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*Kindred* chapter: Summary and Analysis

In the science fiction novel, *Kindred*, Octavia Butler presents to the reader a fast-paced thriller that excites with each turn of the page. The reader is introduced to the protagonist, Dana, in the year of 1976. While doing her daily routines, she is suddenly sent back in time to the antebellum south in the year of 1815. After her arrival, she saves a young child named Rufus from drowning to death. As quickly as she came, she is then sent back to her present time with barely any time having passed. As the story unfolds, Dana continues to transcend to the past and continues to stay for longer durations. However, Dana soon learns that it is not her intentions that she wishes to return to the antebellum south but from the child, Rufus. Dana and Rufus discover that they share a bond with one another and whenever Rufus is in danger, Dana is sent to aid him. With this, Dana discovers that in able for her to return to her time period, she must be in imminent danger. As Dana continues to return to Rufus in 1815, she slowly begins to interpret and understand the time period as well as the dangers that comes with it. In the chapter titled “The Fall,” dangerous situations continue to unfold for Dana as she is exposed to the violence, coercion, and persuasion that is seen on a day-to-day bases in the antebellum south in 1815.

Violence is easily seen throughout the novel, especially in the chapter “The Fall”. Butler writes, “The whipping served its purpose as far as I was concerned. It scared me” (92). Dana is exposed to the violence and dangers of being black. In a time period when inequality was at the highest in America’s history, black people were seen as property to the white race. Furthermore,

if you were property and did not react in which h the owner liked, you were punished. As if the punishments were not bad enough, the rest of the property must spectate the whippings to show that they must stay in line or they too will be punished. Another scene of violence that “The Fall” captured was the excruciating whipping that Dana received when she was caught for having a book with her in the cookhouse. Butler writes, “But it came like a hot iron across my back, burning into me through my light shirt” (107). This experience will affect Dana in many ways and will, most likely, be the factor that decides her judgment for her time in the south. Dana will now be reminded of what the consequence are for doing anything that is not seen fit for her and she will no longer do anything that could result in a whipping.

Though coercion is not seen quite as often as the others, it can still be seen in “The Fall”. Butler writes, “In fact, you don’t even have to be in her. Tell Carrie to do this room... And stay away from the books” (97). In the world that we live in today, education is knowledge and knowledge is power. However, with that said, if a black person in the south in 1815 has access to books and is able to read then that possess an immediate threat to the white slave owners. If slaves are able to read and write then they could have the knowledge to escape or possible to revolt against their masters. Dana doesn’t quite understand the power that she has right now as a black person but soon she will put her knowledge of reading to use.

Persuasion is seen quite frequently in “The Fall.” Butler writes, “So she made Marse Tom sell my three boys to get money to buy things she didn’t even need” (95). The selling and buying of slaves is just a typical thing for the south in this time period. However, the need to persuade the owner to sell a human-being to provide luxurious needs is quite extreme. This proves to the reader of how little emotions and values that the white people of the time viewed their slaves. Dana looks back on this moment and ponders if she will eventually be sold off to satisfy the

luxurious needs of others. Another example of persuasion can be seen in the novel when Dana is asked if she would like to teach Rufus how to read. Butler writes, “How would you like to be the one doing the teaching” (91). Once it had been discovered that Dana could read, it would certainly draw attention to herself. Now that the master knows that Dana can read, he can almost do what he wants with her at his very own will. If Dana does not accept the job, then the master could sell her away or very much kill Dana because of the dangers of having this knowledge. However, if Dana does accept, the master does not have to worry about sending Rufus back to school because he will assure that he will receive an education and will become successful. This is a very pivotal moment in the novel and Dana’s decision could help her or put her in more danger.

Octavia Butler’s novel, *Kindred*, is very unique when compared to other science-fiction novels. Her ability to examine and craft the time periods and characters makes this novel far more impressive than those of its kind. In the chapter “The Fall,” many different occurrences of events can be examined and analyzed. However, it was quite noticeable of the many times that violence, coercion, and persuasion was seen throughout the chapter.