

# Chapter 7

Chapter 7 immerses readers in the daily struggles and triumphs of rural Kentucky, highlighting how knowledge and resilience shape the lives of the people in Baileyville. The narrative focuses on Alice, who continues her work with the Packhorse Library, delivering books to families living in isolated mountain homes. She recognizes that literacy is not just about learning to read but about gaining the tools needed to navigate a world that is often unfair to those without power.

One of Alice's regular stops is the Horner family, where young Mae Horner greets her with excitement, eager to share her progress in reading. Mae's pride in making a peach pie using a recipe from a borrowed book symbolizes the library's impact, proving that access to knowledge can enhance even the most basic aspects of daily life. For Alice, moments like these reaffirm the importance of her work, reinforcing the idea that even small victories can lead to greater empowerment.

However, not everyone in Baileyville supports the Packhorse Library's mission, as many believe women should not be encouraged to seek knowledge beyond what is necessary for household duties. This resistance is most evident in the opposition from men like Geoffrey Van Cleve, who view the library as a threat to traditional values. Despite the challenges, Alice remains committed to her role, knowing that education is key to breaking cycles of poverty and oppression in the region.

During her travels, Alice becomes more aware of the growing tension between landowners and coal companies, an issue that weighs heavily on families like the Horners. With corporate greed leading to forced evictions and environmental destruction, the fight to retain land ownership becomes an ongoing battle. Alice realizes that while books offer comfort and escape, they can also serve as a tool for resistance, providing people with the knowledge needed to advocate for their rights.

Meanwhile, Alice's personal life becomes increasingly complicated as she struggles with her place in the Van Cleve household. Her relationship with Bennett remains strained, and her father-in-law's constant interference makes her feel more like an outsider than ever. Her desire for independence grows stronger, fueled by her experiences in the community and her interactions with the librarians who have found ways to carve out their own paths.

A moment of unexpected kindness comes when Alice has an embarrassing encounter with a skunk and finds herself in need of help. Fred Guisler, one of the few people in town who treats her with warmth and respect, steps in to assist her. Their interaction is brief but meaningful, serving as a reminder that not everyone in Baileyville shares the rigid, oppressive views of the Van Cleve family.

The chapter culminates with a town gathering featuring Tex Lafayette, a popular cowboy singer, meant to bring people together in celebration. However, underlying tensions surface as discussions about land rights and societal roles expose the deep divides within the community. Despite these conflicts, moments of solidarity emerge, with the Packhorse librarians standing firm in their belief that access to knowledge should not be restricted by gender or social class.

By the end of the chapter, Alice finds herself at a turning point, questioning whether she can continue living a life dictated by others. Her work with the library has opened her eyes to the strength of the women around her, as well as her own potential to shape her destiny. As she watches the people of Baileyville fight for their land, their rights, and their futures, she begins to see that true change comes from those who refuse to accept injustice without a fight.

This chapter weaves together themes of education, resilience, and personal growth, illustrating the power of knowledge to transform lives. Through Alice's journey, the novel continues to explore the tension between tradition and progress, reminding readers that even in the face of opposition, small acts of courage can spark lasting change.