in Charlotte's plan: writing passes that can mimic white permission to be on the street. This allows Charlotte to have more agency over where and when she goes into town.



From then on, Charlotte disappears a couple of days each week to hire herself out and sew for pay. Scared of the danger if Charlotte gets caught, Handful asks her mother to stop leaving the Grimké grounds. Charlotte just asks Handful to put a pail next to the gate if anyone ever notices her absence, so that Charlotte can be prepared when she comes back.

One day in January, Charlotte is found missing from her cellar sewing room. Missus asks Handful if she knows where Charlotte is, but Handful has no idea. As soon as she can, Handful puts the pail out to warn her mother. Charlotte creeps back after night fall, and pays Tomfry a half dollar to sneak her onto the roof and pretend she was there the whole time. Missus buys the story, simply lecturing Charlotte for the stupidity of going on the roof when there is sewing to be done. Charlotte takes the scolding but tells Handful that night that they should never bow and scrape to that woman.

Sarah. Sarah is not excited about another sibling, and sees how exhausted her mother is to be pregnant again. It makes Sarah shudder to think of her own future spent bearing babies. Still depressed from the lack of books, Sarah is diagnosed with severe melancholy and hysteria. Yet by the time Christmas rolls around, Sarah manages to pull herself out of the deep hole and refocus herself on the **silver button** and the dream it held.

The Grimkés throw Thomas a goodbye party before he goes off to college in New Haven. Sarah is finally enjoying herself again, until she hears murmured conversation about abolition by law in the Northern states. Sarah, emboldened by this talk, gives Thomas a goodbye speech that ends with her own wish to be a jurist, but her family laughs at her. Even Father refuses to consider Sarah's dream. Sarah retreats to her room, heartbroken.

Mother goes to comfort Sarah but reaffirms how silly Sarah was to dream of studying law in the first place. Sarah notices an odd vulnerability about her mother, as Mother admits that she too once had ambitions as a girl but had those dreams knocked aside for her own good. Mother advises Sarah to stop fighting her fate. After Mother leaves, Sarah takes her **silver button** and drops it in the fire as Handful mournfully watches.

Charlotte's desire for freedom might seem to trump her care for her daughter at first, as Charlotte callously brushes off Handful's concerns. Yet it is far more important for Handful's spirit that Charlotte continue to resist their enslaved circumstances.



The roof, a place closer to the sky and connecting to the flight imagery of the novel, again offers a space of freedom for the slaves by giving Charlotte an alibi for going into town. Missus' pregnancy seems to have temporarily eased her harshness, but Missus still treats Charlotte with nothing but contempt and disrespect. Charlotte knows that she and Handful are just as worthy of respect and self-worth as any white woman.



Mother's life is a sad reminder for Sarah of the life of every white woman she knows. Every woman of their social status is meant to spend their life having children and tending to a house so that men can have real careers. Sarah's sadness at the loss of her academic passion is passed off as melancholy and hysteria, two words that have become primarily reserved for women in order to dismiss their feelings of suffocation or isolation.



Thomas is living the life that Sarah wants, even though he himself feels trapped. When Sarah even attempts to discuss matters of abolition or law, she is silenced by her family. Anyone who might support Sarah is now involved in deconstructing her dream for good – the final blow for Sarah.



Mother reaffirms that female ambition is an unnatural and harmful thing. Without any (white) female support at all, Sarah finally gives up her dream and her silver button. Handful, a true friend (and one with much more crucial and dangerous goals), saves Sarah's button for a time when she is ready to work towards her goal once more.



At the beginning of February, Mother takes to her bed to prepare for the new baby's birth. Sarah visits her with a request to be named the godmother of the new baby. Mother resists, saying that the religious welfare of a child is too important to trust to a 12-year-old girl, but Sarah persists. Finally, Mother grants Sarah's wish as a consolation for losing all her other ambitions.

Handful. Handful wraps **red thread** around a tree in the yard to make a spirit tree. Handful and Charlotte give their spirits to the tree as Handful strokes the **silver button** that she rescued from Sarah's fire. Handful officially announces that she gives her spirit to the tree, following the footsteps of her mother and grandmother, then gathers leaves and twigs to keep in a pouch at her neck. Handful reflects on the events of the past year, Sarah's friendship, and reading, and knows that she will have trouble accepting slavish obedience from here on out.

PART 2: FEBRUARY 1811 – DECEMBER 1812

Sarah. Six years later, Sarah is getting ready for a society ball. Sarah makes up her face while her godchild (and little sister) Nina tries to follow Handful's instructions on how to braid Sarah's thin, red hair. At 18, Sarah has been a part of society for two years but still hates the general hubbub, only putting up with the rituals because she knows she must find a husband.

Nina (christened Angelina) is a beautiful child with a lively intellect. Sarah tries to ensure that Nina remains fearless, though Sarah herself has had to give up all of her dreams the way that proper ladies must. The bond between Nina and Sarah is so strong that Nina calls Sarah "mother," and Sarah tries to teach Nina to hate slavery the way that she does.

Sarah lets Nina pick her dress for the night. Handful helps Sarah get dressed and Sarah notes the distance that has grown between the two friends. Sarah tries to empathize with Handful's discovery of the boundaries on her life, but Handful refuses to let Sarah pretend that their struggles are equal.

All of Mother's mobility and choice is taken away by the pregnancy. Sarah starts to tie together religion and belonging, asking to be the new baby's godmother so that she will have something of her own in the Grimké family.



Handful uses the red thread she stole from Sarah to make a spirit tree that keeps her soul safe from any damage that living as a slave might do to her body. This tree is a tangible reminder that Handful's mind cannot be enslaved, especially now that she has reaffirmed her humanity with her mother and broadened her horizons through books. Sarah's friendship as well shows Handful a world that she deserves just as much as a white girl does.



This scene between Sarah, Handful, and Nina is the most genuine affection Sarah has received so far in the novel, with the three women forming a small temporary family. Sarah still feels as though she doesn't belong in the elite society that the Grimké name gives her access to.



Sarah tries to make sure that Nina will be able to achieve everything that she herself wasn't. As Nina's surrogate mother, Sarah is determined to foster Nina's ambitions rather than crush them. She also passes on her hatred of slavery, showing how each subsequent generation can push further toward equality.



Kidd displays an intersectional outlook on discrimination, comparing Sarah and Handful's differing situations. While Sarah and Handful each suffer, Handful is oppressed due to both her gender and her race. Sarah cannot understand that by simply comparing the sexism that she has experienced as a free white.



Mother comes in and scolds Sarah for wearing a dress she has worn just two nights earlier, but Sarah insists on wearing the dress that Nina chose. Mother tries to command Nina back to the nursery, but Nina throws a fit and demands to stay with Sarah, her real mother. Mother gives in and leaves, as Sarah scolds Nina for calling her “mother” in front of Mother.

Sarah and Nina’s individuality is threatened by societal rules, as even a simple dress choice is dictated by convention. Sarah and Nina defy these conventions and stay loyal to each other above all else. The blood bonds of motherhood and sisterhood matter less than the relationships that Sarah and Nina have chosen to build with each other.



At the ball, Sarah dances only with her brother Thomas, home from Yale, until Thomas leaves to dance with his betrothed. Sarah stays at the fringes of the party, self-consciously hiding her strong jaw with her fan. Sarah silently scorns the other girls of Charleston for the ridiculous fashions they wear, yet can’t help but envy their ease and grace. Sarah can never escape her discomfort in polite society, especially one that depends on slavery but refuses to call it by name – referring only to “the peculiar institution.”

Sarah, already harboring an “unfeminine” intellect, also looks slightly masculine with her strong jaw. Sarah tries to judge the darlings of society just as harshly as they judge her, but can’t quite escape her jealousy. Life would be easier for Sarah if she could escape her scruples and live comfortably in society. Though Sarah does not yet speak out publically against slavery, she sees the injustice of distancing “polite” white society from the evil institution that makes Southern life possible.



Sarah turns to leave the room and runs into a slave carrying a pitcher of punch, causing a spectacular spill. A striking young white man is caught in the mess, but takes the blame for the accident to save Sarah’s pride. Sarah and the young man go to a private chamber to dry their clothes, and the young man introduces himself as Burke Williams. Sarah is quite taken by Burke’s appearance and his straight-forward manner.

Burke accepts the blame for Sarah’s social mistake, making it possible for Sarah to remain happily at the party. This seems like a good thing, especially given Sarah’s immediate attraction to Burke, but the slave with the pitcher is a subtle reminder that fitting in with society means tacitly approving of slave labor.



Sarah and Burke pass the party together, though Sarah is aware that Burke’s family background as a silver merchant puts him below her status as a member of the planter elite. Sarah cares nothing for the class difference, too enamored with the fact that a lovely boy is flirting with her and she is not embarrassing herself. Burke kisses Sarah’s hand and promises to call on her soon.

Class inequality in Charleston is not limited to simply black slaves and white owners. There are layers also among white society, with planters who own slaves at the top. Sarah extends her desire for equality to this type of class difference as well, connecting with Burke as a person rather than a lowly son of a silver merchant.



Handful. Handful and Charlotte begin to sew a **story quilt**, sitting under the spirit tree. Handful worries over Sarah strutting through society and mourns the loss of Sarah’s friendship now that Sarah is rightfully focused on Nina. Even distracted by these thoughts, Handful is a better seamstress than her mother. Missus made Handful apprentice seamstress when she was 15.

Handful and Sarah are each growing up, creating a distance in their friendship as their life paths (and disparate levels of opportunity) begin to diverge more clearly. While Sarah attends parties, Handful has to learn to work. At the tender age of 15, Handful is treated as an adult slave.



Charlotte sews figures into the quilt squares, promising to explain the whole story to Handful once **the quilt** is finished. Handful recognizes some of the scenes, like the night the stars fell, but Charlotte only has so much time to work on the story quilt before she has to return to the Grimké's sewing or pieces to sell.

Handful tells her mother that Sarah's thoughts are full of some boy she met at a ball, and Charlotte admits that she has a sweetheart too. His name is Denmark Vesey and he is a Free Black man, having won the lottery and purchased himself from his master. Handful asks why her mother doesn't just buy a lottery ticket, but Charlotte refuses to waste any of her hard earned money.

Missus actually allows Charlotte to hire out and make money, softened by a special quilt Charlotte made of all Missus's children's old clothing. Charlotte has earned \$190, but Handful doesn't believe that the Grimké's will ever actually let two such wonderful seamstresses go free. Charlotte just says that their sewing will go bad if that ever happens. Charlotte does not want to end up like Snow, the Grimké's coachman who died a slave. The new coachman, Goodis, is sweet on Handful, but Handful refuses to even think of taking a husband. Charlotte happily agrees, saying that the price for herself and Handful will be high enough, once Handful finds out what it is.

Sarah. Sarah starts to keep a diary of lovesick rambles about Burke, resenting his hold on her even as she falls for him. Only Nina and the arrival of a new wonderful copper bathtub distract Sarah. In March, Sarah is ecstatic to receive a note from Burke asking if he may call the next night. Sarah happily tells Handful and Nina the good news, dreaming of marrying Burke.

The next night, Burke is fifteen minutes late, causing Mother and Father fits at the impolite snub. Sarah is just happy to see his handsome face again. Father interrogates Burke about his family's lowly silver shop, but Burke reminds Father that the Grimké ancestor owned a silver shop himself before working to become a part of Charleston aristocracy. Father is quieted, but maintains a dislike of Burke.

Charlotte's story quilt offers her a chance to express her own voice and give her own perspective on her life. Important as this work is to Charlotte, it has to take second place to her master's demands or work that may buy her freedom.



Denmark Vesey is the ultimate lucky story for a slave, yet Charlotte rejects the hope of the lottery in favor of working hard for her freedom. Handful admires Charlotte's determination to earn their freedom, keeping their pride intact.



In other twist of injustice, Handful reveals that the Grimké's have the power to deny Charlotte and Handful freedom even if they earn their price. Charlotte takes back agency by maintaining control over her sewing skill – the one thing that the Grimké's cannot take away from her. Everything else, including life and romantic relationships, is at the mercy of their masters. Handful is understandably reluctant to open herself up to the pain of losing a husband.



Sarah's resentment of Burke's control on her mind reveals that this relationship is not as happy as it might seem. Sarah should be using her intellect for more than baths and waiting for letters from Burke. Yet marriage is traditionally the only happy ending for a woman in Charleston society.



Burke gives polite society as little respect as Sarah does, and challenges the Grimké's class superiority. Sarah takes this as another reason to love Burke, thinking that he is a misfit in society just like her.



At the hour of slave curfew, Burke politely leaves, but intimately asks Sarah to toss a lock of her hair over the fence as he steps out the door. Sarah goes back into the house, hearing her parents insult Burke's background, and runs to her room. Sarah interrupts Handful slowly reading *Leonidas* and orders Handful to cut a lock of hair for Burke. Handful doesn't understand, but obeys. Sarah wraps the hair in a handkerchief and rushes back down to the garden fence and throws the bundle across.

The next day, Father immediately moves the family to Belmont, ostensibly to prepare for Thomas' impending wedding but truly to separate Sarah from Burke. Sarah busies herself with renovating the slave infirmary to keep her mind off her absent suitor. Mother chides Sarah for spending so much energy on the infirmary, and only allows Sarah to write to Burke once while they are gone. Sarah hopes that her hair will be enough to keep Burke interested, comparing this faith to Handful's trust in the pouch of bark she keeps at her neck. Yet Sarah thinks little of Handful while she is gone, only noticing that there is a wide and steadily growing gulf between her and her childhood friend.

Handful. Handful takes advantage of the Grimké's absence to sneak in Master Grimké's library and find out the price for herself and her mother. Sarah has let Handful keep practicing reading poems, and Handful can now puzzle out most words. Handful finds the list of all of Master Grimké's possessions, with the slaves written out just under his garden tools and bushels of corn. Charlotte is \$550, and Handful is \$500, prices that make Handful proud—she and her mother are worth almost as much as the male slaves, and more than any other female slaves.

Handful tells her mother that they need \$1,050 for freedom, knowing it would take 10 years for Charlotte to earn that much. Handful wants to give up hope, but Charlotte won't listen to that "white talk." Handful goes to the window to watch boats in the harbor and finally realizes that the list of slaves makes them no better than objects. Her pride gone, Handful sobs. When Handful goes to the cellar for the night, Charlotte sees her raw eyes and reminds Handful that no one can decide her worth for her.

Sarah defies her parents' wishes yet again, but this time it is only to pursue Burke. Focused on a relationship with the socially acceptable Burke, Sarah treats Handful like an ordinary slave mistress might. Burke makes Sarah forget about her friendship with Handful, and treat Handful with disrespect. Sarah even interrupts Handful reading, though she knows how important it is for Handful and her emotional well-being.



Sarah does work to improve the lives of slaves in Belmont, yet her focus on the infirmary also has a selfish motive. Sarah's help for the slaves is impossibly tied up with her own biases. Though Handful is supposed to be Sarah's best friend, Burke keeps Sarah from thinking of her. With Burke on her mind, Sarah even seems to laugh at Handful's spiritual practice of keeping pieces of the spirit tree with her at all times, though this is anything but a joke to Handful. However, Kidd points out that Sarah's lock of hair is a very similar practice, drawing another parallel between the two girls.



Handful's ability to read is a blessing and a curse, opening the entire library to her, but showing her just how little the white masters think of black slaves like herself. At first, Handful is impressed with the price for her and her mother. Their monetary prices reflect both racism—reducing the slaves to objects and possession instead of people—and sexism—valuing men more than women.



Handful and Charlotte's high prices may be a point of pride, but they also add another obstacle to gaining their freedom. Charlotte remains determined, saying giving up is something that only white people would do in the face of oppression. Only later does Handful truly mourn the implications of having a price on her head, not matter how high. Again, Charlotte helps Handful hold on to her self-worth and helps her resist some of slavery's damaging psychological burdens.



Sarah. The Grimkés return to Charleston in May, a day earlier than expected. Sarah is elated to find a letter from Burke waiting for her, asking Sarah to spend the day horseback riding with him. Sarah goes to her room and finds Handful taking a bath in the wondrous copper tub. Handful is shocked to be discovered, but refuses to ask forgiveness for her indiscretion. Sarah angrily rants at Handful in her head. Handful starts to speak, but Sarah asks her not to say anything. Sarah helps Handful empty the tub so that Mother will never find out.

Handful tells Sarah that she didn't see any harm in bathing in the tub just like Sarah does. Sarah then realizes that Handful's bath was not a revolt but a baptism. She further regrets that her anger at the bath is proof that she has grown accustomed to the evils of slavery. Sarah tries to tell Handful that it's all right, but Sarah's stammer has returned.

Handful. Handful goes with Charlotte to buy fabric at the market. The market is full of strange smells, sounds, and people. Handful enjoys the trip, and teases her mother about the free black man that she sees twice a week. Charlotte hurriedly finishes the shopping and takes Handful to 20 Bull street, the house where Denmark Vesey lives. Handful sees a woman through the window and is surprised to find out that her mother is sleeping with a man who already has a wife, but Charlotte is not ashamed.

Denmark Vesey comes out of his house and Charlotte introduces Handful. For the next year, Charlotte goes to Denmark's house whenever she has the chance. When Charlotte and Denmark are finished having an intimate moment in his workshop, Denmark talks to Handful. He boasts about all the places he visited when he worked on a slave ship. Denmark even tells Handful about another free black man who owns three slaves himself. Denmark is also deeply religious, quoting the Bible and telling biblical stories of doom every five minutes. Denmark terrifies Handful.

When Sarah catches Handful in the bathtub, she surprises even herself with how angry she is that Handful took advantage of this privilege. Though Sarah talks often about equality, she is not comfortable with actually treating Handful as an equal. Sarah still helps Handful to protect her from punishment, but the distance in their friendship widens further.



Handful herself meant no disrespect by taking the bath, simply claiming for herself the same comforts that Sarah enjoys. Sarah has to come to terms with the fact that giving Handful equal rights does not rob her of her own rights. Living with slavery has affected Sarah despite her best efforts, and her stammer seemingly returns because she is no longer honestly following her principles for equality.



Handful's world is very small, limited to the Grimké house and the places that the Grimkés allow her to go. Charlotte too has to steal moments when she can to do the things that she wants. Denmark Vesey offers a very different view of the world, one that is liberating in some ways and confining in others. Denmark liberates Charlotte from the life of a slave, yet he takes many mistresses with no regard for how it affects his wife. Denmark symbolizes racial equality but fails to support gender equality.



Kidd complicates the class differences in Charlotte by also mentioning black men who own black slaves. Handful can't believe that black people would commit that sort of cruelty against their fellow black people. Yet owning slaves was one way to climb up the social ladder, a very enticing prospect for free black people who still lived as second-class citizens in Charleston. Denmark shows another version of black spirituality, using the same bible as the white Christians, but for very different reasons.



The first time Handful waited outside the workshop, she wandered down the street a way, stepping aside for a white woman so that the lady could pass on the narrow path. Handful finds this ordinary, but Denmark rushed down the street, grabbed Handful's arm and shamed her for stepping aside and groveling to the white woman. Handful can't believe that Denmark even dared to touch her, but didn't fight back. Charlotte asked Denmark to let Handful go, and Charlotte and Handful walked home. Though Handful doesn't like Denmark, she understands what her mother sees in him: the promise of going places.

Sarah. Nina is obsessed with helping Sarah get rid of her speech impediment. Sarah allows Nina to try anything to help, and sits quietly on the balcony while Nina tries to massage Sarah's tongue with a towel. Sarah watches the sea, looking out to Sullivan's Island where she last rode horses with Burke. Finally, Nina lets go of Sarah's tongue, calling the experiment hopeless. Nina commands Sarah to loosen herself. Sarah does her best to comply, imagining the sight of Handful's bathwater pouring into the yard. Nina then tells Sarah to repeat "Wicked Willy Wiggle" and Sarah is able to do so without stuttering.

Sarah turns nineteen and Mother reminds her that she is now marriageable age. Sarah gets fitted for new dresses, the only contact she has with Handful. Handful sings to avoid talking and Sarah is secretly grateful. That January, Sarah overhears her brothers comforting Father that they will defend him against a mysterious recent outrage. Sarah is at first moved to help her father, then grows angry that her brothers never defended her, or indeed any other woman, from all their lack of rights and injustices they face.

A week later, Sarah and her sister Mary Jr. attend a parlor concert together. Burke rushes to Sarah's side, and hands her a letter, and tells her to open it later. After the concert is over, Burke takes Sarah outside on the porch. Sarah opens the letter to find a marriage proposal. She immediately accepts, though she is supposed to consult her parents first. Sarah is shocked when Burke kisses her on the lips, but Burke tells her that such liberties are allowed now that they are engaged. Burke kisses Sarah passionately, mussing her dress and hair.

Denmark may have good intentions in telling Handful to stop giving reverence to white people, but his methods are also condescending and oppressive. Denmark's passionate defense of racial equality is crucial, but it is not true liberation he's fighting for as long as he still treats women poorly. Still, Charlotte's world is as constrained as Handful's, and Denmark gives her the chance to dream of broadening her horizons and escaping slavery.



Sarah's speech impediment is more than a normal physical difficulty, as Sarah's mental and emotional state greatly affects her ability to speak clearly. More than simple nervousness or a natural speech impediment, Sarah's stutter closely tracks her discomfort with slavery. Thinking of Handful's bath, a moment in which Sarah had to confront how deeply committed she was to equality, helps loosen Sarah's tongue. It seems as though she is meant to speak out against slavery.



Sarah and Handful's friendship deteriorates faster the more Sarah enters white society. Sarah also considers her relationship to her family, at first feeling loyal to her family above all else, and then wondering why her family will not stand up for her rights. Men in Sarah's life stand up for each other with no thought for women.



Burke ironically takes "liberties"—that is, getting physically intimate with Sarah—now that they are engaged. Yet engagement is the beginning of Sarah's loss of liberty. As a wife, Sarah will be essentially Burke's property and will have very little freedom to make decisions for herself. Even worse, Sarah is not supposed to choose her husband on her own, as she is expected to defer choice on that matter to her father.



Sarah and Burke walk back to the house, where the host of the concert, Mr. Drayton, waits at the door. Mr. Drayton questions Sarah's unkempt appearance, as she tries to smooth over the impropriety with the news that she and Burke are engaged. Still skeptical, Mr. Drayton remains skeptical but congratulates Sarah on happy news for her family in spite of the impeachment charges against her father. Sarah is shocked to finally find out what her brothers were trying to defend Father from.

Any celebration about Sarah's engagement is covered by worry about the impeachment. Father remains in his library day and night as Sarah overhears wisps of grim conversation. The trial that spring finds Father acquitted, but the whole affair dirties the Grimké name and ruins Father's health. Unnoticed by the family in crisis, Burke continues to meet Sarah for unchaperoned visits where he pushes the boundary of proper intimacy between unmarried couples.

Handful. Charlotte fusses around the cellar room at night, watching the sky and sewing more of her **story quilt**. Handful can't wait to see the finished product, but pretends to sleep as her mother works to give Charlotte privacy. Charlotte keeps the squares locked in a trunk with the money that she has earned so far. There is now \$400 saved.

As Charlotte works on the **quilt**, Handful thinks about Sarah and Burke, unable to imagine Sarah marrying a man who never respects slaves. Sarah asked Handful if Handful would move with Sarah when she marries, but Handful refuses to leave her mother. Across the room, Charlotte wonders aloud how old she is. Handful guesses that her mother is 38, twice Handful's age of 19. Handful and Charlotte see a shooting star out the window, and Charlotte rubs her belly. Handful realizes that her mother is not too old to be pregnant again.

Sarah. Thomas takes a day off lawyering to meet with Sarah privately, putting Sarah on edge. Sarah is worried that Father's bad health has worsened further, remembering how Father was too sick even to attend her engagement party months earlier. Sarah is no longer close with her father, and the only words he has said about her marriage was a warning that there is no divorce law in South Carolina.

Social propriety demands both that Sarah find a husband and that she remain chaste and pure until the marriage, confining acceptable female behavior into a very narrow set of rules. Sarah's engagement is supposedly her greatest triumph, yet it is contrasted with her father's greatest failure as a judge. Women's achievements are solely personal while men's achievements can be personal or professional.



Sarah is meant to only worry herself with her engagement and impending marriage, while her brothers take care of the legal matters. Though Sarah is intelligent and has studied law, she is not allowed to help her family in this crisis. As a woman, Sarah is again relegated to the background.



The one thing over which Charlotte has complete control is her story quilt. Handful respects that privacy, thereby respecting her mother's freedom. Charlotte keeps the quilt with the money that will buy their freedom, using the quilt as inspiration to make sure her story ends in something other than slavery.



As Sarah and Burke get closer, Sarah and Handful drift ever farther apart. Sarah selfishly asks Handful to leave her family in order to continue serving her, but Handful is strong enough to stand up for herself. Yet Handful realizes that her mother has more secrets. Charlotte has not told Handful that she is pregnant, though a baby will complicate the pursuit of freedom for them both.



Father does not seem concerned with Sarah's happiness in her marriage. His reminder about the impossibility of divorce, itself an oppressive law that keeps women trapped in bad situations, seems more concerned with the fact that Sarah is marrying down into the merchant class than that Sarah might not be happy with Burke.



Thomas hesitantly tells Sarah that Burke has asked two other women to marry him. Sarah does not understand why Burke would do that until Thomas explains that Burke proposes in order to convince women to have sexual relations with him. Thomas reveals that he confronted Burke last night and broke the engagement for Sarah, and Sarah is as angry that Thomas took away her chance to confront Burke herself as she is that Burke has been so cruel.

Thomas leaves Sarah with one more apology and the news that Mother commands Sarah to withdraw from society for three weeks as the talk dies down. Sarah is angry and embarrassed that she fell for Burke's trick. She rips up Burke's proposal letter and watches birds fly across her window and disappear.

Handful. Handful is sorry that Sarah has been hurt so badly, but glad that Burke is no longer a part of their lives. Handful puts together a tray to bring up to Sarah and slips Sarah's **silver button** onto a saucer. When Sarah sees it, she just stares. Handful tells Sarah that the button is there for her, and leaves Sarah's room.

Sarah. Sarah, still in isolation, worries about Nina, who is playing with young girls who live next to the horrible Work House where slaves are punished. Nina was traumatized hearing the screams from the building last time she went into town. It starts to rain and Sarah decides to go get Nina herself. Goodis takes Sarah into town but the carriage gets stuck in a mud hole. As Goodis leaves to get help, Sarah sees Charlotte walking down the street.

Charlotte is so focused on keeping her feet out of the mud that she doesn't notice a white woman walking towards her. Etiquette dictates that a slave will step into the mud so that the white woman will not dirty her shoes. Sarah watches in horror as the white woman meets Charlotte and Charlotte refuses to step aside. A City Guard comes to force Charlotte to move, but Charlotte swings her basket of fabric at the white woman, knocking the white woman into the mud. The Guard reaches Charlotte and forces Charlotte into a wagon. Sarah screams Charlotte's name and Charlotte finds Sarah's eyes as she is dragged away.

Burke used social conventions to take advantage of women. Sarah is obviously hurt by this discovery, but another wound is that Thomas made huge life decisions for her, effectively silencing her. Sarah would have been capable of breaking the engagement herself, and would have been able to stand up for her pride in the process.



Sarah never enjoyed society, but there is further insult in the idea that she must withdraw from society for a scandal that was Burke's fault. The birds flying across Sarah's window are a reminder of the ever smaller chance that Sarah will be able to do what she wants with her life.



With Burke and the promise of social acceptance gone for good, Handful reminds Sarah of her original passion to be a juror. Handful supports Sarah when it matters the most, though their relationship has been strained recently.



Like Sarah, Nina is sensitive to the horrors of slavery. Yet rather than taking the radical position and ensuring that these horrors never happen in the first place, Sarah is only brave enough to protect Nina from learning of the evils of slavery. Sarah does not yet realize that she needs to do more.



Charlotte's refusal to move is an important step in Charlotte's journey of self-worth and freedom. Yet seeing this scene from Sarah's perspective only highlights the danger that Charlotte is in. As a slave, standing up for herself means taking a huge risk with her life and safety. Sarah can only watch and witness this injustice, unable to overcome the laws that dictate life in Charleston.



Handful. Earlier that day, Charlotte takes off to town looking happy and clean for her visit to Denmark. Handful tries to make sure that her mother's work badge and pouch of spirit tree clippings are securely fastened. Handful is full of questions about Charlotte's new pregnancy, but stays silent as her mother walks away.

Mid-afternoon, Handful sees Sarah and Nina come back in a carriage driven by Goodis, who gives Handful a pitying look. No one says a word to Handful until nightfall, when Sarah comes to tell Handful that her mother was taken away by the City Guard. Handful is actually hopeful, having expected someone to tell her that Charlotte was dead. Sarah continues to say that no one knows where Charlotte is now, as she escaped the guard and ran away. Handful whispers, "She'll come back," over and over all night.

Sarah. Charlotte's disappearance puts Burke's betrayal into perspective for Sarah. The Grimkés put an ad in the newspaper for a disappeared slave, but there is no response. Sarah watches Handful pacing circles around the yard without stop every day. Sarah looks at Handful's grief and sees that her own sadness is more shame than tragedy. Sarah takes comfort in the break from society.

A month after Charlotte disappears, Mother forces Handful to go back to work doing all the sewing. Sarah is forced back into society again, with orders to cheer up and find a husband once more. Sarah goes to a lecture at the Presbyterian Church, knowing that her family does not approve of Presbyterian revivalism, and is incredibly moved by the reverend's call to repentance. Sarah silently vows that she will never marry, instead dedicating her life to God.

On Sarah's 20th birthday, the Grimkés have a simple dinner to celebrate. Thomas debates a new idea with Father: colonization, or sending the slaves back to Africa. Sarah shocks her family by declaring herself against colonization, only to scandalize them further by advocating for setting the slaves free and letting them live in America as equals. Silence falls over the room, and Sarah realizes the magnitude of declaring slaves equal to whites. Father asks if Sarah got this idea from the Presbyterians, but Sarah says she thought of it herself, thinking of all the things she has experienced with Handful.

Charlotte takes great pride in her appearance on this day, adding emotional weight to her later refusal to dirty herself in the mud for a white woman's sake (as Sarah previously narrated). Additionally, Handful's care to make sure Charlotte has a piece of the spirit tree with her echoes the idea that Charlotte needs to have some of her soul with her if she is ever taken from the Grimké house.



Sarah is willing to tell Handful the truth even when it is hard. Handful has spent her life preparing for the worst, a sign of the hopelessness of being a slave. Handful has to believe that Charlotte will come back, as Charlotte was Handful's main source of strength and inspiration at the Grimké house – as well as her only comfort now that Sarah and Handful are no longer close.



Burke's betrayal may have had poor social consequences, but it is not a true tragedy like Charlotte's disappearance. Though Sarah faces hardship, she knows nothing of the struggles that Handful faces as a slave. This time away from society gives Sarah a good chance to reflect on these injustices.



The Grimkés have seemingly little sympathy for Handful, even though she has just lost her mother. While Handful has to return to work, Sarah simply has to return to society. With Burke gone, Sarah knows for sure that she will never belong to the Charleston upper-class. She dedicates her life to religion instead, looking for something more meaningful.



Sarah now becomes an advocate of radical equality, not just freeing the slaves but living in racial equality with black and white people. While this idea seems natural to Sarah, it flies in the face of the entire Southern way of life, which is built around slavery and white supremacy. The Anglican church also preaches that blacks are naturally inferior to whites, no matter the morality of slavery as an institution.



Handful. Handful mourns Charlotte’s disappearance but puts aside her grief and anger to get back to sewing work. One night, Handful finds the key to open Charlotte’s trunk. She takes out the bundle of **quilt squares** and lays the squares out, marveling at all of the vibrant colors. Handful can tell what the events are in some of the squares, but others are a mystery.

The first square is the stars falling as Handful’s grandmother arrives in America. The second is Handful’s grandmother hoeing the field. Third is Charlotte learning to sew. Fourth is a spirit tree behind two bodies picked clean by vultures. Fifth is Handful’s father Shanney working the field. Sixth is Charlotte and Handful (as a baby) lying on a quilt frame. Handful lets all the stories wash over her, feeling chills.

Two squares are Charlotte’s one-legged punishment and Handful’s whip lash for learning to read. The last square is Denmark Vesey standing proudly next to the number 1884, something that means little to Handful. Handful pieces **the quilt** together and spends the whole day sewing, stuffing, and finishing the quilt. Handful cuts all her hair off and puts that in the quilt as well. It is only after Handful finishes that she realizes that she never found the \$400 her mother had saved. The next morning, Handful wears the quilt like a cape and walks out into the sun.

PART 3: OCTOBER 1818 – NOVEMBER 1820

Handful. Six years after Charlotte disappeared, Handful still searches for her every time she goes to town. The slaves hold a memorial for Charlotte every year on the day she went missing. By now the slaves gather and only tell stories that highlight the good sides of Charlotte, ignoring the pain. Handful wishes that the others knew the real Charlotte, and tells everyone that her mother wouldn’t have run off. Tomfry puts it straight: Either Charlotte ran off or she’s dead.

Handful goes to her cellar room and lies on the **story quilt**, thinking about the way that Charlotte told her story. Handful has taken over sewing duties completely, no longer helping Sarah with anything. Sarah even gave Handful back to Missus, though Sarah tried to explain to Handful that she would have freed Handful if she could have. Handful finally understands that she has the same choices as her mother: run away or die a slave.

Handful takes out her mother’s quilt, keeping Charlotte’s desire for freedom and Charlotte’s voice present even though Charlotte herself is now gone. The quilt is a triumph of Charlotte’s vibrant spirit over the chains of slavery.



Charlotte’s quilt includes important moments in her life, both happy and sad, that shaped her into a strong woman determined to reach freedom. These stories are also Handful’s legacy, and a reminder of the freedom that their family once had.



The last squares juxtapose the worst that Charlotte has suffered as a slave with the hope of escape, shown by Handful’s reading and Denmark’s freedom. Handful finishes the quilt, suggesting that she will also be able to finish Charlotte’s mission to buy their freedom from the Grimkés. Handful may not have Charlotte’s money, but she certainly has Charlotte’s strength and support in the form of the quilt.



Handful wants the other slaves to tell Charlotte’s full story, acknowledging her suffering as well as her strength. This true story is a better memorial for Handful than ignoring the bad parts of the past – just as it is impossible to memorialize slavery by ignoring its true pain. Tomfry’s honesty is harsh, but realistic. Charlotte’s fate is most likely not a happy ending.



Handful is essentially in the same place as Charlotte—the seamstress for the Grimké family with very little hope of ever achieving freedom without running away. Yet Handful does have one thing that Charlotte did not. While Charlotte could only sew to express herself, Handful’s friendship with Sarah left her with the ability to read and write to tell her own story.



In January, Handful hears about a new African church in Charleston meant just for black people. Denmark Vesey attends and contributes many of the messages. Handful hates to think of Denmark again, but decides to join the African church so that she can talk to Denmark about her mother's disappearance. Handful fake cries to Sarah for a pass and Missus allows Handful to go twice a week as long as it doesn't cause any problems.

Sarah. Sarah and Nina are called to the drawing room where Mother and Reverend Gadsden are waiting. Nina refused to be confirmed in the Anglican church the past Sunday and Sarah shudders to think what Nina will say now. Nina's fiery temperament and confidence are much stronger than Sarah's, though Nina is only 14. Nina was even able to refuse the present of a slave when she turned 11. Sarah feels she can say nothing about Nina's loss of religion, given that Sarah herself rejected the Anglicans in favor of the Presbyterians.

The only thing Sarah and Nina disagree on is religion. Nina finds Presbyterian asceticism pointless, as Sarah attends society functions then prays to beg forgiveness for the excess afterwards. Still, Sarah dreads the day that Nina marries and leaves her alone in the Grimké house as a spinster. At 26, Sarah is now too old for the society balls where she might have found a husband.

Reverend Gadsden tries to reason with Nina not to put her soul in jeopardy and Mother guilts Nina with the thought that Father's dying wish might be to see her confirmed. Nina refuses to be moved, and Sarah stands up for Nina's right to follow her conscience. Mother accuses Sarah of brainwashing Nina, though Nina takes offense at the suggestion that she cannot think for herself. Mother escorts the Reverend to the door, sighing that Sarah and Nina's souls are both lost as long as they live in the same house. Sarah lies awake that night, imagining Nina sent off to a boarding school.

Handful. At a meeting of the African Church, Denmark Vesey speaks to a congregation of 200 slaves. Handful has been attending for four months and has learned nothing about Charlotte, but is actually starting to understand what other people see in religion. The services give people hope, though Handful agrees with Denmark that hoping for heaven is useless if one does nothing to improve their life here.

While Sarah joins the Presbyterian church because it better matches her own convictions, Handful joins the African church for the possible advantages that the church community can offer. Handful does not feel a connection to the spiritual fervor of the religion, but sees the practical uses of it.



Nina refuses to join the Anglican church for the same reasons that Sarah left it: she sees it as an institution that protects slavery at the cost of practicing true Christian brotherhood and love. Nina takes all of Sarah's abolitionist principles one step further into action, as Nina seems not to care at all about the possible consequences of being rejected by society. This is partly due to the fact that Nina has Sarah's support, whereas Sarah was on her own.



Nina, though she is more radical, is also more conventionally attractive. Sarah imagines that this will help Nina better fit into the Charleston society that rejected Sarah.



Sarah and Nina are much stronger when they are together, modeling how female solidarity can prove to be a huge source of strength for women who choose socially unacceptable lives. Yet Nina does not want to think of herself as some sort of disciple of Sarah's. She asserts her own individuality and equal intelligence to Sarah. Still, Sarah does not want to think about the possibility of being separated from Nina, her real family.



Many slaves looked to religion as a form of community and belonging in a world that otherwise offered no places of comfort or support. Handful sees this, but continues to use the Christian faith as a tool for other things. She believes more strongly in the Fon religion of her family and childhood than the hope of a Christian heaven.



As the congregation sings, the City Guard bursts in and starts surrounding the people. Denmark tries to throw them out, but a guard just hits Denmark in the face with his gun. The head guard reads a warrant of arrest for all the church members for causing a nuisance to the neighbors. The guards round up the congregation to take them to the Guard House. From there, a slave's master either has to pay a fine for the slave's release, or the slave is sent to the Work House.

Handful spends the night in the jail cell, listening to everyone snore and fight while a baby cries. In the morning, a slave with deep whip scars on his back tells everyone that the fine for release is 5 dollars, which equals 12 lashes or time on the treadmill at the Work House. The morning wears on and the baby cries louder because her mother cannot raise any milk for her. Finally, the guard comes into the cell and begins reading the names of the slaves whose masters have paid the fine. Handful cannot believe that her own name isn't called.

At the Work House, Handful and 11 other slaves are led past the Treadmill. Denmark is there, having refused to pay the fine for himself as long as there were any slaves whose masters did not pay for them. Handful thinks that Denmark probably just didn't have five dollars. Denmark recognizes Handful, but doesn't know who she is. Handful just says she goes to the African Church and asks where God's deliverance is now. The lady with the baby gasps when the overseer tells her that no one has time to watch her baby when it is her turn on the treadmill. The overseers then chain the slaves up to the treadmill, a contraption that forces people to run in order to grind corn.

Sarah. Sarah comes into the kitchen where Aunt-Sister is tending to Handful's mangled foot. Sarah starts to cry, guilty that Mother was able to be so cruel to Handful because Sarah gave Handful back to Mother—which she did to soothe her own conscience at owning a slave. Handful's foot has a gash from ankle to toe, and Aunt-Sister explains that Handful fell off the treadmill and her foot was crushed by the wheel. Sarah takes Handful's hand and bends close to hear what Handful is trying to say. Handful hisses, "Go away." Sarah does so, trying to convince herself that Handful is simply delirious with medicine.

The guard does not respect the sanctity of the African Church, though they would have never come in to the Anglican church to commit violence. The congregation is arrested for nothing more than a noise complaint from their white neighbors—another instance of the oppressed having their voices forcibly silenced.



The conditions in the jail cell are inhumane, with no compassion even for a baby as long as he is considered a slave. The masters who paid the fine are lauded as saints of compassion and mercy, even though the slaves never should have been arrested (or enslaved) in the first place. Handful unfortunately belongs to Missus once more. Had she belonged to Sarah, Sarah likely would have paid the fine.



Handful questions Denmark's religious fervor, though Denmark tries to present himself as a modern-day Christ figure willing to suffer with his people. Handful still has not revealed who her mother is, or asked him about Charlotte. Now, Handful has even less faith in religion's potential to offer comfort in the midst of suffering. The only possible deliverance would be for the slaves to save themselves. Treadmill work like this is usually reserved for animals, further degrading and punishing the slaves.



Though Kidd has not shied away from describing other scenes of violence in detail, she chooses to skip over Handful's injury in the work house, suggesting that the experience was so traumatic that even Handful cannot yet face what happened. Sarah tries to bring comfort to Handful after the fact, but Handful no longer wants Sarah's pity when Sarah does nothing to prevent the horrific effects of slavery.



Handful stays in her room for ten days and Sarah stays away for fear that Handful truly does not want to see her. Still, Sarah leaves two books at the door for Handful. The day Handful comes out, Sarah and Nina rush away from the breakfast table to go talk to her in the yard as Handful winds fresh **red thread** around a tree. Sarah apologizes, and Handful thanks her for leaving the books. Nina asks to touch Handful's foot, and Handful lets her. As Nina touches the scar, Sarah asks if there is anything that Handful needs. Handful looks at Sarah with angry eyes and laughs, then softens when Sarah scrambles to explain what she meant. Handful just turns and limps back to the kitchen.

A few days later Mother summons Sarah, and Sarah worries that her mother will be replacing Handful now that she is damaged. Instead, Mother tells Sarah that Father's health has not improved in a year and the doctors are now recommending that he see a physician in Philadelphia. Mother expects Sarah to accompany him, given that all the other children old enough to go have families and careers to care for. Sarah realizes that Mother is sending her away to separate Sarah and Nina.

Handful. Handful must now walk with a cane, but the crutch she has is too tall for her small stature. Goodis takes it and cuts it down to size while whittling the top into a rabbit. Handful loves the gift and the fact that she can now get around more easily. Missus gets rid of her aging maid and calls a new girl, Minta, spooking the rest of the slaves into working harder so that they too will not be sold off. Yet even as Handful acts obedient, she keeps her true feelings secret.

Sarah comes down to Handful's cellar distraught over her imminent departure North with her Father. Sarah's stutter has returned, and Handful feels truly sorry for this development in Sarah's life, though she can't shake the hatred that has wormed in at Sarah's privileged place. Before Sarah leaves, Handful asks Sarah to write her a pass to be on the street. Sarah is hesitant at the danger, but writes the pass when Handful threatens to just steal ink and paper to write the pass herself.

When Sarah has been gone a week, Handful sneaks out for the first time. She walks to 20 Bull street to see what happened to Denmark after the Work House. Memories of the Work House come rushing back, as the sight of the overseer whipping the woman with her baby on her back made Handful fall off the wheel, no wings to save her.

Sarah stays away out of guilt, a gesture that is partly selfish but also respects Handful's wishes. Sarah allows Handful to choose who she sees, rather than ordering Handful to be friendly once more to assuage her own conscience. Handful tends to her spirit tree, showing that this physical wound has not damaged her desire for freedom. Handful, like Charlotte, uses the pain of this unjust punishment to spur her determination to reach freedom. Yet Handful does not completely turn her back on Sarah, keeping a small part of their friendship alive.



Mother treats the slaves like tools, who can be replaced at will once they are no longer functional. Mother uses the excuse of family duty to separate Sarah and Nina, sending Sarah away from her home. However, it is clear that Sarah does not belong in the South and may actually benefit from a trip to the more abolition-friendly North.



Goodis offers kindness to Handful, something that she's rarely experienced. Goodis also gives Handful back some of her autonomy, minimizing the effect that Handful's limp has on her mobility. However, Handful's life still clearly depends on the whims of her masters. The only option for Handful to preserve her autonomy is to continue secretly working towards freedom.



Sarah is also relatively powerless in her own life, as evidenced by Missus' ability to send her away despite her wishes and the return of Sarah's stutter. Handful's request echoes Charlotte's earlier demand that Handful write her a pass. Now, Handful is the radical one while Sarah hesitates and worries over the danger. Handful knows that the danger of getting caught is far less important than the trauma of remaining a slave.



Handful finally confronts what happened at the Work House. She saw a baby, the ultimate figure of innocence, whipped for no reason other than its status as a slave. From birth, the world oppresses the slaves and it seems as though there is nothing Handful can do to stop it. This image of brutality shocked Handful into falling off the treadmill where her foot was crushed.



At Denmark's house, Handful asks Denmark's wife, Susan, if Denmark is home. Denmark comes out and invites Handful in. Handful tells Denmark that her mother was Charlotte and asks Denmark if he knows what happened to Charlotte. Handful then unwraps her mother's **story quilt** for Denmark. Denmark sees himself on the last square and tells Handful that 1884 were the numbers on his lottery ticket. Handful tells Denmark that Charlotte was pregnant when she disappeared, and Denmark is visibly shaken.

Sarah. Sarah gets Father to Philadelphia despite a harrowing ship journey and marvels at the absence of slaves on the street. The doctor can find no reason for Father's sickness and recommends sea air. Sarah finds this laughable, but agrees to take Father to summer at an isolated town on the New Jersey Shore.

The New Jersey town is miniscule and austere. Father seems no better, and Sarah begins to feel hopeless feeding her father soup like a baby bird. Sarah writes a letter to Nina explaining where they are staying for the summer and praying that Father will improve soon. Sarah spends her days caring for Father and watching men and women swim in the ocean in different shifts. Sarah is fascinated by the women swimming, but is not brave enough to join them.

In August, Father admits to Sarah that he is dying. Sarah expects him to insist on returning to Charleston, but Father tells Sarah that it has been easier to let go here. Finally, Father asks Sarah forgiveness for silencing her radical mind and her dream of being a jurist. Father never saw a way to make things better for the slaves or for Sarah as a woman, but he tells her to take care of herself now. He tells Sarah to go down to the ocean and passes on alone in his room. Sarah goes down to swim in the sea, soothing her grief at her father's death by floating in the water.

Handful. Missus calls Handful in to advise her on the elaborate mourning gown she would like Handful to sew. Handful promises to have it ready in two days, and goes to the market to get supplies. There, Handful sees Susan wearing a red head scarf that Handful recognizes as her mother's. Susan admits that Charlotte came to 20 Bull Street the night she ran away and traded the red head scarf for a less distinctive brown one. Susan then gives Handful the red head scarf back. Handful wears the red head scarf the whole time she sews Missus' mourning dress. She finishes the dress and even Missus admits that it is the finest dress Handful has ever made, telling Handful that her mother would be proud.

Handful shares her mother's story with Denmark, finally trusting him with this important family history. Handful seems to have grown closer to Denmark now that they have suffered together. Charlotte's quilt does indeed end in an image of freedom, though Denmark's lottery win is a far cry from the hard-earned freedom that Charlotte imagined for herself.



Sarah may not have wanted to go to the North, but she appreciates this possibility of a slave-free community once she sees it. The doctor can find no medical reason for Father's sickness, suggesting that it is a disease brought on by mental or emotional suffering.



Sarah compares her father to a bird, echoing Charlotte's care of the baby owl and Sarah's promise to help Handful find freedom. Sarah has trouble breaking free of the restrictive social codes of Charleston, denying herself the pleasure of swimming even though it would be allowed here in the North.



Finally, the source of Father's disease seems clear. He is wasting away after a life of denying his principles for the sake of greed and comfort. Though he agrees with Sarah that slavery is wrong and that women should have more rights, he refused to stand up for those ideas and now suffers physically from this emotional toll. On his deathbed Father spurs Sarah to take a risk for herself, and afterwards, swimming in the sea, Sarah has her own version of a baptism. From now on Sarah will start making decisions for herself.



Missus cannot purely mourn the death of her husband, but must put on an elaborate show as befits her social standing in Charleston. Handful mourns her own mother more simply, wearing her mother's head scarf as a memorial. Handful also honors her mother with her sewing skill, as Charlotte had used sewing as a method of self-expression and economic independence. Handful has finally received some word of how her mother ran away, but knows not to hope for a miracle.



Handful tries to sneak out the next day, but Tomfry catches her and doesn't believe that she has permission to go to the market. Handful can't use the pass Sarah wrote because Tomfry knows Sarah is still up North, but Nina appears and tells Tomfry that Handful is on an errand for her. Once she gets to 20 Bull Street, Handful sneaks into a meeting Denmark is having with his "lieutenants." The other men do not trust Handful, but Denmark calls her family.

Denmark tells his lieutenants to step outside and tells Handful the real story of what happened to Charlotte. Denmark tried to hide Charlotte in a tenement house for free blacks, but a poacher caught Charlotte one night and captured her to sell her to a new owner.

Sarah. Sarah makes it back to Philadelphia but decides not to go back Charleston right away. Sarah sends a letter to Mother letting her know that she needs to grieve alone, and Mother's response accuses Sarah of cruel selfishness. Yet Sarah is mostly at peace in Philadelphia, though she is somewhat repelled by the grim presence of the Quakers in the city. However, Sarah knows she must leave before winter hits.

On the boat back to Charleston, Sarah meets a Quaker man named Israel Morris. Israel challenges Sarah about her silence in the face of her family's part in slavery. For the next two days, Sarah thinks of nothing but Israel, attracted to him even though she knows he is married. A few more days into the voyage, Israel tells Sarah more about the basic equality of all people in the Quaker faith. The two debate the intricacies of abolition and theology. Sarah even meets Israel's wife, Rebecca, who invites Sarah to stay with them if she ever comes North again. Israel leaves Sarah with a book of the Quaker faith and a promise that she will write him when she finishes it.

Handful. Missus gathers all the family and slaves to read Master Grimké's will. The goods are dispersed among the Grimké sons, and Handful stops paying attention until she hears that Missus will only be allowed to keep six of the slaves. All of the older slaves begin to shake at the thought of being sold. Sarah (who has returned) cries out that this isn't fair, but Missus hushes her.

Tomfry cannot give Handful even this small amount of freedom, knowing that he too will be punished if anyone suspects that he was helping Handful be disobedient. Nina stands up for Handful in Sarah's absence, acting on the anti-slavery ideals that Sarah simply wrote into a pass. Handful uses that support to attend a revolutionary meeting, the first step toward achieving freedom for all the slaves in Charleston.



Denmark and Handful have formed a familial bond, drawn together by their shared struggles and their love for Charlotte. Charlotte's fate is now clear—rather than running away to freedom, she is now a plantation slave with an even more restricted life than she had at the Grimkés.



Sarah chooses to stay in the North, despite the accusations of selfishness. In the North, Sarah can live (relatively) free of the evil influence of slavery that is far more present in the South. Sarah still finds the Quakers grim, having been raised her whole life to distrust the Quakers' simple lifestyle and dress.



Sarah confronts her prejudice against the Quakers by becoming friends with Israel. The Quaker religion speaks directly to the issues of equality that Sarah has been wrestling with her whole life, by denouncing slavery as evil and accepting women ministers alongside men. Despite the intellectual nature of Sarah and Israel's conversations, their friendship is still tinged with impropriety because Sarah is unmarried. Meeting Israel's wife is an important aspect of keeping this growing friendship socially acceptable.



Handful and the other slaves are again treated as property who can be willed away with no regard for their own lives or wishes. Sarah tries once more to speak out against this injustice, but is completely ineffective in the face of the slave culture of the South.



Handful prays that she won't be sold, thinking that her mother will return to this house when she can. Christmas comes, but the Grimkés do not celebrate. Missus agrees to have Jonkonnu, a Jamaican holiday celebrated by the slaves, and hand out presents to the slaves. As the slaves celebrate the finery that Missus gives them, Missus gives 5 slaves an extra jar of gargling oil and the news that they will be sold. Handful is in shock, but glad that neither she or Goodis were sold (though she is also surprised to find she cares for Goodis).

Handful wants to stay with the Grimkés because this house is the last tie she has to her mother, another instance of the complex relationship that slaves have to "belonging" at their masters' houses. The holiday of Jonkonnu is an important moment of community bonding for the slaves, but Missus ruins this celebration by also tying it to the imminent departure of some of the Grimké slave "family." Even Missus' gift is an ironic twist of the knife, as the slaves use gargling oil to clean their teeth and appear healthier (and thus more valuable) to their new masters.



Missus splits more duties among the remaining slaves, and Handful adds house cleaning to her work. Sarah helps Handful clean the drawing room chandelier and Handful asks if Sarah is sad about her father. Sarah just answers that she feels trapped in this life. Handful comments that she may be a slave in body but Sarah is a slave in mind.

Sarah and Handful share the work, as Sarah is now more committed to acting on her ideals of equality after her trip North. Handful's observation of the different ways that she and Sarah are both "slaves" points to the different ways that Sarah and Handful experience oppression, based on the intersection between racism and sexism.



Sarah. Sarah attempts many letters to Israel, but can finish none of them. Sarah feels called by the Quaker beliefs but cannot accept becoming a Quaker because the Quakers are reviled in Charleston. As Sarah packs away the letters, Mother comes in and sees the secret stack. Mother says nothing about the letters but asks Sarah to go help pack up Father's library. In the library, Sarah reflects on the melancholy of her life in Charleston – especially now that Nina has reached an age where she no longer wants Sarah to mother her. Sarah picks up a biography of Joan of Arc and notices a fleur-de-lis pattern that reminds her of the **silver button** she once had.

Sarah usually finds comfort and self-expression in writing, but is now unable to even give that voice to her troubled thoughts. Becoming a Quaker means rejecting her family completely and facing public humiliation. However, Sarah has very little place in Charleston anymore now that even Nina's companionship is complicated. Joan of Arc, a woman who faced disgrace and eventually execution for leading an army even though she was female, is another reminder that Sarah might have to pay the costs of losing her place in society in order to fulfill her true purpose in life.



That night, Sarah goes to her desk to write Israel another letter, and notices that all of her previous unsent letters are gone. Sarah rushes to Mother's room, yelling about the offense, waking Nina in the process. At the sight of Nina, all anger leaves Sarah. The next morning, Sarah cannot manage to get out of bed, and she stays in her room for the next weeks. Handful brings Sarah trays of food and, one day, a sack of half-burned letters.

Sarah's depression shows the physical consequences of her emotional and mental turmoil. Mother has once again removed Sarah's ability to choose her own path in life, by burning the letters to Israel that might have promised a future as a Quaker. Handful displays an understanding of her friend by returning those letters to Sarah, but is unable to undo Mother's damage.



Spring comes, but Sarah gets no better. Mother and Nina try to help, but nothing shakes Sarah's depression. In May, Thomas arrives and begins yelling about the current political situation regarding slavery in Missouri. Sarah is interested in spite of herself and begins to argue with Thomas about his continued belief in the merits of sending the slaves back to Africa. After that day, Sarah begins to slowly rejoin life in the house. Finally, Sarah manages to finish a letter to Israel asking more about following the Quaker faith. She gives it to Handful to send.

The only thing that can cut through Sarah's depression is the reminder of what she is fighting for. Thomas gives her a reason to live by forcing Sarah to argue about her deep-seated conviction that slaves should be free and equal to white citizens. Finally, Sarah is able to give voice to these opinions by writing a letter to Israel pursuing Quakerism. Again, Handful supports Sarah through this journey of self-discovery.



Israel writes Sarah back with encouragement in the Quaker walk, as well as the news that his wife Rebecca has died. Sarah begins to spend long hours listening for the Voice of God inside her, as the Quakers teach. Sarah and Israel keep up correspondence, and just when Sarah gives up on the Voice, she hears a Voice tell her to go North.

Sarah's search for the Voice of God seems like a passive activity looking for something else to tell Sarah what to do with her life. She doesn't hear it for so long because Sarah herself has to choose which direction is best for her. Sarah cannot rely on becoming a Quaker to give meaning to her life if she is not staying true to her own principles.



Sarah agonizes about the Voice telling her to go North, knowing the impropriety of travel by unmarried women and the scandal she would cause her family. Sarah does have a small inheritance that would give her enough to live on her own. Sarah remembers Handful telling her that she was enslaved in mind and worries over the **silver button**. Finally, Sarah decides to follow the Voice, be it God's or her own desire for freedom.

Beyond traveling alone, Sarah is also going to live with a widowed man – something that would render her stained in society's eyes due to the possibility of sexual immorality. Sarah, as a wealthy white woman, has the economic freedom to make this choice for herself, whereas Handful, an enslaved black woman, does not. Sarah finally takes responsibility for her own destiny, remembering her pledge to free Handful and deciding to follow the Voice to freedom even if it is not God's order.



PART 4: SEPTEMBER 1821 – JULY 1822

Sarah. Sarah stays at Israel's house just outside of Philadelphia, after months of arguments with Mother about the true piety of following this Voice to live with a widowed man. In the end, Mother gives Sarah permission as long as she says the trip north is for her health. Yet Sarah is surprised that she misses the city of Charleston even as she is glad to be rid of slavery.

Religious pursuits are one of few areas where women could seek excuse for traditional married life. Still, Sarah must keep her true reasons for going North a secret. This concession is another reminder that Sarah will always belong to Charleston in some ways, whether she wants to or not.



Sarah keeps busy trying to help Israel's sister, Catherine, care for a house of eight children. Catherine complains about Sarah's fine clothing, as Sarah should dress plainly if she is serious about becoming a Quaker. Sarah is more interested in talking with Israel about Quaker theology.

Though Sarah is not married, she performs the traditional domestic chores of a wife and mother. Catherine unfairly judges Sarah for her appearance and background, rather than taking Sarah's commitment to Quakerism seriously.



In September, Israel's youngest daughter Becky sneaks into Sarah's room to sleep after having a nightmare. Sarah notices a necklace in Becky's hand. Becky shows Sarah a locket with the name Rebecca on it and says it is hers—but Becky wants Sarah to wear it. Uncomfortable, Sarah agrees to wear it just once. Sarah finally wears it one day at the girl's tutoring and Becky swells with pride.

As a tutor, Sarah tries as hard as possible to teach the girls all the subjects that are normally taught only to boys. Sarah takes the girls outside for a natural history lesson on bird calls. The girls' attempts at bird calls draws Catherine's attention and Catherine notices that Sarah is wearing a locket. Catherine scolds Sarah for wearing Israel's late wife's locket. Sarah stammers that she didn't know, and she gives the locket to Catherine, as Becky looks on, crestfallen.

That night, Sarah paddles a small canoe into the middle of the pond and wishes the Voice would tell her to go South. Israel finds her and Sarah attempts to explain her mistake about Becky and the locket. Israel eases Sarah's mind, reminding Sarah that Rebecca herself invited Sarah to visit before Rebecca passed.

Handful. Handful sneaks to Denmark's house more than ever now that Tomfry is no longer there to keep the slaves in check. With Sarah gone, Missus hits the slaves for any mistake and lets the house fall into disrepair. Missus even writes letters to her sons asking for more money.

Handful gives Denmark a jar of sorghum she stole from the kitchen and goes to help Susan making corn fritters. Susan confesses that Denmark is angry because one of the lieutenants lost a list of slaves who have agreed to join the resistance movement. Denmark has been recruiting local slaves to freedom, using the Bible to justify to any skeptical slaves the righteousness of what they are doing. Handful agrees with Denmark wholeheartedly, though she has not signed a list, as those are only for men.

Handful asks Denmark what would happen if a white person found a list of names. Denmark says that every slave on the list would be whipped, and Handful begins to worry over hiding places. Thinking of her mother, Handful offers to sew the lists into a quilt to make sure they will never be found.

Sarah naively accepts the locket from Becky, seemingly unaware that wearing it could fuel concerns that Sarah is trying to take Rebecca's place as Israel's wife. Sarah's action may open her up to criticism, but Sarah focuses on the good it does for Becky. As when Sarah nurtured Nina, Sarah is determined to allow young girls to have some control over the world around them.



Sarah ensures that the next generation of young women is not academically stunted the way that she was, helping to break one cycle of gender inequality. Despite these lofty ideals, Sarah's life is still very much governed by acceptable female behavior. No matter Sarah's intentions with the locket, she will be judged harshly for this perceived hint at taking over the role of Israel's wife.



Sarah still wants to take a passive role in her own life, wishing for a Voice to tell her to go home and avoid trouble. Israel reminds Sarah that their behavior is not actually immoral, and that Sarah should have more faith in herself.



Without her husband, Missus is in complete control of the day-to-day running of the house, but also at the mercy of her male children to make decisions about finances. This cruel dichotomy does not excuse Missus' racism and harsh treatment of the slaves, but it does explain how Missus too faces a level of oppression.



Handful and Susan are relegated to the kitchen, though the slave revolution would affect their lives just as much as the male slaves. Denmark reclaims passages from the same Bible that the Anglican church uses to keep black people enslaved to offer hope of freedom. Though Denmark is doing important work towards racial equality, he is still failing at gender equality.



Handful ingeniously helps Denmark find a way to improve the methods of the revolution, but she still is not recognized as an equal contributor. Quilts are again tied to freedom, literally protecting the slaves' efforts from the masters' eyes.



In January, Nina tries to start a Female Prayer Society as a front for exposing the evils of slavery. The other girls get bored, however, and turn to talk of dresses and gossip. In March, Nina finally crosses a line by showing the girls the scar on Handful's foot from the Work House. The other girls scream, and one even faints. Missus hears about the hubbub and strikes Handful with her cane. Nina is forbidden from having any more prayer meetings.

Handful gets busy making a quilt for Denmark to hide his lists, covering the front with red and **black triangles** for blackbirds flying. Handful thinks about Nina's lectures and Sarah's guilt, and recognizes the good impulses behind them. Yet Handful knows that Denmark is right when he says that freedom will not come without bloodshed.

Sarah. Sarah takes the children on a picnic to celebrate the first warmth of April, further offending Catherine by putting the good tablecloth on the ground. Yet Sarah is too excited for spring after a bleak northern winter to care about Catherine's complaints. Sarah does anything she can to entertain the children while Israel falls deeper into mourning Rebecca. Yet Israel also surprises Sarah by coming to the picnic.

As Catherine begins to clear the picnic things, Sarah makes a grave error in daring to touch Israel's hand. Catherine sees them and accuses them of unseemly behavior. Israel tells Catherine it is none of her business and walks into the house. Catherine tells Sarah that she will have to move, no matter what Israel wants.

Catherine insists that the whole family come to the Quaker meeting, though it is the monthly business meeting that Sarah usually does not attend. Sarah watches the lone woman minister with jealousy, wishing she had the courage to speak in Meeting. When the business portion of the Meeting begins, Catherine stands and asks that the elders find a new home for Sarah to avoid any temptation of an unmarried woman living with a widowed man.

Nina uses religion as a cover for anti-slavery rhetoric, but is largely unsuccessful. When faced with the real consequences of slavery, the other white women maintain their innocence by making themselves victims of seeing this horror up close. Slavery must be kept silent in polite society to protect white women's delicate constitutions, though these women directly benefit from slavery.



The quilt that Handful makes for Denmark is dedicated to the pursuit of freedom, covered with the wings that Charlotte used to inspire Handful to strive for escape from slavery. Meanwhile the red background acknowledges the violence and bloodshed that will be a cost of this freedom.



Sarah does not truly belong to Quaker society, unused to the work and care it takes to live as a Quaker after a childhood of Southern wealth. Though Sarah is fully committed to Quaker ideals, she is not a seamless addition to the Morris household. Furthermore, the romantic possibilities between Israel and Sarah are forever disrupted by the memory of Rebecca.



Even this tiny touch is enough to brand Sarah as a sexually immoral woman, a sign of the constraints on female behavior at the time. Sarah is losing yet another home because of her desire to live outside of social conventions.



Quakerism may accept female ministers, but the fact that there is only one female minister in the meeting suggests that this position is still unfairly biased towards men. Catherine also feeds into the unfair treatment of women by penalizing Sarah for simply having a friendship with a man who does not have a wife.



Catherine frames her request that Sarah move as a matter of the strength of Sarah's faith as a Quaker, making it impossible for Sarah to stand up for herself and Israel. Israel too cannot speak for fear of dishonoring Rebecca's memory. Only the woman minister speaks for Sarah's right to stay where she is. Yet with everyone else in agreement, the Quakers decide that Sarah will find new lodging by the end of the month. Sarah thanks the woman minister after the meeting. The minister introduces herself as Lucretia Mott and invites Sarah to live with her and her husband.

Handful. At Denmark's house in April, Denmark tells his lieutenants that there are 6,000 names in his lists and he has set the date for the rebellion two months from now. Handful listens and serves the men refreshments. Denmark warns the slaves to be on their best "happy slave" behavior in these last few weeks. Handful thinks of her mother's constant resistance and fingers the scab on her head that Missus caused last time she caught Handful sneaking out.

As Denmark explains the preparations of arms, Handful fiddles with a feather in her pocket and remembers when Charlotte told her that birds always have a funeral for their dead. Denmark's right-hand man, Gullah Jack, talks about getting a bullet mold from the Guard House. There is too much security for a male slave to sneak in there, but Handful knows that she can get in there unnoticed, as female slaves always are.

Sarah. Sarah gets a letter from Nina detailing how terribly Mother has been acting as well as Handful's new potentially dangerous sneaking out. Nina ends by saying that she feels alone and helpless in Charleston, a feeling that Sarah understands. Sarah packs her things to leave Israel's house as Israel comes in to her room and offers to fight this decision. Sarah refuses, holding up Nina's letter as evidence that she is needed at home. Israel asks Sarah to promise that she will come back when things calm down, but Sarah cannot.

Handful. The night before Handful is set to steal the bullet mold, she has sex with Goodis to see what all the fuss is about. He is careful to make Handful comfortable in the old stable and Handful feels true tenderness for him. Goodis kisses Handful's scars, bringing tears to her eyes. The next morning, Handful goes to ask Nina for a pass to the market. Though Nina knows Handful is not going to the market, she writes the pass.

Sarah's status as an unmarried woman makes her dangerous to the rules of Quaker society. Again Sarah is silenced, unable to defend her actions with Israel without implicitly renouncing her faith as a Quaker. While Sarah's fate is decided by men, Sarah finds an immediate kinship with Lucretia, the woman minister. This role model of feminine strength shows Sarah that there is still hope for her despite this heavy blow.



Denmark presents a vision of solidarity and community strength that will help the slaves achieve freedom. Denmark further strengthens the idea that what the masters see of the slaves is not their true identity. Still, women are left unacknowledged in this fight, though they suffer just as much as the men.



Handful's feather and Charlotte's story come as a reminder that flight and freedom do not come without a cost. Handful must risk herself like never before, depending on the relative invisibility of enslaved black women to gain a significant weapon for the slaves. Handful can use the way that white people judge and underestimate black women to her advantage.



Sarah and Nina each feel helpless when they are alone, and need each other's support in order to fight against oppression (slavery in Nina's case and gender oppression in Sarah's). Sarah chooses to be with her sister, instead of pursuing a relationship with Israel.



A relationship for Handful is also less important than the work she is doing for the slave revolt. Still, Goodis demonstrates a relationship that is based on true affection rather than the troubling power imbalance seen between men and women elsewhere in the book.



Handful walks into the Arsenal where the Guard keeps all their supplies and pretends to be filling in for their regular cleaning lady. Handful starts sweeping as the guards clean their muskets, and she surveys the room. Handful looks through chests while “dusting” and is nearly caught when her lame foot causes a drum to rattle. Yet the guard just warns Handful to be more careful. Handful finds the bullet molds and hides two in her basket, then walks straight out of the Arsenal.

That night, Handful reflects on Denmark’s praise when she gave him the bullet molds. She can’t sleep and wishes that Goodis was awake. The reality of the death that those bullet molds will cause sinks in, and Handful wishes that the moon could fit in the bullet molds instead of lead.

Sarah. Sarah comes back to Charleston in full-fledged Quaker garb, much to the chagrin of Mother and the town. Sarah can’t believe that her welcome is an insult about her dress, though Nina immediately wants one when she hears that the dress symbolizes anti-slavery ideals. Nina also tells Sarah that there are rumors of a slave revolt. Mother cannot believe that slaves would think of such an elaborate plan, but Sarah can see it happening all too well. Charleston officials have determined that there is no true threat, but the atmosphere is still tense.

Sarah looks for Handful the next morning and finds her joking with Goodis. Goodis jumps up at the sight of Sarah and leaves Sarah and Handful alone. Sarah awkwardly hugs Handful, and asks many questions about life in her absence. Sarah gathers her courage and asks Handful if the rumors about a slave revolt are true. Handful asks what Sarah has heard, and is far too relieved to hear that officials do not believe that the revolt is true. Sarah remembers the day that she and Handful shared all their secrets on the roof and knows that Handful will now keep her secrets.

Nina and Sarah go to the Charleston Quaker meetinghouse the next Sunday. As they walk across town, they hear a commotion in the market as militia men march with muskets toward the noise. Slaves run in every direction and a guard stops Sarah to interrogate her about her “abolition” clothing. Sarah says that she is a Quaker, and the guard attempts to detain Sarah for insurgency. He gives up when he hears that Sarah is a Grimké, but warns Sarah that the slave revolt has been stopped. Sarah speaks out for the slaves to revolt, aweing Nina with her audacity.

Another example of racism comes in the guards’ inability to tell Handful and the regular maid apart, because they have never bothered to even look at the maid as a human being. It seems as though Handful’s injury will ruin the plan, but Handful is able to use the guards’ poor opinion of slaves to her advantage by pretending to be clumsy.



Handful loves the feeling of belonging that she has with Denmark and Goodis, though she regrets the violence that she is now involved in. Handful wishes for a peaceful resolution, but knows that the wounds that slaves have already suffered and the stubborn white mindset towards slavery make a peaceful progression towards equality impossible.



Sarah now marks herself as a Quaker, officially becoming an outcast in Charleston society. Nina too seems ready to leave Charleston for good. Mother underestimates the intelligence of the slaves, and this type of casual racism is one reason why the slave revolt may actually succeed. The less the officials suspect of the slaves, the greater chance they have to effect change when they rise up.



Sarah wants to re-establish a friendship with Handful, but the gaps between them are too large at the moment. In order to protect the slave revolt, Handful cannot risk confiding in any white person, even one as seemingly committed to equality as Sarah. They are no longer children, and Handful now has some power of her own (as part of the revolt) to keep in mind.



Though Sarah wears her abolitionist ideals literally on her sleeve, Sarah’s blood as a Grimké still offers her protection, no matter how much she feels like she doesn’t really belong to that family. Sarah finally speaks up for the slaves in a public way, using her privilege and safety as a wealthy white woman to advocate for people, like the slaves, who cannot risk their health and safety to speak for themselves at this tense moment.



Many slaves are arrested for the intended revolt, and the white citizens of Charleston remain in a panic. As rules for slaves get stricter, Sarah and the Grimké's are targeted for Sarah's outburst in favor of abolition. Sarah feels powerless, having reached the age of 30 without doing a thing to end slavery. Sarah remembers her **silver button** and knows that she can not stay in the South.

Handful. Handful waits two days after the failed rebellion for safety, then goes to Denmark's house. He has not been arrested, and even the quilt with the lists is untouched, though Handful thinks the **black triangles** now look like a bird funeral. Denmark tells Handful that most of his lieutenants have been arrested and he has to leave Charleston to keep hope of rebellion alive. Denmark thinks one of the house slaves betrayed them to their master. Denmark gives Handful the quilt and asks her to burn the list of names.

Four days later, Denmark is also arrested. Legends about him fly thick, but Handful realizes that half of what Denmark said about their forces was not true. Sarah finds Handful to tell her that Denmark was found guilty and sentenced to death, unaware how important Denmark was to Handful. Sarah then warns Handful that any black person who mourns Denmark in public will be whipped.

On July 2nd, Handful follows Denmark from the Work House as he is taken to his place of execution. Denmark and three of his lieutenants are chained in separate wagons. Rolla, Ned, and Peter are taken to be hung at Blake's Lands, the place for pirates and criminals, but Denmark's wagon goes to an ordinary field. Handful follows and is the only one to see Denmark's death. The guards bury Denmark in an unmarked grave, but Handful creeps after them and marks the grave with a stick strung with **red thread**.

PART 5: NOVEMBER 1826 – NOVEMBER 1829

Handful. In November of 1826, Goodis catches a cold and Handful goes to the stable to visit him, taking advantage of the lack of oversight in the house now that Missus is always busy fighting with Nina. As Handful passes the garden, she notices an old slave woman and a slave girl outside the back gate. The woman calls Handful's name, and Handful realizes it is her mother Charlotte. The slaves help carry Charlotte inside, as she is weak and sick from the journey. Handful introduces the slave girl as her sister, knowing she must be Charlotte's daughter by Denmark Vesey.

Sarah feels the cost of speaking up for what is right, but instead of backing down she now actually wants to do more. Her silver button is now a constant reminder that she has to do something to end slavery for good, rather than just free one slave. Sarah is not fleeing North to protect herself, but going North so that she can work for abolition.



The slave revolt was stopped before it could even begin, as if the birds on Handful's quilt were shot before they could fly. A constant danger in recruiting new slaves to the revolt was that a house slave might fear punishment so much that they tell everything to their master. Denmark even suggests that some house slaves get so used to living with white people that they feel more loyal to their white masters than to their fellow slaves. Burning the list is the safe choice, but it is also a harsh reminder that all of their hard work can easily disappear.



Denmark's attempts to build confidence were actually lies, as their numbers and arms were never as plentiful as Denmark said. Freedom seems farther away than ever—Handful's dreams are dead and she is not even allowed to publicly mourn them, or the man who had become a father figure.



The city guards add another insult by executing Denmark in secrecy so that no one can even witness his death. This is the ultimate disrespect to Denmark's spirit. Handful risks her own safety to honor Denmark with the red thread that she uses as a reminder that one day the slaves will be free.



Nina's fights with Mother indirectly achieve Nina's goal of improving life for the Grimké slaves, simply by giving the slaves more autonomy in the home. Charlotte's return brings Handful great joy, as her family is whole once more, but also sadness, as Charlotte has returned showing the full age and wear of her years as a slave.



As Charlotte sleeps, Handful asks the slave girl, whose name is Sky, about their journey. Sky loves to talk, telling Handful everything about their wandering trip away from a plantation. Charlotte even told Sky the same blackbird legends that she told Handful. Finally, Charlotte manages to wake up and Handful hugs her tightly.

Sky's name is another image of freedom and flight, as Charlotte keeps the desire for freedom alive in both her daughters. Sky is more "free" with her voice and her opinions than Handful, after growing up on a plantation away from the secrecy and censorship of life as a house slave.



Handful shows Charlotte the **story quilt** that she finished and Charlotte is pleased that Handful got the order of all the squares correctly. Handful dreads telling Charlotte what has happened to Denmark Vesey while she was gone. Charlotte also looks worse for the wear from her time away, with whip scars and missing teeth. Sky tells Handful that Charlotte was rebellious and mischievous on the plantation no matter the consequences or punishments.

Handful took care with her mother's quilt, giving the proper respect to Charlotte's life's work. Handful understands her mother the way few other people would, as they have suffered many of the same things. Yet Charlotte has suffered under a different type of slavery. On a plantation, the bodily toll of slavery is often harsher than it is in the house.



Sarah. Israel visits Sarah at Lucretia Mott's house, with a new beard covering his face. Israel and Sarah have a growing friendship, though Sarah can't help but wish for a deeper relationship. On this visit, Israel admits that his eldest son is getting married and Sarah realizes that the only thing keeping the relationship between her and Israel from moving forward is her own passivity.

Sarah takes Israel's new beard as a sign of a new distance between them. Back in her old habits, Sarah passively waits for Israel to reintroduce a romantic element to their conversations. As Israel talks of his eldest son getting married, Sarah realizes that she is partly to blame for letting life pass her by.



Sarah loves living with Lucretia and talking with her about theology and philosophy. The two women form a bond deeper than friendship. One night, Lucretia gives Sarah a letter from "Nina" that is in Handful's handwriting. The letter explains that Charlotte has returned to the Grimké house with a new daughter, Sky, and reiterates Handful's hopes for freedom. Sarah tells Lucretia about the letter and Lucretia sympathizes with the obstacles facing slaves, particularly women slaves. Sarah realizes that she can no longer dream about helping Handful—she has to do something real. Sarah decides to become a Quaker minister.

Like Sarah's friendship with Handful or her bond with Nina, Sarah and Lucretia's friendship is also built on their struggles to fight gender inequality and speak out for abolition. Handful uses the freedom that writing gives her to communicate with Sarah her joy, but Sarah also sees Handful's continued desire to be free. Seeing the good work that Lucretia has done as a minister inspires Sarah to begin the long, difficult journey toward becoming a female minister herself.



Sarah tries to write Handful a letter, but can't find a respectful way to express her joy at Charlotte's return (as Charlotte is still a slave even if she is "home"). Sarah gets the **silver button** out of her desk and remembers how Handful gave it back to her when she was on the verge of giving up on life. With the button on the desk, Sarah writes a letter to Handful expressing the depth of emotion she has for Handful and her mother and telling Handful that she is becoming a Quaker minister in order to speak against slavery.

While it is good that Charlotte and Handful are reunited, Sarah can't help but regret the circumstances, as Charlotte returns to the slave life that she fought so hard to leave. The silver button shifts from representing Sarah's dream to be a jurist to standing for her dream of becoming a minister. Knowing that she will soon be working to improve life for Handful and Charlotte, Sarah can speak freely to Handful once more.



Handful. Charlotte returns to sewing, but Sky does not fit well into urban life. She is too rough for house work and sings Gullah slave songs too loudly. Handful overhears Missus considering selling Sky in the spring to cover some of her growing expenses and rushes to form a way for Sky to earn her keep at the Grimké house. Charlotte insists that Sky is as smart as her daddy, Denmark, though Charlotte doesn't tell Sky who her father is for fear that Sky will chatter that information to the wrong people. Handful and Charlotte decide to put Sky to work in the garden.

Sky has an incredible talent with the garden, coaxing even dead plants back to full harvest. The vegetables are so big and bountiful that spring that Missus keeps Sky on for good. Meanwhile, Charlotte does not tell Handful what happened to her while she was away, but begins to sew more squares of her story to add to the **story quilt**.

Sarah. Sarah wears the **silver button** to Quaker meetings, offending more conservative Quakers like Jane and Samuel Bettlemen with her flashy dress. Sarah does not care, as she offends many elders with simply her desire to be a female minister and her radical stance on immediate abolition and equality for the slaves. Despite opposition, Lucretia keeps Sarah from backing down or giving up.

Nina writes to Sarah with news that she has fallen in love with the Presbyterian Reverend McDowell, enchanted with how Rev. McDowell defended her right to give anti-slavery lessons at the Sunday School. As Sarah reads the letter, Israel comes to visit her again. He seems nervous and tells Sarah that he had a dream about Rebecca giving him back the locket. Israel then asks Sarah to become his wife. Sarah, happy and afraid, asks if she can be Israel's wife and a Quaker minister. Israel does not say no, but he does make it clear that Sarah would be too busy with family and house care as a wife. Sarah refuses Israel, knowing that she cannot be true to both him and to her calling as a minister.

Handful. Handful works on the sewing for Missus while Charlotte sews nothing but her **story quilt**. As they work, Charlotte tells more about life in the plantation and the many times she and Sky tried and failed to run away. When the plantation master began to make sexual advances towards Sky, Charlotte knew it was time to leave or die trying.

Sky's upbringing on a plantation shaped her very differently than Handful's childhood in a house interacting regularly with a white family. Handful learned how to be useful and silent for the Grimké family, but Sky does not know how to censor herself. This freedom of expression is a good thing, but it does complicate life for Sky in the house.



As fits Sky's natural name, she does better in the open air than she did in the house. Charlotte again chooses to use the story quilt to express herself. Charlotte's quilt is the truest expression of who she is.



The other Quaker women judge Sarah solely on her outside appearance, not knowing that the button is the most important expression of Sarah's Quaker commitment. As a female, Sarah is under intense scrutiny from those who believe that she should not be a leader for any cause. Still, the support of another strong woman keeps Sarah from giving up.



Sarah's situation seems to parallel Nina's, as a religious man committed to ending slavery comes to ask her hand in marriage. Yet though Israel is a kind, good man, he still does not understand Sarah or her passion to end slavery. Sarah chooses her ambitions and her principles over marriage, even though she truly loves Israel. Ultimately, Sarah knows that she will be more fulfilled by her calling as a minister than she would be by the "perfect happy ending" that others imagine for a woman.



Charlotte finally gets the chance to devote herself to work meant only for herself. While Kidd hinted at the possibility of sexual assault in Sarah's relationship with Burke, black women were far more likely to suffer sexual assault, having no rights or voice of their own. Charlotte does everything she can to make sure that Sky will not have to bear that trauma.



Now at the Grimké's, Sky cannot easily leave the Grimké estate as she has no ownership papers and the regulations in Charleston are so strict. Still, Handful begs Nina to write Sky a pass, and she takes Sky by the house that used to be Denmark's. Handful tells Sky that her daddy was brave with a big heart and lived to free all the slaves. Sky knows that Denmark was hung for the failed slave revolt.

One night, Charlotte asks what happened to her stash of money. Handful thought that Charlotte took it with her, explaining that she looked everywhere but couldn't find it. Charlotte laughs and tells Handful to look inside the lining of the first quilt they made together, the one covered in red and **black triangles**. All the money is still there, and Charlotte tells Handful to keep it safe so she can one day buy freedom for herself and Sky. Charlotte no longer expects to gain freedom herself.

Sarah. Sarah writes to Nina, explaining how she refused Israel's proposal. Sarah no longer wants to be Nina's mother or example, she just wants to be her sister. Nina writes back that she has also broken off her engagement, fed up with Rev. McDowell's inaction against slavery. Nina is full of righteous indignation, but Sarah carries more regret for refusing happiness with Israel. Yet Sarah knows she would have regretted accepting marriage as well.

For two years, Sarah struggles to be accepted as a minister. Her speech impediment renders her messages in meeting incoherent, though Sarah studies Quaker theology night and day. She continues to try Nina's tongue exercises, trying to rid herself of the stammer. Nina writes letters detailing her efforts to push the Charleston Presbyterians toward abolition, while Sarah writes about the fights for racial equality among the more liberal Philadelphia Quakers. Finally, Nina writes Sarah that she will be joining her in the North.

Sarah leaves Lucretia's house and moves in with Catherine so that there will be room for Nina when she comes. Sarah marvels at the thought that two daughters of a Southern slaveholder will now be living in the austere North. Nina finally arrives, looking more beautiful than ever, and the two sisters run to each other and embrace.

Sky's lack of ownership papers, rather than making her more free, actually constrain her movement even more. Handful knows that the risk of going into town is outweighed by giving the chance to tell Sky her legacy and her story, giving Sky a father and a family she can be proud of.



Though Handful didn't know it, she copied her mother exactly when she hid the list of members in the slave revolt. Like that list, Charlotte hid the money meant to buy freedom in a quilt covered in the black triangle wings that symbolize freedom. Charlotte finally gives up on her own freedom to ensure that her children will have a better life than she did.



Sarah and Nina have each grown and matured, so that they can now interact as equals. Still, Nina is far braver about the future and the actions that must be taken for abolition. Sarah continually looks to the past, worrying about the choices that she did or didn't make.



Sarah cannot speak up verbally, still suffering from her speech impediment. Though she has good ideas, she cannot communicate them to anyone but her sister. Sarah is far freer on the page than she is in person. While Nina fights simply to free the slaves, Sarah takes on the thorny issue of true racial equality when whites and blacks live together in the supposedly "free" North.



Sarah and Nina's childhood as slaveholders is perhaps surprising given their passion for abolition, but it also gives them a unique perspective on the true evil of slavery and plenty of evidence to convince others to fight slavery. Now that they are together again, Nina and Sarah can support each other and achieve even more in the abolition movement.



PART 6: JULY 1835 – JUNE 1838

Handful. Missus' eldest daughter, who the slaves call Little Missus, now lives at the Grimké house after the death of her husband. Little Missus brings 9 slaves and renews the harsh punishments and strict rules that Missus had relaxed in her old age. Charlotte is weak and unable to do much other than go over and over her **story quilt**. Handful listens as best she can as she sews all the new clothes and linens that Little Missus wants.

One afternoon, Charlotte shuffles out to the spirit tree with the **story quilt** wrapped around her shoulders. Handful rushes out to her, and Charlotte tells Handful that she has come to collect her spirit so that she can move on to eternal rest. Charlotte asks Handful not to remember her as a slave, but as a woman who never belonged to anyone but herself. Handful promises, and Charlotte passes away.

Sarah. Sarah and Nina go to the Sunday Quaker meeting and sit on the "Negro pew" meant for black people only. Sarah is hesitant to scandalize the white Quakers, but Nina is emboldened by William Lloyd Garrison's radical abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* to do everything she can to fight racial inequality. Sarah knows that even the North has become dangerous for abolitionists, but she presses on in support of Nina. Sarah worries over Nina, already thirty and still unmarried. Nina is too headstrong to fit in easily with the Quakers.

Sarah and Nina sit down next to Sarah Mapps Douglass and her mother Grace, the two black members of the Quaker congregation. Sarah worries about putting Sarah Mapps and Grace in danger as two Quaker Elders come over to ask Sarah and Nina to move. The four women huddle together on the bench as Sarah and Nina refuse to get up. Eventually, the Elders leave them be. Sarah Mapps and Grace visibly sigh in relief. Sarah thinks about how well Nina's brash action and her own quiet thinking complement each other, like two wings of one abolitionist bird.

Three weeks after the Negro pew incident, Catherine asks Sarah and Nina to come down before dinner. The sisters are surprised to see the Quaker Elders, and Sarah's heart falls when she sees that they carry a copy of *The Liberator*. It turns out that Nina sent a letter to William Lloyd Garrison that was published in *The Liberator*. Nina protests that she didn't expect the letter to be published, but Sarah and Nina are now branded inflammatory abolitionists. The Elders ask Sarah and Nina to disavow the letter or be expelled from the Quaker society. Nina and Sarah stand firm to their anti-slavery ideals.

Just as Nina is like a more extreme version of Sarah, Little Missus is a more extreme version of Missus. Both those who fight against slavery and those who defend it seem to get more radical in the next generation. As Charlotte comes to the end of her life, she too seems obsessed with the legacy that she is leaving.



Charlotte ends her life with her spirit and her story quilt intact, showing how she never allowed her soul to be enslaved along with her body. Though Charlotte is dying a slave, Handful will continue her efforts towards freedom and honor her memory as a fundamentally free woman.



*With Nina in the North, Sarah is pushed to ever more radical actions. Newspapers like *The Liberator* helped sway many people towards the cause of abolition, but the strength of numbers is not a guarantee of freedom. Nina, unlike Sarah, does not seem to care about belonging in the Quaker community or following social rules. Nina (who presumably has not faced as many obstacles as Sarah) only cares for doing what is right.*



Though it is Sarah and Nina who choose to sit where they don't belong, it is likely that Sarah Mapps and Grace would be the ones who are actually punished. Though the North is free from slavery, it is not free from racial prejudice or unfair treatment. Sarah's intelligence and rhetoric go well with Nina's bravery and passion. Comparing them to a bird reinforces the ties between freedom and flight.



While the Quakers were able to ignore Nina and Sarah's small protest, they cannot ignore Nina's much more powerful words. In writing, Nina is far more dangerous to those who would rather keep abolition slow and steady. Rather than ensuring their own safety in the Quaker community, Sarah and Nina choose to stay true to their principles.



Handful. Handful writes to Sarah that Charlotte has died. Handful and Sky hold a small funeral for Charlotte, spreading rice on her grave so that Charlotte's spirit can return to Africa. Handful steals stationary and Missus' stamp to sneak the letter past Little Missus, who spies on the slaves more than ever.

Handful and Sky give a funeral for Charlotte that honors their African heritage rather than her life as a slave. In writing, Handful can "pass" for a white woman, using the stationary and stamp of the Grimké family.



Sarah. Sarah and Nina look desperately for another place to stay in the North, but their reputation as revolting abolitionists closes every door. Just when Sarah is going to give up, Sarah Mapps Douglass writes offering to let Sarah and Nina stay secretly in her attic. Sarah and Nina leave Catherine's house the next day.

Sarah and Nina receive more support from the already vulnerable Sarah Mapps than they do from any of the Quakers who profess to be for abolition. Kidd recognizes the personal costs that come from standing up for an unpopular, but morally right, position.



Sarah Mapps is a well-educated woman who teaches the Quaker children, while her mother Grace makes beautiful hats that no Quaker can wear. Nina and Sarah clean out the attic and sequester themselves in the house to avoid the neighbors who disapprove of white and black women living together. The sisters spend their time reading books and old letters. Sarah thinks constantly of her promise to Charlotte, who has now passed, that she would free Handful.

Sarah Mapps and Grace are complex individuals with intelligence and artistic spirits that are not fully utilized in the Quaker community. The North may be respectful of free blacks, but the prejudices against true integration are still very strong.



Sarah comes up with the idea to write an apology for the anti-slavery cause directly written for the wives and daughters of Southern slaveholders. Nina suggests that she write the letter to the women and Sarah write a pamphlet for the Southern clergy. Sarah and Nina write pages and pages each day, then send them down to Sarah Mapps to proofread.

Sarah and Nina are able to passionately write in defense of abolition in a way that they are unable to speak for fear of putting themselves (and Sarah Mapps) in more danger. Writing offers a freedom that the women do not otherwise have.



When the pamphlets are almost finished, Nina receives a letter from William Lloyd Garrison. It encloses a letter from Elizur Wright, the founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, asking Nina and Sarah to consider joining a series of lectures against slavery he is planning to give in New York. Nina is incredibly excited at the chance to meet famous abolitionist orators like Theodore Weld, but Sarah is uncertain about speaking publicly. Yet Sarah realizes that the voices in her head telling her not to take this chance are only the voices of everyone who tried to silence her all her life. Sarah decides that she will join the lecture circuit.

Sarah and Nina are finally given a chance to publically speak out against slavery. Sarah is afraid, given her history of failing at public speaking and being silenced when she chooses to stand up for herself and others. Yet Sarah cannot let the judgment of others keep her from doing what is right. She must take advantage of this opportunity to help slaves like Handful and prove to herself that she can speak as strongly as any man.



Handful. Little Missus sends Handful to get some scotch whiskey, trusting Handful with many errands that she cannot give to the plantation slaves she brought with her. Sky also receives the brunt of Little Missus' anger, and is punished with a muzzle after Little Missus hears Sky singing a teasing song about her.

Handful, as a house slave, is given more freedom than the plantation slaves. Sky does not understand how to protect her true feelings from the close proximity of the masters in the house. Sky especially is punished for her freedom and self-expression because Sky has not yet learned to pretend complete obedience to the masters.



In town, Handful sees a mob burning large bundles of papers. Handful picks up a paper that has floated by and sees that it is a pamphlet by Sarah Grimké. A man tries to take the pamphlet away, so Handful gives him the scotch in order to keep the paper. Handful laboriously works out the first words Sarah has written, calling all slaves “a person under God.”

Handful connects strongly with the words that Sarah wrote, as reading has always been one of the ways that Handful best expressed her self-worth. The friendship between the two women has been a strong reminder for both Sarah and Handful that slaves deserve the same rights as white people.



Handful gets ten whip lashes for returning late without the scotch, the first time she has been whipped since the lash she was given for learning to read. Handful survives the pain by thinking of Charlotte, as well as Sarah’s words calling her a person under God. The next day, Little Missus is extra kind to Handful as Handful measures Little Missus for a new dress, but Handful is reminded of her whipping every time the wounds on her back stretch.

Handful may have been punished for returning without the scotch, but her true crime was again reading. This brutal whip lash galvanizes Handful against her position as a slave, along with Charlotte’s legacy and Sarah’s abolitionist rhetoric, but she has perfected the art of keeping her true feelings secret from her masters even when she is forced into close proximity with them every day.



That afternoon, the mayor comes to see Missus. Handful overhears him tell Missus that Sarah and Angelina will no longer be allowed in Charleston, for their own welfare, due the uproar their pamphlets caused. Missus stands up for her family, indignant that anyone would disrespect a Grimké, but the Mayor’s ban stands. Handful realizes she might never see Sarah again.

Missus stays loyal to her children, asserting that they belong in Charleston even though Missus herself abhors their radical stance on abolition. Though Handful and Sarah haven’t seen each other in years, it is still a blow to Handful to think that her friend might never return.



Sarah. Sarah and Nina give their first lecture in New York, to a full house at one of the larger halls in the city. Theodore Weld defended Sarah and Nina’s right to speak despite the public outcry against women speaking to such a large group. Theodore trained the male orators in proper speech techniques, but let Nina and Sarah decide for themselves how a woman should speak. Nina appreciates Theodore’s respect.

Nina and Sarah are already faced with sexist opposition to their speeches before they have even said a word. Nina, however, is especially excited for this chance to speak her own mind, controlled by no one. Theodore’s license for Nina to speak how she wishes suggests that Theodore truly respects women on their own grounds.



Nina’s electrifying speech is met with resounding applause, and then it is Sarah’s turn to speak. She is nervous, and can feel her stammer returning, feeling especially plain in her Quaker clothing after her sister’s dazzling looks. Yet as Sarah starts to speak, she realizes that the words are coming smoothly. Sarah ends her speech advocating for women to end their silence and speak out for the slaves.

Sarah has come to terms with her identity, unflattering Quaker clothes and all. Sarah may no longer belong to the Quaker fellowship in Philadelphia but she still very much belongs to the Quaker theology and tradition. Sarah is finally able to speak smoothly now that she has taken control of her life and uses her talents to honestly stand up for her principles.



The lecture circuit spends weeks in New York, and then moves on to New Jersey. Nina and Sarah become both famous and infamous as the Grimké sisters who spur women to act against slavery, even receiving a letter from Mother that they will no longer be welcome in Charleston. Theodore Weld continues to advocate for the sisters, especially Nina.

Sarah and Nina are the most controversial figures of the abolition movement, as even those who agree with abolition have qualms about allowing women to speak. This gender inequality can touch even those who are most committed to reversing racial inequality.



Sarah watches Theodore and Nina steal every chance they can get to be alone. Sarah and Nina go to Massachusetts for a two-week rest with the Whittier family, dear friends of Theodore Weld. Mrs. Whittier tells Nina proudly that her son John Greenleaf Whittier and Theodore Weld have both pledged not to marry until slavery is abolished, unaware how much pain this causes Nina.

In the summer of 1837, the Grimké sisters begin to have men in their audiences. The conservative Puritans are livid that two women dare to speak in front of men, and public outcry against the sisters grows even stronger. Sarah and Nina try to stay strong, now fighting not only for abolition but also the right of women to speak. By August, the sisters are forced to take refuge with Mrs. Whittier once more, after protestors throw rocks at them during their latest speech. Newspaper editorials blast Sarah and Nina for fighting for abolition just so that they can take black husbands.

Elizur Wright, Theodore Weld, and John Greenleaf Whittier visit Sarah and Nina to ask them to step back from the abolition lecture circuit. Elizur and John are concerned that the debates over women's right to speak are distracting from the anti-slavery message. Sarah and Nina are outraged at this latest attempt to silence them, arguing that women can do even more to help the slaves if women are allowed to speak freely. Sarah gets to work writing a new pamphlet, "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes."

Handful. One Sunday in spring, Handful rolls down the quilt frame and checks on the stash of money in the **black triangle** quilt, then spreads Charlotte's **story quilt** across the frame. Little Missus comes down to check on a cape she wanted mended, and notices Charlotte's quilt. Handful rushes to hide it, but Little Missus calls the whole story (as represented on the quilt) gruesome. Little Missus insists that they treated Charlotte well as she leaves the cellar room, but Handful can tell she feels guilty.

In the wake of Little Missus' insult of **the story quilt**, Handful's hatred of being a slave crystallizes. Handful tells Sky that they are leaving, soon. Handful hides the story quilt and the money with Goodis in the stables, then writes a letter to Sarah saying that Handful will bring Sky north as soon as she can.

Theodore and Nina start to build a relationship after bonding over their passion for abolition. However, this very passion may prevent them from gaining the happiness of marriage. It seems that Nina, like Sarah, will have to forego marriage to a man she loves for the abolitionist cause, though this is not Nina's choice.



Women who dare to speak to men scare the conservative Puritans who believe that men should be the only authorities. Sarah and Nina now have to direct their energies to two causes as they battle for both slaves and women. The newspapers use Sarah and Nina's unwed status, a sign of their commitment to abolition over their own happiness, as a gross weapon to prove that the women have selfish motives for advocating for "equality."



The men who were closest to the Grimké sisters withdraw their support when it matters most, for fear that the issue of gender equality will overtake their efforts for abolition. Sarah and Nina assert that their identities as women can be an asset to the cause of racial equality if the men will step up for the cause of women. They don't go so far as to suggest true "intersectionality"—that all oppression is linked, and no true fight for freedom can be divorced from the fight for freedom of other oppressed groups—but Kidd seems to imply it in the narrative.



Little Missus sees the quilt that was Charlotte's life's work and dares to call it ugly. Handful is insulted, seeing another example of white masters refusing to see anything human in their slaves. Still, Little Missus clearly knows that slavery is wrong, and feels guilt when confronted with all of the pain that her family caused Charlotte.



The insult to her mother is the final straw for Handful. Aside from all the physical pain she has borne, this emotional blow is far worse. Handful and Sky are now throwing caution away completely for the chance to run for freedom.



Sarah. On May 14th, Nina marries Theodore Weld. Sarah finds the whole occasion beautiful, though Nina wears a free-labor brown cotton dress instead of a fancy gown. Mother even sends a letter blessing the wedding and calling Sarah her dear daughter. This union of two prominent abolitionists in front of a mixed-race congregation becomes known as the Abolition Wedding.

As the wedding ceremony begins, Sarah thinks of all the things that led up to this wedding: Theodore's agreement with Nina's right to speak, the split among abolitionists over the issue of women orators, and the fight for women's rights. Sarah was overjoyed when Theodore proposed to Nina, but scared for the loss of her own place in Nina's life. Yet Nina quoted a passage from the biblical book of Ruth and asked Sarah to remain with her and Theodore even after they are married.

Nina pronounces herself and Theodore husband and wife, then the reception party begins. Sarah happily speaks to Lucretia Mott about their feminist accomplishments, until Sarah Mapps interrupts with a letter for Sarah. Sarah is terrified at the news that Handful is planning to run with Sky, imagining all the things that may go wrong. As the letter is only dated three weeks ago, Sarah decides to go to Charleston and see if she can convince Mother to have compassion and free Handful before Handful runs.

Handful. Handful takes her sewing upstairs to watch the boats out in the harbor. She sees men and women boarding and disembarking as the guards carefully check for stowaways aboard the ships. Handful knows that a boat leaves on Thursday for New York and that tickets are \$55. Now she just has to think of a way to get herself and Sky on it.

One week later, Handful has an epiphany: she and Sky can use Missus' old mourning dress to pose as mourning white ladies on a boat. Handful gets Missus' and Little Missus' magnificent black dresses out of storage and considers the alterations that would be necessary to fit the dresses to her or Sky's figures. The only thing they need now is shoes. Sky sings a Gullah song while Handful sews, with the lyrics "If you don't know where you're going, you should know where you come from." Sky reveals that she has made a tea of poisonous white oleander for herself and Handful to drink if their escape attempt fails.

Nina achieves the happy ending society expects for women, but uses it to further the cause of abolition. The wedding shows how far Sarah and Nina have come from their roots as wealthy Southerners, yet Mother's letter reminds them that they will always belong to their family.



Rather than Nina softening her position on women's right to speak in order to make Theodore more comfortable, Theodore had to choose to support Nina in order for their relationship to move forward and fulfill both Nina and Theodore. Nina also assures Sarah that she will always belong with Nina, even if she and Nina now have this large difference in lifestyle.



Nina takes control and power in her marriage by pronouncing herself and Theodore husband and wife, rather than leaving that to a man. Sarah's cautious instincts take over as she hopes for a legal solution to Handful's desire to run away. Sarah knows that her Mother offering freedom is a long-shot, but thinks that she might be able to appeal to Mother as her "dear daughter."



Handful had watched the harbor dreaming of freedom as a child, but she now has a concrete plan of how to make sure that she and Sky are on one of those boats. As an adult, Handful can finally take action towards her childhood longings.



Handful's plan uses Charleston's social conventions to their advantage, as mourning women are rarely bothered out of respect for their loss. Sky's song reinforces the importance of family and legacy. Charlotte taught both her children that they were once a free people and they deserve to be free again. Sky's tea underscores the life or death stakes of this endeavor. If they cannot reach freedom, they can at least end their lives in the manner of their choosing.



Sarah. Sarah gets back to Charleston, for the first time in 16 years. She relishes this return to the city of her birth, loving her city even as she is glad she left it. Yet the other Charleston residents cannot forgive Sarah for betraying the South. Sarah ignores them and goes to find Handful.

Sarah will always belong to Charleston, even as she seemingly fights against everything that Charleston stands for. Yet living as a slaveholder in Charleston is what convinced Sarah to fight so passionately for abolition, through her close interaction with Handful.



Handful is happy to see Sarah, but hopes that Sarah has not come to talk Handful out of her escape plan. Handful thinks that running away is a safer option than serving for the rest of her life. Sarah convinces Handful to wait until Sarah has a chance to talk to Mother before she does anything more. Handful is skeptical that Mother will do anything, but agrees to wait a few days.

Handful knows the dangers associated with running away, having listened to Charlotte's stories. She has decided for herself that running away is more important for her mental and spiritual health than it would be to ensure her physical safety by staying with the Grimkés. Handful knows that she will have to fight for her freedom, as no one is ever going to give it to her.



Sarah waits four days before talking to Mother. She knows that she has to approach the matter very delicately if she has any chance of swaying Mother's mind. Mother is already upset at Sarah's Charleston ban, telling Sarah that it would be more prudent for Sarah to leave soon. Sarah promises to leave as long as she can purchase Hetty and Sky to take with her. Mother knows that Sarah means to free them, and explains to Sarah that the Grimkés cannot do without a seamstress, regardless of the laws that complicate emancipating a slave.

Sarah seems to have pushed her mother too far, as Mother would rather Sarah simply leave Charleston rather than supporting her daughter against the ban from Charleston society. Mother thinks only of her own comfort, citing a need for a seamstress as the reason that she cannot free Handful. Charleston society makes it incredibly hard for any one slave holder to free their own slaves and erode the power of slavery as an institution.



Mary Jr., Sarah's older sister, joins the fight about Hetty and Sky, asking why Sarah feels the right to attack their way of life. Sarah explodes, asking Mary why the Southerners feel that God has given them permission to subjugate people, as if God himself were white. It is the most audacious Sarah has ever been. Mother stops Sarah and refuses to sell Hetty and Sky, but offers a compromise.

Sarah questions the religious justifications for slavery, knowing through her experience with Quakerism that faith does not have to involve subjugating other people. Sarah attacks the privilege of whiteness and boldly states that their way of life is wrong.



Sarah goes down to the cellar room that night and wakes Handful. Sky wakes too, and calls Sarah "the best of the Grimkés," faint praise to Sarah's ears. Sarah tells Handful that Mother agreed to set Handful and Sky free in her will, but Handful refuses to wait for Mother to die. Handful announces that she and Sky will be leaving in two days. Sarah asks what she can do to help.

Even if Sarah is the best of the Grimkés, she knows that she too has been complicit in slavery for too long. Now is the time to act against it. Handful refuses to spend any more of her life under a master or mistress, knowing that waiting for Mother to die means risking the possibility of suffering even more as a slave – or even dying a slave herself.



Handful. The night before they plan to leave, Handful and Sky gather together all the supplies they will need for their mourning disguises. As Handful sews pockets into their dresses to hide their money and possessions, Sky comments that the rabbit is outfoxing the fox. Sarah agrees to hide Charlotte's **story quilt** in her trunk. Handful notices that Sarah is not the same timid girl she was, and says that her hair is shining like **red thread**. Handful goes out to the spirit tree one last time to gather clippings to put in the pouch she wears at her neck.

The next morning, Handful and Sky act as if nothing special is happening. At nine o'clock, Sarah goes to give Missus one final goodbye, wearing her **silver button** at her throat. Handful and Sky paint their faces with white flour gum and get dressed in the mourning clothing, slipping tiny vials of oleander tea in their pockets. Handful tries not to get her hopes up about the free lives waiting for them in the north.

Sarah bluffs past Missus' butler and gets Handful and Sky ready in the carriage. Goodis notices Handful underneath the make-up and Handful worries that everyone will find her out. Still, the three women continue with the plan. At the harbor, they board a boat and find seats. Two guards board and ask Handful where she is traveling. Sarah tries to speak, but can't get any words out. Handful remembers her dress and begins to cry as if she is trying to answer but can't speak for grief. The guard apologizes for her apparent loss and moves on.

The boat's engine starts and pulls away from the gangplank. Sarah holds Handful's hand as they watch Charleston fade into the distance, and Handful pictures the scene as the last square on **her mother's quilt**. Handful hears blackbird wings flapping as the boat sails off into the open water.

Handful, as a rabbit, should not naturally be able to trick the white masters, the foxes. Yet Handful and Sky are able to rise above what people say is the natural order of life for black people and white people and claim their freedom. They bring the quilt with them, honoring Charlotte's legacy. Handful also brings her spirit back from the tree, and compares Sarah's hair to red thread, now that Sarah is also fully committed to preserving the sanctity and autonomy of Handful and Sky's souls in the free North.



Sarah wears her button one more time, now letting it stand for pursuing freedom for the slaves at all costs. Handful and Sky hide their true identities from the masters and put on makeup for the hope of living in the North, where they will (hopefully) never have to censor their true spirits again.



Goodis sadly cannot follow Handful to this freedom, as Handful is risking enough for herself and her sister. On the boat, Sarah is rendered speechless one last time. It is Handful's ingenuity that saves Handful and Sky from scrutiny. Handful, though she has Sarah's help, does not need Sarah to be her "white savior." Sarah and Handful both contribute equally toward their freedom.



Sarah and Handful can finally publically show their friendship, joining hands as the boat leaves. Handful imagines this as the last square of the quilt that traces her family line into slavery and back out again. As Charlotte foretold, Handful invents her own wings and hears blackbird wings as she sails into the North and freedom.





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