

Kindred



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

Butler grew up in the racial mix of Pasadena, experiencing segregation and discrimination first-hand as she watched her mother and female relatives withstand abuse as maids from their employers. A dreamy and introspective child, Butler found escape in books and writing. After graduating high school, Butler found many temporary jobs that allowed her to attend Pasadena City College at night and later write in the early mornings. With the publication of the Patternist Series and *Kindred* in 1979, Butler was able to support herself on her writing alone. Butler has won numerous awards for her novels and short stories, including the Hugo for her short works [Speech Sounds](#) and [Bloodchild](#) and the Nebula Award for her book *The Parable of the Talents*. In 1995, Butler was the first science fiction author to receive the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship “Genius Grant” meant to sponsor brilliant work from the country’s leading artists. She is most famous for the Patternist Series, the Xenogenesis Trilogy, and the Parable Series, with *Kindred* representing her most significant departure from more clearly science fiction work. In 1999, Butler moved to Lake Forest Park, Washington, where she lived until her death. Her papers and manuscripts are now housed in the Huntington Library.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Much of the novel deals with the effects of two interracial relationships, though one is a legal marriage and the other is an arrangement in which a master takes sexual advantage of his slave. From accounts of the time period, it seems to have been a matter of course for white male slave masters to sexually abuse their female slaves, and less likely for white women to engage in relationships with black men. Despite this, the public perception painted black men as predators of white women, and warned against diluting the “purity” of the white race through these couplings. Very few white men legally recognized the mixed-race children that came from these relations, as Dana urges Rufus to do at the end of *Kindred*. The status of children matched the status of the mother, meaning that most mixed-race children were kept as slaves just like their black mothers, though some of the lightest-skinned children could run away and attempt to “pass” as white by hiding their racial identity. This explains why Dana would have no idea that her ancestry included white blood. Interracial marriage was not fully legal in all 50 states until 1967, only about a decade before Kevin and Dana married within the world of the novel. However, there is still a strong preference in certain regions of

America for partners of the same race, with interracial couples accounting for only 5% of all marriages annually.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In moving through time and space, Butler works within the template of a fantastic travelogue pioneered by science fiction authors such as Jules Verne, Jonathan Swift, and others – yet Butler approaches it from a specifically racially conscious perspective. Many works written after Butler’s initial foray into African American science fiction are collected in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* edited by Sheree Thomas. Butler also includes elements of the slave narrative, with extensive research into the slave narratives she could find, especially those with a strong autobiographical component such as [The Narrative of Frederick Douglass](#), Harriet Tubman’s accounts, and [Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl](#) by Harriet Jacobs. *Kindred* is an important entry into the neo-slave narrative genre that reconstructs the lives of slaves from a modern historical perspective. Butler also uses both of the neo-slave and science fiction genres for feminist purposes, featuring a strong female protagonist similar to those found in the works of Gayl Jones (*Corregidora*) and Toni Cade Bambara (*The Salt Eaters*).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Kindred*
- **When Published:** 1979
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary literature
- **Genre:** Fantasy, Science Fiction, Neo-Slave Narrative, Literature
- **Setting:** California, 1976 and Maryland, pre-Civil War
- **Climax:** When Rufus finally crosses the line of Dana’s freedom and attempts to rape her, Dana manages to stab Rufus and kill him. She returns to her present, but loses her left arm in the process.
- **Antagonist:** Tom Weylin, the institution of slavery, racism and discrimination
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Contemporary remake. As of 2017, *Kindred* has been adapted to a graphic novel by writer Damien Duffy and illustrator John Jennings, bringing this visceral account of slavery to a new audience and updating it to address the racial upheaval of recent years in America.

Gender dynamics. Dana, the main character of *Kindred*, was originally planned to be a male protagonist. Butler then developed a female protagonist in order to explore the ways that women would be treated as if they were weak and safe when they could really be powerful and dangerous.



PLOT SUMMARY

Dana (Edana) wakes in the hospital with her **left arm** amputated. Her husband, Kevin, comes in, and the couple hopes that the police won't investigate the incident any further.

The trouble began on June 9th, 1976 as Dana and Kevin are moving to a new house in Los Angeles, California. Dana feels dizzy and blacks out, then finds herself at a river where a young boy is drowning. Dana saves the child and gives him CPR, despite the protests of the boy's mother. The boy's father comes and points a rifle at Dana, but Dana is transported back to her home before the man can shoot. Kevin crouches over Dana, explaining that she was only gone a few seconds, though Dana is sure she spent minutes saving the boy. Kevin isn't sure if he believes Dana about where she went, but knows that something very strange is happening.

Dana tries to put the incident behind her, but a few hours later she again feels dizzy and finds herself transported to a bedroom in a wooden house. A boy—who looks like an older version of the boy that Dana saved from the river—is staring at his curtains burning in the corner of the room. Dana throws the curtains out the window, then tries to talk to the boy to find out what is happening. The boy's name is Rufus, and he remembers almost drowning and then being saved by Dana when he was five. When Rufus repeatedly calls Dana, a black woman, a “nigger,” Dana starts to believe that she is in the pre-Civil War South. According to Rufus, the date is 1815 and they are in Maryland, close to the town of Easton on the Weylin plantation. Dana realizes that she must be traveling through space and time, but she doesn't understand how this is happening. Dana vaguely remembers an old family Bible that listed the names Rufus Weylin and Alice Greenwood Weylin as the parents of Dana's great-great-grandmother Hagar Weylin. Dana realizes that she must travel through time and save Rufus each time his life is in danger in order to ensure the survival of her own family line.

To avoid meeting Rufus's cruel father again, Dana sneaks out of Rufus's house and heads for Alice's family cabin in the woods. Rufus gives her directions, saying that Alice is a “free black” and a friend of his. As Dana approaches the cabin, white men ride by and begin to terrorize the black family living there. These patrollers are supposed to ensure order among the slaves, but really just enjoy torturing black people. They whip Alice's father for leaving the Weylin plantation without a pass and drag him off, then beat Alice's mother. After they leave, Dana creeps up

to the house and secures a safe place to stay for the night. But another patroller waits outside and snatches Dana when she goes out to collect another blanket. Fighting for her life, Dana struggles not to let the patroller rape her and eventually knocks the man unconscious. Terrified that the man will kill her when he wakes, Dana tries to run away but gets too dizzy and blacks out. When Dana wakes, she is back in her home with Kevin. Dana explains that she traveled back in time, and Kevin realizes that she must be traveling to the past whenever Rufus is afraid he will die, and then returning to the present when she herself is afraid of death. The couple put together an emergency bag so that Dana will be ready when this happens again.

Dana and Kevin first met while Dana was working another temp job to fund her lifestyle of writing through the night. Kevin is also a writer, and has a book published. The two bond over their isolation from society and the fact that they have both lost their parents, and they soon begin dating. Others in the office make comments about their interracial relationship, as Kevin is white, but Kevin and Dana pay little attention.

Back in the present, Kevin helps Dana clean herself up after the beating the patroller gave her, but Dana then gets dizzy and returns to Rufus's time with Kevin in tow. Rufus is sprawled on the ground, having broken his leg falling from a tree as a young slave boy named Nigel watches, unsure how to help. Dana sends Nigel to get Rufus's father, who comes back with a wagon and a large slave named Luke. They get Rufus back to the house and Rufus's father, Tom, lets Dana stay with Rufus. Kevin pretends to be Dana's master in order to avoid questions, and he starts to tutor Rufus while his leg is broken. Dana joins the household, helping the cook Sarah and Sarah's mute daughter Carrie and reading to Rufus when his strict father and hysterical mother, Margaret, are not around. Dana still has difficulty fitting in, however, because she is educated like a white person though everyone in this time expects her to act like a slave. Eventually, Dana starts teaching Nigel to read as well, but the two are caught in the cookhouse by Tom. Tom drags Dana into the yard and **whips** her viciously, until she wonders if Tom is trying to kill her. Kevin hears the commotion and comes to the yard, but can't reach Dana before she transports back to the present.

Kevin and Dana had decided to get married even though their surviving family members did not support an interracial marriage. Now back in the new house that they had bought together, Dana does not feel at home without Kevin there. She carefully tries to wash the lash wounds on her back and recovers for eight days in the present before she is called back to the past. She finds herself in the woods with Rufus, now a young man, who is fighting a young black man while Alice watches. Dana convinces the young man, Isaac, not to kill Rufus, though Rufus raped Alice after Alice married Isaac. Isaac and Alice run away, heading North, while Dana gets Rufus back to the Weylin house. Dana learns that Kevin waited for her a

while, but five years have passed since Dana left and Kevin is now in the North. Rufus agrees to let Dana write Kevin a letter, but makes Dana burn a book on slavery and a map of Maryland so that Dana can't escape on her own.

Four days later, Alice and Isaac are caught by patrollers. Rufus goes to town and buys Alice back, while Isaac is punished horribly and sold to Mississippi. Alice is in terrible shape from the patrollers' beatings and dog packs, but Dana manages to nurse her back to health and keep her wounds free from infection. As Alice recovers, Rufus forces Dana to convince Alice to become his mistress. Alice hates it, but does so to keep herself safe from more punishment. In Rufus's room, Alice finds Dana's letter to Kevin—unsent. Dana decides to run away on her own rather than trust Rufus. She sneaks out and manages to make it past Easton town, but is betrayed by another slave. Tom and Rufus find Dana and bring her back, then whip her soundly. Dana spends a week recovering, then finds out that Tom wrote to Kevin on her behalf. Kevin arrives and he and Dana try to escape the Weylin estate. Unluckily, they meet Rufus on the road and Rufus threatens to shoot first Kevin, then Dana, if they leave. With Rufus's rifle pointed at her face, Dana gets scared enough that she transports herself and Kevin back to the present.

Kevin struggles to readjust to the present after five years spent in the past trying to help slaves escape while keeping himself alive. He can't even write anymore, and Dana sees traces of Tom and Rufus in Kevin's face and voice. After a few hours at home, Dana is transported to the past again and finds Rufus unconscious in a heavy rainstorm. She and Nigel get Rufus back to the house, where Tom puts Dana in charge of healing Rufus from the *ague* (malaria). Dana does her best with her limited medical knowledge. It has been six years for the Weylins, and Alice has had a child with Rufus named Joe. Dana still desperately waits for her ancestor Hagar to be born so she can be freed of her connection to the Weylin family. After Rufus recovers, Tom has a heart attack and dies. Though there is nothing Dana could do, Rufus blames Dana and sends Dana out to the field for a day of backbreaking work under the harsh overseer's whip. As an apology, Rufus then assigns Dana to the relatively easy work of being a servant to Margaret, who is now addicted to laudanum. With her education, Rufus also puts Dana in charge of household affairs. He seems to see Alice and Dana as two halves of his wife. Alice has another child, this one finally Hagar, and makes plans to run away as soon as the baby is old enough to withstand the trip. Dana tries to convince Alice to wait and persuade Rufus to officially free Alice's children, but neither is responsive. Rufus then crosses the line by selling off a slave who had committed the "crime" of speaking to Dana and making Rufus jealous. Stripped of the semblance of control over her life, Dana sends herself back to the present by cutting her own wrists.

Kevin helps Dana get medical attention for her wrists and the

two have 15 days of peace to heal and reaffirm their relationship. They have a hard conversation about whether Dana can manage to kill Rufus if she travels again. Dana believes she can if Rufus attacks her or attempts to rape her. On July 4th, Dana is called back to Rufus. She finds him distraught outside the Weylin house, and learns that Alice has committed suicide by hanging herself in the barn. Rufus punished Alice for trying to run away again by pretending to sell Joe and Hagar, plunging Alice into a deep depression that ended in her death. Dana convinces Rufus to be a true father to Joe and Hagar, even drawing up certificates of freedom for the children when he brings them back to the Weylin plantation from Baltimore. Yet Rufus wants Dana to stay with him and act as a mother to his children. He forces himself on Dana in her room in the attic, and Dana is compelled to get her knife from her emergency bag and stab Rufus. When Rufus dies, Dana is catapulted back to the present, but the place on Dana's arm where Rufus's hand was clamped is severed and crushed in the wall of Dana's house.

After Dana's amputated arm heals, Kevin and Dana travel to Maryland in the present to find out what happened to the Weylin family. Nigel covered up Rufus's death with a fire and he and Carrie, now Nigel's wife, took Joe and Hagar to Baltimore to raise them. Dana knows that she will never find out everything about her family's past, and Kevin encourages her to look to the future free of Rufus and her other ancestors.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dana (Edana) Franklin – The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Dana is a black woman from 1979 California who gets pulled back in time to Antebellum Maryland to save the life of her white ancestor, Rufus Weylin. Dana is a strong, resourceful, intelligent woman, as well as a writer like her white husband Kevin. Dana learns how to adapt to the oppression of the Antebellum (pre-Civil War) era, but always retains her sense of self and autonomy despite Rufus's attempts to force her to become a true slave. Dana struggles between the relationships she has built with fellow slaves on the Weylin plantation, such as Sarah and Nigel, her sisterhood with the enslaved Alice, and her blood tie to Rufus as she tries to survive in the past with as little damage as possible to herself and others. As Butler deals with issues of freedom and privilege, she displays in the bonds between Dana and Rufus the delicate balance between master and slave and in Dana and Kevin the eventual possibilities of truly beneficial interracial relationship. Dana **loses her left arm** after her final trip to the past, bearing a physical reminder of the burden that many descendants of slaves bear from this family history.

Kevin Franklin – Dana's husband, a white man with eerily pale

eyes. Kevin, like Dana, is a writer, and the two bond over their feelings of isolation and detachment from the other people in their machinery office. Kevin is an example of the progress that some white people have made in rejecting racism and treating people of color with respect, though he does not fully understand Dana's background as a black woman. He and Dana do research her past, and Kevin supports Dana as much as possible when they are transported to the past together. In the Antebellum South, Kevin must come to grips with his own emphasized privilege as a white man and avoid becoming a monster who oppresses others to survive in this harsh time. Butler draws comparisons between Kevin, Rufus, and Tom, as these white men alternately help or harm other people using their privilege. Kevin works to free slaves using his relative safety as a white man and strives to protect Dana whenever possible.

Rufus Weylin – A white, red-headed slave owner in Antebellum Maryland, and Dana's ancestor. Rufus is a product of his time and culture, becoming harsher, more selfish, and crueler as the years go by and he is more immersed in the patriarchal slave-holding culture of the South. While Dana attempts to teach Rufus respect for all people regardless of race, Rufus is unable to overcome his upbringing and societal pressure. He loves Alice, but the obsessive and possessive nature of his affection provides a horrifying glimpse into an interracial relationship gone wrong. Throughout the novel, Butler uses Rufus to show the complicated relationship that slaves can have for their masters, as Dana comes to regard Rufus with a mix of fear, loathing, and even a small amount of affection. However, Rufus never learns to truly treat black people with respect and becomes an irredeemable character by the end of the novel.

Alice Jackson (Greenwood) – Though born a free black woman, Alice becomes a slave of the Weylin estate after the arrest of her first husband, Isaac Jackson. Rufus retains an obsessive love for Alice since childhood and forces Alice to become his mistress. Alice later bears two children with Rufus, Joseph and Hagar – and Hagar turns out to be Dana's great-grandmother. When Dana travels back in time, she and Alice build a sister-like relationship. They often fight, but ultimately share a deep bond. Alice consistently attempts to reach her freedom, showing the fiery viewpoint of slaves who were willing to escape slavery at any cost, and she tragically commits suicide when Rufus sells her children as punishment for a failed runaway attempt.

Sarah – The cook of the Weylin family, who chooses to stay a slave in order to ensure the safety of her deaf, mute daughter Carrie. Sarah and Dana become friends and Dana learns to respect Sarah's endurance and self-sacrifice. Butler uses Sarah to undermine the "mammy" stereotype of a slave who becomes too close to the white family they serve. Sarah's subservient attitude to the Weylin family masks a deep rage at the abuse that the Weylins have put Sarah through by selling her children.

Tom Weylin – Rufus' father. Tom is a harsh master to his slaves, but Dana notes that Tom is not an entirely cruel man. Tom does what he thinks is right for a man of his standing during this time period, which means putting black people "in their place" when he feels they are being too presumptuous and **whipping** them himself when they "deserve" punishment. Tom is also cold and distant to his own son, up to and including whipping Rufus. Tom is very dismissive of his wife Margaret. Though Tom is not necessarily a bad man, he does represent the harmful actions that many men in the south during this time period committed in order to assert their masculinity and privilege in society.

Margaret Weylin – Tom Weylin's wife and Rufus's mother, a hysterical and high-strung woman who relieves her boredom and sense of uselessness by making the lives of her house slaves miserable. She particularly hates Dana due to Dana's higher education and confidence. Margaret's sense of propriety and insistence on acting like a lady mask a deep-seated insecurity, fed by both her husband's and her son's callous treatment of her and the rumors that she came from a white-trash family. In her old age, Margaret mellows when she becomes addicted to laudanum.

Nigel – A slave on the Weylin estate, Nigel is the personal servant to Rufus and enjoys some of the advantages of living close to white people. Nigel does what he wishes despite the threat of **whippings**, like his father Luke. Yet Nigel is tied down on the Weylin plantation when he marries Carrie and has a son, Jude. Nigel eventually helps Dana cover up Rufus's death and raises Joe and Hagar in Baltimore. Nigel consistently puts family above everything, as another character who displays the importance of kinship in the novel.

Carrie – A slave on the Weylin estate, Carrie is Sarah's daughter and the only child Sarah has left (as the others have been sold). Carrie is deaf and mute, but finds other ways to assert her power and agency in her own life. Carrie eventually marries Nigel and has three sons, including Jude.

Alice's Mother – Alice's mother is a free black woman, legally making Alice free as well. Alice's mother teaches Alice to be strong, but is unable to protect her daughter from the harsh reality of life for all black people in the slave-holding American South. Alice's mother also agrees to help Dana as long as it does not further endanger herself and Alice, but her true priority is only her own family.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Hagar Weylin – Alice and Rufus's youngest child, and Dana's great-grandmother.

Sam Jones – A field hand at the Weylin Estate who is sold by Rufus after Sam expresses an interest in Dana.

Isaac Jackson – Alice's husband, who is tortured and sold into slavery in Mississippi when he and Alice are caught trying to run away.

Luke – A slave on the Weylin Estate, and Nigel's father.

Tess – A slave of the Weylin estate, who is sexually abused by Tom Weylin.

Jake Edwards – A cousin of Rufus Weylin, who works as the overseer on the estate and is harsh and cruel to the slaves.

Liza – A slave on the Weylin estate who betrays Dana to try to ensure her own safety. Liza is then ostracized by the other slaves, which shows the loyalty of the slave family on the plantation.

Joseph (Joe) Weylin – The young son of Rufus and Alice, who looks like a darker version of Rufus.

Evan Fowler – The overseer that takes over from Jake Edwards. Evan is even crueler to the slaves than Jake was, wielding **the whip** with absolutely no regard for the slaves' humanity.

Jude – The infant son of Nigel and Carrie, born into slavery.

Old Mary – A slave on the Weylin plantation who used to know healing and herbs, but now is old and has lost her memory.

Buz – A worker at Dana's temp agency who is prejudiced against Kevin and Dana's interracial relationship.

or societal protection within the institution of slavery. In contrast, Rufus and his parents seem unable to form meaningful and healthy relationships with one another and rarely help each other in times of trouble. Dana then attempts to help Rufus bond with his own children, born from the enslaved Alice, in an effort to help Rufus see that families have to support each other in order to survive. Butler points out that families have a responsibility to help one another, even if it is only to ensure their own survival. The slave families are forced to put these bonds to the test, forming connections—in order to endure the harsh treatment from their masters—that are far stronger than the blood bonds between other characters. Dana chooses to remain loyal to Alice and the slaves who suffered with her rather than simply looking at the biological connections that tie her to Rufus.

Butler further explores the ways that families can be formed by choice, giving Dana and her husband Kevin a new definition of home. Dana and Kevin act as each other's family when their respective biological families are unable to support their career ambitions or their interracial relationship. When they are separated by time travel, both Dana and Kevin are unable to feel at home when the other person is not there. The notion of home becomes more than a place, but rather the location where a person can be with the people that they love. Even as Dana desperately wants to get "home" to the present and to Kevin and escape the pain of life in the past, the Weylin plantation begins to feel like home precisely because Dana feels as though she belongs with the people there and has a responsibility to help care for them through the "stronger, sharper reality" of this intense time. Dana has both biological ancestral family and chosen family on the Weylin plantation, and therefore feels caught between her home in the past and her home in the present each time she travels.

When the time travel finally ends, Dana and Kevin bring these two notions of home together by going to Maryland and researching the fates of Dana's biological ancestors. Butler asserts that home is made up of places where people have strong personal connections, even if those connections are as fraught with pain as Dana's racially complicated family history.



INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Butler depicts the complicated dynamics and power struggles of many different types of interracial relationships, in the romantic relationship between Dana and Kevin, the master-slave relationship between Rufus and Alice, and the complex familial relationship between Dana and Rufus. In Dana and Kevin's marriage, Butler shows the possibility of an interracial relationship that is built on true connection based on shared personality and experiences, as the couple each struggle to become writers, rather than focusing narrowly on the differences in their race. However, Dana and Kevin's



THEMES

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FAMILY AND HOME

Starting with the book's very title, family and kinship are some of the most important considerations to the characters and plot of

Kindred. The family bond between Rufus and Dana is the driving force of the story, as Dana travels back in time to save Rufus each time he is in trouble, because she has to keep Rufus alive so that he can bear the child that will continue Dana's family line. Yet family is not a simple concept in the novel, as Rufus and Dana also have to navigate what it means to be family when Dana is black and Rufus is white. Butler highlights the fact that American families are very rarely purely one race or another, and that the very idea of racial purity is a fiction meant to perpetuate the damaging racial hierarchy of white and black in America.

Dana must then decide whether her familial responsibility belongs with the enslaved African Americans on the Weylin plantation or with Rufus Weylin himself. Dana admires the strength of the bonds between the black families on the plantation, and laments that these families are not given legal

relationship is not free from the harmful effects of racial discrimination. They each have to fight against prejudiced family members and co-workers, while maintaining a balance where Dana's writing career does not come second to Kevin's, even though Kevin is more socially accepted as an author due to his race and gender. Still, Dana and Kevin each put in the necessary effort to meet each other with mutual respect and support to make an honest, loving relationship possible.

In contrast, Rufus and Alice are the ultimate example of an unhealthy interracial couple. Rufus is obsessed with "possessing" Alice as both a slave and the object of his affection, while Alice regards Rufus, her master, with a mix of fear, loathing, pity, and hints of affection. The social structures and injustice surrounding black and white relations in the Antebellum South make it impossible for Rufus and Alice to escape the twisted power discrepancy of Rufus as a master and the de-humanizing oppression of Alice as a slave. A romantic relationship between them cannot be beneficial for either partner, because there is no respect or common ground between them. Rufus sexually exploits Alice with no regard for her human feelings, forcing Alice to give up her consent and freedom as well as subjecting her to the resentment of the other slaves. If Alice gives in to Rufus's sexual desire for her, she both gives up control over her own body and "betrays" her fellow slaves by taking advantage of the comforts that sleeping with the plantation master gives her. In the end, Alice chooses to take her own life rather than losing her self-respect by becoming Rufus's loyal mistress, and Rufus is also destroyed because he cannot recognize the necessity of respecting black women as equals instead of objects.

Contact between these two couples influences the dynamic between Dana and Kevin as well as Rufus and Alice. Dana, as a present day descendent of both the white master and the black slave, tries to approach Rufus from the position of an equal and convince Rufus to acknowledge Alice as a fellow human and true romantic partner. Yet the time that Dana and Kevin spend in the past also exposes their healthy marriage to the harmful effects of slavery on black-white relations. Butler emphasizes the physical similarities between Kevin and Rufus (as well as Rufus's father Tom) as well as between Dana and Alice, stressing how interracial relationships in the present are not free from the legacies of oppression and privilege between the races in America. Butler acknowledges the unique conflicts that interracial couples face, yet also advocates for increased acceptance of interracial couples so that these couples can move forward in a more supportive atmosphere and provide crucial first steps to healing the racial divide in America. It is only when systems of oppression and privilege are not present that couples have a chance of stripping away the differences of race and racial experience in order to connect in a positive way. While this one healthy couple certainly doesn't solve the centuries of pain that white masters inflicted on black slaves,

Kevin and Dana do offer a future in which white and black people are equal and integrated and have a chance at an authentically loving relationship.



HISTORY AND TRAUMA

Much of the novel focuses on the many ways that American slaves faced incredible emotional and physical pain throughout the history of the

American slave states. Butler, led by a desire to remind Civil Rights activists not to blame slaves for accepting their abuse by offering a reminder of the extent of the trauma that slaves faced, bears visceral witness to the terrible things that slaves daily survived. Rather than using the enslaved characters as simple objects for displaying the horrors of slavery, Butler takes care to make each of her black characters nuanced and complicated human beings. By giving the awful facts of oppression and harm human faces, Butler acknowledges both the pain inflicted in the past and the pain of forgetting or minimizing what African American ancestors endured when this history is reduced to statistics and stereotypes.

By actually traveling back in time, Dana is forced to grapple with the insane violence of slavery instead of passively reading about it or pretending that it didn't happen in order to go on with her life. Butler gives a voice to the aspects of slavery that others try to sanitize for a present day audience in the name of "moving on." Recognizing that the trauma of slavery continues to affect the descendants of slaves in the present day, as seen in the racial discrimination that Dana faces at her job and the resistance to interracial relationships that Dana and Kevin encounter, Butler stresses the importance of understanding the past in order to come to terms with histories of trauma rather than ignoring past violence in a foolhardy attempt to erase those wrongs. In fact, Butler gives support to the old adage, "those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it" by marking the similarities between the centuries of American slavery practices and the crimes against the Jewish population in Europe during the Holocaust. The historical practices of slavery offered a model for oppression later followed by tyrants, which would continue as long as people remain ignorant to the real horror faced by oppressed groups in the past. Dana's wounds in the past and **the loss of her arm** physically bring this trauma back to the present, making it clear how much trauma in the past influences the lives of those in the present.

Though the novel centers on one woman traveling back to the antebellum period, Butler makes it clear that Dana's purpose is not to change the course of the Weylin family or their slaves. Dana is actually supposed to make sure that history happens how it did, so that Dana's ancestor Hagar can be born. While Dana is there, she realizes that she cannot change history, but she can witness it and move past it. She does what she can to minimize the pain of those in her immediate surroundings, but

the entire social history of the South cannot be changed by one person. Similarly, *Kindred* as a whole does not attempt to rewrite history or cast the burden of slavery in a new light, but instead testifies to the pain that slaves went through and honors the sacrifices and trauma they had to live through so that African Americans in the present could have a chance at a better life.



FREEDOM AND PRIVILEGE

As Dana moves between time periods, she (and her husband Kevin) also move between various states of freedom and privilege. Dana, a modern African

American woman, has to deal with the total loss of her freedom in order to keep herself alive on the estate of her white ancestor, Rufus Weylin, in the oppressive Antebellum South. In contrast, Kevin must learn to resist the increased privilege he gains as a white male in the Antebellum South. Though Kevin and Dana already have to balance Kevin's white male privilege in their relationship in the present, the gap between them is even more pronounced in the past. Kevin is encouraged to use the full extent of his privilege to brutalize others in the past, straining their relationship and threatening to demean Dana as an abused slave and Kevin as a cruel master.

While taking on the persona of a slave, Dana must be very careful not to forget her own freedom. She faces the constant struggle against white supremacy as embodied by Rufus and his family who believe that they can use and abuse all black people however they see fit. Various characters remark that Dana sounds “white” due to her education and writing ability, equating freedom of expression and self-confidence with whiteness. No matter where in time she is, Dana finds freedom in writing, using the practice to assert her own identity in the face of male privilege when Kevin, and later Rufus, expect her to write for their purposes instead of her own. Furthermore, Dana feels guilty at how much she hates her small episodes of living in slavery, knowing that she has been far more privileged than any of the slaves born on the Weylin estate simply because she knows that African Americans will achieve freedom in the future. Dana thus holds on to some vestiges of privilege through her education and her healthy self-esteem even when she is surrounded by the harmful and dehumanizing system of slavery.

However, freedom in the “present” is still marked by racial and sexual discrimination. Butler recognizes that freedom, privilege, slavery, and oppression are all measured on sliding scales based on factors of race, gender, ability, and more. There is not a simple binary between free and not free or privileged and not privileged, as Dana is “free” in the present and has some markers of privilege, yet is still oppressed as a woman of color. The future is not perfect, and is still marked by racial discrimination and the systems of white and male privilege that made life unbearable for Dana in the past. Significant strides

have been made, but there is still work to be done to ensure that every member of American society is truly free and that systematic privilege based on race or gender does not dehumanize or distort relationships between people.



CHOICE AND POWER

As Butler delves into the everyday lives of Antebellum slaves in a neo-slave narrative, she also points out the places where slaves take back

agency and power in their lives despite the oppressive system that attempts to rob them of their choice and humanity. At points, it seems as though slaves are choosing to stay oppressed. The Weylins' cook, Sarah, flatly refuses to think of running away to the North, a choice that Dana secretly thinks would be seen as weak and cowardly by later generations of African Americans. Yet Butler points out that these supposedly weak choices actually display the strength of slaves who are choosing to accept abuse to keep themselves and their loved ones safe. Sarah cannot attempt to run away as long as she has to worry about keeping her mute daughter Carrie free from harm. The Weylin slaves do not need Dana (or Kevin) to step in and educate them on how they should be taking back their own freedom—rather they need Dana to respect the choices that they have made in order to survive within this horrific societal system. As Butler portrays it, the life of a slave is marked by using the illusion of powerlessness to protect what agency and choice the slaves can save for themselves. Carrie is the ultimate example of this, without even a voice to express her pain and an inability to communicate verbally that suggests that she has no power or choice over her own life. Yet Dana finds out that Carrie still finds ways to communicate through self-devised sign language, and that Carrie is actually one of the brightest slaves on the Weylin estate. Though Carrie may not seem to have any agency, she is one of the few slaves to escape at the end of the novel, as Butler overturns the usual expectations about power and potential.

The insane horror of slavery sometimes pushes the slaves to make the hardest choice of all, when it is the only choice left to them. For some, this means choosing death when life is unbearable, such as when Alice chooses to commit suicide after the perceived sale of her children. Butler certainly does not glorify this choice, but she does present it as an understandable reaction to Alice's feeling that all of her power, choice, and life's purpose had been taken away. In comparison, Dana consistently asserts her power in her interactions with Rufus, making sure that Rufus understands that he must respect her if he wants her to continue to help him when he gets into trouble. Yet Dana must temper her power with the knowledge that Rufus may lash out at other slaves if Rufus feels that Dana is stepping out of her “place” too far, eventually choosing to feign powerlessness in order to protect others. When other tactics of entering a healthy partnership with Rufus ultimately fail,

Dana makes the difficult choice of taking Rufus's life in self-defense. Rufus has no respect for Dana's agency over her own body, and underestimates Dana's power over his life. This fundamental lack of understanding pushes Dana past her breaking point and into this critical decision of murder.

Throughout the novel, Butler shows the ways that people who might seem powerless might actually be the most powerful. Yet the mask of powerlessness comes with a price. When people's fundamental agency is constricted, they can be pushed into making life-or-death decisions that display their true power.



SYMBOLS

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



DANA'S LOST LEFT ARM

Dana's lost hand both opens and closes the novel, bookending *Kindred* with a reminder that Dana's

intense experience in the past may be over, but it is not something that she can move on from unmarked. Significantly, Dana seems to lose her arm because Rufus keeps hold of her wrist when she transports back to the present. Rufus' touch symbolically represents the power that Rufus had as Dana's master and the lingering effect that living under the white master's thumb had on enslaved people and their children. Dana is alive, with her soul and relationship with her husband Kevin intact, but she could not return from the past whole. Her time as a slave has left a deep impression on her psyche as Dana comes to terms with the dehumanizing effects of slavery on her fragile human body.

Unlike many of the wounds, both physical and emotional, that Dana suffered from her time in the Antebellum South, the loss of an arm is a permanent disability that will mark Dana forever. There is nothing Dana can do to regain her arm, just as the systems of slavery have permanent consequences on African American lives and race relations in America. The traumas of the past are not over for the descendants of enslaved peoples in America, as the African American population still feels the effects of the years of oppression and abuse that their ancestors endured as slaves. This is not something that can easily be "gotten over" or "moved past." Losing her arm gives Dana a physical reminder of how this history still affects her. While Kevin, a white man, is able to look forward to a future where he and Dana no longer have to be afraid of being sent back to the past, Dana's lost arm shows how Dana will never be able to fully forget about the trauma her ancestors suffered.



THE WHIP

The whip represents the physical abuse of slavery and the psychological terror that enslaved people experienced from living in such horrible conditions. While many characters in the novel use weapons and inflict physical harm on one another, the whip is ultimately used only by white people for abuse and never for self-defense. Whipping thus represents the incredible imbalance of power between white and black people in the Antebellum South. White men who carry the whip, such as Tom Weylin and Evan Fowler, are symbolically past the hope of learning to regard black people as equals rather than objects or animals.

The disproportionate ability of white people to use the whip to enact violence against black people increases the emotional cost of these blows. While the wounds of whip lashes are already physically extensive, the fear of being whipped adds a powerful emotional component to the control of the enslaved characters at the Weylin plantation. Dana undergoes several whippings and sees how the constant threat of physical pain could push people into accepting the less extreme yet still damaging drudgery of slavery in order to avoid the physical abuse that the whip threatens. After being whipped for attempting to run away, Dana wonders if she has the strength to ever chase her freedom again, knowing the pain that the whip brings. Spending one day in the field, Dana learns the terror of the overseer who follows her with the whip and lashes out no matter how fast Dana is working. The whip gives the white masters complete control over the slaves and restrains their mental freedom as well as harming them physically.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Beacon Press edition of *Kindred* published in 2009.

Prologue Quotes

☞ I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone. When the police released Kevin, he came to the hospital and stayed with me so that I would know I hadn't lost him too.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Kevin Franklin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Dana loses her left arm on her final trip back from the past, though the prologue leaves the circumstances of this injury mysterious. What is clear from the start, though, is Dana's attachment to Kevin. Even through the horrible things that Dana undergoes while living as a slave on her ancestor's plantation, she never loses sight of the wonderful relationship she has with her husband, Kevin, even though Kevin is white. Through Kevin and Dana, Butler offers hope for healthy interracial relationships to thrive despite the many losses that African Americans, in particular, have to deal with even after slavery has been abolished for decades. Dana confronts these issues head on in her trips to the past, and is unable to come back from the experience unscathed. Yet though she bears the marks of slavery on her body, Dana does not give up on Kevin due to this past trauma. She may be disabled moving forward, burdened with a constant reminder in her lost limb of the trauma of her ancestral past, but Kevin and Dana still have a future worth working towards together.

Chapter 1: The River Quotes

☞ "I'm beginning to feel as though I'm humoring myself." "What do you mean?"

"I don't know. As real as the whole episode was, as real as I know it was, it's beginning to recede from me somehow. It's becoming like something I saw on television or read about—like something I got second hand."

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Kevin Franklin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

The first time that Dana travels back into the past, she doesn't understand what is happening and has trouble believing that this sort of teleportation through time and space is even possible. As her husband, Kevin, also has trouble wrapping his head around the reality of time travel, the two are almost able to convince themselves that this whole experience was an odd hallucination of Dana's that Kevin "humors" his wife by listening to. Yet Dana still knows that these events in the past were real, even as she immediately starts to distance herself from the actual details of her experience as a protection mechanism. Likewise, modern Americans often know the bare facts of

American history without fully engaging in the reality of life for Americans in the past – both white and black. Butler recounts the actual experiences of enslaved people in the American South, reminding her readers that these things, atrocious though they may be, are the actual events of history. As Dana must come to grips with the immediate reality of her situation when she time travels in order to survive and save her family line, Butler's readers also must confront the truth of the past rather than treating it like a distant fiction with no effect on their lives.

Chapter 2: The Fire Quotes

☞ Alice Greenwood. How would she marry this boy? Or would it be marriage? And why hadn't someone in my family mentioned that Rufus Weylin was white? If they knew. Probably, they didn't. Hagar Weylin Blake had died in 1880, long before the time of any member of my family that I had known. No doubt most information about her life had died with her.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Rufus Weylin, Alice Jackson (Greenwood), Hagar Weylin

Related Themes:   



Page Number: 28


Explanation and Analysis

Dana slowly puts together that she is traveling into the past to save Rufus, a white boy in the Antebellum South who will someday begin Dana's own family line, along with a black woman named Alice Greenwood. Recognizing that it would have been impossible at that time for Rufus and Alice to have had a legal marriage, Dana wonders how this interracial relationship actually played out. These mysteries are a part of many American families, as Butler points out how often family history becomes tangled even when modern Americans would rather believe that the story was simple. Dana, a black woman, has always believed that all of her ancestors were also black. Yet *Kindred* points out how frequently masters took advantage of their female slaves and increased the number of mixed-race children who were treated as black in society. Through Dana's travels to the past, she gets to witness firsthand details about her family tree that most modern Americans never find out.

☛ I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. I was probably less prepared for the reality than the child crying not far from me. In fact, she and I were reacting very much alike.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Alice Jackson (Greenwood)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 36



Explanation and Analysis

Dana, a 20th-century woman, is confronted with the sharp reality of violence in the Antebellum South when she witnesses a group of white Patrollers harass a slave for the crime of visiting his wife at night. Though Dana is no stranger to racial discrimination and televised violence in the modern world, she is shocked at the visceral nature of the torment that her ancestors had to face. Indeed, the young girl crying at the whipping is actually Dana's many-times great-grandmother, Alice. Alice and Dana are each exposed to true violence for the first time at this whipping, and have to choose how to respond to the horror of that experience. While Dana has some hope of escaping this life of pain, as she belongs in a future where slavery has already been abolished and black people are at least nominally protected by the law, Alice must find ways to survive this harsh world. Butler pays tribute to the strength that slaves and free blacks living in the days of plantation slavery needed just to make it through the awful reality of that time period, so that later generations like Dana could be born.

Chapter 3: The Fall Quotes

☛ I was working out of a casual labor agency—we regulars called it a slave market. Actually, it was just the opposite of slavery. The people who ran it couldn't have cared less whether or not you showed up to do the work they offered.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

In the present, Dana is removed enough from her ancestors' experience of slavery to joke about it by calling her temporary job a "slave market." This somewhat flippant attitude towards actual slavery is a privilege of Dana's place as a modern woman who knows that she will never be enslaved. Though the temporary labor agency is obviously very different from the institution of American slavery – as Dana explains when she says that no one at the agency is forced to do work against their will – there are certain similarities. Both slave labor and the casual agency jobs are menial tasks that require little special ability on the part of the people who perform them. Dana takes these jobs so that she can conserve her mental energy for her writing, but enslaved peoples were actively discouraged from developing their intellect. Dana's ability to choose when and how she uses her education is another mark of her privilege when compared to her enslaved ancestors.

☛ He had written and published three novels, he told me, and outside members of his family, he'd never met anyone who'd read one of them. They'd brought so little money that he'd gone on taking mindless jobs like this one at the warehouse, and he'd gone on writing—unreasonably, against the advice of saner people. He was like me—a kindred spirit crazy enough to keep on trying.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Kevin Franklin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Kevin and Dana meet while working day jobs at a warehouse they hate in order to fund their dreams of being authors. They build a relationship from this basis of shared desires and sense of "kindred spirits" (a phrase recalling the novel's title and the theme of family and home), giving them a solid foundation from which to deal with the difficulties of having an interracial relationship. Dana and Kevin do not ignore the differences in their familial and cultural backgrounds, but they prioritize the ways that their personalities and values are similar. Each prize their freedom and independence as writers above having a "normal" job according to the opinions of family or society. Race is certainly a consideration in their marriage, as Butler

does not present or advocate for a “colorblind” definition of interracial love that erases the heavy history of racial interactions in America, but Kevin and Dana put other things above this potential divide in the hopes of working toward a future in which racial harmony is possible. In a perfect world, Dana and Kevin would be met with support and encouragement for following their hearts rather than their skin color.

“Why you try to talk like white folks?” Nigel asked me. “I don’t,” I said, surprised. “I mean, this is really the way I talk.” “More like white folks than some white folks.”

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Nigel

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

When Dana is in the past, her modern (and Californian) speech patterns and education as a writer come out in her conversations with the other slaves on the Weylin plantation. When Nigel comments on this difference, he calls it talking like “white folks,” automatically associating education, articulate speech, and confident self-expression with white people alone. Dana is actually distrusted by both the Weylins themselves and her fellow enslaved characters because she sounds so different than the average slave. The Weylins, like most whites of the time, believe that educated slaves are more likely to run away and cause rebellion among the other slaves, whereas the Weylin slaves believe that talking like a white person is one step from wanting to be white. Dana has to prove that she is loyal to her chosen family of slaves and will not sell them out in order to gain favor or privileges with the white masters. Still, Dana’s clear speech and ability to read and write are huge advantages in a world where white society works to keep black voices muted and unheard. Dana can express herself and sometimes advocate for better treatment of all the slaves by reasoning with the white masters in language they respect.

“The expression in her eyes had gone from sadness—she seemed almost ready to cry—to anger. Quiet, almost frightening anger. Her husband dead, three children sold, the fourth defective, and her having to thank God for the defect. She had reason for more than anger. How amazing that Weylin had sold her children and still kept her to cook his meals. How amazing that he was still alive.”

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Sarah, Tom Weylin, Carrie

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Dana finds out that Sarah, the Weylins’ cook, has experienced huge losses at the hands of her white masters. In general, one of the worst emotional tolls that resulted from the institution of slavery was the destruction of black families. Sarah’s children are sold with no regard for how it will hurt her to be separated from them. Furthermore, Sarah’s last remaining child, Carrie, is kept primarily to ensure that Sarah will never run away to find her other children or do something to take revenge against her masters. Though Sarah feels this pain deeply, she cannot act on these emotions for fear that her masters will retaliate against Carrie. Sarah’s love for her children is used against her, keeping Sarah obedient despite the awful things that the Weylin family has done to her. As much as Sarah might wish to put something in the food or botch the cooking in a way that makes the Weylins ill (or even kills them), she has to serve them well to protect Carrie’s well-being. Instead of questioning Sarah’s decision not to “fight back” by poisoning the Weylins, Butler comments on Sarah’s strength for restraining herself from doing something rash that would ultimately cause Sarah even more pain by putting Carrie in danger.

“A place like this would endanger him in a way I didn’t want to talk to him about. If he was stranded here for years, some part of this place would rub off on him. No large part, I knew. But if he survived here, it would be because he managed to tolerate the life here.”

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Kevin Franklin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

When Kevin comes back to the past with Dana, Dana is very worried that Kevin might get stuck in the past alone if she transports back to the present without him. While Kevin, as a white male, will certainly be in less danger in the Antebellum South than Dana is herself, Kevin still faces significant peril the more time he spends in this harsh time period. Aside from the diseases and injuries that could hurt Kevin in the past, the poisonous atmosphere of this social climate might influence Kevin negatively against black people. In the present, Kevin has a strong sense of right and wrong that includes having respect for all people no matter their race. But living in the slave-holding South means that Kevin has to at least pretend to see white people as being superior to black people. Dana is worried that Kevin may start to actually believe that he deserves the privileges that this society gives to white people, and white men in particular, and begin to enjoy the control that he is given over other people here. That idea would seriously harm the Kevin that Dana knows, damaging his humanity just like being treated as a slave damages Dana's psyche.

☞ "This could be a great time to live in," Kevin said once. "I keep thinking what an experience it would be to stay in it—go West and watch the building of the country, see how much of the Old West mythology is true."
"West," I said bitterly. "That's where they're doing it to the Indians instead of the blacks!"
He looked at me strangely. He had been doing that a lot lately.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Kevin Franklin (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis



As Kevin is less affected by the horrible practices of slavery, he is able to see more of the fascinating and potentially positive aspects of Dana's time travel and living in the past. Kevin and Dana face many difficulties in the Antebellum South, but they also get a firsthand look at an interesting era of history. Kevin wants to push this interest further, finding out more about the American Old West in order to correct the historical record about life on the frontier where reliable surviving documents are often scarce. While Dana also sees the intellectual merit of their travels, she has less

protection from the painful and deplorable aspects of American history due to both her race and gender. After her firsthand experience of slavery and the very real violence of whites against blacks, Dana has more empathy for the Native American tribes that were enslaved or killed in the Old West, and cannot push past this discomfort to enjoy the potential academic interest of such a trip. Kevin, shielded from most of the worst effects of slavery thanks to his white skin, does not fully understand why Dana can't get over this unease in order to try to enjoy this time as a type of vacation, but Dana does not have that freedom in the past.

Chapter 4: The Fight Quotes

☞ "She doesn't care much for white people, but she prefers light-skinned blacks. Figure that out. Anyway, she 'forgives' me for you. But my uncle doesn't. He's sort of taken this personally." "Personally, how?"
"He ... well, he's my mother's oldest brother, and he was like a father to me even before my mother died because my father died when I was a baby. Now ... it's as though I've rejected him. Or at least that's the way he feels. It bothered me, really. He was more hurt than mad."

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Kevin Franklin (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 111


Explanation and Analysis

When Dana and Kevin decided to get married, they faced opposition from each of their families. In 1976, interracial couples were still somewhat of a novelty and both Kevin and Dana's relatives do not fully understand why each do not want someone "of their own kind." Dana's aunt and uncle also deal with the additional layer of internalized racism that prizes light black skin above darker black skin, as it is closer to the white "ideal." As American society in general tells black people that black skin is undesirable and white skin is beautiful, Dana's uncle is then somewhat understandably bothered by Dana's choice to reject the beauty of her own people in favor of a white man. While some white people argued against interracial marriages for fear of "diluting" their valuable white blood, a major argument made by people of color against interracial couples is that people of color should not perpetuate the idea that white people are inherently the most attractive and desirable partners. The damaging prejudices of American society keep Dana and

Kevin's family from being supportive of their relationship, though Dana and Kevin are very well-matched in personality. Their relationship of mutual respect and affection actually works in its own small way to bridge the divide between their races and dismantle the idea that only white people are worthy of love and marriage.

Then, somehow, I got caught up in one of Kevin's World War II books—a book of excerpts from the recollections of concentration camp survivors. Stories of beatings, starvation, filth, disease, torture, every possible degradation. As though the Germans had been trying to do in only a few years what the Americans had worked at for nearly two hundred.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Kevin Franklin (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 116-117

Explanation and Analysis

When Dana returns from living as a slave in the Antebellum South, she identifies with accounts of survivors from the Holocaust during World War II. She compares the horrible acts of the Nazis to the behavior of slave holders who worked at every turn to demean enslaved people and lessen their humanity. While the monstrosities of the Holocaust may have been more intense over a shorter period of time, Butler points out that those who lived through slavery endured conditions just as horrible over a much longer duration. Yet while Americans are largely comfortable acknowledging the events of the Holocaust as the worst impulses of mankind, there is often more hesitancy to take responsibility for the degradations of enslaved people that took place on American soil. Butler works to bear witness to the awful things that Dana's black ancestors had to survive and points out how human history repeats these damaging cycles of abuse and control when the pain of the past is forgotten or ignored.

I said nothing. I was beginning to realize that he loved the woman—to her misfortune. There was no shame in raping a black woman, but there could be shame in loving one. "I didn't want to just drag her off into the bushes," said Rufus. "I never wanted it to be like that. But she kept saying no. I could have had her in the bushes years ago if that was all I wanted." "I know," I said. "If I lived in your time, I would have married her. Or tried to."

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Rufus Weylin (speaker), Kevin Franklin, Alice Jackson (Greenwood)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 124



Explanation and Analysis


Rufus, Dana's white ancestor, confesses to be in love with the free black woman Alice Greenwood and tries to compare his feelings to the interracial marriage between Dana and her white husband Kevin. Dana recognizes that Rufus believes that he truly cares for Alice, but questions whether any romantic relationship between a white slave holder and a black person can be healthy in this corrupt power dynamic. As Rufus has been socially conditioned not to respect the humanity and agency of black people, he works to *own* Alice rather than accepting Alice's choice to be with another man.

Rufus is at least better than his father, who rapes enslaved black women with no regard for their feelings, but the thought of a loving partnership between Rufus and Alice is virtually impossible. Rufus is too much a product of his time to give up any of his privilege for Alice, unlike Kevin and Dana, who have the benefit of years of civil rights activism behind them as they work to have a marriage of mutual respect and shared power. Rufus sees his obsession with Alice as the same thing as the love between Kevin and Dana, but Dana clearly shows how this is not the case. Butler compares these two relationships throughout the novel, showing through Rufus and Alice are the worst extreme of an interracial "relationship" (which is simply a white man forcing a black woman to submit to his will) in contrast to the marriage of equals between Dana and Kevin.

His father wasn't the monster he could have been with the power he held over his slaves. He wasn't a monster at all. Just an ordinary man who sometimes did the monstrous things his society said were legal and proper. But I had seen no particular fairness in him. He did as he pleased. If you told him he wasn't being fair, he would whip you for talking back.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Rufus Weylin, Tom Weylin

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

Tom, Rufus' father, is presented as an average slave holder in the Antebellum South. Tom is far crueler to the slaves than Rufus is, never showing black people any respect and enforcing his will on the plantation through abusive punishments and manipulative emotional threats. Yet Dana acknowledges that Tom is not "a monster," meaning that he doesn't hurt black people for fun the way that the patrollers or the overseers seem to do—but Tom is still used to getting his way and has no problem causing pain if that is what is necessary. Butler points out how Tom reached this stage through societal conditioning, as the larger population in the American South upholds the idea that white men should hold all the power and be given their every desire while stripping black people of any rights or dignity. The law of the land does not say that Tom has to respect black people, so he largely does not. Though Tom is a less sympathetic character than Rufus, and certainly an antagonist in the novel, Butler refrains from painting Tom as an exclusively evil person. Tom exists in his world as he has been told a white man should, and abuses black people because that is allowed and encouraged in the Antebellum South.

Explanation and Analysis

Sarah, the cook for the Weylin family, gives nuance to the "mammy" stereotype of a black slave who chooses, in some sense, to remain a slave and be loyal to her white owners because the alternative is far more dangerous to her own safety and the safety of her children. Dana holds Sarah in contempt at first, failing to understand why Sarah refuses to even consider escaping to the North. It is only once Dana learns of the awful consequences of being caught running away that she understands why Sarah stays more or less happily on the Weylin plantation. Sarah has not given in to her white masters, as later civil rights activists would argue that house slaves did, but chooses to survive in that place because it is unlikely that she or her child would survive if she tried to assert her freedom. While later generations of black militants might suggest that house slaves passively accepted their enslavement, Butler shows how living under the harsh conditions of enslaved life in the Antebellum South might convince some black people that choosing to remain in slavery was ultimately better for their own well-being. Sarah has already lost three children, sold away for profit by Tom Weylin, and loyally continues to cook for the Weylin family so that she and her last remaining daughter Carrie can have some semblance of peace in their lives. Out of her extremely limited options, Sarah has chosen to save herself some pain, even though that choice does not look respectable from outside perspectives of later generations. Sarah is thus a layered character with agency in the novel despite her appearance as a powerless and submissive slave.

☞ She had done the safe thing—had accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid. She was the kind of woman who might have been called "mammy" in some other household. She was the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties. The house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom—the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose, and who knew as little about the freedom of the North as she knew about the hereafter.

☞ Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape. Yet in a few years an illiterate runaway named Harriet Tubman would make nineteen trips into this country and lead three hundred fugitives to freedom. What had I done wrong? Why was I still slave to a man who had repaid me for saving his life by nearly killing me? Why had I taken yet another beating. And why ... why was I so frightened now—frightened sick at the thought that sooner or later, I would have to run again?

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Sarah

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 145

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 177



Explanation and Analysis

After Dana is horrifically beaten for her attempt to run away, she considers the strength it took for people like Harriet Tubman to continue to risk that pain in order to assert their own freedom and facilitate the escape of other slaves. With the benefit of her modern upbringing, Dana understands that she has the agency and power to work towards her own freedom. Furthermore, reading historical accounts of amazing women like Harriet Tubman has shown Dana that escape is possible even though the odds stacked against runaways were very high. But though it might seem obvious that enslaved peoples would work toward running away to the “free” North, Butler shows the awful consequences of those attempts and explains why the efforts of the slaves who did escape were so extraordinary. Resistance to slavery is not as easy or straightforward as it might seem from a modern perspective. Once Dana lives in the past and experiences the degrading and spirit-crushing conditions that her enslaved ancestors had to survive, she understands more why slaves might “choose” to live as slaves instead of constantly running away or defying their masters.

It takes incredible endurance just to live as a slave, without the additional punishments that come from trying to run. Logically, Dana knows that she must continue to resist the bondage placed on herself and her people, but the emotional and physical toll of these actions are far worse than later generations of Americans might see. Butler celebrates the amazing strength of black heroes who were able to fight for their freedom over and over again, while acknowledging that black people who stayed slaves their entire lives had very good reasons for not overtly opposing the unfair and inhumane laws of the Antebellum South.

“Daddy's the only man I know,” he said softly, “who cares as much about giving his word to a black as to a white.”
 “Does that bother you?”
 “No! It's one of the few things about him I can respect.”
 “It's one of the few things about him you should copy.”

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Rufus Weylin (speaker), Tom Weylin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis


Once Dana is in the past again, she tries to send letters to her husband Kevin so that the couple can be reunited. Rufus promises to send them to Kevin, but then jealously refuses

to send those letters in order to keep Dana to himself. When Tom finds out, he “does his duty” and sends the letters because he has a moral code to uphold a promise—no matter how little he respects Dana and all black people. As a slaveholder who has no problem owning another human being and actively works to enforce his will and keep his slaves in submission, Tom is certainly not a good person or role model in the novel. Yet Butler avoids making Tom an outright villain with no good qualities, recognizing that all people, both white and black, are complex and three-dimensional. Tom might not be an admirable person who champions the rights of black people despite the societal pressure to treat them as property, but he at least recognizes that black slaves are humans who deserve basic consideration within his moral code. Dana then takes this (very minimal) good example from Tom and uses it to attempt to shape Rufus into a better person who respects black people on their own terms. Butler likewise uses this nuance in Tom's character to show that the conditions of slavery were not entirely good and evil, black and white. Slaveholders could be honest or loyal, just as Tom maintains his own moral code even though those morals also allow slavery to continue.

Chapter 5: The Storm Quotes

“Christ,” he muttered. “If I'm not home yet, maybe I don't have a home.”... I could recall walking along the narrow dirt road that ran past the Weylin house and seeing the house, shadowy in twilight, boxy and familiar... I could recall feeling relief at seeing the house, feeling that I had come home. And having to stop and correct myself, remind myself that I was in an alien, dangerous place. I could recall being surprised that I would come to think of such a place as home.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Kevin Franklin (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis



When Dana and Kevin return from the past for the third time (for Dana), they are surprised to find that they feel like the Weylin estate has become a kind of home for them. Kevin especially struggles with feeling out of place in the present after spending five years in the past without Dana. Though living in the past is far more difficult for each of them, due to both the day-to-day rigor of making a living in

this time period and the harmful social atmosphere of slavery and inequality, there is also a sense of belonging at the Weylin estate that Dana and Kevin do not feel anywhere else. Throughout the novel, Butler ties the concept of home to people rather than places. Dana and Kevin are wanted and needed by the Weylin family and their slaves in a way that they don't feel connected to their families in the present. Life in the Weylins' time is not easy, but it is all the more rewarding for Dana and Kevin because they feel like they belong there.

Dana especially feels an obligation to the past that pulls her back there in order to help her family. Her biological ties to Rufus are one part of this, but Dana feels even more indebted to the other slaves who welcomed her onto the estate and became Dana's chosen family. After Dana and Kevin lose touch with each other, they each return to the Weylin estate as the last place that they felt truly connected to the people and community. The couple then has to re-establish their marriage in order to come back to the present as their "home" with one another.

☞ I felt as though I were losing my place here in my own time. Rufus's time was a sharper, stronger reality. The work was harder, the smells and tastes were stronger, the danger was greater, the pain was worse ... Rufus's time demanded things of me that had never been demanded before, and it could easily kill me if I did not meet its demands. That was a stark, powerful reality that the gentle conveniences and luxuries of this house, of now, could not touch.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Rufus Weylin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 191


Explanation and Analysis

As Dana comes back from her third trip to Rufus's time, she struggles to find her place between the present where she grew up and the past where she has learned so much about herself. Life is certainly not "better" for Dana in the past, as she is forced to live as a slave, give up her freedom and agency, and be treated as less than human. Yet Dana also feels fiercely connected to the people in Rufus's time, Rufus and Alice as her blood ancestors, and the other slaves on the Weylin estate as her chosen family. Dana is brought together with these people through their shared suffering and so feels an obligation to return to the past and help the

Weylin slaves in whatever way she can. Dana then feels almost guilty for the "gentle conveniences and luxuries" that she enjoys in the present. Furthermore, the very state of existence and reality in the past feels rawer and more "real" than this comfortable and detached present. The life and death stakes of life in the past push Dana to be a better and more alive version of herself, shed of any privileges that growing up in the present affords her in contrast to her enslaved family.

☞ South African whites had always struck me as people who would have been happier living in the nineteenth century, or the eighteenth. In fact, they were living in the past as far as their race relations went. They lived in ease and comfort supported by huge numbers of blacks whom they kept in poverty and held in contempt. Tom Weylin would have felt right at home.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Tom Weylin

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

Back in the present for a short time, Dana hears about the continued apartheid struggle in South Africa, in which black South African citizens fought to desegregate the country and earn the same civil rights that white South Africans enjoyed. After living as a slave, Dana has a much more intense reaction to the blind entitlement that she sees in white south Africans, comparing this group to the slave holders like Tom Weylin in the Antebellum South. These white men share their callous treatment of other human beings and casual acceptance that white people are inexplicably but irrevocably better than black people. Butler points out the ways that 1976 is more progressive in terms of race relations and equality, but she does not gloss over the fact that white supremacy still colors many aspects of "modern" life. Though the black South Africans may not be enslaved, they still struggle with harmful racial discrimination. Living in the past shows Dana how privileged she is to live in a society where black people are free and have the same legal rights as white people, but it also highlights the work that still must be done to ensure that black people the world over are finally able to have the full freedom and agency that they deserve.

Carrie clasped her hands around her neck again. Then she drew closer to me and clasped them around my neck. Finally, she went over to the crib that her youngest child had recently outgrown and there, symbolically, clasped her hands again, leaving enough of an open circle for a small neck.... Margaret Weylin could not run the plantation. Both the land and the people would be sold. And if Tom Weylin was any example, the people would be sold without regard for family ties.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Rufus Weylin, Tom Weylin, Margaret Weylin, Carrie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 223



Explanation and Analysis

When Dana witnesses her first slave sale, she is incredibly disturbed that Rufus would continue this inhumane practice, and thinks of letting Rufus die the next time he is in trouble as punishment for this behavior. Through sign language, Carrie shows Dana that life would be worse for the Weylin slaves if Rufus were to die, as they would all be sold away from their families if Margaret Weylin gained control of the Weylin plantation. Carrie who is mute, is one of the smartest characters of the novel, though she has no voice to express herself. Carrie's inability to communicate vocally metaphorically suggests the lack of agency that the slaves have over their lives. Despite how strongly the slaves regard their familial bonds, there are no guarantees that either their biological families or the families they have formed together on the plantation would be allowed to stay together if any of the Weylin masters decided it was time to sell.

Margaret Weylin, Rufus's mother, has no concept of what it means to keep a family together, as she has no close relationship to her own son and husband, and would certainly not care about separating the much closer ties between the slaves. Carrie understands that her infant son could be sold away from her at any moment, and that there is nothing that she can do about it – not even scream to express her pain and rage. Dana's obligation to protect thus Rufus grows two-fold, both to ensure that Rufus lives long enough to continue Dana's family line and to try to keep the Weylin slaves together as long as possible before the Civil War brings emancipation.

"I know what he means. He likes me in bed, and you out of bed, and you and I look alike if you can believe what people say."
"We look alike if we can believe our own eyes!"
"I guess so. Anyway, all that means we're two halves of the same woman—at least in his crazy head."

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Alice Jackson (Greenwood) (speaker), Rufus Weylin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

As Alice and Dana spend more time together, Rufus starts to regard the two women as two halves of a "wife," though he is not legally married to either of them. He desires Alice physically and craves Dana's company and help with running the Weylin estate. Rufus's love for each woman is a complicated mix of ownership and obsession, as Rufus asserts himself as their master but also wants the women to adore him and be happy in his presence. Rufus is not content to rule through fear, hoping that Alice will forgive him for raping her and that Dana will allow him to curb her freedom voluntarily. Butler draws many parallels between the two women, both in their looks and in their situation as objects of Rufus's affection. Yet Alice, Dana's many times great-grandmother, is much less accepting of Rufus's "crazy" longing for a black woman. Dana, having seen that white men can truly love black women through her relationship with her husband Kevin, prefers to think that Rufus's harmful definition of love can be shaped from possessiveness to mutual respect. Through both Alice and Dana, Butler shows the power dynamics at play in the master-slave dichotomy. Alice is completely subjugated by Rufus while Dana has control over Rufus's life, should she ever choose not to save him.

Her names were only symbolic, but I had more than symbols to remind me that freedom was possible—probable—and for me, very near. Or was it?
Slowly, I began to calm down. The danger to my family was past, yes. Hagar had been born. But the danger to me personally ... the danger to me personally still walked and talked and sometimes sat with Alice in her cabin in the evening as she nursed Hagar.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Rufus Weylin, Alice Jackson (Greenwood), Hagar Weylin, Joseph (Joe) Weylin

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 234



Explanation and Analysis

Alice finally gives birth to Hagar, her fourth child with her master Rufus and Dana's many great-grandmother. Hagar's existence means that Dana can stop worrying about protecting Rufus for the sake of her family line, and is somewhat free from her obligation as Rufus's guardian. Yet though Dana may not ever have to come back to the past, she still has to deal with Rufus until she travels back to her life in the future. Rufus is a danger to Dana personally, with the power to hurt Dana as long as she lives on the Weylin estate.

Alice also sees Hagar as a symbol of her potential freedom, naming her after a slave from the Bible who later gains freedom. Hagar was a mistress of Abraham, the father of the Jewish faith, much like Alice is forced to be Rufus's mistress. Hagar was cast out into the desert by Abraham's wife, Sarah, but God saved Hagar and her son. Alice's other surviving child, Joseph, is also named for a Biblical figure who endured slavery before he worked his way to becoming the advisor to the Pharaoh in Egypt. Alice thus christens her child with her own longing to be free, and her hope that she and her children will eventually escape Rufus's influence.

☹️ Sarah had cornered me once and said, "What you let her talk to you like that for? She can't get away with it with nobody else." I didn't know. Guilt, maybe. In spite of everything, my life was easier than hers. Maybe I tried to make up for that by taking her abuse... "If you go on talking to me the way you do, I won't care what he does to you." She looked at me for a long time without saying anything. Finally, she smiled. "You'll care. And you'll help me. Else, you'd have to see yourself for the white nigger you are, and you couldn't stand that."

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Alice Jackson (Greenwood), Sarah (speaker), Rufus Weylin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

Dana and Alice have a complicated relationship, like sisters who fight even as they try to help one another. Dana especially feels an obligation to make life better for Alice because Dana feels partly responsible for the main source of pain in Alice's life. Dana needs Alice to stay with Rufus in order for Dana's family line to exist, even though Alice hates her conditions as a slave and hates being Rufus's mistress even more. Additionally, Dana has the hope of going back to the future where she can live free with control over her own life, something that Alice has very little chance of ever achieving again if she wants to stay with her children.

Alice misreads Dana's guilt as loyalty to Rufus, and many on the Weylin plantation see the complicated bond between Rufus and Dana as Dana having affection for Rufus. Dana cannot help but feel some affinity for Rufus, as he is her blood relative, but she is actually far more faithful to her chosen family among the slaves on the Weylin manor. For this reason, Dana continually puts up with Alice's insults and tries to help Alice make the best out of her difficult circumstances.

☹️ He gave me a long searching look. "You want to be with that white man, girl?" "If I were anywhere else, no black child on the place would be learning anything."

... "Some folks say ..." "Hold on." I was suddenly angry. "I don't want to hear what 'some folks' say. 'Some folks' let Fowler drive them into the fields every day and work them like mules." "Let him...?" "Let him! They do it to keep the skin on their backs and breath in their bodies. Well, they're not the only ones who have to do things they don't like to stay alive and whole. Now you tell me why that should be so hard for 'some folks' to understand?"

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Sam Jones (speaker), Rufus Weylin

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

Dana finally meets Sam, one of the field hands on the Weylin plantation, and discovers that the field hands think that she

truly likes being with Rufus and taking advantage of the special “privileges” that come with being a favorite of the master. Most also assume that Dana is Rufus’s mistress, though Dana’s relationship to Rufus is far from sexual. Dana has used her influence as an advisor and parent figure to Rufus to start a school for the slave children on the estate and give them a chance at the education that will improve their lives after they are freed in the Civil War. Though Sam and the field hands see the good that Dana is doing, they still mistrust any black person who would “let” themselves get so close to their master. Dana flips that way of thinking, arguing that all slaves actually choose to accept their lot for fear of the worse consequences that would come from disobedience. Just like the field hands go out into the field each day to avoid being whipped by Fowler, the overseer, Dana lets Rufus think that they are friends in order to keep herself safe and to do what she can to improve the lives of other slaves. While it may seem like Dana is giving up some agency by pretending to happily give in to Rufus’s desires, she is actually choosing for herself what she will and will not do in order to help those around her who are not in such strategic positions.

Dana across the face when she dared to protest. These acts symbolically stripped Dana of the ability to choose what she wanted for her own life, making her feel as though she couldn’t even talk to anyone out of fear of what Rufus would do to them in his jealousy. This lack of agency drove Dana to take the chance that she might die over living the powerless life of a slave. Dana takes back her power by making such an extreme choice.

Kevin points out how dangerous Dana’s injury was, suggesting that it would be smarter to put up with things in order to survive. He argues that Dana’s ancestors did that – explaining that they could not have just chosen suicide over slavery without cutting off Dana’s family line and the lives of all those in modern times descended from enslaved peoples. Through Dana’s response, then, Butler both praises the strength of those who were able to endure slavery and give birth to a new generation while also emphasizing how extraordinary that choice was. Though militant activists in the 1960s might argue that all slaves should have revolted and taken their freedom no matter the violence or cost, Butler argues that sometimes the braver choice is to live through the day-to-day horror of being a slave and give one’s children a chance of living.

Chapter 6: The Rope Quotes

“I’m not property, Kevin. I’m not a horse or a sack of wheat. If I have to seem to be property, if I have to accept limits on my freedom for Rufus’s sake, then he also has to accept limits - on his behavior toward me. He has to leave me enough control of my own life to make living look better to me than killing and dying.”

“If your black ancestors had felt that way, you wouldn’t be here,” said Kevin.

“I told you when all this started that I didn’t have their endurance. I still don’t. Some of them will go on struggling to survive, no matter what. I’m not like that.”

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Kevin Franklin (speaker), Rufus Weylin

Related Themes:   


Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

The fourth time that Dana returns from the past, she cuts her own wrists and risks dying in order to escape Rufus and get back to the present. Rufus finally overstepped the careful boundary that Dana had drawn, selling a field hand that expressed interest in Dana out of spite and slapping

“I ate a little, then went away to the library where I could be alone, where I would write. Sometimes I wrote things because I couldn’t say them, couldn’t sort out my feelings about them, couldn’t keep them bottled up inside me. It was a kind of writing I always destroyed afterward. It was for no one else. Not even Kevin.”

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Kevin Franklin

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 252



Explanation and Analysis

After Dana attends Alice’s funeral, she retreats to the library to write out her emotions and process the complex mix of grief and anger that she feels in the wake of Alice’s suicide. Writing has always been Dana’s form of self-expression, but this practice is even more important in the Antebellum South where so much of Dana’s life is dictated by white masters. Dana has to be careful about what she says out loud and how she acts in front of people so that she does not get herself or anyone else in trouble. Writing gives her a release so that Dana does not completely lose her grip

on herself and her choices. This writing is not even for her husband Kevin, though Kevin is supportive and respects Dana's right to her own opinions. It is the ultimate statement of Dana's independence from anyone and a sign of the freedom that Dana does not let go of even when she is forced to live as a slave.

●● A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her. And Rufus was Rufus—erratic, alternately generous and vicious. I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover. He had understood that once.

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin (speaker), Rufus Weylin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 260



Explanation and Analysis


The relationship between Dana and Rufus, always complicated, becomes even worse once Alice dies and Rufus expects Dana to take Alice's place as his mistress. Throughout the novel, Dana has refused to submit herself entirely to Rufus's will, reminding Rufus that he is also under her control, even though Dana has to pose as Rufus's slave in order to survive in the Antebellum South. Dana feels connected to Rufus as he is her ancestor, and tries to keep Rufus safe because of that bond. In return, Rufus has to maintain some basic respect for Dana and remember that she will not be treated as a slave. When Rufus keeps that balance, Dana is able to feel some affection for him as a relative and friend. When Rufus forgets that and seeks to violate Dana's body, Dana has to give up her role as Rufus' guardian and fight against Rufus in self-defense. While Rufus and Dana got close enough for Dana to consider Rufus a friend, his inability to see Dana as fully human eventually causes Rufus's own death by Dana's hand.

Epilogue Quotes

●● "I wonder whether the children were allowed to stay together—maybe stay with Sarah."
"You've looked," he said. "And you've found no records. You'll probably never know."
I touched the scar Tom Weylin's boot had left on my face, touched my empty left sleeve. "I know," I repeated. "Why did I even want to come here. You'd think I would have had enough of the past."
"You probably needed to come for the same reason I did." He shrugged. "To try to understand. To touch solid evidence that those people existed."

Related Characters: Dana (Edana) Franklin, Kevin Franklin (speaker), Tom Weylin

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 264

Explanation and Analysis

When Dana returns to the present for good, she travels to Maryland from her home in California in order to find out as much as she can about the family members she met while living in the past. Kevin rationalizes this desire to return to a place that has caused Dana so much pain as a desire to know that all of the traumatic events in the past actually happened, and led Dana's family to the place it is today. While Dana may never know exactly what happened to her ancestor Hagar, she at least knows that Hagar eventually gained her freedom after the Civil War and was able to continue Dana's family line so that Dana herself could be born and see the emergence of the Civil Rights Era. In some senses, *Kindred* itself expresses that same goal of witnessing both the suffering and the strength of those who lived through slavery and were able to survive long enough to give the next generation a chance of finding a better future. Butler memorializes that awful time for the ancestors of so many black Americans, and *Kindred* recognizes the ways that those traumas still linger in the lives of those descended from enslaved peoples, who can never forget the sacrifices that their ancestors made.



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.

PROLOGUE

The narrator (Dana) describes how she **lost her left arm** “coming home,” and says that she wants to see Kevin to reassure herself in the hospital. The police interrogate her about how she hurt her arm, but the narrator just repeats that it was an accident as she drifts in and out of a drug-induced haze.

The novel starts with no explanation of who the narrator is or where she has been before coming “home.” This uncertainty threads through the novel as Butler considers what “home” means to her characters.



When the narrator finally wakes up fully, Kevin (her husband) is next to her bedside. He explains that they had to **amputate her arm** above the elbow, as the narrator tries to lift her stump. Kevin further says that he told the police a version of the truth about the accident that won't land them both in a mental institution. His story is that he that he woke up and found that the narrator's arm was stuck in a hole in the wall and crushed, even though neither Kevin nor the narrator, Dana, understand how that is possible.

The novel doesn't ever really explain (even at the end) how Dana was injured, leaving the details of her lost arm in shadow. The amputation hints at the trauma that Dana will face throughout the novel. The fact that Kevin and Dana cannot be honest about these events with the police also suggests that the trauma Dana faces is too personal to ever be dissected by outsiders.



CHAPTER 1: THE RIVER

Dana explains that the trouble began for her on June 9th, 1976, her twenty-sixth birthday, when she met Rufus. Dana and Kevin were busy moving to their new house, though Kevin stops unpacking to go to his office and write. Dana brings him a stack of books and muses on Kevin's strangely pale eyes. As Dana begins to shelve the books, she feels nauseous and collapses.

Kevin's pale eyes mark him as almost symbolically associated with whiteness. Much of the book begins in mystery, as Butler does not yet explain who Rufus is or why he matters to Dana. This scene does establish how important education and books are to both Dana and Kevin, and the fact that the “action” begins just as they are moving to a new house emphasizes the idea of home.



The world blurs out of focus and Dana finds herself in the middle of a forest near a river. Dana realizes that a child is drowning in the river, and she rushes to save the child before worrying about how she was transported to this place. Dana swims out to the child and tows him back to shore, only then seeing that a red-haired woman is pacing on the shore. As Dana wades in, the woman snatches the child from Dana's hands.

Though Dana does not yet know it, the child is Rufus and the woman is his mother Margaret. Margaret's distinctive red hair also marks these characters as white. Though Butler does not specify their race, their whiteness is assumed, as white is usually considered the default—especially in the science fiction and fantasy genres that Butler is operating within.



The woman screeches that the child is not breathing, so Dana takes the child back and begins to perform artificial respiration. The woman beats Dana's back as Dana tries to get the child to breathe on his own. Finally, the boy chokes out water and the woman gathers him in a hug and murmurs to her "poor baby, Rufus."

As Dana watches Rufus and his mother recover from the near-drowning, a man's voice sounds behind Dana's ear. She turns and stares down the barrel of a rifle, fearing that she is about to die for saving the boy's life. At that moment, the nausea returns and Dana's vision blurs. She finds herself back in the office with Kevin, covered in mud and across the room from where she had been before.

Dana calls Kevin's name, and he spins around in fear, asking how Dana had managed to teleport across the room. Dana is shaking with residual fear, and can explain nothing. Kevin gets her a towel, and the two sit on the floor as Dana calms down. Kevin again demands that Dana tell him what happened, and Dana gathers herself to tell the story of the river, the drowning boy, and the rifle – realizing as she speaks that she noticed strange details like pine trees and the woman's strangely long, dark dress, and her Southern accent.

Kevin listens calmly as Dana explains what happened. When she finishes, Kevin tells Dana that she was only gone a few seconds from the office. From Kevin's perspective, Dana disappeared for a few seconds, then reappeared across the room wet and covered in mud. Kevin reluctantly decides that Dana's crazy story must be true. Dana begins to shake, wondering what might happen if she is transported again. She likens the feeling to a survivor of robbery or rape, who is now physically fine but no longer feels safe. Kevin tries to comfort her, and Dana attempts to put the whole strange episode out of her mind.

Though Dana is portrayed as an average woman with little knowledge of medical or emergency procedures, she reacts well under pressure and responds quickly to a crisis – even when the crisis involves complete strangers who are actively hindering her from helping the child. Dana begins to introduce a pattern of helping people whenever possible.



Dana's fear at seeing the rifle begins the repeated pattern of Dana time-traveling when she is afraid for her life. Butler confirms that Dana is truly traveling to another place and time by including the details about the mud left on Dana's clothing. Though this experience does sound far-fetched, Dana is in fact a sane and reliable narrator rather than someone suffering from hallucinations or delusions.



Even as Kevin is conspicuously trying to help Dana recover, he still has a domineering presence. Butler frequently uses forceful words such as "demand" to describe Kevin's actions—though he is a kind and loving man, he still has a sense of entitlement and confidence that, it's suggested, is intimately tied to his privileged place in society as a white man. The details that Dana recalls about the woman's long dress suggest that she moved back in time to a period when that style was everyday attire.



While Dana is now physically safe, her mental and emotional concept of safety is marked by her previous traumatic experience. Kevin suggests that putting this experience out of her mind will be easy, but Dana cannot just "get over" it. This feeling mirrors the impossibility of modern day African Americans "getting over" the long history of abuse that their ancestors suffered as slaves, though the actual conditions of plantation slavery no longer exist in America.



CHAPTER 2: THE FIRE

1. Dana tries to leave the unsettling experience behind her, showering off the river mud, but she is unable to forget the feeling of dizziness and dislocation. She worries that she will be transported from the shower and refuses to leave the house for a birthday dinner with Kevin. Kevin brings food back for her and they eat in the kitchen. As Dana eats at the kitchen table, the dizziness and nausea come again, until she finds herself in a small bedroom.

2. Dana sits on a bed and watches a small red-haired boy, who looks like an older version of Rufus, accidentally set fire to the drapes with a burning stick. Realizing the danger of a fire in a wooden house, Dana gathers up the curtains and throws them out the window. Only then does she see the fireplace in the room where she could have safely let the drapes burn, but luckily the curtains land on dirt outside and do not catch fire to anything else.

Now that Dana has saved a child again, she prepares herself to be sent home, but the dizziness does not return. Dana snatches a still burning stick from the boy's hand and tells him he should know better than to play with fire. The boy angrily responds in a Southern accent, telling Dana that she should be careful not to make the boy call his father. Remembering the long rifle, Dana softens her tone, but reminds the boy that his daddy will be mad enough when he sees the burned drapes. The boy backs down, then asks Dana who she is and why she is here.

Unsurprised that the boy doesn't know what is happening any more than she does, Dana asks the boy his name. She is shocked to hear him say "Rufus," as this boy is a couple years older than the Rufus she saved from the river hours ago. She tentatively asks Rufus if he has ever seen her before, or if he remembers a time when he nearly drowned. Rufus is unsure, but thinks that he remembers seeing Dana at the river when he was five years old. His mother had told him that it was crazy, but Rufus remembers that while he was drowning he could see Dana, dressed in pants like a man, inside a room full of books. Rufus's mother hit him, a rare occurrence, when he asked where the woman from the river went.

Though Dana has only transported once, Butler already introduces the recurring feeling of dislocation that will follow Dana as she continually moves between "homes" when the dizziness and nausea strike. These physical symptoms again strengthen the idea that her travels are real and not hallucinated.



Dana again reacts well under pressure, but shows her unease with disaster by throwing the drapes outside instead of looking for a fireplace first. Butler emphasizes that Dana is a normal person, reacting the way that any one of her readers might if faced with these same bizarre situations. Unbeknownst to Dana, this older boy truly is Rufus – aged years though Dana herself has only been away for hours.



Dana does not yet understand how the traveling works, but she does confirm that she has traveled somewhere in the Southern United States. Rufus (the boy Dana has saved once more) starts to show his complicated relationship with his father. Rufus invokes his father as a threat, but is unwilling to actually go to him for help when Dana calls Rufus's bluff.



Rufus and Dana are equally unaware of how this "magic" works, but while Kevin supports Dana through her strange experiences, Rufus's family seems to ignore and actively discourage any talk about what is happening. This is one of many examples of the lack of support between Rufus and his parents. Dana's defining environment in the future is her library of books, marking her as an educated person – especially to Rufus, who seems unused to seeing both large quantities of books and women who are comfortable in those spaces.



Dana steadies herself and asks Rufus where he thinks she went when she disappeared at the river. Rufus replies that she must have gone back to the room with the books. Dana confirms this, but adds that she has no idea how any of this is possible. Dana has an inkling that Rufus controls her travels somehow, but doesn't want to reveal this potentially dangerous information to the hostile boy. Rufus comments that his mother thinks that the woman from the river was a ghost.

Dana knows little about her strange travels, but Rufus seems to have some kind of control over her. Rufus, however, doesn't know that he seems to have the power in this situation, much like many white males in America are unconscious of their privilege unless forced to acknowledge it or become aware of it due to some outside force. Dana is smart enough to be wary of handing Rufus this knowledge.



Dana reminds Rufus that she has come to help him twice now, and that he shouldn't be afraid of her. Rubbing her shoulders where Rufus' mother's blows from the river are still sore, Dana grapples with the fact that hours have passed for her while it seems that years have passed for Rufus. Her travels, apparently centered around Rufus, seem to transport her through time as well as space. Rufus then breaks into Dana's thoughts, commenting that his mother let Dana save him because it was like the story from *Second Kings*, though she usually would not let a "nigger" touch her child.

Dana's travels take physical tolls on her body, as she is injured in the past and then has no time in the present to heal from her wounds. The past traumas on her body carry over into the present just as ancestral traumas can carry over into the emotional psyche of modern descendants of enslaved peoples. Rufus's casual use of a racial slur is the first suggestion that his world is far behind Dana's "modern" times.



Dana is appalled to hear Rufus say the word "nigger" so casually, and tentatively asks Rufus whether his mother uses that word often. Rufus, confused by the question, says of course. Dana decides to let that go, and simply asks Rufus to do her the courtesy of calling her a black woman. Rufus resists, but agrees to pay her that respect when Dana reminds Rufus that she has saved his life.

*Though it may be apparent from the cover or back jacket, Rufus's use of a racial slur is actually the first explicit mention of Dana's skin color. Butler first defines Dana through traits such as her intelligence and her resourcefulness rather than by her race. Indeed, *Kindred* as a whole portrays black characters that are never reduced to stereotypes of racial ideas, as Butler maintains that black people deserve the same basic dignity and respect as white people – including in fictional representation.*



Dana switches topics, asking Rufus if he saw her again like he saw her in the office while he was drowning. Rufus replies that he was too afraid that he would die in the fire to see anything. Dana comments that Rufus probably would have been able to get out in time, but that his parents might have died if they were asleep when the fire engulfed the entire house. Rufus tells Dana that he previously burned down the stable when his father sold a horse that Rufus wanted for himself. This time, Rufus set the fire to get revenge on his father for hitting him. Dana gasps at the long red welts on Rufus's back.

Rufus shows an impulsive desire for revenge at all costs and a casual disregard for dangers to his own life. Part of this seems to stem from his troubled family dynamic, as Rufus is treated abusively by his father – at least by Dana's modern standards. Rufus's fear of death in both the river and the fire seemed to trigger Dana's appearance.



Rufus tells Dana that his father beat him for stealing a dollar, so Rufus decided to burn down the house and make his father lose all his money. But once Rufus set the fire, he got scared that his father would whip him again and actually kill him this time. As the story comes out, Dana determines that Rufus can call her whenever he is legitimately scared for his life, but that he seems unaware that he is doing it. She asks Rufus if his father uses **the whip** often, and Rufus responds that his daddy whips black people when they need it. He adds that his mother was very mad when his father whipped him, and she left with Rufus for a month in Baltimore.

Dana asks Rufus if they are close to Baltimore now. Rufus tells her that they are just across the bay. Dana is hopeful, thinking that she has relatives in Maryland that she can ask for help, if she can get to them. Yet a slowly growing fear forces Dana to ask Rufus what the date is. Confused, Rufus tells Dana that it is 1815. Dana sits down on the bed, in shock at this fact, but realizing that it explains Rufus's callous attitude towards black people and his father's use of a **whip**.

Dana calms herself as Rufus explains that they're on the Weylin plantation, which belongs to his father, Tom Weylin. Remembering a small detail from her family history, Dana clarifies the spelling of Weylin and asks if there is a slave girl named Alice that lives nearby. Rufus confirms this, but tells Dana that Alice and her mother are free blacks. Dana realizes that Rufus might be an ancestor of hers, remembering the names Rufus and Alice Weylin written in her great-great-grandmother's Bible. According to that record, Grandmother Hagar was born in 1831 to Rufus Weylin and Alice Greenwood Weylin.

Dana considers that Rufus may be a blood relative of hers, one of the many ancestors that she never thought she would know anything about. This bond helps explain why Dana is traveling back in time to save Rufus, as Dana herself would not exist if Rufus had died in the river or the fire. Yet much about the time travel is still mysterious, and Dana is not comforted by the little sense that this new information makes. Rufus interrupts her thoughts, commenting that Dana would look a little like Alice's mother if Dana wore proper clothing instead of men's pants.

Though the whip – one of the most symbolic objects of American plantation slavery – represents the height of inhumane punishment to Dana, Rufus sees it as an everyday part of life for black people. Rufus's father uses the whip indiscriminately, even on his own son. As such, Rufus's father appears to be a cruel man in general, beyond being specifically racially motivated. Rufus's mother and father also seem to have an unfulfilling relationship.



Dana already wants to lean on her family for help, a stark contrast to Rufus and his father's difficult relationship. Comparing Rufus's attitude towards race relations to Dana's modern sensibilities at least shows some progress— as using the language and punishments that Rufus seems comfortable with is no longer (generally) acceptable in modern society.



Rufus seems unsure about how to spell his own name, another sign that Dana is far more educated than most people in Rufus's time. The only thing that Dana knew about Rufus and Alice were their names, meaning that she is surprised to find out that Rufus is white and that her ancestor Alice was a free black woman. Dana had previously assumed that both these ancestors were slaves on the Weylin plantation.



The resemblance between Dana and Alice's mother is another link in the family line. Researching family history is especially difficult for Dana, who had assumed that her family were slaves with little to no record kept of their lives. This chance to go back to the past in person is a rare glimpse into the lives of people who otherwise would have remained entirely unknown to Dana. This sense of uncertainty is mirrored in the lack of information about how the time travel itself works. Butler is not concerned with the mechanisms of moving back in time, but rather with the things that Dana can learn when she is in the past.



Dana changes the subject by asking how many slaves the Weylin family owns. Rufus tells her that there are 38 slaves on the plantation, and adds that Dana doesn't talk, dress, or act like a slave. Rufus suddenly becomes worried that he and Dana will get in trouble because Dana hasn't been calling him "Master" the way the slaves are supposed to. Dana compromises by telling Rufus that she will call him "Mister Rufus" if anyone else is in earshot.

Dana's modern upbringing has given her the education and self-respect that Rufus ordinarily considers to belong only to white people. Yet Rufus's confusion about Dana seems to stem from what he has learned from society at this point rather than his own personal prejudices. Rufus seems to worry about his title "Master" only for fear of what other people will say, rather than a real desire to be addressed as a superior.



Dana continues to hope that she will be sent home again, wondering why it is taking so much longer this time. Rufus angrily brings her attention back to him, demanding to know Dana's name. Dana tells him her name is Edana, but that most people call her Dana. Rufus, spooked, tells her that he heard a man's voice calling "Dana" right before Dana appeared and put out the fire. Dana explains that the voice must have been her husband.

Rufus is clearly used to being the center of attention in his household, especially among women, and so he has no problem disrespectfully demanding information from Dana. Dana takes back control of the situation by giving Rufus her name and the name that she prefers to be called.



As Dana worries about what she will do if she is stuck in the past, Rufus suggests that she hide for the night and come back in the morning to see if Tom Weylin will hire her to work for the day. Dana hesitates at the thought of working for someone as mean as Rufus' father, so Rufus suggests that she go stay with Alice and Alice's mother – surprising Dana with a kind-hearted wish to see Dana again before she leaves. Rufus agrees to show Dana the path to Alice's house.

Rufus again is not what Dana expected of a slaver-holder. He seems truly interested in Dana and wants her to be safe. Ironically, Dana will be seeking refuge with her family in Maryland, though it is a much earlier generation than she expected when she first found out she was in another state.



Dana and Rufus creep out of the Weylin house and into the yard. Dana finds the remains of the curtains and stamps them out, then tells Rufus to burn what's left of them in the fireplace. Rufus' mother (Margaret) will replace the drapes without telling Rufus' father and getting him in trouble. Dana then follows Rufus's directions into the woods towards Alice's house.

Rufus and his mother seem united against Rufus' father. Rufus seems to depend on other people to clean up his mistakes, as both Dana and Margaret have to step in to smooth over Rufus' poor choice to burn the drapes. At this point in the novel, Rufus is truly grateful for their help and want to help Dana in return by getting her safely to Alice's house.



3. Dana walks quietly past the small slave quarter cabins on the Weylin plantation, and reaches the edge of the woods. As she gets lost in the trees, she is startled by a rabbit jumping out of a bush. For a second, Dana fears for her life and gets dizzy, but the moment passes when she sees that it is just a small animal and not a threat. She makes it to the road and walks for a while before she hears a strange sound. Realizing almost too late that the sound is horse hoof beats, Dana jumps into the bushes to hide.

Dizziness has previously meant that Dana is about to travel through time, but she steadies once she sees that the noise is not dangerous. This signals that her travels are connected in some way to feelings of being in life-threatening danger. Dana is right to be wary, as her unfamiliarity with details of life in the past (such as what hoof-beats sound like) could be very dangerous.



From the bushes, Dana sees eight white men ride by and head in the direction of Alice Greenwood's house. Dana tentatively follows them from a safe distance and comes across a small log cabin. Dana watches from behind a tree as the white men pound open the Greenwoods' door. The men drag a black man, a black woman, and a small black girl out of their house.

Dana overhears the white men say that the black man snuck away without a pass. The black man tries to make excuses and explanations, but the white men force him over to a tree dangerously close to Dana's hiding spot and tie the black man's hands around the trunk. Dana notices that the black man is naked, and that the black woman only has a blanket wrapped around her. The white men take the blanket and jeer at the woman.

One of the white men gets a **whip** from a bag on his horse and starts to whip the black man. The black man is able to withstand several blows in silence, but begins to scream when he can no longer take the pain. Dana is overwhelmed by the smell of the man's blood and sweat, and the sounds of his torment, but she can do nothing without giving away her own hiding place. The actual sight of a man being tortured is nothing like the violence Dana has seen on the news or in movies. She fights the urge to vomit and tries to think of other things, realizing that she is as prepared for this awful sight as the poor black child who is forced to watch this whipping as well.

Desperate to think of anything but the **whipping** happening in front of her, Dana thinks of the name for the white men who keep "order" among the slaves by terrifying and torturing black people: Patrols, the forerunners of the Ku Klux Klan. The whipping finally ends as one of the white men unties the black man from the tree and drags the man over to tie him behind his horse. Another Patrol member speaks quietly to the black woman, then punches her to the ground before the whole group rides off. They head for the Weylin manor, luckily missing the tree where Dana is hiding.

Dana wonders if the black man belongs to Tom Weylin, and if that is the reason that Rufus is friends with Alice – the young black girl at the house. Dana creeps over to the young girl kneeling next to her unconscious mother, hoping she can help and also find safe lodging for the night. The girl looks up when Dana whispers, "Alice," and Dana knows that these people are her relatives.

White men are probably the biggest threat to Dana in this time period, as they will assume that she is a runaway slave and decide to bring her to "justice." Though Alice and her mother are free blacks, they are still vulnerable to anything that white men choose to do, including breaking and entering.



As a slave, the man at Alice's house has no rights in the face of whatever these white men choose to do to him. Even small "crimes" could be punished harshly with impunity for the white attackers. The white men also attack the black family's dignity by laughing at their nakedness, another symbol of their physical vulnerability in this moment.



This harsh scene of violence is devastating for Dana to witness, but unfortunately a common occurrence for slaves in the Antebellum South. The man is given no chance to explain and receives no fair trial before white men attack him, and the use of the whip underscores how unbalanced the power dynamics are in this interaction. Dana is in the same situation as the young girl, seeing this violence up close for the first time even though Dana thought that the news had desensitized her. The visceral reality of violence is always much more immediate than violence filtered through media.



White people have the power to do whatever they want to slaves with the full support of the law. The history of these patrolers carries over into later generations in the KKK, showing the continuous flow of history and oppression. While the KKK is no longer a powerful organization in the U.S., police brutality against people of color continues to show this thread of disproportionate control over black people and black lives.



Dana now sees that she is related to both a slave owner and a slave family, assuming that Alice's father is a slave on the Weylin plantation. Dana is caught between both worlds just as she is caught between the past and her present.



Dana starts to help Alice's unconscious mother, assuring Alice that her mother is not dead. Alice runs to get water at Dana's request, then Dana washes the blood from Alice's mother's face. Dana notices how similar she and the woman look, though the woman is much stronger than Dana is after a life of surviving in this time period.

Gradually, Alice's mother wakes up and calls for Alice. The woman panics as she realizes that Dana, a stranger, is holding her head, but Dana reassures her that she is a friend and a freewoman. The woman glances at Dana's modern clothing and guesses that Dana is actually a runaway, but Dana repeats that she was born free. The woman is wary of inviting more trouble in tonight, but agrees to let Dana come into the house.

Dana helps the woman into the house and hopes that the Greenwoods can tell her the best way to go North, though conditions there are still restricted for black people. Alice's mother asks who sent Dana here, and Dana tells her that Rufus gave her directions. Alice reassures her mother that Rufus won't tell. Dana asks Alice's mother if Tom Weylin owns her husband, and Alice's mother nods sadly. Alice's father is in trouble for continuing to see his free wife when Tom Weylin told him to choose a new wife on the plantation so that the Weylins will own all of his children.

Alice's mother asks Dana where she is from, noticing that Dana speaks with a strange accent. Dana tells her she is from New York, thinking that California is still a Spanish colony at this point. Dana adds that her husband is waiting for her at home, letting her longing for Kevin bleed into her voice. Alice's mother assumes that Dana was kidnapped by slave catchers in New York, and tells Dana she can stay at the Greenwood cabin until tomorrow night and then leave for another safe house towards the North.

Dana, Alice's mother, and Alice begin to head to bed when Alice's mother realizes she has left the blanket outside. Dana volunteers to get it, but runs into a young white man outside. The young man seems confused by how similar Dana and Alice's mother look, but then notices that Dana is dressed like a boy and assumes that Dana is Mrs. Greenwood's runaway sister. The man grabs Dana by the arm, but Dana digs her nails into his wrist and breaks free.

Dana's ancestors may look similar, but Dana knows that these women are much stronger than she will ever be simply because of the world they live in. Butler admires and praises the endurance of people like Alice and her mother who live through hell but keep trying anyway.



Dana's clothing marks her as a suspicious character, because her modern attire looks like men's clothing—and women slaves would sometimes dress as men to offer some extra protection as they tried to run away. Though Alice's mother sees the danger that housing a runaway might bring, she still risks herself in order to help another person. Alice's mother's spirit may be dampened, but it is not broken.



Though the North is ostensibly "free" for black people, Butler recognizes that running to the North would not feel like freedom to Dana because there was still wide-spread institutional discrimination there. Butler also underscores the emotional trauma of slavery in the disregard for family ties. Alice's father must have known the consequences of continuing to see his wife, but that bond was important enough to defy the rules.



Dana's speech is notable not just for her lack of a Southern accent, but because her polished words contrast with the colloquial speech of the free blacks and slaves during this time period. Dana's real love for Kevin lends strength to her lies. Butler again points out how important the bond between Dana and Kevin is, even after Dana has seen the extreme violence that white men can commit against black people.



The undercurrent of the white man's conversation with Dana suggests that he came back in order to take advantage of Alice's mother sexually. He does not see black women as anything more than objects, easily replacing Alice's mother with Dana simply because she is available. This white man is clearly used to taking whatever he wants in the moment.



Dana runs back to the cabin, only to find Alice's mother blocking the door. The young white man catches up to Dana and drags her down. Dana scrambles up and runs into the forest but the man catches her again. He tackles Dana to the ground and beats her. Dana manages to get her hands on the man's face, but is too sickened by the thought of gouging the man's eyes to hurt him and escape. The man laughs and rips open Dana's shirt. As the man tears at Dana's bra, she lunges to the side and grabs a heavy tree branch. Dana hits the man across the skull with the branch and he collapses. As Dana tries to stand, she worries that the man will kill her when he wakes. Dana then falls unconscious.

Though it would be heroic of Alice's mother to save Dana from the white man, Alice's mother is portrayed as doing what she has to in order to survive. Dana is still not adapted to this harsh way of life, as seen by her reluctance to hurt the white man even as he is attacking her. When Dana is able to knock the man unconscious, she is still afraid for her life – thus sending her back to the present, even though she doesn't realize it.



5. When Dana wakes, she is terrified that the patroller is still there before realizing that she is safe in bed with Kevin by her side. Kevin asks what happened, telling Dana that she was gone for three minutes this time. Dana closes her eyes, too weary to explain anything. Kevin wants to take Dana to the hospital, but Dana is too nervous about the possibility of transporting from the hospital to leave the house.

Kevin, though the person that Dana trusts above all others, is still a white man and thus reminds Dana of the patroller as she regains consciousness. Kevin clearly cares only for Dana's well-being when he suggests taking her to the hospital, but also respects Dana's choice not to go. Dana has full agency in her relationship with Kevin, a stark contrast to her experiences in the past.



Kevin pushes for more details about Dana's trip. She manages to tell him that she was there for hours and attacked by a patroller before she begins to slip back to sleep. Kevin startles her awake again and asks if Dana was raped. Dana says no, then falls asleep.

Kevin's questions stem from concern for Dana, but he is also very insistent when he asks her to describe her experience, echoing Rufus' privileged demands to know more about Dana. Kevin recognizes how vulnerable Dana is in the past, understanding that women, especially black women, were almost always open to attack.



6. Dana wakes again, seeing that Kevin has cleaned the blood off of her and tied a canvas bag with clothing and a knife in it to Dana's wrist. Dana kisses Kevin to wake him and Kevin is elated to see that Dana is still there. Dana explains about the patroller and the information she found out about the Weylin plantation in Maryland. As Dana describes the family connection between her, Rufus, and Alice, Kevin questions whether Dana hallucinated all of this based on information she already knew about her family. Angry, Dana reminds Kevin about her injuries and the resemblance between her and Alice's mother.

Kevin seeks to protect Dana whenever possible, giving her supplies for the possibility that this time travel might happen again. Dana again bears the proof of this travel on her body, helping to solidify the fact that this is not a hallucination, and emphasizing the symbolic nature of her injuries as representative of historical trauma.



Kevin assures Dana that he believes her and begins to think of ways to protect Dana on her trips. He brings out the knife, and Dana knows that she is prepared to use it after her experience with the patroller. Kevin asks Dana to show him that she can use it, then is surprised when Dana lunges close to him without giving him warning. Dana reminds Kevin that she won't be in any fair fights.

After initial questions, Kevin returns to supporting Dana unconditionally. Dana now understands how savage the world of the past is and what she might have to do in order to survive there. She is willing to do what it takes, even if it might break the code of ethics she previously lived by.



Dana is still concerned by all the horrible things she has read about in the experiences of slaves. Kevin suggests that Dana pose as a free black person, and the couple begin researching what a certificate of freedom would have looked like. None of their books are helpful, so Kevin suggests that they write Dana a pass. Dana gets a small pad of paper from the office and the Atlas. She tears out the map of Maryland to help her potentially run away.

Butler points out how important it is that Dana and Kevin know about the past. They have the advantage of knowledge to help them as they try to make sure that Dana will be able to survive, yet the lack of records about this point in history makes it difficult for them to find the appropriate information. Butler advocates for increased historical inquiry while recognizing that reading history books is not the same as actually experiencing life.



Kevin reminds Dana to tie the emergency bag back to her wrist, then wonders aloud how Dana might control when she comes home. He questions Dana's experience with the rabbit that made her feel dizzy and notes that fear seems to have something to do with it. Dana points out that she was afraid of the patroller, but didn't come home until she had knocked him out. Kevin responds that Dana was afraid that the patroller would kill her if he woke up, suggesting that the travel seems tied to moments when Dana believes her life is in danger. Dana clarifies this theory: Rufus's fear of death calls Dana into the past, and her own fear of death sends her home.

The life and death stakes of Dana's time travel mirror the heightened stakes of all the decisions Dana makes in the past. This harsher world demands that Dana pay more attention just to survive. The familial connection between Dana and Rufus also seems to contribute to their time travel, especially as Dana would cease to exist if Rufus died before he helped sire Dana's ancestor Hagar. Kevin and Dana work together to fill out this hypothesis, as they continue to support and complement each other.



Kevin is excited to understand how the time travel works, but Dana is upset that death is such an integral part of the process. Kevin tries to comfort her fears by reminding her that her ancestors survived somehow, but Dana doesn't think that she is as strong as her ancestors. Furthermore, she doesn't want to be a part of the violence in the past, by either killing other people or getting killed herself. Kevin backs down, then asks if he looks like the patroller. Dana says no—Kevin is what she needs to come home to.

Kevin has more distance from the time travel and the violence of the past, so he is able to see its more fantastical aspects. Meanwhile Dana is emotionally entangled in the awful things that the past might to do her or make her do. Likewise, Kevin—as a white person—is more distanced from issues of race and can ignore things that Dana has to deal with daily. Dana sees Kevin as her home, tying home to a person rather than a place.



CHAPTER 3: THE FALL

1. When Dana first met Kevin, she was working for a casual labor agency – which the regulars called the “slave market,” even though it was the opposite of slavery. She goes into the office every day at 6 am to see if she has a job that day, accepting jobs that require menial labor for minimum wage where the more mindless the worker is, the better. Dana works here so that she can shuffle through the day and write her novel at night. She is half asleep at work, prompting Kevin to introduce himself by asking why Dana always looks like a zombie.

Dana was once able to casually joke about slavery from her perspective in the present. These temporary warehouse jobs do not require any special skill, just like the slaves were actively discouraged from developing their education—however, Dana chooses to do these jobs rather than being forced into them, reserving her mental energy for her writing.



Kevin tries to talk to Dana, though Dana doesn't want to get in trouble for slacking off on the job. Another employee, Buz, told Kevin that Dana was a writer, and Kevin reveals that he is also a writer who works at a warehouse for rent money while his books aren't yet profitable. Dana truly looks at Kevin for the first time, noting his strangely pale face, hair, and eyes. Dana is jealous that Kevin even has a book published.

Dana and Kevin bond over their desires to be writers, something that people like Buz laugh at as unrealistic. Both Dana and Kevin place the ability to express themselves in writing above physical comforts. Significantly, Dana doesn't seem to register Kevin's skin color until she is already interested by his personality.



Buz teases Dana for meeting up with Kevin to talk about writing, but Dana looks forward to having lunch with Kevin. Kevin animatedly talks about his book before noticing that Dana has nothing to eat. Dana says she's on a diet, but Kevin goes out to a food truck and buys Dana a hamburger, saying that he has been on that kind of diet. As Dana eats, she tells Kevin about her short stories and the two laugh about the lack of family support for their dreams of becoming authors. They also find out that they are both orphans.

Dana is incredibly independent and self-sufficient, but Kevin already shows that he is willing to take care of her without embarrassing Dana or making her indebted to him. The two of them bond further over their shared familial backgrounds, even though Kevin and Dana obviously have different experiences between growing up white and growing up black.



Dana tells Kevin that her aunt and uncle want her to take sensible classes and write on the side, but Dana can't pretend to be interested enough in any other subjects to keep up with the work. Buz comes into the break room and hisses "chocolate and vanilla porn" at Dana. Dana tries to laugh it off and Kevin grins at her.

Dana puts her aspirations as a writer above everything, something that her family and others at the warehouse do not understand. Buz highlights the racial discrimination that still follows interracial couples in 1976 by fetishizing their relationship as porn.



Kevin and Dana eat lunch together the next week and talk about their novels, their families, and their lives of barely scraping by. Soon, the warehouse is calling them the "weirdest-looking couple" and Dana is pleasantly surprised to find that she likes thinking of them as a couple. Kevin surprises her the next day with play tickets. Soon enough, Kevin and Dana sleep over at each other's places regularly and Dana realizes that she is no longer lonely.

Kevin is not only white, but very pale, making Dana look even darker in comparison. Their coworkers comment on this physical difference, unwilling to see the similarities in personality that bring Dana and Kevin together as a couple.



2. Back in the present, Dana is too worried to go to the library with Kevin so she stays home while Kevin leaves to look for records of certificates of freedom. As Kevin checks in on her before walking out the door, Dana feels dizzy again. Kevin rushes to her side and holds her tightly. Both Dana and Kevin then find themselves in a forest, the emergency bag still tied to Dana's wrist. Dana grabs Kevin's hand, grateful for his protection but wishing that he weren't here.

Kevin supports Dana in the present by trying to gain as much knowledge as possible about her potential situation, and then offers physical support when he goes to the past with her. As nice as it is for Dana and Kevin to be together, Dana wanted Kevin, her safe home, to stay separate from these traumatic events.



Dana looks around for Rufus, finally noticing him lying on the ground clutching his leg while a young black boy crouches beside him. Dana goes over to Rufus, noting that he looks about 12, and Rufus explains that he fell from a tree and hurt his leg. The black boy, Nigel, is afraid of Dana until Rufus says that Dana is here to help. Dana sends Nigel to get Tom Weylin to bring a wagon for Rufus, and Nigel is distracted by Dana's "funny" accent and men's clothing. Rufus tells Nigel to go.

As they wait for Nigel to return, Dana asks Rufus if Nigel will get in trouble for leaving Rufus behind. Rufus responds that it depends what mood Tom Weylin is in. Kevin then introduces himself, explaining that Dana is his wife. Rufus is aghast at the thought of "niggers" marrying white people, and Kevin is upset at Rufus' language. Dana cuts Kevin off before he says something rash, and gently reminds Rufus not to use that word in her presence.

Rufus is confused that Kevin and Dana can marry, as blacks and whites are not allowed to marry in his time. Dana and Kevin decide to tell Rufus the truth about where they come from: California of 1976. Rufus has trouble wrapping his head around the possibility of time travel, insisting that Dana is making it up. Rufus demands real proof that Dana is from the future, so Dana tells him that the next president will be John Quincy Adams. Kevin gets out some coins from his pocket, showing Rufus the dates from the 1960s and 70s. Rufus still doesn't understand, but says he believes their story.

3. Tom arrives with a wagon, Nigel, and an older black man. Tom is suspicious of Kevin and Dana, but lets Kevin explain that he and Dana simply came across Rufus and Nigel after Rufus fell out of the tree and broke his leg. Tom examines Rufus's leg and grumbles about how much the doctor will cost. The large black man lifts Rufus into the wagon gently, but Rufus still cries out in pain. Rufus asks Dana not to go, and Dana realizes she wants to stay to help Rufus through the pain of nineteenth-century "medicine."

Tom has a quiet conversation with Kevin, then turns to go without offering hospitality to Kevin and Dana. Rufus pleads with his father and earns Kevin and Dana a begrudging invitation, as Tom stares at Dana. Dana stares back before remembering that slaves were supposed to lower their eyes in respect. Tom demands to know Dana's name and where she comes from. Dana answers New York, after looking to Kevin to make sure she won't contradict anything he has previously said. Tom glares at Dana, then turns and drives the wagon back home.

Nigel looks to Rufus for what to do, only listening to Dana's directions when Rufus gives the okay. Even though Dana is a competent adult, Nigel trusts the word of a white boy more. Furthermore, Dana does not speak or look like the other black people that Nigel is used to interacting with. Her clothing again causes confusion because Dana's "men's" clothing does not match society's expectation of women in this time.



Kevin gets upset on Dana's behalf for Rufus's slurs. Rufus has no concept of white and black people being together in a relationship of mutual respect. But when Kevin responds with anger, Dana is more willing to forgive Rufus for his misstep and try to redirect his behavior away from the damaging effects society has had on him.



The facts that Dana and Kevin tell Rufus about the past are not actually very useful in establishing that they come from the future, as Rufus has no way of knowing if they will be right about the next president and he does not have very much experience seeing money. Yet Rufus has seen Dana appear and disappear, and has also seen how Dana and now Kevin do not act like anyone he's seen before.



In the interaction with Tom, only Kevin—as a white male—has any authority. Tom and Rufus's strained relationship shows again in Tom's lack of concern for his son's welfare in the face of the cost of a doctor. Though Dana herself does not have specific medical training, the average educated person in the 1970s has more up-to-date knowledge than anyone in Rufus's time.



Tom speaks civilly to Kevin, whereas he treats Dana with disrespect and contempt. Dana looks to Kevin to make sure that their stories are in sync, but to Tom it appears that Dana is rightfully looking to Kevin for permission to speak. From Tom's perspective Kevin and Dana could never be partners—the white male has authority over any black woman.



Dana and Kevin ride in the back of the wagon, watching slaves in the fields as the wagon jostles along the road back to the Weylin house. The building itself is smaller than Dana expects, affordable even for her and Kevin in 1976. At the house, Tom tells the large black man, Luke, to take Dana to the back for some food, but Dana looks at Rufus's pained face and asks to stay with him. Tom agrees and carelessly lifts his son out of the wagon and brings him into the house. Luke whispers a warning to Dana that Master Tom can turn mean quickly.

Nigel comes out and stands next to Luke, allowing Dana to see that Nigel is probably Luke's son. Their familial resemblance is much stronger than the similarity between Tom and Rufus. Dana worries that she will not be able to keep Rufus safe in this world, and that Rufus will grow up to be like his father in personality when Rufus inherits the plantation.

Tom puts Rufus on the bed, neither trying to hurt him nor taking care of the boy's injured leg. A red-haired woman hustles in and begins to become hysterical about Rufus. Tom catches the woman, Margaret, before she can lash out at Dana, and explains that Dana "belongs" to Kevin Franklin, the man who found Rufus when he got hurt. Tom leaves the room and Kevin reluctantly follows.

Alone in the room with Rufus, Margaret glares at Dana and says that she has seen Dana before. Rufus interrupts with a soft "mama," and Margaret rushes to Rufus's side to fuss over him. She demands that Dana go get water, then leaves in disgust to get it herself when Dana asks where to go to get water. Margaret sweeps back in and nastily sends Dana out to the cookhouse. Dana leaves, wondering why everyone in this time period seems to hate her in particular when they are obviously used to seeing black people.

Dana sees a young girl in the hallway and asks for directions to the cookhouse, but the girl doesn't answer. The girl stares for a minute and then goes down the stairs. At a loss for other options, Dana follows. The girl looks back and covers her mouth, making Dana realize that the girl can't talk. The girl then points to Dana's clothing and Dana wonders if her "men's" pants are the reason she has been met with so much hostility. Dana makes up an excuse, blaming Kevin for not giving her proper women's clothing.

Though the Weylins are rich by the standards of their time, they seem fairly poor by the standards of Dana's present. The actual circumstances of life in the past are different from what Dana expects just from reading historical accounts. Meanwhile, Tom again shows disregard for anyone's feelings but his own, even his injured son. Luke seems to care for Rufus while being wary of Tom.



The family resemblance between Luke and Nigel symbolically represents how the family relationships of the black slaves on the Weylin plantation are much closer than the Weylin family themselves. Dana feels some responsibility for Rufus as her ancestor, hoping that her family is not completely unsalvageable.



Margaret babies her son, blaming anyone she can for her son's pain even when Dana has actually been trying to help Rufus. Though Dana knows more about Rufus's situation, the Weylins believe more in Kevin's authority simply because he is a white man.



Margaret seems to hate Dana's confidence and self-possession, expecting black people to act submissive as slaves are taught to do.



The young girl represents enslaved people's lack of agency and rights, without any kind of voice to express herself. Dana uses her lack of control (as a perceived slave) as protection, claiming that Kevin only gives her men's clothing to avoid questions of propriety about her style of dress.



The girl leads Dana to the cookhouse, a small white cottage outside the Weylin house. Luke and Nigel are inside eating, with younger children sitting on the floor eating with their fingers. Dana is relieved to see that children on this plantation are not fed from troughs. The cook, busy at a huge fireplace, turns and asks the young girl, Carrie, who Dana is. Dana notes that the cook and Carrie have the same light brown skin and pretty features. Dana introduces herself and says that Rufus's mother sent her out here for food. The cook calls Margaret a "bitch" and Luke cautions the cook, whose name is Sarah, against saying that too loudly.

Sarah dishes Dana some sad-looking corn meal mush while Dana wistfully smells the stew Sarah is making for the Weylins. Luke explains that the slaves get to eat the leftovers when the Weylins are done, but that just makes Dana worry about the possibility of disease from sharing food. Luke questions Dana about her background in New York, and Dana lies as best she can. She can sense that the other slaves are treating her coldly, but can't figure out the reason until Nigel asks why Dana talks like a white person. Dana lies that her mother was a free black who taught school, and Nigel cautions Dana about acting educated around Master Tom.

4. Dana finishes her corn meal mush but stays in the cookhouse because she is worried about being too far from Kevin in the main house if she starts to feel dizzy enough to go back to 1976. Carrie slips Dana some bread and ham, which Dana eats gratefully while trying to ignore concerns of food safety and hygiene. The cookhouse is a whirl of activity as other black people come in to get food or talk to Sarah.

All the way in the cookhouse, Dana can hear Rufus scream as the doctor sets his broken leg. Carrie runs into the cookhouse with her hands over her ears, and Sarah explains that Carrie likes Rufus because Rufus kept the other children from teasing her when she was little. Carrie is Sarah's fourth child, but the only one that Master Tom hasn't sold away. Dana can see the anger in Sarah's eyes as she explains that Carrie only isn't sold because her speech defect makes her worth less money. Dana thinks that Master Tom could easily find his food poisoned if he were ever stupid enough to sell Carrie too.

Butler again adds details that enforce how slavery continually shamed black people and robbed them of human dignity, such as feeding black children in troughs as if they were livestock. The cookhouse is a safe place for the slaves, where they can show their true feelings for their masters without too much fear of punishment. Yet they still have to be careful, as they constantly have to watch out for other slaves who might betray them to the masters.



Life in the past is far more difficult than Dana's life in the present. Aside from the dangers of living as a slave, Dana also has to worry about risks like disease. Dana is also unused to many of the more personally shameful aspects of being enslaved. Dana's demeanor is also different from most slaves because she had the opportunity to gain an education in the present that most black people in Rufus's time were completely denied.



Carrie may not be able to speak, but she has more power than it seemed at first. Carrie performs small acts of resistance to make life more bearable for the slaves, such as sneaking more nutritious food than they would otherwise be given.



Even efforts to help people in the past, such as setting a broken bone, include more violence than Dana is used to. Dana is also surprised that Carrie is able to care for Rufus so strongly when Rufus is part of the family that keeps her enslaved. Carrie shows great sensitivity and concern for others. Sarah reveals how the Weylins manipulate their slaves by selling off members of their family to show the consequences of disobedience. After so many losses, Sarah is forced to be loyal to the Weylins so that she has a chance of keeping her last remaining child. Tom frames this as a monetary consideration due to Carrie's speech impediment, but Dana knows that it is also a tool to keep Sarah in line.



After a couple hours, Kevin calls to Dana from the yard. Dana forces herself not to show how eager she is to get back to him. Kevin tries to take Dana's hand in the yard, but she resists. Kevin then leads Dana behind the protective branches of an oak tree, where they can talk without being seen. Kevin wistfully thinks of all the more interesting times they could have traveled back to, but Dana snorts that very few times in the past would have been safe for her.

Dana and Kevin have to play-act at a master-slave relationship in order to hide their true affection for each other, because this time period cannot comprehend true partnership between people of different races. Kevin has far more privilege in this time period than he already had as a white male in the present. He is able to entertain thoughts of traveling through the past for fun, while Dana, as a black woman, is stuck dealing with various degrees of oppression in almost every era of the past.



Dana warns Kevin to come quick if he ever hears her calling, fearing that Kevin would be stuck here for good if Dana transports back to 1976 without him. Kevin agrees, but points out that he would have an easier time surviving here than Dana does. Dana doesn't say that Kevin would be in danger of letting the twisted worldview of the Antebellum South rub off on him.

While Kevin may be less physically vulnerable than Dana due to his gender and skin color, he is still susceptible to the damaging atmosphere of past injustices. The longer Kevin spends in the past, the more he is in danger of accepting the privilege and control over others that this society gives him at the cost of his own human decency.



Dana asks after Rufus, and Kevin assures her that the doctor thinks Rufus will be all right. Kevin himself has scratches on his arm from trying to hold Margaret back while the doctor set Rufus's leg. Tom has also asked Kevin to stay on to tutor Rufus, as Rufus can't go to school as long as his leg is healing. Dana wonders what work Tom will give her while they are here, a thought that Kevin doesn't like. Yet Dana knows that she has to fit in as a slave for her own safety, and that slaves have to work.

Margaret again shows the destructive nature of how the Weylin family shows love, hurting other people in a misguided desire to get to her "baby." Dana has to swallow her pride and pretend to be a slave because that is what society expects of her. She would be just as competent a tutor as Kevin, but her skin color prevents her from doing anything but menial labor.



Kevin and Dana get their story straight, deciding that Kevin is a writer from New York who taught Dana to read and write so that she could help with the work. Kevin is in the South researching for a book, but got robbed a couple days ago. Kevin warns Dana that Tom was angry to hear how educated Dana is, and tells her to stay out of his way. Furthermore, Kevin had to tell Tom that he was planning to sell Dana in Louisiana, and also said that keeps Dana docile with the promise of freedom in return for sexual favors—just to keep Tom happy about the “threat” of an educated slave on his plantation. Kevin and Dana decide that they will do everything they can to keep Rufus from turning into his parents, so that Dana might be safe here if she ever has to come again by herself.

Dana and Kevin have to explain how Dana is able to read and write, as black people rarely had the chance to be educated, and many states even outlawed teaching slaves to read and write. The opportunities that reading and writing give were often deemed too dangerous for slaves, as they could then write their own passes or better organize slave revolts. Kevin has to degrade his own principles in order to fit into this society—exactly what Dana is afraid of if they have to stay here much longer. Yet the longer they stay, the more chance they have to introduce Rufus to more evolved viewpoints on race relations and respect for all peoples.



5. Sarah takes Dana into the cookhouse and begins teaching her to cook, while Margaret follows Dana around in the house and complains about the way that Dana does every chore. Dana hides in Kevin's room when she can, but she has to sleep on a mat in the attic. Kevin wants to leave and get Dana out of this poisonous atmosphere, possibly going to Philadelphia, but Dana would rather face the relatively small threat of the Weylins and build up credit for herself with Rufus in case she travels back here during a time when Rufus has control of the plantation.

Kevin wants to test his theory that Dana goes home when she is scared for her life, but Dana asks him to wait six more weeks until Rufus's leg heals. Kevin backs down, but insists that Dana come sleep in his room at night. Dana agrees, especially when she hears that Margaret has been pursuing Kevin. They hope that the Weylins will ignore the "immorality" of them sleeping together, the way that Margaret ignores the slave children that Tom bears.

Later that day, Dana is making biscuits with Sarah when Carrie comes in and signs that a white person wants to see Dana. Dana follows Carrie to Rufus's room, where Rufus is lying in bed with his leg in traction. Rufus asks if Dana is happy with "Aunt Sarah," explaining that Sarah beat the last girl she had as help when she was angry after her boys were sold.

Rufus then asks Dana to read to him, if she really knows how, and produces a copy of [Robinson Crusoe](#) that Kevin had brought in for him. Dana begins to read, getting involved in the story even though it is not her favorite book, and Rufus seems to enjoy the tale. Dana puts the book down when she thinks Rufus has gone to sleep, but Rufus tells her that he likes her reading. Rufus and Margaret do not like to read for themselves, unlike Tom's first wife, Miss Hannah.

Dana convinces Rufus not to give up on reading, playing to his pride and promising that there are more books like [Robinson Crusoe](#) that he can enjoy. Rufus wants Dana to stay and read more, but Dana doesn't want to get in trouble with Margaret. Dana convinces Rufus to try reading a couple of lines himself, but his progress is achingly slow.

Not only does Dana have to submit to doing all these chores, but she has to listen to Margaret demean her as well. Hearing Margaret complain only compounds how unfair it is that Dana has to do all the work that benefits only Margaret. Butler uses Kevin's suggestion that they escape to Philadelphia to introduce the idea that running away from the conditions of slavery will not actually fix the problem, and could even make matters worse for Dana later.



Kevin and Dana make decisions together, showing true partnership as they work out how to deal with this tough situation. However, their marriage is illegal here and they must hide their love. Hypocritically, the Weylins turn the other cheek to white people sleeping with black people outside of committed relationships, and even cheat on each other, but they would not put up with a healthy interracial relationship.



Despite the fact that Carrie is mute, she still finds ways to communicate, showing the resourcefulness of enslaved people who have to find non-traditional ways of asserting their power. Rufus also seems to consider the slaves part of his family in some sense, calling Sarah "aunt," yet he still doesn't care that Sarah's children were sold because he does not consider slaves to be capable of real feelings.



Rufus respects Dana more than Tom does, but he has obviously internalized some of the contempt that his society has for black people. Reading and using her education is one way that Dana can show Rufus that black people are just as intelligent and dignified as white people. Characters in the novel who enjoy reading are more admirable than those who do not, putting Dana above Rufus and Margaret.



Though [Robinson Crusoe](#) treats slavery casually, reading will still help Rufus broaden his worldview and hopefully learn to treat people like Dana with respect. Rufus has to start at the very beginning, learning both how to read and how to treat others as equals.



Dana asks what happened to Alice. Rufus, surprised at the question, says nothing happened, and he has to be reminded that Alice's father was beaten before remembering that Tom sold Alice's father to Georgia. As far as Dana can tell, the white patroller she hit didn't spread any stories about her. Rufus reveals that he told his mother that Dana was the woman from the river, hoping that it would make his mom like Dana more. Rufus doesn't understand why his parents don't like Dana, and he too warns her to be careful.

Rufus has the privilege of forgetting many of the awful things that happen around him, such as Alice's father's beating, because they do not affect him directly. Yet Rufus still has some amount of care for Dana, hoping to make his family like her more, even though his efforts with Margaret may actually backfire. Rufus' impulsiveness shows again, though he has good intentions.



As Dana leaves Rufus's room, she meets Tom on the stairs. Tom is angry at overhearing Dana read to Rufus. Dana forces herself to face Tom calmly, noticing that Tom's eyes look similar to Kevin's. Tom asks Dana how old she is and what year she was born, answers that Dana has practiced for just such an occasion. Tom asks about children, and assumes that Dana is barren when she says she has none. As Tom inquires further about whether she likes Rufus and if she can teach reading and math, Dana realizes that Tom means to buy her. She answers as diplomatically as possible that she would rather stay with Kevin.

Butler draws physical similarities between Tom and Kevin, showing how easy it would be for Kevin to take advantage of the privilege that his white skin gives him. Tom believes that he can have whatever he want, demanding personal information about Dana and planning to buy her instead of considering what Dana may wish to do in this situation. Dana attempts to assert her own choice, but is forced to do so by invoking Kevin's authority.



6. Dana is as careful as possible, especially after witnessing Tom **whip** a field hand for talking back. The harsh punishment serves as a warning to all the slaves what Tom Weylin will do to enforce obedience. Dana worries that sleeping in Kevin's room – even if Kevin were to say that it was his orders – would be enough to earn her a beating. Dana does as many chores as possible in Kevin's room to give her a reason to be in there alone with Kevin.

Tom wields the whip himself, showing that he does not care about harming other people to get what he wants. While he pretends that the slave did something to "earn" this beating, Butler makes it clear that there is no reason why anyone should be punished in such a harsh way. The threat of physical harm is enough to force Dana to police her own behavior – another terrible result of slavery.



As Dana sweeps the library one day, Margaret corners her and slaps her across the face for shaming the Weylins' Christian morals by sleeping in Kevin's room. Unsure how to react, Dana stays silent and goes on sweeping while watching Margaret for signs of worse violence. Margaret leaves the library in a huff, presumably to go "supervise" and criticize the work of the other house slaves. Dana can tell that Margaret micromanages the house out of boredom and a desire to prove she is a real lady.

Margaret shows extreme hypocrisy in punishing Dana for sleeping with her husband when Margaret herself has been trying to seduce Kevin. Margaret truly has nothing in her life to bring her real pleasure, and is trapped in her position as a "lady" with no purpose except stealing from the energy of others. Slavery is obviously more damaging to black lives, but it also harms the white slave holders.



Dana goes about her work that day wondering if Tom will punish her for sleeping with Kevin. She finishes her tasks and goes to find Sarah in the cookhouse. Sarah greets Dana by saying that she spoke up for Dana today. Dana assumes that Sarah spoke to Margaret, but Sarah says she has as little to do with Margaret as possible because Margaret's fancy taste forced Tom to sell Sarah's children for money. Sarah says that she spoke for Dana's ability as a hard worker to Tom. Dana explains that Kevin won't sell her, and Sarah agrees that that's for the best.

Sarah acts as though she has done Dana a favor by talking her up to Tom, not seeing how it is demeaning for Dana to have her worth assessed by other people who try to control her future. Dana has to defer to Kevin's authority instead of telling Sarah that it is her own choice not to work for Tom. Sarah didn't even have the ability to keep her family together, as Tom sold her children to make money for Margaret. Again, the Weylins have no regard for their slaves' feelings or families when it gets in the way of what they want.



Sarah warns Dana not to cross Margaret anymore, suggesting that Dana should make Kevin let her sleep in the attic again. Sarah hints that she knows that Dana can make Kevin do anything she wants, and that she should take advantage of this while she is young and pretty. Dana realizes that Sarah was probably in a similar situation with a white master when Sarah herself was young, but Sarah refuses to say anything more.

Sarah misreads Dana and Kevin's relationship in a different way, suggesting that Dana has seduced Kevin in order to use her sexuality to gain some power over Kevin. Butler suggests that this was not an uncommon occurrence among female slaves, who had little option outside of sexual favors to assert their agency over white men, who otherwise completely controlled their lives.



7. Instead of moving back to the attic, Dana decides to follow some of Luke's advice and tell white people what they want to hear while doing what she wants to do. Tom often threatens to **whip** Luke, but rarely does so. Dana even sees Tom in the hall one morning as she stumbles out of Kevin's room, but Tom just winks. As time passes, Dana and Kevin become more integrated into the Weylin household and Dana adjusts to the drudgery of life as a slave. Kevin dislikes having to put up with the Weylins' boring guests and wishes that he and Dana could go explore the old West. Dana is resistant, not wishing to see Native Americans mistreated there the way that blacks are in the South.

In some aspects, the Weylin slaves pay lip service to their master's control over their lives and make decisions on their own. This mirrors the way that Dana play-acts at being Kevin's slave while continuing to maintain her romantic partnership with him. Tom has no problem with Kevin and Dana sleeping together because he too sleeps with his slaves, yet Tom does not understand that Dana actually wants to be with Kevin. Kevin may be bored in the past, but he has a far easier time than Dana does. Dana now has more empathy for all those mistreated during this time period, because she is suffering in the same way.



Tom catches Dana in the library reading one day, and tells her not to go in the library any more. But that night, Nigel asks Dana to teach him how to read. Aware of the risks if they are found out, Dana agrees. After thinking over Nigel's request, Dana realizes that she and Kevin are still just play-acting at being part of this time period, while people like Nigel truly have to live here.

Tom clearly thinks that educated slaves are dangerous, as knowledge can translate to power. In order to assuage her conscience at the privilege that she has due to her modern education, Dana helps Nigel learn to read so that Nigel will also have that power and self-respect.



On a miserably hot day, Kevin and Dana walk to the woods to have a private moment together. On the way, they see some slave children playing at buying and selling one another. As the children argue about how much they are worth, Dana walks away disgusted. Kevin is less upset, rationalizing that the children are only doing what they have seen adults do. When Dana glares at him, Kevin admits that he can't know how she feels about this. He and Dana have to focus on surviving, not saving these children from their likely futures.

The institution of slavery continues because the children, both black and white, perpetuate the actions they have seen their parents and other adults do. While Rufus learns to act as the master from his father, the children of enslaved people learn that their future is to be bought and sold. Kevin is less upset by this because his white skin gives him some distance from these children, while Dana sees these children as a potential part of her family.



Kevin goes further to say that the plantation is better than he expected, though he doesn't know about the **whipping** that Dana witnessed. Dana is angry, responding that the Weylins don't have to beat their slaves to be cruel to them. Dana explains that Kevin has more shielding than she does, though both of them are often able to act as observers. Dana reveals that she has started to teach Nigel to read in order to relieve some of her guilt at her inability to change the slaves' lives. Kevin is happy to hear that Nigel is gaining this skill, but warns Dana to be careful.

Even if there was no physical punishment on the Weylin plantation, the conditions of slavery would still damage the enslaved people because they have no control over their lives. Dana feels deeply how limited her options are in this time period, while Kevin actually has more freedom here as a white man who ostensibly owns other people.



8. Dana goes to read to Rufus again, though Tom doesn't like the thought of a black person reading to his son. Margaret often comes in, annoying Dana by interrupting frequently to offer Rufus food and drink. Snappish after two months of bed rest, Rufus sends Margaret out this time. Dana is surprised at how harshly Rufus speaks to Margaret, but Margaret does not fight back. Rufus laughs that his mother will be back soon with a piece of cake for him, and Dana continues reading.

Margaret tries to disrupt Dana's attempts to help Rufus learn, not seeing the value in reading—which Dana knows can help Rufus become a better person. Meanwhile, Rufus's sense of entitlement shows in his relationship with his mother. Rufus is used to getting whatever he wants no matter how cruelly he treats his mother, because there have never been any consequences for this kind of behavior in the past.



Later, Dana goes to the cookhouse to give Nigel a reading lesson. She finds Nigel and Carrie hunched over books and the two children are frozen with fear until they realize it is just Dana at the door. Dana is sad to realize that though writing would give Carrie a much-needed way to communicate, it would also most likely get her beaten by the Weylins. Dana offers to teach Carrie as well, though she knows that Sarah doesn't want Carrie to take the risk of learning. Carrie runs out of the cookhouse to return to her chores.

Nigel continues to spread the power of reading and writing to Carrie, offering her a chance to have a voice when the Weylins would rather she stay silenced. Though Dana knows the risks involved and understands that Sarah is right about the danger Carrie could get in, she also understands that it is more important for Carrie to have some ability to communicate that will give her a greater ability to affect the path of her own life.



Dana warns Nigel to be more careful than ever about letting someone find out about their reading, and then gives Nigel a spelling test. Though the Weylins usually never come into the cookhouse, Tom bursts into the room while Dana still has the spelling book in her hand. Knowing she is in for a harsh beating, Dana wonders where Kevin is. Tom knocks Dana to the floor and drags her to the door as Dana manages to mouth "Get Kevin" to Nigel.

Though Dana might hope that she can give Nigel more opportunities in life, Tom's interruption proves that very little is actually under Dana's control on the Weylin plantation. Dana can tell that Tom might beat her within an inch of her life, and wants to get Kevin in case she transports back to the future—but she also wants him to be there because Kevin's authority as a white man has the potential to protect her.



Once in the yard, Tom begins to **whip** Dana. The leather sears through her light shirt, feeling like hot iron. Dana screams and twists, but can't escape the blows. After several harsh lashes, Dana feels as though Tom is trying to kill her, and even welcomes the thought of death if it means ending the pain. Through blurred vision, Dana sees Kevin racing over from across the yard. As the dizziness takes over, Dana reaches towards Kevin, but passes out before Kevin gets to her.

This is one of Dana's worst experiences during her time as a slave: receiving an incredibly harsh whipping for simply giving a black boy the tools to gain an education. In conditions as demeaning and awful as this, life is not necessarily worth the pain for Dana. Butler does not shy away from describing the extent of Dana's pain in this moment, trying to convey in the present the visceral reality of slavery's brutality.



CHAPTER 4: THE FIGHT

1. Dana and Kevin never officially moved in together while they were dating, simply switching off nights at their two small apartments filled with books. Kevin urges Dana to quit at the agency and focus on writing full-time, but Dana likes the independence that having a paying job gives her. Four months after they meet, Kevin casually brings up marriage, and teases Dana that she could type all his manuscripts if they were married. Typing has been a sore subject between them, as both Kevin and Dana hate the work. Dana has already refused to type for Kevin twice, angering Kevin though he ultimately accepted it.

Dana is surprised by the thought of marriage, asking Kevin if his family would be opposed to him marrying her. Kevin has no close family left except his sister, who he expects will love Dana. Dana is not quite reassured, and furthermore thinks that her aunt and uncle won't be in favor of their marriage. Still, Kevin and Dana decide to get married and go to tell their families separately.

Kevin is shocked when his sister threatens to cut off contact with Kevin if he marries a black woman. He blames this racism on influence from his sister's prejudiced husband. Dana's aunt is in favor of the match because Kevin's skin will make Dana's children lighter, but her uncle is personally offended that Dana doesn't want to marry a black man. Dana's uncle says he will cut her out of the will if she marries Kevin, but Dana remains committed to her relationship. Kevin is equally determined to get married, so the couple elopes in Vegas.

2. Dana wakes up on the floor of her bathroom in 1976 with her back on fire and Kevin nowhere to be found. She gingerly gets up and fills the bathtub with warm water. She gets in the tub with her clothes on and waits for the water to loosen the strips of cloth from her torn back, wishing forcefully that Kevin were there. She imagines Kevin in the past, thinking that he might have gotten to go West. Eventually she gets out of the tub and falls immediately to sleep.

Dana and Kevin each retain their independence in their relationship, keeping their own space even as they start to live together. Dana does not want Kevin to have control over her by supporting her monetarily, preferring to keep her job and stay on equal economic footing with Kevin. Kevin at first tries to get Dana to put her own creative work on hold in order to further his writing, but eventually learns to accept that he and Dana must be true partners for the relationship to continue.



Kevin does not expect resistance to his relationship with Dana because he doesn't judge or dehumanize her based on her race. Dana has experienced enough racial discrimination in her life, though, to know that the world is not as accepting of racial mixing as Dana and Kevin would like and as progressive activists would hope.



Dana and Kevin do not let their families' criticism and hurt feelings get in the way of their marriage, but their life would be easier if they had more support starting their life together. While Kevin's sister espouses straight-forward racism, Dana's aunt displays more complex internalized prejudice that holds up light skin as the height of beauty. Meanwhile Dana's uncle is hurt that Dana is "rejecting" her family and her heritage by allying herself to a white man, not seeing how Dana is making the best choice for herself.



Dana's return to the present might have saved her life by not only helping her escape from Tom's whip but also offering her the chance to treat her wounds with better hygiene. Slaves on the Weylin plantation would have had nothing better than lye or salt to try to keep the lashes from becoming infected.



When Dana wakes again, she searches for an old prescription for sleeping pills, but then catches sight of herself in the mirror and decides to take another shower to wash her hair. Everything hurts, but Dana pushes through until she feels human again. She then puts together a replacement emergency bag with some extra modern comforts like aspirin, toothpaste, and ball-point pens. She still has the large knife because it was tied to her ankle when she transported back. Dana hadn't had a chance to use it in defense against Tom, and wonders whether the consequences of killing Tom would be worth sparing herself pain. She finishes packing the bag, finds herself something to eat, and goes back to sleep.

The next time Dana wakes, it is morning. Dana's back feels like a burn injury, and she wonders how to treat the lacerations without getting an infection. She thinks of the field hand she saw **whipped** who had brine thrown in his wounds and was able to heal without infection, but the thought of the horrible punishment feels out of place now that Dana is home. She puts ointment on her back and a loose dress, then goes outside. Watching a neighbor working in a garden causes Dana to think of Margaret, but the thoughts make Dana feel even more confused about where she belongs in time. Dana turns on a radio and finds that the date is June 11, 1976. Her two-month trip to the past has only taken one day in the present.

Dana sits down in her office and tries to write, but is unable to put down any words. She calls her favorite cousin in Pasadena and asks her to bring groceries, because she is too afraid to leave the house in case she transports again from an unknown location. The cousin comes quickly with food, immediately assuming that Kevin has been abusive when she sees the bruises on Dana's face and body. The cousin seems disappointed that Dana would let a man beat her, but Dana knows that the cousin will keep this a secret.

Days pass, and Dana stays in the present. She tries to busy herself with books about slavery, but is unable to stand the accounts of "happy darkies" presented in books like *Gone With the Wind*. Finally, Dana finds Kevin's World War II books and identifies strongly with the horrible suffering of the Jewish people, comparing the concentration camps to a distilled version of the oppression that the American South stretched out over two hundred years.

Dana decides to wash her hair through the pain because it is more important to feel clean and human after an experience in which Tom (and society in general) tried to treat her as an animal. This shower allows her to take back her humanity. Each time she goes back to the past, Dana becomes more accustomed to the violence of that life – her qualms about killing Tom are now more about the potential consequences after Tom is dead rather than a distaste for murdering someone.



Dana's enslaved ancestors would have had no chance to recover in peace from a whipping, but would have been treated with more pain after the inhumane beating. Yet Dana has trouble holding on to the visceral reality of life in the past when surrounded by the relative comfort of the present. Without Kevin, Dana feels displaced in time and unsure of where her home is. Her long experience in the past is reduced to only a day in the present, showing how quickly the traumas of the past can be forgotten in modern times.



Dana usually finds solace in her writing, but her time as a slave was so traumatic that she cannot even find the words to express it for herself. Dana can't explain to her cousin what actually happened to her, so she is forced to let her cousin think that Kevin has abused her. Though their relationship is actually healthy, Butler points out that women, even in the more "progressive" present, are vulnerable to mistreatment by male partners.



Butler points out that many books of American history gloss over the atrocities of slavery in order to make the American past more palatable. Dana finds more solace in sharing the horrors of her time as a slave with the accounts of Holocaust survivors who endured many of the same things.



3. After eight days at home, Dana feels the dizziness once more. She is transported to the woods with the sun either rising or setting. To the side, a young black woman holds onto a torn dress and watches a white man and a black man fighting. From the white man's red hair, Dana knows he is Rufus, even though his face is obscured with blood. Dana assumes from the situation that Rufus has forced himself on the black woman, and the black man is defending her honor. Rufus is losing the fight badly, and Dana realizes that she has to save Rufus because he is perhaps the only person who can help her find Kevin.

The black woman catches sight of Dana and calls out, as the black man lands one more blow on Rufus and knocks Rufus unconscious. Dana approaches the small group as the black man moves to hit Rufus while he is down, and she cautions the man against killing a white person. The man is suspicious and hostile to Dana's interference, but backs down despite his extreme anger over what Rufus has done to his wife.

The black woman also counsels her husband, Isaac, not to kill Rufus. As the woman speaks, Dana realizes that she is Alice, now grown up. Alice recognizes Dana and explains that she married Isaac Jackson after her mother died, even though Rufus was jealous. Dana promises not to tell anyone where Alice and Isaac go (assuming that they will run away), and even offers to write the pair a pass to help them as they travel. Isaac refuses this, and turns to go. Before they leave, Alice tells Dana that Kevin waited for a long time but eventually went North. Dana wonders how she will find Kevin now.

4. Dana rolls Rufus onto his back and assesses the injuries, deeming them fairly minimal. She waits for Rufus to wake up, hoping that Alice and Isaac will have a good head start in fleeing. Finally, Rufus comes to. He is glad that Dana came to help him, and asks where Alice and Isaac went, but Dana refuses to tell him. Dana then tells Rufus that his new story is that he was attacked by a group of white men who robbed him. Rufus balks at the lie, but backs down when Dana reminds him that he has done a horrible act by trying to rape Alice, and should be grateful to Dana and Alice for saving his life.

Again Dana has to save Rufus from his own impulsivity and stupidity. Rufus is used to getting what he wants with no consequences, but his desire to have this woman has caught up with him this time. Though Dana might want Rufus to get what he deserves for taking advantage of a black woman, she is forced to help Rufus because of the information that Rufus might have about Kevin, not to mention the fact that Rufus has to survive so that Dana's ancestor, and thus Dana herself, can be conceived.



While Rufus certainly deserves to be punished for what he has done to this woman, Dana reminds the black man that there would actually be worse consequences for him to deal with if Rufus were to die. No one would believe that the black man was acting in self-defense, and he would surely be killed for murdering a white man.



Alice, a free black woman, chooses to follow her own heart in her life instead of bowing down to Rufus's desires, even though she knows that Rufus may react poorly to this news. Dana uses her own skills and education to offer to write a pass that might help the two escape to the North where they could be more in control of their lives. Kevin has gone North, presumably because he could not stomach living in the South with his ideals of equality.



Rufus may have done something horrible, but he still has a conscious that Dana can appeal to in order to make running away a bit easier for Alice and Isaac. Dana continues to try to shape Rufus into a better person than his father or the rest of Antebellum society want him to be. Her task as Rufus's guardian includes caring for his soul as well as his mental well-being. Though Dana is Rufus's descendent, she takes on a parent-like role.



Rufus seems to feel guilty for what he has done to Alice, confirming that he did rape her but also getting angry that Alice would dare to prefer a black man over him. Dana reminds Rufus that Alice is a free woman with the right to say no, but Rufus won't hear it. He daydreams aloud about the punishment that Alice and Isaac will receive for running off together, and Dana shudders that the young boy she knew has turned into this man. But then Rufus's tone softens as he tells Dana that he told Alice about Dana and Kevin's marriage to try to convince Alice to leave Isaac for him. Dana realizes that Rufus does love Alice, in his twisted fashion.

Rufus tries to get up, but is in too much pain from his broken ribs to manage it. Dana agrees to go for help on the condition that Rufus does not betray Isaac and Alice. She reminds Rufus that they both have to rely on one another or else risk massive consequences, given that their relationship has life or death stakes. Dana knows that she could abandon Rufus right now if he won't work with her, as Alice's rape means there is a chance that Dana's ancestor Hagar has already been conceived. Finally, Rufus agrees to say that white men attacked him and Dana goes to get Rufus help.

Dana heads off through the forest as night begins to fall, marking the trail back to Rufus with bits of paper. Once on the road, she passes a house much finer than the Weylins' and wonders about how things have changed on the Weylin plantation in the intervening years. She gets close enough to see the Weylin house in the distance and is startled to find that she feels as though she is coming home. She gently touches her still healing back to remind herself that this place is hostile. Though it has only been a few days for her, Dana begins to feel as though years have passed in her time as well.

Dana approaches the house, mentally preparing herself to see Tom Weylin, but is stopped by an unfamiliar white man. Dana explains that she is getting help for Rufus, and the white man mutters about worthless Rufus getting in trouble again. The man tells Dana to come into the house and Dana sees Carrie in the hall. Carrie hugs Dana fiercely, making the white man suspicious again. Tom Weylin then comes out of the library and tells the white man, Jake, to send for the doctor, while Nigel takes the wagon and get Rufus.

Rufus still believes that he is a far better choice for Alice, because he has been conditioned to believe that white people are inherently superior than black people. Even though he feels bad for hurting Alice, Rufus does not recognize Alice's agency and ability to choose what she wants in life. His "love," though he tries to compare it to the partnership and love between Kevin and Dana, looks more like ownership.



Dana makes deals with Rufus that force Rufus to treat Dana as an equal rather than a slave meant to do his bidding. Dana and Rufus are linked together in a bond more complex than the master-slave relationship, as each has to depend on the other in order to survive. Dana's only hope is that Rufus has already started her family line, but Dana has to help Rufus until Hagar is born in order to ensure her own existence.



Dana has a complicated relationship to the Weylin house. It is a place that has caused her immense pain, but it also a place where she feels as though she belongs. Dana is needed in the Weylin house, and has bonds with both Rufus and the other slaves as a kind of chosen family. Furthermore, this house is the last place that she saw Kevin – the person who most signifies home to Dana. The events in the past are far more intense than events in the present and so take greater precedence in Dana's mind.



Butler points out that Rufus seems especially accident-prone, as Dana has had to come save him from potential death many more times than seems likely for most people. Tom seems to have accepted his son's foolishness and does not complain about the cost of the doctor as he did when Rufus was younger, but Tom still expresses contempt for his own son. Dana's feelings of being home are solidified by Carrie's welcome, showing that Dana was missed in the Weylin house.



Dana warns Tom that Rufus probably has broken ribs, but Tom is unconcerned and tells Dana to bandage them when Rufus gets here. Dana worries that her mediocre medical knowledge will injure Rufus further, but doesn't risk another confrontation with Tom. Dana gets in the back of the wagon, and is surprised to see that Nigel has grown into the spitting image of Luke in the intervening years. Tom barks at Nigel and Dana to stop talking and asks Dana to give them directions to Rufus.

Tom seems to believe that Dana has magical healing knowledge, though Dana only knows the basic first aid that average people know in 1976. This is still more than most people in the 1800s understand about the human body, and so gives Dana an advantage to ensure that Rufus survives. Nigel also greets Dana like family, welcoming her back to the plantation, while Tom gave her a very cold reception even though Dana is trying to help his son.



The group finds Rufus with little difficulty. Nigel lifts Rufus carefully into the wagon and Dana feels his forehead, noticing he has a fever. Once back at the house, Nigel carries Rufus up the stairs, while Tom calls Dana back. Tom asks “what” Dana is, knowing that she is the same woman who has disappeared and reappeared on this estate. Dana tries not to answer, simply reminding Tom that she has saved Rufus' life. Tom is not grateful for Dana's help with his son, but surprisingly tells Dana that Kevin went North and has written some letters to Rufus. Tom also allows Dana to stay on the plantation as long as she works and helps Rufus. Dana hopes that Kevin will return at some point.

Dana herself has no idea how she is traveling back in time, and Butler again gives no exact explanation for the fantastical elements of the novel. The time travel is a device Butler uses to explore her themes, rather than a major plot point. Despite the lack of thanks she receives for saving Rufus's life so often, Dana still feels that she has an obligation to help her white ancestors as much as possible. This duty, as well as the danger of a black woman traveling alone, keeps Dana from leaving the estate to search for Kevin.



6. Up in Rufus's room, Dana bandages Rufus as best she can, but his fever and coughing get worse. Sarah comes up to see Dana and sighs at the marks of fighting on Rufus's face. Noticing that Sarah is acting as if she were Rufus's mother, Dana asks about Margaret. Sarah whispers that Margaret is in Baltimore, but won't say more in front of Rufus. Rufus thrashes on the bed and Dana decides to give him some of her aspirin from her emergency bag. The doctor is held up at a birth, so Dana spends the night with Rufus, because Tom seems to think that Dana's “magic” translates to healing ability.

The members of the biological Weylin family do not care for each other as much as long-time house slaves like Sarah care for Rufus. Rufus is almost a surrogate child for Sarah, growing up in her care after Sarah's biological children were sold. Yet though Rufus cares for Sarah, he does not respect her or award her the concern that he would give to his “real” family. Dana doesn't believe that she really has healing magic, but pills such as aspirin seem like magic when compared to the rudimentary medical knowledge that Tom displays.



Nigel comes up to tell Dana to call Sarah if she needs anything, and Dana welcomes his friendly presence. Nigel tells Dana that he and Carrie are expecting a baby together, and that Rufus paid for a minister to come give them real wedding vows instead of making them “jump the broom.” Dana knows that Nigel and Carrie's marriage still isn't legal, and silently wishes that Alice and Isaac had been allowed to marry legally.

Just as interracial marriages are illegal at this time, slave marriages also did not have legal authority. Many slaves took to the tradition of jumping over a broom to symbolically mark their marriage, though they would never be legally allowed to marry. Slave owners could sell husbands and wives away from each other on a whim, or separate a couple that they disliked if they wished.



The next morning, Dana and Rufus eat breakfast together. Rufus comments that Tom wouldn't like seeing a slave eat with his son, but that Tom will be fair and not punish Dana for following Rufus's orders to eat in his room. Dana isn't sure that Tom is fair, but admits that he is not as cruel as he could be. Rufus is in a good mood, and chatters to Dana that she still looks so young. Dana asks about Kevin, and Rufus points to Kevin's letters in his desk, still trying to wrap his head around the time difference. Rufus marvels that Dana would still be young even when he is an old man, but Dana warns him that he has to be more careful if he ever expects to grow old.

Kevin's letters are sent from addresses in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. In the most recent letter, Kevin says he is heading for Maine. Dana hopes Kevin hasn't left for Maine yet so she can send him a letter and call him back to the Weylin plantation. Tom then comes in with the doctor, who interrogates Dana about Rufus's condition. Dana can see that the doctor knows little more about real medicine than she does, but at least the doctor won't "bleed" Rufus, as the fever seems to be gone. Dana escapes down to the cookhouse.

In the cookhouse, Dana angrily kneads dough for Sarah and catches up on the news of Margaret. After a hard pregnancy, Margaret gave birth to sickly twins who soon died. Margaret was in poor condition and her sister took her to Baltimore to heal. Meanwhile, Margaret's cousin, Jake Edwards, has become the overseer. Sarah won't say more, so Dana asks Nigel later what happened to Luke. Nigel quietly tells her that Luke was sold, and says nothing more.

Rufus later fills in the blanks about Luke, saying that Luke's habit of doing what he wanted and "acting white" caught up with him. Rufus warns Dana not to end up the same way. Dana shudders to think of trying to escape from a Louisiana plantation, and wonders aloud why Nigel stayed. Rufus explains that Nigel did try to run, but Patrollers brought him back. And now that Nigel is married with a child on the way, Rufus isn't worried that he will try to run again. Dana tells Rufus that he doesn't have to sell anyone when he is the head of the plantation.

Though Dana doesn't consider Tom "fair," she acknowledges that Tom does not cause the slaves pain for his own pleasure. With the power given to white men during this time, Tom is simply used to getting what he wants at all times. Rufus has a much closer relationship with the slaves than Tom does, seeming to actually want their company – especially Dana's. As their ages get closer and Rufus matures, he starts to see Dana as a potential friend and confidante rather than an awe-inspiring guardian.



Kevin keeps going north, presumably looking for a society that looks more like 1976 in terms of freedom and equality for the genders and races. With the low place of black women in the Antebellum South, Dana has to deal with the contempt and distrust of the doctor, even though she has more medical knowledge than a man who still believes that intentionally draining Rufus's blood will be helpful to his recovery.



Childbirth was an especially harrowing time for women in the Antebellum era, rendering them vulnerable to disease and death, as most doctors did not understand how to keep the mother safe during the birthing process. This is yet another way that Dana's gender opens her up to greater danger in the past. The Weylins continue to show no respect for the familial bonds among their slaves, as they sell Luke away from his son.



To Nigel, "acting white" means being able to choose for oneself how to live. Luke attempted to maintain his own agency by telling white people what they wanted to hear but acting on his own desires. Nigel also tried to find a kind of freedom, but is far more tied down to the Weylin estate now that he has a wife and expected child to care for. Rufus seems to follow his father's example of using family ties to manipulate people like Sarah and Nigel into willingly remaining in slavery.



Dana sits down at Rufus's desk to write a letter to Kevin using her ball-point pen. Rufus is intrigued by the pen and Dana allows him to look at the other things she brought from the present while she writes. Rufus starts to read a book on slavery Dana brought, calling it abolitionist trash. Dana explains that the book is just history, meant to tell what happened rather than persuade anyone to either side. Knowing that the book has details about important figures like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Nat Turner, Dana worries what will happen because this book is in a white man's hands. Rufus tells Dana she should burn the book if she doesn't want to end up like another Denmark Vesey.

Dana decides it probably is safer to burn the book. She tears out the map of Maryland and throws the book on the fire, though this makes her think of Nazi book burnings. She then seals her letter to Kevin and hands it to Rufus to send. Rufus tells Dana that he won't send it unless she burns the map too. Dana is upset that Rufus is stooping to blackmail, and begins to gather her things. Rufus presses her and Dana explodes that she shouldn't have to bargain for her freedom. Rufus says he is only trying to help her survive, and that he is the reason that Tom didn't shoot Kevin when Dana disappeared. If Tom sees the map, Rufus probably won't be able to protect Dana. Dana wants to keep the map out of principle, but knows that she doesn't really need it to escape. She burns the map, and Rufus tells her, "Welcome home."

7. After five days, Isaac and Alice are caught. Two days later, Rufus and Nigel take the wagon into town – ostensibly to mail Dana's letter, but really so that Rufus can buy Alice. Unaware, Dana goes to help a young slave named Tess with the laundry. With Margaret gone, Sarah minds the house and manages much better than Margaret did. Dana is surprised that Sarah makes the slaves work so hard, and questions why Sarah doesn't run. Sarah reminds Dana what happens to most slaves who escape and get caught.

Dana wants to give Sarah hope of freedom, telling her about books written by slaves who escaped and made it North. Sarah can't read and doesn't want to hear any more dangerous talk. Dana sees that Sarah has accepted the "safe" life of slavery, a choice that activists in the 1960s would abhor. Dana looks down on Sarah until she sees Rufus come back with Alice.

While Dana tries to help Rufus gain a more modern mindset regarding respect for black people, it is dangerous to let Rufus know too much about how the course of history will play out. Dana worries that Rufus will try to stop abolitionist figures or freedom fighters if he learns too much about their subversive actions during this time. Butler gives no concrete answer to whether Dana's presence in the past has the power to change the present, but Dana must be careful either way. Rufus brings up Denmark Vesey as an example of a former slave who tried to lead a slave revolt. Vesey (a real historical figure) was caught and executed.



Dana again draws parallels between the tight control of information and knowledge among American slaves and the Nazi preoccupation with dictating what sort of literature and ideas people should be able to access. By controlling education, both American slave-owners and German Nazis were able to keep groups oppressed. Rufus flaunts his own power over Dana by forcing her to burn the map. Though he claims that it is for Dana's safety, Rufus truly wants to keep Dana dependent on him and stuck with no way to leave the Weylin estate. Rufus also considers the Weylin house to be Dana's home, ignoring the fact that Dana is treated poorly in a place where she should be treated as family.



Though Dana has a privileged position as one of Rufus' favorite slaves, she still works just as hard as the other slaves in order to belong with them and not cause resentment. Sarah also works hard, and forces the other slaves to also for fear of what the Weylins would do to punish them all if any one slave was disobedient.



Sarah's illiteracy keeps her from believing that anything written in books could actually contain information that is useful for her own life, even if that information would help her to freedom. Sarah chooses to remain a slave rather than risk the awful punishments given to slaves who are caught trying to run away. Dana at first sees this as cowardly, but Butler points out that Sarah is making a conscious choice to keep herself and her daughter safe, and should actually be applauded for her strength in enduring the day-to-day horrors of living as a slave.



Rufus and Nigel return late that night, with Alice barely alive in the back of the wagon. Rufus calls Dana down to tend to Alice's wounds. They take Alice to the attic where Dana does the best she can to clean Alice's cuts with soap and lye and bandage the wounds. Tom would never call the doctor to treat a black person, and the only other option is an elderly healer named Aunt Mary who barely remembers her name. Rufus is concerned that the lye and brine Dana uses to stop infection will hurt Alice worse, but he backs down when Dana shows him her own back where the **whip** scars are nearly healed.

Butler again describes the physical torture that slaves endured, bearing witness to the pain of this era despite how uncomfortable the violence of this scene may be. Dana has to hurt Alice even worse with lye and brine to keep her safe from potentially life-threatening infection later. Dog bites and whip lashes are not only terrible wounds, but open slaves up to a high risk of infection that could take their life even if they survive the initial beating. Dana has the advantage of 20th-century knowledge to tell Rufus that a small amount of extra pain now will save Alice later.



8. Dana does what she can to help Alice, realizing that most of the wounds are dog bites and **whip lashes**. Rufus is angry that the Patrollers did so much damage, but has no sympathy for Isaac, who has been sold to Mississippi. Dana asks if Rufus sent her letter and he replies yes. Dana doses Alice with modern sleeping pills in Rufus's bed and hopes that Kevin comes soon. Dana is then shocked when Rufus climbs in bed with Alice, but Rufus promises not to touch her. Dana goes to bed in the attic, thinking that Rufus has been rewarded despite all the trouble he caused Alice and Isaac.

Rufus's love for Alice again only goes so far. Now that Rufus owns Alice, he seems to have no thought for whether Alice will actually be happy to live with a man who raped her—especially when her husband has been tortured and sold into one of the worst areas for plantation slaves. While Rufus has compassion for Alice's physical injuries, it is clear that he will not care about her emotional trauma after this experience.



Sarah comes in to the attic and asks about Alice. Sarah then tells Dana that the patrollers cut off Isaac's ears. Dana is livid that Rufus's crime of raping a woman has earned Isaac such a harsh punishment, but Sarah quiets Dana for fear that someone will hear. Sarah and Dana hope that Rufus will treat Alice kindly, and Sarah asks if Dana and Kevin are really married. Sarah says that Kevin got in trouble during Dana's absence for treating whites and blacks the same. Sarah warns Dana to check with Nigel to see if Rufus really sent her letter. Before Sarah leaves, she reveals that she slept with her first white master, the father of Tom Weylin's first wife, Hannah.

In the cultural atmosphere of the South in the early 1800s, Rufus can get away with any crimes against black people due to his white skin and status, while black people like Isaac suffer horrible punishments for trying to assert their freedom. Sarah can't imagine a world in which white and black people are equal enough to be able to legally marry one another, as her experience has been only of men like Rufus taking advantage of women like Alice. Sarah also endured a similar situation, showing how common it was for female slaves to be sexually used or abused by their masters.



9. Dana asks Nigel about the letter the next day, but Nigel was on errands in town and only saw Rufus again once Rufus had bought Alice at the jail. Nigel doesn't know how long a letter would take to reach Boston, though Nigel whispers that he wishes he could follow the letter North. The overseer Jake is not supposed to bother the house slaves, but Jake constantly threatens to put Nigel in the field. Nigel can't run now because of Carrie.

Rufus does have some respect for Dana, allowing her to write a letter to Kevin in her own hand, but he doesn't have enough compassion to keep his promise to actually deliver the letter. It seems that Rufus considers Dana his property now, just like Nigel, who can never leave the estate.



Dana goes up to the library to see Rufus and asks him how long it takes for a letter to reach Boston. Rufus warns Dana not to talk so familiarly to him in a place where people might overhear, but has no answer for her. Dana goes to check on Alice and decides to trust that Rufus sent the letter. Dana dresses the wounds and prays that infection will not take. Alice has regressed to childhood due to her wounds and is happy to sleep in the room with Rufus, her childhood friend. But as she heals, Alice comes back to herself. As she remembers more, Rufus begins to worry that Alice will start to hate him again.

10. After three weeks, Alice heals more and asks to sleep with Dana in the attic. Alice goes with Dana down to the cookhouse, where they find out that Carrie is having her baby. Sarah rushes out to help with the birth, leaving Dana in charge of supper. Rufus has let Nigel earn money to buy things for a comfortable cabin next to the cookhouse, so Carrie will be able to have the baby on a bed. Dana sets Alice to peeling potatoes and starts on the chicken.

Cooking makes Alice think of her mother cooking for her husband, and Alice asks about Dana's husband. Dana says her husband is up North. Alice is happy that Dana has married a free man and asks what it's like to be a slave. Wary of the question, Dana tries to change the subject, but Alice persists and tells Dana she should run away. Dana tries to backtrack, but then Alice suddenly realizes that she too is now a Weylin slave. Dana gives up, agreeing to tell Alice everything she wants to know about her past. After a few minutes of remembering, Alice becomes hysterical when she recalls Isaac and his punishment. Dana calms her as best she can.

Somehow, Dana manages to get the full supper finished and finds two young boys to bring the food to the table. Tess comes in to help as well, repaying a debt as Dana has done the washing lately since Tom has been abusing Tess at night. As the leftovers come back, Dana tries to get Alice to eat, but Alice won't. Alice is horrified that she has been in Rufus's bed after all the pain Rufus caused to her family. Dana tries to soothe Alice, but Alice accuses Dana of being white and shouts abuse at her. In the background, Dana can also hear the cries of Carrie's new baby.

Rufus's warning not to talk too familiarly echoes his worries as a child that Dana would get in trouble if she didn't call him "master." Yet Rufus now seems to truly believe that Dana should be more deferential to him, instead of just worrying about the reactions of other people. Alice returns to the innocence of her own childhood, seeing Rufus as the playmate of her youth rather than the threat to her safety and humanity that he is now.



Alice's request to sleep in the attic shows that she is wary of Rufus and what Rufus might do to her at night. Rufus again shows glimmers of kindness towards his slave, as when he let Nigel build a better house for his wife. But Nigel still had to work incredibly hard for this privilege, something that a white man would have taken for granted.



Alice assumes that Dana is married to a black man, because the thought of an interracial marriage is inconceivable in this time period. The unspoken irony of Alice's question is that Dana has no better idea of what it's like to be born a slave than Alice has. Dana and Alice are in a similar situation of falling into slavery as adults due to circumstances outside their control. Alice's condition is far more traumatic, however, as there is little hope for her escape and almost no chance that Alice will ever see Isaac again, whereas Dana has some possibility of getting a letter to Kevin and returning to her own time.



Dana takes over Sarah's role in the house when Sarah is busy delivering her daughter's baby, as the Weylins would never accept any excuse for their dinner not being ready. Though Dana works to help the other slaves as much as possible, some (like Alice in this moment) still see her as an outsider who doesn't truly know the suffering that the others slaves face—as they aren't favorites of Rufus or protected by Kevin. As Dana wrestles with her place living as a slave while waiting to go back to the present, Butler compares Dana's situation to Carrie's baby. Carrie's baby is born into slavery with little hope of ever gaining freedom.



11. Carrie and Nigel name the baby Jude. Tom gives Nigel new clothes as a present, which Nigel accepts gratefully in front of the Weylins but grumbles about in the cookhouse. Tom is now richer because he owns Jude, and can splurge for a small present. Meanwhile, Tom is angry that Rufus has spent all his money on buying Alice, and tells Rufus that he should have been happy with Dana. Dana corners Rufus in the hall and demands to write another letter to Kevin. Tom overhears, and becomes angry that Rufus let Dana write a letter herself.

The birth of Jude, a biblical name meaning “praise,” shows that Carrie and Nigel still find joy in their lives even as they deal with the demeaning circumstances of slavery. Tom automatically owns any of Carrie’s children, making the small gift he gives Nigel almost a slap in the face. Tom also sees no difference between any black women, and assumes that Rufus was sleeping with Dana because Tom has no concept of any other possible relationship between white men and black women. Tom also doesn’t trust Dana to write a letter herself, perhaps suspecting that Dana would use her education for abolitionist or slave revolt purposes.



The next day, Rufus asks Dana to talk Alice into sleeping with him willingly. Dana refuses to help Rufus rape her again. Rufus gets angry and compares his love for Alice to Dana’s feelings for Kevin, then plays to Dana’s fears by suggesting that Kevin may have found a white woman for himself in the North. Kevin had been married to Dana for four years, but has now been in the Antebellum South for five – plenty of time to find a new wife, in Rufus’s eyes.

Rufus expects others to do his dirty work for him, and strikes at Dana’s most vulnerable places when he doesn’t get what he wants. Living in the pre-Civil War South has already made Dana question whether she and Kevin are right together, or if they should each find partners of their own race. Rufus hypocritically advances this argument even as he also claims that he loves Alice.



Dana remains neutral through Rufus’s insults, until Rufus threatens to have Jake beat Alice until Alice agrees to love him. Dana yells that Rufus doesn’t love Alice. Rufus yells back at Dana that he has treated her too well, making her think she’s white. Dana wonders what she’ll do if Rufus hits her, as Rufus towers over her. Finally, he backs down and mutters that he would cut his own throat if he ever wanted Dana the way that he wants Alice. Dana prays that problem never comes up. Rufus pleads with Dana to talk to Alice so that Rufus won’t have to beat Alice in order to rape her. Hoping to help Alice avoid more pain, Dana agrees.

Rufus’s idea of love contains only possessiveness and obsession, as he has no concept of respecting a woman’s agency or right to choose her own life and partner. He equates Dana’s self-confidence with being white, rather than seeing that all humans deserve to have their own voice. Dana’s worries that Rufus will hit her are less about the physical pain that Rufus could cause and more about Rufus using this abuse to assert his power. Yet in hoping to keep Alice from being beaten, Dana simply trades physical abuse for emotional abuse, as Alice would have to demean herself to sleep with Rufus.



The previous night in the attic, Alice had told Dana to write another letter to Kevin, but then viciously insulted Dana for loving a white man. Dana thinks that Alice is like Rufus, lashing out at others when she is hurt. Now, Dana finds Alice in Carrie’s cabin watching the babies and sewing. Alice has taken over the sewing from a slave named Liza, who now resents having to do harder work. Alice holds up a blue dress she sewed for Dana, then threatens to throw the dress in the fireplace when Dana tells Alice that Rufus wants Alice in his bed tonight. Dana tells Alice to do what she wants, but consider her options carefully. Alice can go to Rufus willingly, be **whipped** and raped, or run away.

Alice, like Dana’s uncle, sees Dana’s relationship with a white man as an offense to their race. As Alice does not know about Dana’s true home and time period, she only sees that Dana is in love with the man who oppresses her. Strangely, Alice and Rufus are similar in personality, just as Kevin and Dana are, though Alice and Rufus cannot use their similarities to build a healthy relationship when Rufus carries so much power over everything in Alice’s life. When Alice is in Rufus’s favor, she gets easy sewing work, but Rufus could easily make her life miserable.



Alice watches the children crawl around for a minute, then asks Dana what she should do. Dana tries to tell Alice that it's her body and her decision, but Alice knows that her body belongs to Rufus. Alice darkly thinks about taking a knife into Rufus's bed tonight, then yells at Dana for being a "mammy" who loves white men and helps the white master keep the slaves in check. Alice then cries, telling Dana that she is grateful that Dana saved her life. Alice decides that she will go to Rufus to avoid having to run away and get caught again.

Though Alice ostensibly gets to choose what happens to her body, her options are extremely limited by the fact that Rufus is her master. Alice is in the position to end Rufus's tyranny, but refrains from doing so – like Sarah, who is passionately angry at the Weylin family but does not poison their food. Even if they were to escape or punish the Weylins, both women would face unavoidable repercussions from society at large.



12. Alice doesn't kill Rufus in his sleep, but she seems to die a little after sharing his bed. Dana sends another letter to Kevin, but a month passes without a reply. Rufus is far happier, though he still hits Alice when he drinks. Rufus has also figured out that the way to control Dana is to threaten to hurt other people – just like Tom used Carrie to control Sarah. Dana now knows that she cannot depend on Rufus to help her go North to find Kevin.

Like Dana and Rufus, Alice and Rufus are also locked in a battle of wills with life-or-death stakes. Alice could choose to kill Rufus, but "dies" herself as Rufus continues to dominate and abuse her. Meanwhile Dana is almost powerless against Rufus because she doesn't want anyone else to get hurt. Rufus uses Dana's chosen family against her, knowing that Dana feels responsible for her slave family.



Dana wishes she still had her map, so she could plan to run on her own despite the dangers of the road. Finally, Alice brings Dana the letters she had written to Kevin with their seals broken. Rufus clearly never sent them. Dana packs her denim bag and prepares to leave. That night, Dana conspicuously goes to bed, then sneaks out with plans to head toward Easton. She creeps away from the Weylin house, sick to her stomach with fear.

Rufus has done everything he can to keep Dana dependent on his help and unable to escape on her own, both forcing her to burn her map and cutting off communication with the only person who has a chance of protecting her. Faced with the knowledge that Rufus is actively hindering her agency, Dana decides that the risks of running are less dangerous than the risks of staying submissive to Rufus.



Dana walks in the darkness, hiding from anyone she sees. She hits a dog with a stick, hoping that the dog will not alert its masters or its pack to her presence. As dawn approaches, she passes town and begins to think about a place to hide for the day. Two horsemen come slowly up the road and Dana hides again in the bushes. Dana startles when she realizes that the men are Rufus and Tom, and snaps a twig. Tom and Rufus hear the noise and stop. Rufus drives his horse into the exact bush that Dana is hidden in. Rufus grabs Dana and Tom kicks Dana in the face, knocking her unconscious.

Dana's choice to leave carries significant physical risk to her safety. While the success stories of runaway slaves are more well-known in modern times, Rufus and Tom find Dana so quickly and easily that it almost seems inevitable that most runaways were caught. Indeed it was far more likely that runaways would be caught and punished than that they would reach safety in the North.



13. Dana wakes tied up on Rufus' horse and missing two teeth in her jaw. She moans, and Rufus stops the horse. He scolds Dana for forcing him to treat her so roughly, wiping blood from her mouth and making Dana wince. Rufus unties her, but Dana's feet are asleep and she can't run. Rufus puts Dana in front of him on the saddle as Tom rides up, saying that Dana may be educated but she isn't smart. Dana swallows her pride and leans against Rufus as the horse begins to move.

Rufus blames Dana herself for her pain, suggesting that her punishment is her fault for running rather than seeing how this situation is his fault for enslaving Dana in the first place. Rufus is again unable to experience love as anything other than possessiveness, thinking that Dana should be happy to be owned by someone who "only wants the best for her." Tom too supports the idea that he and Rufus are only doing what is best for Dana, adding the insult that all of Dana's education and knowledge about freedom did not actually help her reach safety. Dana may have the benefit of a modern education teaching her that running away is possible, but escaping slavery is not an easy task in reality.



As the horse nears the Weylin house, Rufus tells Dana that she'll have to be **whipped** again. Dana nearly slides off the horse in her attempt to get away, but Rufus grabs her roughly and tells her not to struggle so it won't hurt so badly. Dana fights, half-crazed, but Tom and Jake Edwards tie her to the barn wall and whip her. Dana wishes that she would be sent home, nearly driven insane by the pain, but she knows that Tom isn't truly trying to kill her.

Butler details this harsh scene of punishment, bearing witness to the ever-present physical and mental pain that was an everyday part of slaves' lives. Rufus again blames Dana for this abuse, suggesting that Dana is hurting herself by struggling—instead of recognizing that white society is the villain for creating an institution in which people can be whipped like animals.



When the **whipping** is finally over, Rufus carefully unties Dana and takes her into Carrie and Nigel's cabin. Alice later tells Dana how Rufus insisted that all of Dana's wounds be cleaned carefully. When Dana wakes, Alice is there with some of Dana's aspirin. Dana cries, thinking how both she and Alice failed to run away. She worries that she will now be too frightened of another whipping to ever try to run again. Alice tenderly wipes Dana's face as Dana tries to say that she will run again.

Rufus's "kindness" after the beating fleshes out the complex emotions that Alice and Dana feel for him. He is not cruel for cruelty's sake, and so cannot be exclusively hated, but he is fundamentally incapable of truly caring for anyone but himself. Dana now understands better why slaves like Sarah refuse to even consider running away, as she wonders if she herself will have the strength and bravery to risk another beating. The fear of the whip is almost as controlling as the whip itself.



14. Liza "fell" and hurt herself after Dana was caught, she learns, though Alice, Tess, and Carrie are also hiding scratches. Alice tells Dana that Liza was the one who betrayed Dana to Tom, out of misplaced anger at Alice for stealing Liza's easy sewing job and fear of Tom. Alice and the other slaves made it very clear where Liza's loyalty should lie.

The slaves on the Weylin plantation put great importance on sticking together apart from their masters. No matter how angry Liza was, she never should have betrayed a fellow slave. Yet the slaves also perpetuate violence by beating Liza for this offense, showing how pain permeates every aspect of the slave's experience.



15. When Dana is well enough to get up, Rufus brings Dana a letter from Kevin. Tom wrote to Kevin on Dana's behalf after finding out that Rufus never sent Dana's letters. Dana tells Rufus that she knows her letters were never sent, making Rufus angry that Dana was snooping through his things. Dana is even more angry that Rufus lied to her, but Rufus shrinks and admits that he didn't want Kevin to take Dana North, away from the Weylin house. Dana realizes that Rufus loves her too, in his selfish way.

Rufus is angry that Dana invaded his privacy, hypocritically unable to see how he has never respected Dana's own autonomy and privacy. Rufus's lies come from a fear of abandonment, which Dana understands and even has sympathy for. Dana continues to have some affection for Rufus, seeing that his upbringing is partly to blame for his lack of experience with true love or affection.



Dana may resent Rufus, but she can't help but care for him as well. Alice bears more straightforward hate for Rufus, but Dana knows that this hate won't prevent Rufus from having his way with Alice and eventually having a child with her. Dana thinks that she would be driven crazy enough to kill Rufus if he ever tried to rape her. Alice and Rufus feel like siblings to Dana, even as she watches Rufus hurt Alice so that Dana's ancestor Hagar can be born.

Dana's affection for Rufus comes from both her familial bond and her role as Rufus's guardian, which at times seems quasi-parental. Alice, on the other hand, sees Rufus only as an oppressor who has stolen her freedom. Dana knows that she too would be forced to hate Rufus if he ever crossed the line of bodily autonomy and failed to respect Dana's choice not to take him as a lover. Yet Dana cannot help Alice escape from Rufus until she is sure that Hagar will be born and her family line will remain intact. Dana is thus forced to show more loyalty to Rufus than to Alice, because Rufus's desires are the catalyst for Dana's family's entire existence.



Rufus tries to tell Dana that she should have waited instead of running away, but Dana reminds him that it was his own choice not to send the letters that drove her to run. Rufus finally agrees, admitting that he respects Tom for sending a letter to Kevin and keeping his word to a black person just as if they were white.

Just as Butler humanizes Rufus with his moments of regret for his actions, she also adds nuance to Tom's character through his code of ethics. Tom considers a promise to a black person as binding as a promise to a white person, recognizing Dana's basic humanity at least enough to keep Rufus's word and send the letter.



The next day, Dana is sent back to work. She is supposed to help Sarah and Carrie, but Jake Edwards assigns her the laundry because Tess is going to the field. Jake isn't supposed to dictate to the field hands, but losing an argument with Nigel has left him testy. Wary of Jake's **whip**, Dana goes out to do the washing despite the pain in her back. Alice comes out and tells Dana to go back inside. Alice will do the washing, knowing that her relationship with Rufus means that Jake can't touch her.

Jake lashes out at all the slaves when he feels that his authority is questioned, a sign of how insecure many white masters were about their power. Dana could stand up to Jake as Nigel did, but she chooses not to in order to keep the peace for the other slaves and to keep herself away from the whip. Meanwhile, Alice uses her advantage as Rufus's mistress to do what she wants, helping Dana as Dana has helped her. Though Alice and Dana may fight bitterly, their bond is incredibly strong when either is in trouble.



As Dana heads back into the cookhouse, a white bearded man rides up to the main house. Dana opens her mouth to tell the visitor that the Weylins aren't home, then realizes that the man is Kevin. Kevin leaps off the horse once he sees Dana and pulls her into a hug. Dana has to struggle away as her back is sore. Kevin holds her tenderly, asking if Tom beat her again. Dana is slow to answer, knowing that Kevin won't be able to let it go. Kevin looks grimmer than Dana remembers, with his beard covering his mouth and a new scar on his forehead.

Dana tells Kevin they should leave now while they have a chance, and then notices Alice looking on with a heartbreaking look on her face. Alice regains her tough composure and tells Kevin to leave with Dana as soon as possible. Dana scrambles up to the attic as quickly as she can to get her bag of emergency things, and then returns to Kevin at the Weylins' gate. Dana yells goodbye to Alice as Alice beats a pair of Rufus's pants clean. On the road, Dana can still hear Alice's beating.

The sounds of Alice doing laundry turn into the sound of hoof beats as Rufus rides up in front of Kevin. He asks Kevin and Dana to at least stay for dinner and say a proper goodbye to Tom. Dana cuts Kevin off before he can say anything terrible about Tom, and quietly says goodbye to Rufus. With no warning, Rufus whips up his rifle and aims it squarely at Kevin.

Dana realizes that she has underestimated how mean Rufus can be, but even now she is not afraid of Rufus the way she is afraid of Tom. With Rufus pointing the rifle at Kevin, Kevin and Dana get down from the horse. Rufus speaks soothingly, saying that his father will just want to settle up the cost of Dana's keep and then let them go. Dana begins to wonder if she can convince Rufus to shoot her, hoping that the fear will send her home with Kevin, and screams at Rufus that she and the other slaves owe the Weylins nothing. Kevin tells Dana to just go back to the house, but Dana refuses. Rufus, on the verge of firing, shrieks that Dana can't leave him. Scared, Dana dives behind the horse and loses her balance. As her vision goes blurry, something hits Dana hard in the back and she falls unconscious.

CHAPTER 5: THE STORM

1. Dana comes to on the living room floor with Kevin crouched over her, and is overwhelmed by the knowledge that they are home. Kevin apologizes for falling on her back, but Dana is ecstatic to have him back. The two go to bed together, though Kevin is worried about hurting Dana more. Eventually, they fall asleep.

Dana and Kevin's time apart has been enough to make them not immediately recognizable to each other. Kevin's beard covers his face, showing how he is now a mystery to Dana, who doesn't know what Kevin might have had to endure while living in the past, or how Kevin still feels about her. Kevin is also marked with a scar, showing that he too has been marked by a past pain that will always be with him.



Dana and Kevin's reunion is a cruel reminder to Alice that she will never again see her husband Isaac. Yet Alice is able to put aside her own pain in order to help Dana reach safety. As Dana leaves, Alice is stuck doing Rufus's laundry, a symbol of how Rufus has kept Alice from freedom. This sound follows Dana, like her memories of all the slaves that she has to leave behind to keep herself safe.



Kevin holds more venom toward the Weylins than Dana does, though Dana has actually suffered more at their hands—as Dana's hatred is tempered with her family connection and obligation.



Rufus's talk of Dana's "keep" adds insult to injury, as Dana has worked hard the entire time she lived at the Weylin estate without pay. If anything, Rufus owes Dana and the other slaves far more than money. Furthermore, Rufus is clearly trying to manipulate Kevin and Dana into going back to the house so that he can keep Dana for himself and assuage his fears of abandonment by possessing her in some way. While Kevin seeks to protect Dana in the moment, Dana understands that some physical risk now is worth escaping the long-term danger of being Rufus's property at the Weylin estate.



With Kevin back, Dana is able to relax at home in a way that she could not do when she was back in the present by herself. Reaffirming the emotional connection to her husband by having sex is more important to Dana than protecting herself physically.



Dana wakes up and hears Kevin in the kitchen, noticing that he now has a slight accent similar to Tom and Rufus's speech. Dana heads in to the kitchen, overhearing Kevin mutter that he feels as though he still isn't home. Dana remembers walking along the road to the Weylin estate and feeling relieved to be "home." The house that Dana and Kevin have just moved to in 1976 is not yet familiar enough to feel like home, and Dana finds herself missing the sharpness and stark power of reality in the Antebellum South. Dana can't imagine how much worse Kevin feels after 5 years alone in the past.

Dana joins Kevin in the living room, where he is fiddling with the knobs on the TV. Dana turns it on and an ad for pregnancy clinics starts to play. Kevin remembers seeing a woman die in childbirth and asks Dana to turn it off. Dana comments on the poor medical care for pregnant women in the past, but Kevin corrects her. This woman died because her master beat her child out of her. Kevin sighs that home just feels like another stop in his travels to Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Maine. Dana is very relieved to hear Kevin say that he still loves her, but Kevin goes on to say that the Weylin House is the only place that felt like home in the past five years.

Kevin explains that he grew his beard to hide his identity after being chased out of the South for allegedly helping slaves escape during the uproar of the rumored Denmark Vesey rebellion. He doesn't want to talk about it more, but Dana has to clarify that Kevin really was helping slaves. Kevin angrily responds that he was a stop on the underground railroad—he's defensive after living years in a place where that was a crime.

Kevin putters around his office, then angrily slams his fist on his typewriter. Dana recalls how she couldn't write, and assures Kevin that he'll be able to write again in time. Kevin sweeps his pencil sharpener and pencils off the desk and then storms out of the room. Dana runs after him and pleads with Kevin to be patient with himself coming home. Kevin's pale eyes are cold, and his expression reminds Dana of Tom Weylin. Kevin goes into the bedroom, looking at a picture of himself as a younger man, then startles as a jet flies overhead. Dana attempts to comfort him, but Kevin asks to be left alone and goes back to his office.

Kevin's time in the past has clearly marked him. Dana's comparison of Kevin to Tom and Rufus shows that she is worried that Kevin has adopted the Antebellum way of thinking along with his accent, and will no longer respect her as his equal partner. Their separation has also disrupted Dana's sense that Kevin is her "home," as she said earlier in the novel. A dangerous sense of distance has come between the couple that must be addressed if they ever want to fit into the present once more.



Though their home in the present is not as difficult or demanding as their time in the past, Dana and Kevin also feel less connection to this place because they felt such a strong sense of belonging with the people in the past with whom they shared such suffering. Dana and Kevin feel an obligation to help those people and so define their home based on where their community is. Dana hopes that she and Kevin can rebuild their relationship enough to make each other their home once more.



Dana feels obligated to make sure that Kevin continued to fight for abolition and equality even when he was surrounded by a society that promised him total impunity and immense power as a white male.



Dana and Kevin each use writing as an outlet for their emotions, but their time in the past has been so complicated and traumatic that they cannot yet process it enough to write. Kevin's anger at his sense of displacement and unease makes him lash out, as Tom did whenever he didn't get his way. As much as Dana suffered in the past, Butler points out that living in an unbalanced state of privilege was not healthy for Kevin either.



Dana bathes and repacks her emergency bag with Excedrin and an old pocket knife to replace the knife she lost while trying to run away. She wonders if Kevin will ever be able to write again, and if he blames her for the years he lost in the past. In the kitchen, Dana notices that some chops of meat she had put out to defrost are still icy. Turning on the radio, Dana finds out that she has only been gone for a few hours. The news switches to a story about black resistance to white supremacists in South Africa, and Dana turns it off. She tries to cook dinner without thinking too much about the similarities between white South Africans and men like Tom Weylin.

Kevin comes into the kitchen and asks how long Dana has been gone this time. He brings a newspaper from his office with today's date, frustrated that he has no idea what is going on in any of the articles. Dana reminds Kevin to slow down, but begins to feel dizzy. She yells at Kevin to get her emergency bag from the bedroom. Kevin presses the bag into Dana's hands, as Dana prays that Kevin will not come with her this time.

2. Dana finds herself in a rain storm with the Weylin house in the distance. She can't find Rufus, and begins to walk toward the house when she trips over Rufus lying face-down in the mud. Dana tries to drag him to the house but Rufus is too heavy. Dana goes to the door and gets Nigel, who comes outside and swings Rufus over his shoulder to carry him back to the house. In the hallway they run into Tom, looking older and thinner. Tom tells Nigel to take Rufus to his room to sober up and asks Dana to meet him in the library once she has changed into "decent" clothing.

In the library, Tom comments that Dana still looks young, though it has been six years since he last saw her. Dana tries to explain how her time runs differently, but Tom won't hear it. Tom insults Dana's intelligence when Dana tries to explain that she has been traveling through time, and Dana thinks to herself that she will never again let Tom beat her. Tom asks why Dana continues to help Rufus, and Dana answers that no one should die alone in a ditch choking on their own vomit. Tom tries to yell at Dana for this indecent language about his son, but runs out of breath. He simply says that the Weylin plantation will always be home for Dana as long as she keeps helping Rufus. Dana replies that she will help Rufus as long as she is never beaten again. Tom tells her to leave the library, as Dana thinks about the complete lack of rights she has in this time.

Dana has become so used to accepting the blame for everything while living as a slave that she even wonders if it is her fault that Kevin got stranded – though Dana has no control over her travels through time. The news of South Africa, still in the midst of desegregation as black South Africans protest the inequality in the country, shows Dana how far the world still has to come in order to correct the damaging states of oppression and inequality.



Even though Kevin is disoriented and angry, he is still able to do what he can to provide for Dana's safety by making sure she has her emergency bag of things that might help her stay alive in the past. Though Kevin's presence was helpful to Dana in the past, it is more important that he stay away from that poisonous society and give Dana a safe home to come back to in the present.



Nigel and Tom show no surprise that Rufus has passed out drunk, showing that though Rufus may have gotten older since Dana last saw him, he has not matured. The constant concerns over Dana's clothing show how misplaced the Weylins' sense of propriety is. They have no trouble with the heinous act of owning other humans, but they balk at the sight of Dana wearing pants like a man.



Tom has more concern about his son now than he did when Rufus was young, but there does not seem to be an increased level of affection in the family. If anything, Tom is worried that there will be no one to run the plantation after his own death if Rufus manages to actually get himself killed. Tom refuses to listen to Dana, and expects her to do his bidding without even a promise that she will not be beaten again. Dana is again confronted with her lack of power and agency in this time, as she has little choice but to stay on the Weylin plantation after learning how dangerous it is to try to run away.



3. Back in Rufus's room, Rufus is shaking with fever, and Nigel says that Rufus has the ague, and that the doctor won't be necessary. Dana tells Nigel to go dry off while she stays with Rufus, guilty that she has had more freedom in her life than Nigel will probably ever know. Dana then feels a mosquito bite her neck and remembers that the "ague" is another name for malaria. Dana asks Nigel if they have any mosquito netting, so that they can enclose Rufus and keep the disease from spreading. Nigel doesn't listen until Dana reminds him that she is not from this time and has medical knowledge about ague that doctors of Nigel's time don't know.

Dana looks down at Rufus, thinking that he has fallen asleep, and wondering aloud why Rufus keeps trying to die. Rufus answers that living is too much trouble, and begins writhing in pain before he can say much more. Tom and Nigel come back in, and Dana asks Tom to send for the doctor. Tom refuses, telling Dana that it is her responsibility to keep Rufus alive at the risk of her own life.

4. Nigel puts up the mosquito netting, telling Dana that Tom really is more afraid of her than he is of anyone. Dana has no idea how to help Rufus get well, so Nigel suggests that Sarah make the tea she usually makes to help ague. Sarah comes in with the tea, looking much older, and Dana goes to get the Excedrin from her bag in the attic. She narrowly rescues the pills from a small slave girl who was trying to open the bottle, thinking it was candy. Dana then takes all her medicines down to Rufus's room for safe keeping.

Dana comes back in the room to find Nigel asleep on the floor and Rufus thrashing in his bed. She dissolves three aspirin in water and has Nigel hold Rufus down while she forces Rufus to drink it. For the next six days, Dana gets little sleep as she tries to keep Rufus hydrated and fed while the illness runs its course.

Alice comes in a couple times, a bitter shell of the girl that Dana knew. Nigel tells Dana that the years of being with Rufus have caused the other slaves to resent Alice, and that Alice has had two babies die. Alice's lone surviving child is a red-haired boy named Joe. Dana is disappointed that the child isn't Hagar, so that she can finally be done with saving Rufus without worrying about cutting off her own family line.

As much as Dana hates her experience as a slave, she also recognizes that she is more privileged than people like Nigel who were born into slavery and have very little chance of ever living as a free black person. Dana's modern medical knowledge again comes in handy as she attempts to stop Rufus's malaria from spreading and potentially killing herself or some of the Weylin slaves. The slaves are far more vulnerable to disease, as they have less nutritious food and worse living quarters than their masters, so it is even more important that Dana keep Rufus quarantined behind nets.



Rufus struggles to give his life purpose, showing that living as a slave holder is detrimental to his health as well as causing the suffering of all the people he owns. Whereas Dana earlier took it upon herself to keep Rufus alive, Tom now places that burden on her in order to avoid the cost of the doctor. Tom's selfishness constantly wins out over helping anyone else.



The self-confidence that Dana has gained from her education and upbringing in a time where black people are at least assured basic rights gives her some power to stand up to Tom in a way that other slaves are not always able to do. Tom understands on some level that he cannot control Dana the way he attempts to control everyone else. Meanwhile, Dana has to again save Rufus to keep herself safe, this time wary of a punishment from Tom if Rufus worsens.



Nigel is very loyal to Rufus, having grown up with him and treated him as a friend all his life. Dana and Nigel take care of Rufus like family, giving up their own comfort for his sake—though Rufus would never do the same for them.



Butler shows the many abuses that black women in particular had to deal with. Not only has Alice had to allow Rufus to rape her, but she is also scorned by other slaves, who only see that Alice gets to live in the house and do easier tasks because of her position as mistress. Alice also deals with the loss of her children, something that many slave women faced due to high rates of child mortality at the time and the fact that many enslaved women were treated as mere breeders with no regard for their health.



After eight days, Rufus finally feels well and Dana goes back to sleep in the attic. Yet she is woken that night by Alice telling her that Tom is having pains in his chest and needs healing. Dana guesses that Tom is having a heart attack, and knows there is nothing she can do to help, but she runs down to the parlor anyway. When she gets there, Tom is lying still on a couch. Dana can't find a pulse, but tries mouth-to-mouth resuscitation despite her distaste for Tom. The CPR does no good, and Dana has to tell Rufus that Tom has died. Rufus blames Dana for letting his father die.

As Rufus believes that Dana's modern medical knowledge is magic, he chooses to think that Dana willfully decided not to save his father rather than seeing that the heart attack was beyond Dana's control. Dana does everything she can, even though she hates Tom, and receives no thanks for her effort.



5. Dana goes back to work with Sarah and Carrie, as Rufus completely ignores her. She is grateful for the chance to catch up with life on the Weylin estate. Nigel now has three sons, and Alice clearly loves her son Joe even though Joe is nearly white. Rufus still can't help but lash out at people when he is in pain. The day of Tom's funeral, Rufus sends the new overseer, Evan Fowler, to force Dana from the cookhouse into the field.

Rufus seems unable to reconcile the loss of his father with the strained relationship they had when Tom was alive, and he mourns his father even more because he never received his approval in life. In contrast, Nigel is a doting father to his sons, and Alice clearly loves Joe fiercely even if she hates how Joe was conceived. The slaves show true love for their families rather than the twisted and strained love of the Weylins.



Evan Fowler marches Dana to the cornfield, though Dana has never done field work before. Fowler has no sympathy and sends Dana into the corn row to cut stalks like the other slaves. Dana tries to chop one stalk and doesn't manage to cut it all the way through. Fowler brings the **whip** down on Dana's back, then again across her breasts when Dana whirls around in pain. Dana struggles to resist the urge to strike Fowler with her corn knife, and struggles through her pain to cut down two corn stalks.

Evan Fowler is one of only a few one-dimensional characters in the novel, displaying only cruelty and inhumane malice. He uses the whip even when there is no possible explanation for why Dana should deserve it, as Dana is clearly working as hard as she can. He has no respect for Dana's humanity, beating her like an animal with no thought for the pain that she is experiencing.



Dana pushes herself to cut through the corn row as Fowler watches. The other slaves warn her not to go so fast, as Fowler will just expect her to go faster, but Dana is too wary of Fowler's **whip** to risk slowing down. Yet after hours of work, it is less painful to let Fowler hit her than it is to continue lifting and striking with the corn knife. Eventually, Dana is so tired and numb from pain that she lays down in the dirt and passes out.

The whip again symbolizes the abuse that slaves faced every day, and the psychological trauma they experienced because of it. This horrific scene is just one day to a field hand, who would be worked in this cruel way every day of the year no matter the weather or their physical condition. As bad as this is, Dana knows that one day will not kill her, and so she is not sent back to the present.



6. Dana wakes to see a white face and hopes for a moment that it is Kevin, but it is only Rufus. Rufus helps her up, telling her that she should walk because it will hurt more if Rufus carries her. Dana makes it back to the house and struggles to pull water from the well and wash out her cuts. Dana then heads to Rufus's room to get Excedrin. Rufus tries to talk to Dana about her "lesson," but Dana shakes Excedrin into her hand and turns to leave. Rufus threatens to send her into the field again if she walks out, and Dana realizes that he is actually serious.

Despite the abuse Dana has just suffered at a white person's hands, she is still capable of remembering that white people (like Kevin) can show love and mercy. Rufus, taking the place that Kevin has previously held, shows some mercy by getting Dana back to the house, but he has no concept of compassion for the pain that Dana has just endured. Rufus thinks only of forcing Dana to be obedient to his will, assuming that women (especially black women) owe him their submission.



Rufus's face takes on an old expression of Tom's, and Rufus screams at Dana never to leave him again. Dana stands still, then walks to Rufus's desk and sits down. Rufus softens and Dana shamefully realizes that she is close to tears. She swallows three Excedrin as Rufus tries to make conversation. Dana explodes that she shouldn't be punished for saving Rufus's life and trying to save Tom's. Rufus just asks for some medicine, making Dana get up and give him an Excedrin pill. Rufus then admits that he knows it wasn't Dana's fault that Tom died—he just wanted to make someone pay.

Rufus has an intense fear of abandonment, as his mother and father have now left him and he has never experienced a healthy relationship. Though Dana understands that Rufus is in pain after his father's death, that grief does not excuse the immense harm that Rufus has done to Dana and continues to do to the other slaves now that he is the master of the estate. Dana doesn't want to give Rufus the satisfaction of seeing her cry, keeping her emotions private as the last reserve of personal pride through everything she has endured.



Rufus then asks Dana to use her healing knowledge to help his mother, Margaret, who is finally coming home. Dana pleads with Rufus not to make her Margaret's personal servant, especially after she hears that Margaret is now addicted to laudanum, but Rufus stands firm. Rufus then sends Dana out with directions not to work any more that day, as a feeble apology.

Many women in the Antebellum South were prescribed laudanum for "hysteria," a disease that covered a range of symptoms when women were being unruly or "difficult" in some way. Rufus again ignores Dana's wishes for her own life, yet his apology suggests that he still wants Dana to like him, despite how unfairly he treats her.



7. Margaret is far older and far nicer to the slaves now that she has the laudanum. She asks Dana to read the Bible to her and trusts only Dana with all her household concerns. Dana begins to steal moments for herself when all of Margaret's chatter gets to be too much, but has to admit that this work is easier than anything else in the house and it gives her back time to heal.

The "easiest" work for a slave was to be a personal servant to a white man or woman, a job that was made bearable or unbearable based on the temperament of one's master. Margaret may treat Dana kindly now, but Dana still has to submit all of her time to Margaret and her whims.



Alice pulls Dana into her cabin one day and scolds Dana for being so agreeable to Margaret and Rufus after just half a day in the field. Dana leaves and goes into the cookhouse where two field hands are worrying over the possibility that they'll be sold. The slaves go quiet when they see Dana, and Dana turns back out. Afterwards, Dana wonders why she was so submissive when she could have explained that she's not really loyal to Rufus and Margaret.

Alice wants Dana to keep resisting her life as a slave, even when it is far easier to simply be obedient. Dana's close association with Rufus and Margaret has led the other slaves to believe that she is more loyal to the white Weylins than to her fellow slaves. Dana's guilt for how comparatively easy her life is keeps her from standing up to the field hands.



Dana hears Margaret thumping her cane to call her into the house, so she turns to the woods for a moment alone. Several people come riding up through the woods and Dana hides in the bushes to let them pass. A white man is leading slaves in chains, and Dana realizes that the field hands were worried about being sold immediately to this trader now coming down the road. Dana creeps back to the house and sees Tess being added to the line of sold slaves. Dana tries to say goodbye, but the slave trader points his gun at her. From the door, Rufus yells at Dana to get away from there. Dana hisses that Rufus might as well sell her too.

Dana knows that Rufus will never sell her, as his worst fear is that Dana will leave him. Yet seeing Tess sold is another harsh reminder that no slave is truly in control of their own life. The slave traders do not care at all about any slave's emotional attachment to their house, friends, or family. Where Rufus sees this sale as a simple transfer of property necessary to pay bills, Dana sees how traumatic this moment is for Tess, who has to leave her home, and the other slaves, who have to say goodbye to one of their family.



8. Dana tries to head back upstairs, running into Carrie in the hall. Carrie brings Dana out to her cabin and signs that she told Margaret that Dana was sick. Dana rails against Rufus for selling slaves like his father did. Carrie signs that everyone will be sold if Margaret is allowed to continue running the plantation. Dana sobs that she feels guilty for saving Rufus only to have him act cruelly by selling families apart, and that she understands why some of the slaves think that Dana is too “white.” Carrie rubs her fingers down Dana’s face, but Dana doesn’t understand. Carrie brings Dana to Nigel, who translates. Carrie means that Dana will always be black because of her skin, no matter what people say about her.

Carrie again shows great thoughtfulness by telling Margaret that Dana is sick so that Dana has time to process the sale that she just witnessed. Carrie also understands the larger picture of the Weylin slaves’ lives. Dana has to keep Rufus safe so that he can keep running the Weylin plantation and keep as many of the slaves together as possible. If Rufus dies, or if Dana lets him die, the slaves will all be sold with no thought for family bonds. Carrie also makes sure that Dana knows that she is accepted because her skin color will always mark her in this society—there is a community formed by shared oppression and injustice.



9. Dana avoids Rufus for three days after the sale, until Rufus comes to find Dana in Margaret’s room. Rufus asks Dana to come to the library with a modern pen. Once there, Rufus explains that the doctor said he had dengue fever and should have been bled to get all the poisons out. Dana mutters that then all their problems would be solved. Rufus tries to threaten Dana, but is too weak. Rufus motions Dana to sit down and begins telling her that all the slaves will be sold if he does die. They trade a few more threats, until Rufus stops and asks Dana to write letters for him.

Rufus always looks for the easy way out, as when he asks Dana for a modern pen instead of dealing with the tricky ink pens of his time. He also looks for the easy way out when Dana blames him for Tess’s sale, blaming his fever and his debts for this choice. Dengue fever is a mosquito-borne illness that would actually be made much worse by bleeding, but Rufus maintains his time period’s standards of medical care just as he holds to the practice of selling people. Each of these customs are obviously harmful, but Rufus is too blind to see that Dana is trying to show him a better way of life.



Rufus needs to answer letters from creditors and traders, a task he hopes that Dana will do for him. Dana hates the thought of writing for Rufus, but softens when Rufus offers her more paper to do her own writing when she is done. Furthermore, writing letters to persuade creditors to forgive Tom’s debts is the only way to keep more people from being sold.

Dana has always tried to avoid using writing to copy down other people’s thoughts, as when she refused to type out Kevin’s manuscripts. She compromises her strong feelings about keeping writing as a sacred act of self-expression in order to gain the materials to write for herself and potentially help keep more families intact among the Weylin slaves.



10. Dana reads a few of Rufus’s letters to pick up the nineteenth century style, and then writes the letters as best she can, hoping none of her modern mannerisms will offend the creditors. Margaret is bitter that Rufus now has Dana split her time between these duties and caring for Margaret. One night, Rufus returns from a dinner drunk and finds Alice and Dana eating together in Dana’s cabin. He comments that the two of them really are “only one woman.” Dana is confused, but Alice clarifies that Rufus likes Alice in bed and Dana for all other wifely tasks—and this is compounded by the fact that Alice and Dana look so similar.

Dana cannot be herself in these letters, yet the work still allows Dana to use more of her talent and education than she’s been able to previously. Margaret refuses to see that Dana has valuable skills to help run the estate and selfishly mourns the loss of her personal servant. Meanwhile, Rufus seems to see both Alice and Dana as two halves of a wife, with Alice providing the romantic component and Dana supplying the work partnership and companionship. Yet Rufus does not respect either woman as he should, making this relationship far more unhealthy and detrimental than Dana and Kevin’s marriage.



11. Alice is pregnant again and Dana hopes that this child will be Hagar. She begins to keep a journal in secretarial shorthand to keep herself sane and relieve her boredom. Dana even attends a corn husking party to distract herself. The slaves pass around a bottle of fiercely strong whiskey and shuck the corn, then Rufus comes out to greet his slaves with a huge meal and receive their praise. Dana notes how the slaves seem to like Rufus even as they also feel contempt for and fear of him—unlike the overseer, who is universally hated and feared so that the master doesn't have to get his hands dirty.

Dana uses writing as an outlet of self-expression, being very careful that no one will be able to understand her journals. This writing is for herself alone, and a huge symbol of the mental freedom that Dana fights to maintain even when she is a slave. Dana has an outsider's perspective on the master-slave relationship, seeing how there is a familial aspect to how the slaves feel for Rufus even as they also hate how he oppresses them. Because they live on the Weylin plantation, the slaves seem to feel some belonging with the Weylin family. This is made possible by the presence of an overseer who handles discipline so that the master can retain the appearance of love and care for his slaves.



After the party people begin to couple off, and Dana misses Kevin. Rufus comes over and asks if Dana has found anyone to “jump the broom” with. Dana is surprised, and knows that Rufus would have serious consequences for any man who made him jealous by giving Dana attention. Dana ignores a tall slave man who has been trying to catch her eye at the party, and tells Rufus that she already has one husband who is enough for her.

Rufus knows that Dana is married, but seems to think very little of her marriage to Kevin, just as most white people do not respect the informal marriages that slaves make together. Dana stays faithful to Kevin, both out of love for her husband and careful consideration for the other slaves who would have to pay for Rufus's jealousy. Telling Rufus that one husband is enough is also a subtle warning that Dana does not want to sleep with Rufus.



As Alice advances in her pregnancy, Rufus gets surlier. Dana is grateful that Alice creates another job for her that keeps her out of Rufus's way: teaching Joe to read. Dana finds that Joe is very bright, even if he has Rufus's quick temper when he feels like he doesn't understand something. Rufus even begins to take an interest in Joe, helping the young boy decipher a map in his library. Dana compliments Joe, and Rufus confides that Alice has asked him to free Joe. Rufus says he will do it on the condition that Alice shows that she loves him.

Rufus's lack of interest in Joe seems to come from both his own father's example of disengaged parenting and the feeling that Joe is not truly his son because Joe is half black. Dana helps Rufus see that Joe is worthy of Rufus's attention and even has much in common with his father—yet Rufus does not seem bothered that his own flesh and blood is still a slave. He uses the same emotional manipulation that his father used on Sarah, leveraging the well-being of Alice's children for Alice's complete loyalty.



In a private conversation with Alice, Dana learns that Alice would rather try to run again with Joe than continue to live under Rufus's thumb, even with a newborn baby. Dana agrees to help by getting Alice a bottle of Margaret's laudanum to keep the baby quiet on the road, but cautions Alice to carefully consider the consequences running could have for her and her children.

Alice knows intimately the cost of running away, as she has already endured that punishment once when she ran with Isaac. However, Alice decides that her love for her children means that she must make this sacrifice in order to give her children the chance of growing up in freedom.



12. Alice's baby is a girl, with far darker skin than Joe. Rufus is sweet to Alice after the birth, not realizing the significance of Alice naming her children Joseph and Hagar – Biblical slaves who achieve their freedom. Dana nearly cries with relief now that her ancestor Hagar has been born. With the danger of cutting off her family line over, Dana feels free to consider ways to get herself out of the danger of slavery. Alice too refocuses on freedom, demanding the laudanum from Dana so that she can run with the baby. Dana again suggests patience, but Alice refuses to wait to turn into “a white-person lover” like Dana.

Alice may be happy that her daughter looks like her, but darker skin is more dangerous for mixed race children. Joe's light skin gives him a small chance of passing for white, whereas Hagar's dark skin means that she will always be treated as a slave. Yet Hagar is also Dana's ticket out of slavery, as Dana can now run away from the Weylin estate for good—Rufus may well die, but Dana does not have to care because her family line is already in motion. Alice too wants to run away, unable to imagine a future in which white and black people can coexist in equality. To Alice, loving a white person will always mean submission and oppression.



Dana tries to leverage her help against Alice treating her with more kindness, but Alice knows that Dana will help her out of guilt no matter how much Alice insults Dana. Dana gets the laudanum, but also asks Rufus if he is going to free Joe. Rufus says yes, but Alice won't believe it unless she sees the actual freedom certificate.

Dana retains significant guilt for both the fact that Alice has to be Rufus's mistress and that Dana has experienced freedom in the present and has a home where she will likely return soon. Alice is right to take her freedom and that of her children into her own hands. Rufus has already shown himself to be untrustworthy, of course.



13. Dana manages to convince Alice to wait until early summer to run, and convinces herself not to do anything dangerous to send herself home. To fill her time, Dana gets Rufus to let her teach Nigel's sons along with Joe, though Rufus's neighbors caution Rufus on the dangers of educating slaves. Rufus seems happier, and Dana wonders if Alice is really treating him with kindness and starting to genuinely like Rufus. The feelings developing between Rufus and Alice seem to be the very thing driving Alice to run.

Dana does not send herself home right away because she still feels obligated to help Alice and the other Weylin slaves as much as possible. Though she may no longer care about Rufus, Dana still feels a sense of kinship with her fellow slaves. One way to do her duty for her slave family is to teach Nigel's children to read and give them a shot at improving their lives once they are emancipated. Alice desperately searches for freedom because she sees herself becoming twisted to Rufus's will the more she comes to like him. Alice has to risk running away in order to reassert her independence.



One day, the field hand that noticed Dana at the corn husking party stops Dana at the cookhouse and introduces himself as Sam Jones. Sarah had already warned Sam not to pursue Dana and invite Rufus's anger, but Sam wants Dana to teach his siblings to read. Sam questions why Dana “lets” Rufus have so much sway with her, but Dana fires back that the field hands too “let” Evan Fowler abuse them – both house slaves and field hands have to do distasteful things to stay alive and whole. Sam is impressed with Dana's spirit, but Dana is careful to keep the interaction short and innocent.

Butler presents the lives of slaves in the house and in the field as a series of choices. Rather than leaving the slaves as completely powerless to their master's will, Butler explains that all slaves are simply making the rational choice to be obedient to their masters in order to avoid greater pain. In Dana's case, giving Rufus some obedience allows her to have some room to teach other slaves to read and hopefully give the next generation the tools to better their lives. Yet Dana still has to compromise her own desires to protect this small benefit, as when she cuts short her conversation with Sam to keep Rufus from getting jealous.



Though Dana was careful, Sam is sold away three days later. Rufus had not said anything to Dana about the conversation, and doesn't even warn Dana that Sam will be sold. Dana rushes out of Margaret's room when she sees Sam being herded into a slave trader's coffle (a line of chained slaves) out the window, and pleads with Rufus not to do this. Rufus says nothing. Sam's younger sister wails in the yard, then catches sight of Dana and hurls insults at her for getting Sam in trouble. Rufus steps between the two women, and Dana uses the opportunity to ask Rufus again not to sell Sam. Rufus strikes Dana hard across the face.

Rufus cuts Dana off from any attention except his own, expressing his "love" for Dana by trying to own her completely. Yet rather than blaming Rufus for causing all of this pain, Sam's sister directs her rage Dana. From her perspective, white people are expected to cause anguish in black families, so black people then have the obligation to help protect each other. Dana does everything she can to help Sam, but Rufus is completely insensitive to both Dana's wishes and the cruelty of separating Sam from his family. This action cements Rufus's change from someone Dana might be able to teach to be a good person, to a man of his time who cares nothing for the humanity of his slaves.



After Rufus hits Dana, she knows that the basic trust between them has been destroyed. Dana goes to the cookhouse, against Rufus's orders, and heats up a bath of water. She takes the basin up to the attic, washes her knife in antiseptic, then crawls into the tub and slits her wrists.

When Rufus sells Sam and hits Dana, he takes away any possibility that Dana has control over her own life at the Weylin plantation. Without that assurance, Dana knows that death would be better than actually living as Rufus's slave. She is thus willing to risk the chance that cutting her wrists will actually kill her instead of just sending her to the present.



CHAPTER 6: THE ROPE

1. Dana wakes in her own bed at home with her wrists heavily bandaged and Kevin asleep beside her. Kevin wakes and gently scolds Dana for doing something so dangerous to get home. Kevin had a doctor friend of his come over to tend to Dana's cuts, which luckily were not as deep as Dana meant them to be. The doctor had suggested that Dana needs a psychiatrist, but Dana would rather not deal with the amount of lies she would have to tell. Kevin tells her she was gone for three hours in the present, though Dana spent eight months with the Weylins.

Kevin's concern for Dana shows how deeply he cares for her, but his scolding suggests that he does not trust Dana to know how to make her own choices. Kevin is thinking of Dana's physical well-being, while Dana has chosen to prioritize her mental well-being and escape slavery through any means necessary.



Dana fills Kevin in on the details of Hagar's birth, Tom's death, and the changes in Rufus's personality. Kevin suggests that if she goes back, Dana should let Rufus die, now that Hagar is safe. Dana mentions that Carrie told her that if she lets Rufus die, all of the Weylin slaves will be sold. Kevin is surprised to find out that Carrie can communicate at all, but understands how terrible being sold would be for all the Weylin slaves.

Dana thought that she would be free once Hagar was born, but she still feels an obligation to keep Rufus safe for the sake of the Weylin slaves. She no longer cares for Rufus in any way, but feels an obligation to protect her chosen family of fellow slaves. Kevin could not see Carrie's intelligence, a symbol of how many white people were not able to see the humanity of black people because they did not expect them to be capable of having a voice or opinions.



2. Dana and Kevin enjoy 15 days together, long enough for the couple to come back together and heal the rifts that the time travel created in their relationship. After two weeks, Kevin tells Dana to stop dragging around her emergency bag, but Dana knows that Rufus will call her eventually and she needs to be ready.

Dana and Kevin's bond was tested, but proves to be strong enough to withstand these traumas. However, Dana is less able to forget the past than Kevin is, as it affects her more deeply. Similarly, many white Americans are ready to forget America's history of slavery while black Americans are still dealing with the consequences of that awful institution.



Kevin misreads Dana's unease as eagerness to return to the Weylin estate, and suspects a relationship between Rufus and Dana. Dana flatly denies this, and swears that if Rufus ever tries to rape her, she will kill him. Dana refuses to fully become a Weylin man's property, like poor Tess, even if she has to pretend to be a slave to survive in that time period. Without some semblance of bodily autonomy, the tentative balance between Rufus and Dana will force Dana to make the ultimate choice of killing Rufus. Kevin comments that Dana wouldn't be here if her black ancestors had thought that way, but Dana knows that she doesn't have the endurance that her ancestors had. The only worry left is that Dana won't be able to return home if Rufus is not alive.

Attempted rape is introduced as the final boundary that Dana will never allow Rufus to cross. Dana has let Rufus take many liberties with her life, but she cannot allow him to cross this line without completely giving up on her own agency. When pushed to that extreme, Dana is willing to contemplate murder—though she initially balked at that type of violence when she first traveled to the past. Butler points out how much strength it took for people to continue living as slaves for the sake of their families and future generations.



3. On the Fourth of July, Kevin and Dana have friends over, but Dana refuses to go with them to watch the fireworks. As the friends are leaving, Dana feels dizzy and grabs her emergency bag just before she is transported to Rufus. Rufus stumbles over Dana and sprawls both of them onto an ant hill. Dana notices that Rufus looks more tired and haggard than she has ever seen him. Dana asks Rufus what's wrong, and Rufus stands up and marches Dana back to the plantation. Once they reach the barn door, Rufus opens the barn and points inside. Alice has hung herself, wearing her best clothes and with her hair neatly brushed.

On America's Independence Day, in the year of the bicentennial celebration, Dana is ironically brought back into slavery. Though America may have been conceived with ideals of equality and justice, Butler points out that those concepts were not true during the majority of American history (including at its founding). This trip is the first time that Rufus has not been in immediate, visible danger, but Alice's death suggests that Dana is meant to stop Rufus from killing himself. Alice's neat appearance suggests that she planned this act in advance.



Dana struggles to cut Alice down, then holds Alice's body and cries. Rufus steps into the barn, confirming that Alice did this to herself. Dana asks what happened to Alice's children, but Rufus walks away. Dana goes to find Sarah in the cookhouse and tells her Alice is dead. Sarah hisses that Rufus killed Alice, even if Alice herself tied the noose. Sarah explains that Rufus sold Joe and Hagar after Alice tried to run again. Sarah had to take care of Alice after that, bringing back memories of Sarah's own wish to die after her children had been sold.

Rufus pushed Alice into suicide by cutting off all the other options in her life. Robbed of her freedom and her children, Alice saw no purpose to her life and made the extreme choice to end it for good. Butler does not condone this choice, but she does present it as an understandable response to the horrible things that Alice has had to endure. Sarah has sympathy for Alice's choice after her own experience losing her children, showing how important family is to those who have nothing else to call their own.



Carrie comes in crying, and signs that Rufus wants Dana in the house. Dana goes to the library, finding Rufus there with a gun in his hand. Dana realizes that the threat to Rufus's life is himself this time. Dana harshly asks Rufus how he could sell his own children, and Rufus reveals that the children were never actually sold. Joe and Hagar are currently in Baltimore with Rufus's aunt, so Rufus could scare Alice into never running again. Dana asks Rufus to free Joe and Hagar now that he has taken away their mother, but Rufus accuses Dana of causing all of this by leaving him. Dana just touches her face where Rufus hit her and tells Rufus to free his children and raise them legally.

4. Alice's funeral is the next day, with the full Weylin plantation in attendance. Some of the slaves whisper that Alice is going to hell for committing suicide, but they stay quiet in front of Rufus. After Alice is buried, Dana avoids the dinner in Alice's honor and goes up to the library to think and write out her feelings. The next day, Rufus takes Dana to town and lets Dana watch while he draws up certificates of freedom for Joe and Hagar.

Rufus goes to Baltimore to collect the children, leaving Evan Fowler to watch Dana and make sure that she doesn't send herself home again. Dana hides in Margaret's room to escape Evan's presence and is surprised to find herself enjoying conversations with the lonely old woman. Rufus returns with the children, and Joe rushes up to Dana chattering about his "Daddy." Dana is surprised, but happy that Rufus has decided to be a true father for Joe.

Dana resumes classes for all the children on the plantation, and slowly works to persuade Rufus to free all of his slaves in his will. Rufus makes no promises but doesn't resist either. Finally, Rufus admits that he would be crazy to free the slaves in his will and tell Dana, for fear that Dana will kill him as soon as the slaves' fates are assured. Rufus reveals that his greatest fear is that Dana will leave him when he needs her most. Dana tries to tell Rufus that she has no control over when she leaves, and that Rufus himself should be more careful, but Rufus won't listen.

Rufus's use of emotional manipulation backfired in the worst way possible. Rufus has actually caused his own greatest fear to come true, as losing Alice to death is even worse than having her run away and leave Rufus behind. Yet Rufus still refuses to take responsibility for his own actions, suggesting that this terrible event is Dana's fault for making the choice to leave Rufus in order to preserve her own sanity. Dana shows great optimism, hoping that she can convince Rufus to save his family and make amends for the damage he's done to Alice.



The religious argument against suicide was another reason that slaves did not often take this course of action to escape their dreadful circumstances. Many slaves wanted to have the hope of heaven to greet them after a hard lifetime of toil. Dana uses writing as her own outlet to remind herself of her independence and avoid giving in to her desire to escape. Her efforts are rewarded when Rufus listens to her advice and frees his children, making them legally part of the Weylin family.



Butler makes Margaret more sympathetic, redeeming her somewhat in her old age. Rufus too seems to have finally changed. Rufus was never close to his own father, but tries to correct these errors with his own son, though it is too late to be a full family now that Alice is dead.



Rufus finally sees how much control Dana has over his life, as Dana might be able to escape to her present instead of facing the consequences that another slave would have to deal with for killing a white person. Rufus expects the worst of Dana, showing that he has never been able to trust anyone or believe in their innate goodness, especially as he himself so often lies and hurts others to get what he wants. Rufus again shirks responsibility for his own life, leaving it up to Dana to get him out of trouble instead of taking care of himself.



Rufus comments that Dana isn't really black, and really belongs with white people. Dana responds that she could never belong with people who sell a man just for talking to her. Rufus feels guilty, but asks Dana not to leave this time and to stay to take care of Alice's children. Dana reminds Rufus that she has to get home to Kevin. Dana knows that, even if Rufus promises never to hurt her, eventually Rufus will lash out at her. Dana gets up to leave, but Rufus stops her.

Rufus's claims that Dana is not truly black on some level claim that Dana is a true part of the Weylin family. However, Dana has realized that her family truly is her fellow slaves who have suffered with her, rather than the white people with whom she shares blood. Rufus wants Dana to take Alice's place for good, refusing to let go of anyone that he considers his possession.



Rufus talks about the first time Alice came to his room. Rufus was afraid that Alice would somehow kill him in his sleep, but he wanted her so badly that he didn't care. Rufus steps closer to Dana and comments again how similar Dana and Alice are, and he grabs Dana's arms. Dana threatens to abandon him for good and pulls away. Dana runs up the stairs and goes to the attic to get her knife.

Rufus again shows his impulsive and reckless heart, as Alice did in fact threaten to kill Rufus, but was unable to go through with it. Dana may be similar to Alice, but she is ready to kill Rufus if Rufus tries to rape her. Rufus may have claimed to love Alice, but his love objectifies Alice and makes her easily replaceable rather than respecting her as a full person and mourning her loss.



Rufus follows Dana up to the attic. Dana keeps her knife hidden in her bag, as Rufus apologizes to Dana. Dana is unsure why Rufus is apologizing, though he has never before said those words out loud. Rufus goes on to describe how lonely he is, a feeling that Dana intimately understands. Dana thinks that Rufus at least still has his children. Dana herself had been the one to tell Joe that his mother had died, and had held him when he cried. Dana hopes that Rufus will step up to be a parent for Joe and Hagar.

Rufus's previous apologies came as actions or gifts, as he never seemed fully capable of admitting that he did something wrong. Rufus's apology foreshadows that he will not be able to overcome the worst parts of his nature and become a parent for Joe and Hagar. Rufus lets his loneliness drive him crazy and he takes out that pain on other people rather than recognizing the pain and coming to terms with it by making an equal connection with others.



Now in the attic, Rufus sighs that Alice hated him for so long, but had finally accepted him right before she ran away. Rufus takes Dana's hand and wonders aloud when Dana will stop hating him. Dana's other hand clenches involuntarily on the handle of her knife. Rufus again tells Dana that she should be responsible for Joe and Hagar, but Dana reminds Rufus that it is his job to stay alive and take care of his children. Rufus pushes Dana back on her pallet in the attic and lays his head on her shoulder.

Rufus expects Dana to act just as Alice did, forgetting that the two women are not actually the same person. Dana's modern upbringing has given her greater ability to resist Rufus because Dana has more options for preserving her safety than Alice ever had. Rufus tries to guilt Dana with familial obligation (although this also brings up the incestuous implications of his desire), but Dana now understands that she has to keep herself safe instead of worrying only about protecting other people.



Rufus and Dana lay calmly for a minute, and Dana realizes that she might eventually forgive him even for this, and relax into Rufus's desire. Then Dana's resolve hardens and she twists sharply away from Rufus. Knowing that Rufus's gentleness will only last as long as Rufus is happy, Dana prepares to kill the man who has been like a younger brother to her. She sinks the knife into Rufus' side, then again into his back as Rufus screams and struggles. Rufus punches Dana in the face, but Dana keeps her grip. Rufus collapses across Dana and goes still. Dana, half-conscious, vomits.

The temptation to take the "easy" path and give in to Rufus is strong, but Butler maintains that Dana would die a bitter death like Alice's if she were to give up her bodily freedom and autonomy in that way. Dana cannot continue to forgive Rufus because he is family. Rufus's definition of love can only destroy everything it touches, and Dana can no longer wait for Rufus to become a better person. As Rufus crosses the final boundary of Dana's freedom and agency by trying to rape her, Dana is forced to make the decision to kill him.



Nigel comes in and sees Rufus bloody on top of Dana. Rufus moans once more and then goes completely limp. Dana pushes Rufus's body away, but Rufus's hand remains clamped to Dana's arm. Dana convulses with sickness and she feels something hard clamp down on her arm, pressing forcefully until **Dana's arm** is melted. Somehow, Dana's arm then becomes stuck in the plaster of her living room wall at home. Dana stares at her arm for a second, then screams as an avalanche of pain hits her.

Rufus's hold on Dana continues after he dies, as seen in his hand still on her arm. Though Dana might be free of Rufus's immediate influence on her life, she still bears the psychological scars of her time as a slave, and the violence she had to commit in order to survive with her freedom intact. Dana's arm, stuck back in the past, represents the parts of Dana's psyche that will never be able to heal after all the trauma she's endured.



EPILOGUE

Kevin and Dana fly to Maryland as soon as Dana's arm is healed enough. They drive into Easton, the city near the Weylin plantation, noting all the modern changes. Rufus's house is no longer there, and is covered over by a corn field. Dana tries to locate Rufus's grave, but finds only a newspaper article about Rufus's death in a fire that destroyed the Weylin house. The article also includes a list of the Weylin slaves, including everyone that Dana met in the past except Nigel, Carrie, Joe, and Hagar. Dana decides that Nigel must have set the fire, then escaped with Carrie, Joe, and Hagar to live with Margaret in Baltimore.

Dana is not able to get full closure on the events that happened in the past. Similarly, many descendants of enslaved peoples will never know exactly what their ancestors' lives were like, and will not be able to answer the many questions of their own family history. As Nigel, Carrie, Joe, and Hagar are not listed as slaves, Dana can only hope that Nigel and Carrie raised Joe and Hagar in freedom. As much as Dana owes a debt to Alice for enduring pain to conceive Hagar in the first place, she is also indebted to the sacrifices that Nigel made for her family at the cost of his own happiness.



At the Historical Society of Baltimore, Kevin and Dana research any mention of Margaret and Hagar together in Baltimore. Dana hopes that Margaret accepted Joe and Hagar as her grandchildren. Kevin laments that Rufus did not make a will to free his slaves, but Dana confesses that Rufus never made that will for fear of what Dana would do. Kevin assures Dana that she never would have been capable of killing Rufus except in self-defense.

Dana and Kevin still wish that they could have done more to help the slaves on the Weylin estate. Dana carries survivor's guilt for escaping that life when the other slaves were not able to do so, especially because she thinks that Rufus may have made a will if he were not scared of her. Yet Rufus might have been far worse to his slaves without Dana's presence in his life. Kevin supports Dana by helping her find out about her family history, offering a true partner's support instead of Rufus's twisted version of love.



Dana sighs, regretting the pain that her trips to the past caused for Nigel, Sarah, and the others. Kevin reminds her that there's nothing they can do now. They look at the records, appreciating the solid evidence that these people existed and that their trips to the Weylin plantation were not crazy delusions. Dana looks back to the Historical Society building, but Kevin looks forward toward a future free of Rufus and the past.

Butler gently argues that Dana could not have done anything to change history, simply allowing Dana and Kevin to bear witness to the pain of the past and hope for a better future. While Kevin symbolically looks forward, dreaming of living unencumbered by this history of suffering, Dana looks backward – tied forever to that trauma in her skin and her lost arm as reminders of everything her ancestors survived.





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