

## Book Discussion Questions for *The Lieutenant's Lady* by Bess Streeter Aldrich

Presented by Gretchen Garrison of "Odyssey Through Nebraska"

About the author: Bess Streeter Aldrich was born on February 17th, 1881, in Cedar Falls, Iowa. She was the 8th child of James Wareham Streeter and Mary Wilson Anderson Streeter. Her closest sibling was ten years older, so she described herself as having the "world's record for the number of bosses over her."<sup>1</sup> As a young adult, Bess began entering story contests and even won several. She received her degree from Iowa State Normal School in 1901, then she taught for several years. During this time, she met Cap (Charles) Aldrich. They were married on September 24, 1907. In 1909, their daughter was born. Soon after, they moved to Elmwood, Nebraska, to run the American Exchange Bank in Elmwood with Bess' sister and brother-in-law. By 1920, the Aldrich family also included three sons. During these years, Bess would find snatches of time to write. She published many short stories in magazines and some of her serials became books. When her husband died in 1925, Bess' hobby became necessary for her family's livelihood. Over time, Bess wrote nine novels. Additional stories were combined into compilations. Bess died on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1954. In 1972, she was named to the "Nebraska Hall of Fame" and is now a part of the display at the Nebraska Capitol.



The original jacket cover was illustrated by Bess's son, James Aldrich. This painting is on display at the Aldrich Museum.

### About *The Lieutenant's Lady*

This novel by Aldrich was based on a primary source. "Miss Lillian Houghton of Marshalltown gave Bess diaries her aunt had written in 1866 and 1867 while travelling by riverboat up the Missouri from St. Louis into the Dakota and Montana territories to meet her Lieutenant husband at Camp Berthold in Dakota territory – a long, tiresome and dangerous voyage. Bess spent almost a year researching to make each detail as authentic as possible."<sup>2</sup> For more information on this book, please contact [aldrichfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:aldrichfoundation@gmail.com)

***The Lieutenant's Lady* Basic Plot:** Linnie Colsworth is visiting Omaha relatives. Lieutenant Norman Stafford fights for the Army during the Indian Wars and proposes to Cousin Cynthia. On her way back East, she travels to Norman's current fort to tell him that her cousin has jilted him. To save face, she marries Norman temporarily, but then she decides to stay with him out of love, despite the hardships and difficulties that took place for those serving in the Army during the 1860's out in Western territories.

### ***The Lieutenant's Lady* Secondary Characters (see the Facilitator's Guide for additional details)**

Omaha	River Rose	Fort Berthold	Native Chiefs	Camp Cooke	Travel
Uncle Harry	Mrs. Duncliff	Major Halligan	White Shield	Lanes	Lt. Walbourn
Aunt Louise	Elderly captain	Sargent Smith	Crow Belly	Talcotts	Mrs. Duncliff
Cousin Cynthia	Pilot & his wife	doctor	Red Cow	Norris	Uncle Henry
George Hemming	St. Louis merchant	Father DeSmet	Fool Dog	Houghtalings	Cynthia
Magnus & Olga	(no Norman)				Aunt Louise

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the *Bess Streeter Aldrich Scrapbook* by Vopal Gowman Youngberg (page 11)

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from the *Bess Streeter Aldrich Scrapbook* by Vopal Gowman Youngberg (page 40)

## Book Discussion Questions for *The Lieutenant's Lady* by Bess Streeter Aldrich

### Overall questions:

What do you think are the themes of *The Lieutenant's Lady*?

This book is told from the perspective of a white adult woman. How might it change if it was told from the lieutenant's perspective? What if one of the Native American chiefs told this story?

Would you consider this book to be a romance? What about a love story?

### Omaha: Chapters I-V (1-5)

How did Linnie end up traveling to Omaha? Do you think she wanted to come?

What did Linnie notice about Cynthia when it came to how she felt about men?

"Here she was thinking about Norman Stafford, who was over at the Hernden House thinking about Cynthia, who had been chattering away about George Hemming." Did you predict what might happen?

When Lieutenant Spafford had to say his good-byes to Linnie instead of Cynthia was any part surprising?

How did Cynthia and Linnie's versions of love differ?

On p. 58 it says "But, surprisingly, it seemed in that brief second that Uncle Henry and George knew something which no other human being knew." What do you think Linnie was referencing?

### River Rose: Chapters VI-VIII (6-8)

Do you think that Linnie was brave or foolhardy to venture West to find Lieutenant Stafford?

What was truly motivating Linnie in her trek west? Her cousin's wishes or something more?

How were the women different that she met on the riverboat?

What do you think was the toughest part of the journey for Linnie?

Would you have been willing to travel the route that Linnie did by yourself?

### Fort Berthold: Chapters VIII-X (8-10)

Lieutenant Spafford did not think it was appropriate for Linnie to stay in his quarters unless she was his wife. Do you think that sense of propriety would be true today?

"She knew now that Cynthia would have never come at all." Do you agree with Linnie?

For the first time, Linnie was around Native Americans. What experiences did she have with them?

### Camp Cooke: Chapters XI-IXX (11-19)

What new places did Linnie see on their way to Camp Cooke?

What does Mrs. Talcott need to be content? Do you feel the same way?

Even after her relationship with the Lieutenant changed, Linnie kept up Cynthia's picture. Why?

What are some ways that the soldiers and families passed the time at Camp Cooke?

"Rachel in a frontier fort was crying for her children and would not be comforted." How was Linnie affected by the loss of the Houghtaling baby and by the loss of the soldier?

Did Linnie's schooling efforts really make a difference for the children? Why or why not?

### Travel/ Omaha: Chapters XX-XXIII (20-23)

How would Linnie's life had changed if she would have remained at Camp Cooke with the others?

"I can stand it" becomes a theme in the book. How did Linnie manage through the tough times?

Has Cousin Cynthia changed since becoming a widow? Why or why not?

According to p. 168, Linnie felt that "Norman did not love her as he had loved Cynthia." Did that change by the end of the book?

Norman's thoughts near the end of Chapter XXIII seem to summarize the tone of the book. What might the reader conclude?

What did old Mrs. Stafford (Linnie) think that she heard right before she died?

## Book Discussion Suggested Answers for *The Lieutenant's Lady* by Bess Streeter Aldrich

### Overall questions:

*What do you think are the themes of The Lieutenant's Lady?* Courage. Patriotism. Adventure. Love. Sacrifice. Family. Independence. Other answers are possible.

*This book is told from the perspective of a white adult woman. How might it change if it was told from the lieutenant's perspective? What if one of the Native American chiefs told this story?*

If Lieutenant Stafford told this story, there would probably be more details about the battles and soldier experiences rather than tales about fort life. If a Native American chief told this story, they would consider the army to be the intruders. Additional answers are possible.

*Would you consider this book to be a romance? What about a love story?* Answers will vary based on opinions. This was considered a romance. Today's definition tends to involve physical passion, and there was little of that in this novel. The book has stronger claim to be a love story since this story demonstrates the power of committed love.

### Omaha: Chapters I-V (1-5)

*How did Linnie end up traveling to Omaha? Do you think she wanted to come?* Uncle Henry had "insisted that she return home with them for a long visit." Since Linnie was going to travel with cousin Cynthia, this also allowed Uncle Henry to return home. Cynthia could "stay a while and take in the New York sights when he found she would have Linnie's company on the long trip to Omaha."

*What did Linnie notice about Cynthia when it came to how she felt about men?* Cynthia said she was anxious about traveling on the stagecoach with men. But Linnie could see that was not really the case at all. "The one thing Cynthia would never be afraid of was men." To Cynthia, catching the eye of men seemed to be a fun game.

*"Here she was thinking about Norman Stafford, who was over at the Hernden House thinking about Cynthia, who had been chattering away about George Hemming." Did you predict what might happen?* Opinions will vary on if the reader notices what is coming. The characters mix. Norman was "scarcely able to take his eyes from Cynthia's pale prettiness." George was "making Cynthia the center of his attention." Norman could not do that since he was committed to army life. Linnie spent time with the Lieutenant and "could not remember when she had enjoyed a person more than her partner." "He was sensible and interesting, treating her as though she were an intelligent person and not a flirt or a dolt."

*When Lieutenant Spafford had to say his good-byes to Linnie instead of Cynthia was any part surprising?* Besides asking Linnie to tell Cynthia that he loved her "more than anything in this world," he asked Linnie to give her this. "He drew Linnie up to him as though she were Cynthia, kissed her lips warmly, and was gone." The fact that he kissed Linnie despite being engaged to Cynthia was surprising.

*How did Cynthia and Linnie's versions of love differ?* Cynthia desires to be the center of attention – love is all about her desires and dreams. Linnie seems willing to think about what is best for the other person.

*On p. 58 it says "But, surprisingly, it seemed in that brief second that Uncle Henry and George knew something which no other human being knew." What does that mean?* After finding out Cynthia and George secretly married, he went "striding about the room, scolding and blowing." But later, Linnie wondered if it was all an act. "Uncle Henry's ability to do things behind closed doors. His stormy attitude when the elopers came home but his almost miraculous change." George had his "promise of being a money maker." Uncle Henry did not want his daughter to leave Omaha or marry a soldier.

### River Rose: Chapters VI-VIII (6-8)

*Do you think that Linnie was brave or foolhardy to venture West to find Lieutenant Stafford?* Answers will vary. She was brave to take a chance, but she might have been foolhardy in her approach since she did not really have an advanced plan.

*What was truly motivating Linnie in her trek west? Her cousin's wishes or something more?* Cynthia told Linnie, "You write it to him" because she "couldn't bear to hurt him." Linnie could not figure out what to say and felt it was cruel. She decided to use the steam boat passage papers that were sent for Cynthia. Linnie finally admitted to herself that "she wanted to see Norman Stafford before she returned east."

*How were the women different that she met on the riverboat?* Mrs. Duncliff was a "plump, little person" who was cheerful and talkative. Linnie considered the others to be "uncouth and not quite tidy." Two of them were miner's wives and there was a merchant's wife. The pilot wife was a "gaunt, somber woman with red chapped face and rough hands." The Indian woman was a Blackfoot princess, but she stayed in her cabin much of the time since she was ill.

*What do you think was the toughest part of the journey for Linnie?* "She knew the country to be worse than she had dreamed, nothing but hills of dry sand with little streaks of short shrivel grass in the hollows and on the rivers bottoms."

*Would you have been willing to travel the route that Linnie did by yourself?* Answers will vary. Traveling as a single woman today is much easier and potentially safer than it would have been back then.

### Fort Berthold: Chapters VIII-X (8-10)

*Lieutenant Spafford did not think it was appropriate for Linnie to stay in his quarters unless she was his wife. Do you think that sense of propriety would be true today?* Today it is common for couples to live together before marriage. Today a gentleman may be noble and offer to sleep on the couch while allowing a lady to have his room. But since travel is easier, this type of predicament would be rare now.

*"She knew now that Cynthia would have never come at all."* 115 *Do you agree with Linnie?* Cynthia felt that Norman was a "handsome and citified officer," so she was convinced that he would not be sent to a remote area. She liked the idea of marrying a soldier, but not the commitment that was required.

*For the first time, Linnie was around Native Americans. What experiences did she have with them?* Norman told her she would "be safe enough" but possibly be annoyed as they were fascinated with white women. Norman traded for moccasins She saw the squaws at work. At the chief gathering and pow wow, they were mostly undressed and one had scalps. Norman helped her realize that she must not seem afraid. She observed a swimming party and a "brave heart" dance. She also heard "a young warrior serenading his lady love" with screeches and groans.



**Photo Courtesy of the Library of Congress**

**Title** Bluffs near Fort Berthold, D.T.

**Contributor Names**

Carbutt, John, 1832-1905,  
photographer and publisher

**Created / Published:** [1866]

**Headings**

Albumen prints--1860-1870.

## Camp Cooke: Chapters XI-IXX (11-19)



**Library of Congress Map of Dakota Territory**

Drawn by Julius J. Durage, United States War Department,  
Office of the Chief of Engineers.

*What new places did Linnie see on their way to Camp Cooke? “In time the way became harder, the scenery bolder and grander. Sometimes they seemed to be headed straight for the bluffs, only to find that they were entering a sharp bend in the river. Every day there was some special animal life to see: a drove of buffalo, elk, or antelope. They also saw Fort Buford, Fort Peck the Yellowstone River and Bird Rapids. They also saw small streams – “The Milk, the Musselshell, and others.”*

*What does Mrs. Talcott need to be content? Do you feel the same way? “The colonel says I can be satisfied anywhere if I have a cracker-box to put a tablecloth on and a spot to hang up ‘God Bless Our Home.’” Answers will vary. Probably most people would struggle to be content with that little.*

*Even after her relationship with the Lieutenant changed, Linnie kept up Cynthia’s picture. Why? “Many times she decided to put away Cynthia’s picture, eternal smiling at them from the white carved frame, but each time she forbore. No, she could compete with Cynthia. She, who was warm and flesh and easy laughter, who could make appetizing stews, give sturdy advice for indecision and sympathy for disappointments, she had nothing to fear from the shadowy substance of a memory. Or so she thought.”*

*What are some ways that the soldiers and families passed the time at Camp Cooke? Besides following duties, the soldiers did dress parades. They went fishing. Norman and Linnie explored the area. The men hunted. The women did the washing. They would read magazines. They celebrated Christmas with Santa. They had a New Year’s reception. They did plays and read the Bible together.*

*“Rachel in a frontier fort was crying for her children and would not be comforted.” How was Linnie affected by the loss of the Houghtaling baby and the loss of the soldier? Although the soldier knew he could lose his life fighting, the baby was innocent. Mrs. Houghtaling felt an “indignant grief.” “Linnie thought her throat would burst with its throbbing for the old mother whose soldier boy would not come home again, and for the young mother who could not think her dead baby was the Lord’s will at all, but only the result of the evil of raiding Indians.”*

*Did Linnie’s schooling efforts really make a difference for the children? Why or why not? Answers will vary. No, because she was not formally trained and did not have educational resources. Yes, because she kept them out of trouble. She helped the students to learn the basics and to pass their time in a meaningful way.*



## Travel/ Omaha: Chapters XX-XXIII (20-23)



**Title** Farnham Street Omaha from hill west of city. (Taken Between 1862-1868). Library of Congress.

*How would Linnie's life had changed if she would have remained at Camp Cooke with the others?* Perhaps if Linnie had stayed, Norman would have reconnected with Cynthia since she clearly made herself available to him. Linnie would have grown closer to the families at the Camp, but she also would have been lonely and missed out on connecting more with her husband.

*"I can stand it" becomes a theme in the book. How did Linnie manage through the tough times?* "Long years stretched ahead filled with Indian alarms and wild animals, dust and blizzards, jealousies and disappointments, endless journeyings, creaking wagons, and bugs and rancid butter. There would be days and nights of anguish and worry and fright. But never mind that. Follow your man. Make him a home with a table-cloth and a cracker box – 'I can stand it. Oh, Norman, with you, I can always stand it.'"

*Has Cousin Cynthia changed since becoming a widow? Why or why not?* Not really. "She had chosen George first, but now she was free and wanted Norman." She continued to focus on having fun.

*According to p. 168, Linnie felt that "Norman did not love her as he had loved Cynthia." Did that change by the end of the book?* Possibly. He stayed committed to Linnie. "I want you to know that this little lady is just about the only thing that makes the old army life livable."

*Norman's thoughts near the end of Chapter XXIII seem to summarize the tone of the book. What might the reader conclude?* The Spaffords will stay committed to each other.

"She doesn't like Indians ... or army quarters ... or army food ... or guns ... or mules ... or buffalo hides ... but luckily she likes *me*. Well, how about it? Another move at once. Are you disappointed?"

'This was it. This was her wooing. No matter whether or not Cynthia still fascinated him. Never stop to question it. Never stop to analyze. Grasp happiness quickly before it can flee. This was her courtship and her betrothal. He had said it before Cynthia. He had said it before them all. This was her family wedding.'

*What did old Mrs. Stafford (Linnie) think t she heard right before she died?* A sound "kind of like bugles." "Maybe they were the echoes of bugles from a hundred bleak camps and outposts and frontier forts."

### Further Background Information on *The Lieutenant's Lady* from Petersen's Aldrich Biography

In 1941, Bess Streeter Aldrich felt she was “unable to write historical fiction because of the war and concerns for her own and other’s sons.”<sup>3</sup> But publishers seemed to feel differently as her books continued to be reprinted, and they felt that people were wanting to read stories of the past. Aldrich still was not convinced, and “during this period, Aldrich found articles easier to write than stories of any length.”<sup>4</sup>

One of her readers sent her documents that she hoped would inspire another novel. “Aldrich received two diaries from Lillie M. Houghton, of Marshalltown, Iowa, that had been written by Miss Houghton’s aunt and uncle Sarah Elizabeth Canfield and Second Lieutenant Andrew Nahum Canfield.”<sup>5</sup> These first hand accounts provided an eyewitness perspective of part of the Indian Wars.

“Sarah’s diary covers a little over a year, 30 April 1866 to 9 June 1867, and tells of her trip up the Missouri to join her husband in Dakota Territory. Sarah did not write every day, but she was particularly conscientious that every entry include weather information. The time span for Andrew’s diary is January through November 1868. The entries are an almost daily log of his work as second lieutenant in the post-Civil War regular army, providing brief descriptions of the duties and activities in the forts on the Upper Missouri and the happenings on the trip back down the river at year’s end.”<sup>6</sup>

According to correspondence with Erd Brandt, the *Saturday Evening Post* editor, Mrs. Aldrich enjoyed reading the diaries, but she did not feel immediately compelled to start a new project. In fact, she actually tried to pass off the project to the *Post* and step out of the middle. But Brandt could not figure out how to use the diaries either.<sup>7</sup>

Eventually Aldrich changed her mind and decided to use “the diaries to make them into a novel that would provide escape for her readers from contemporary pressures.”<sup>8</sup> Because she was struggling with living through yet another war, she knew others were too. She hoped she could add feeling to the facts found in the diary.

Although the diaries provided a springboard, Mrs. Aldrich continued her own research. “With her passion for authenticity, Aldrich studied all of the information available about the early-day fortifications on the Missouri River, material from the Montana and Nebraska historical societies, the *Kurtz Journal*, and the translation of part of the diary of General Philippe de Trobriand, who was at Fort Berthold in September 1867.”<sup>9</sup> The end result was historically accurate fiction.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Bess Streeter Aldrich* biography by Carol Miles Petersen c. 1995 University of Nebraska Press, p. 185

<sup>4</sup> *Bess Streeter Aldrich* biography by Carol Miles Petersen c. 1995 University of Nebraska Press, p. 185

<sup>5</sup> *Bess Streeter Aldrich* biography by Carol Miles Petersen c. 1995 University of Nebraska Press, p. 185

<sup>6</sup> *Bess Streeter Aldrich* biography by Carol Miles Petersen c. 1995 University of Nebraska Press, p. 185-186

<sup>7</sup> *Bess Streeter Aldrich* biography by Carol Miles Peterson c. 1995 University of Nebraska Press, p. 186

<sup>8</sup> *Bess Streeter Aldrich* biography by Carol Miles Peterson c. 1995 University of Nebraska Press, p. 187

<sup>9</sup> *Bess Streeter Aldrich* biography by Carol Miles Peterson c. 1995 University of Nebraska Press, p. 185

## ***The Lieutenant's Lady* Character Guide**

### **Omaha**

Linnie Colsworth	"smooth dark hair, wide brown eyes, and warm generous mouth"; "parents died when she was small"; "knows how to be cordial or cold" "found most intelligent"
Norman Spafford	"fine and strangely attractive with his lean strong face and well-knit uniformed figured" "sensible, interesting" "brusque" "constant duties"
Uncle Harry	"large man; vitality exuded from every pore"; one of 55 lawyers, so he dabbled in real estate, commodities and "fixing" for the territorial legislature;
Aunt Louise	"a delicate little wisp of a person"; "one never knew whether or not she would appear;" "delicate health"; "weak spells"
Cousin Cynthia	"Fair-haired; vivacious; fluttery;" flirt; idealizes military life; engaged to Norman but marries George instead after Norman does not write often enough
George Hemming	Dry-goods clerk; town cut-up; lived at Bachelor's Mess; "fell over himself" to wait on Cynthia at the store and gave her a bracelet later; Linnie's observation that he "would number new birthdays with the passing years but would never grow up." 64
Olga & Magnus	"The Swedish woman who came across the alley every day to help with the housework." "Too much a friend and neighbor of the family to be called a hired girl." "Magnus was Olgas's husband, and although there was scarcely enough for him to do around the house all day it pleased Uncle Henry to have a stableman and to be driven the few blocks to his office behind a pair of spanking bays." 11-20-21

### ***The River Rose***

Mrs. Dunccliff	Pleasant but talkative; husband with the regulars as 2 <sup>nd</sup> lieutenant – Fort Rice
Elderly captain	Dignity & loquaciousness; Decides to keep his eye on Linnie. "Decent young women didn't run around on Missouri River steamboats unsure of their destination."
Pilot	Sets up little house on roof of saloon; Killed by Indians – buried at Fort Rice
Pilot's wife	She tells about shipwrecks; "red chapped face and rough hands"; after her husband's death "it was though she had always known it would happen"
St. Louis merchant	Tries to help Linnie; makes himself too familiar – she is uncomfortable

### **Fort Berthold (includes Native American chiefs)**

Major Halligan	"thick-set, red-faced officer with pock-marked face"; describes himself as a "rough-and-tumble old army man"
Sargent Smith	Wedding party; "hard-boiled old bachelor"
doctor	Wedding party; "had possessed three wives at various times in his life and all had given him trouble, and here was this smart young lieutenant who didn't know calamity when he saw it"
White Shield	Arikara chief
Crow Belly	Mandan or Gros Ventres (Big Bellies) chief
Red Cow	Mandan or Gros Ventres (Big Bellies) chief
Fool Dog	Yankton Sioux chief; "extremely friendly, probably hoping to get special favors;" was forced to camp with his tribe some distance away
Father De Smet	"white-haired and gentle of face," "Indians would always be his concern"



## Camp Cooke

Mrs. Lane	Distressed; lonesome for family in St. Louis; “hysterical with fear for her husband’s safety;” almost returned to St. Louis right away; “chronically homesick and teary”
Lieutenant Lane	Ran a scouting detachment; “a too-slim Santa Claus but chosen as the only one who could get out of the opening in the shaky adobe structure”; liked to tease Ezra
Mrs. Talcott	“middle-aged and motherly with a sense of humor which often sent her small fat body into shaking chuckles. She had a single child, a son at West Point.”
Col. Talcott	“tall and gray and grizzled, a quiet man who read constantly in his leisure moments and in conversation bit off his words as though they were ginger-snaps” “curt voice” “went through a chapter from the Bible as though on a brigade charge”
Mrs. Norris	“harassed woman who was in a perpetual state of worry over her offspring, their lack of educational advantages, their boisterous activities, their democratic associations with tough old sergeants and tough young orderlies.
Captain Norris	Barely mentioned, Linnie notes “The Colonel and Captain Norris, their familiar faces, homely and weather-beaten, looked only kind and fatherly now.” when they leave
Effie and Essie:	Always mentioned together; acted and dressed like tomboys (once wearing pants)
“Sometimes in their boyish clothes hoyden-like ways, the only possible means for telling Effie and Essie from Ezra was by the tied-back horse-tail appearance of their flying long hair.” Sad when the Lanes left “Effie and Essie were crying a little, their coarse unlovely hair in their eyes and their roughened knuckles digging at sodden faces.”	
Ezra Norris	Almost dies after having lung fever; in between age; when Indians were coming – “too old to be in any one’s arms, too young to be anything but a frightened little boy in a world of tragic horror”; tried not to cry when Linnie left
When men were leaving for three months, children “were in a perpetual state of being yanked back from some place in which they were not supposed to be” (185)	
Jimmie Houghtaling	Seven years old; “whose energies added many more units of power to that of the potent Norris children”; fell into the stream often when fishing
Mrs. Houghtaling	Recently arrived from Ft. Snelling; Lost baby during childbirth after Indian scare – feels indignant; expects another baby soon after – that one survives
Lt. Houghtaling	Tried to find the Indians after attack; ended up with an arrow in his hip;

## Traveling/Omaha

Lt. Walbourn	Lives with wife & 2 boys at Ft. Stevenson; courteous, kind; killed 3 weeks later
Mrs. Duncliff (2)	Wonders how Linnie became a Lt. wife; updates on pilot’s wife
Uncle Henry	“familiar old bluster” “apparent pleasure” “loud”; still thinks of himself
Cynthia	Sparkled, Norman focused, (“one unhesitatingly would have picked Linnie for the young woman recently bereft”) “she always wanted to ignore unpleasant things”
Aunt Louise	Needed so much attention that Olga & Magnus lived upstairs

## Section Summaries for *The Lieutenant's Lady* by Bess Streeter Aldrich

### **Omaha: Chapters I-V (1-5)**

Orphaned as a child, young adult Linnie Colsworth was persuaded by her Uncle Henry to accompany him and Cousin Cynthia west to Nebraska Territory for several months. She quickly realizes that Cynthia requires to be the center of attention as she becomes engaged to Lt. Spafford while stringing along George. Norman goes off to his posting. Life goes on in Omaha with concessions made for Aunt Louisa's poor health. When Norman does not write often enough to Cynthia, she marries George instead. Linnie discovers that her uncle probably tried for that since he did not want his daughter to live in rough conditions. Linnie had become fascinated with Norman, so she wonders if she now has a chance.

### **River Rose: Chapters VI-VIII (6-8)**

Linnie heads north to Sioux City with the plan that she would continue on toward Lieutenant Spafford to tell him that Cynthia has jilted him. She could not head west without seeing him one more time. For the first time, she meets a variety of people and sees the rough conditions. "If she had gone into this too easily and willfully, the only thing left to do was to put on a brave front and see it through without complaint. But in another few days she knew the country to be worse than she had dreamed." (79)

### **Fort Berthold: Chapters VIII-X (8-10)**

Linnie arrives at Fort Berthold. Norman wonders why she came and will not let her leave since it would not be safe for her to travel alone. He marries her in name only temporarily. She leaves up Cynthia's picture to remind herself she is second best. The nearby Indian village fascinates Linnie. She walks by to see how they live, she attends a pow-wow and tries to get used to Native American life nearby. The Lieutenant takes her for walks every day. She chooses not to leave on the June boat. When the soldiers get new orders to head to Montana Territory, Linnie has to join them since she cannot travel alone.

### **Camp Cooke: Chapters XI-XIX (11-19)**

They travel on a stern-wheeler. The way is hard, but the scenery is beautiful. Norman helps them celebrate July 4<sup>th</sup> on the trail. At Camp Cooke, Linnie is finally around women again. Mrs. Talcott notes that "I can be satisfied anywhere if I have a cracker-box to put a tablecloth on and a spot to hang up 'God Bless Our Home.'" To make fort life bearable, families spend time fishing. After an Indian scare, Mrs. Houghtaling loses her baby, a soldier died, and everyone struggles in their grief. Linnie again chooses not to leave to the East, and Norman realizes that he wants her to always stay, and she agrees. Linnie is happy because Norman seems content. Linnie starts to teach the children school lessons, Ezra survives lung fever. The soldiers start going on trips, and the families stay behind. The soldiers return. Nearby Indians scare everyone, and settlers agree to take drastic measures if necessary. Norman tries to take six months leave, but it's declined. New orders are given in October to travel to Fort Buford.

### **Travel: Chapters XX-XXIII (20-23)**

Linnie decides to travel with Lieutenant Spafford rather than stay behind. She is the only woman with eight men and more are added. Along the way, they do stop at a fort with dancing. The trip is mainly cold and brutal. They finally end up in Omaha. Linnie wants to avoid Cousin Cynthia since she had gotten word that George had died several months prior. Her Uncle Henry continues to be loud and opinionated, and her Aunt Louise is even more fragile. Cynthia is still lovely, and sees that Norman notices. Ultimately Lieutenant Spafford makes a public declaration that he is glad that Linnie likes him despite all of the hardships. ("I can stand it. Oh, Norman ... with you .. I can always stand it." The book ends summarizing about the rest of their days including a son and grandchildren. Linnie dies hearing the sound of bugles.

Because this book is about the Indian wars, Native Americans are mentioned frequently in *The Lieutenant's Lady*. Many of the references are unkind. Do you think this reflects the opinions of the diary or the opinions of those in the 1940s? Are statements perceptions, factual or prejudicial? Why did settlers feel that way? Which statements might have been true?

<p>"Farther out on the prairie, the Sioux and Cheyennes were destroying cabins and wagon trains. Indeed, the Indians were so troublesome that some of the eastern insurance policies of the day contained a pointed paragraph to the effect that benefits accruing were null and void in case you crosse the Missouri River and were massacred." P.6</p>
<p>"The dirty Injuns'll all be cleaned up and there'll be nothing more for the army to do." Uncle Henry 21</p>
<p>"Now that the war's over, the next thing is to lick the hid off the Injuns .. and then there'll be peace for two hundred years." Uncle Henry p. 21</p>
<p>"Some days Indian squaws begged at the Colsworth back door. Olga gave them cold pancakes with an uncharitable look thrown in for good measure. p. 36</p>
<p>"Injuns don't attack much in winter. And they've a healthy respect for a well-garrisoned fort and those long iron devils that spit fire." <i>River Rose</i> Captain p. 91</p>
<p>"Do you know how Indians treat a white woman captive? No, you wouldn't know, of course. Well, I'll tell you ... so horribly that you would kill yourself before you'd be taken ... and no mercy from the squaws either ... they're worse than the bucks." Norman 97</p>
<p>"But the fear of the strange brown people was instinctive, and she could not throw it off. Nor could she do so all the years of her life. As long as she lived, she could not conquer that tenseness of nerves in the presence of the mildest one of the race." Linnie's perspective p. 112</p>
<p>"What should I wear &lt;to the pow wow&gt;?" "Your best white doeskin with the porcupine quills," he answered, jocularly, "and just act dumb like a squaw." Norman p. 117</p>
<p>"The squaws were laughing their heads off, so Norman and Linnie to join in, too, realizing that laughter can be an intertribal and international thing." 124</p>
<p>"Biggest mistake in the world to put a gun in an Injun's hand." 132 traveling soldiers</p>
<p>"Norman was disgusted. 'To Think they can do that right under our noses ... playing cat and mouse with the army. I'd like to help clean them (Indians) all out.'" 148-149</p>
<p>"Raids by the Indians were sporadic, but there was a constant succession of thieving – cattle, corn, a horse or two – more a subject for irritation than alarm." 169</p>
<p>"Tears were all alike then. How queer that was! There was no racial quality in them. All the tears that had been shed by women since the world began – what a deep stream they made! Chinese women[s tears – Negro women's tears – white women-s tears – rose into a river that wended its way to the sea with the tears from Nehawka. Linnie p. 176</p>
<p>"We can throw hot tomato stew on the Injuns if they attack," Norman said in disgust. 185</p>
<p>Between slinking Indians and slinking rats, she thought at times she preferred the savages." p. 198 Linnie</p>
<p>"Indeed, with every fiber of her being she knew now how a squaw felt. Don't ask questions. Don't think. Do as you're told. Just follow your man." Linnie p. 235</p>
<p>"Fire was a worse enemy than the Injuns here on the frontier." (Merchant) p. 245</p>
<p>"What's the matter with the army anyway?" Uncle Henry wanted to go on with his grievance. "Why don't they clean the damn Injuns out and get it over with?" p. 266</p>
<p>"There are good Indians and bad ones, just as there are good and bad white people. And there are quite a few of both running around loose, you know." Norman p. 267</p>

Forts Mentioned in the *Lieutenant's Lady*

Information in this section is from *Forts of the Northern Plains* by Jeff Barnes (c. 2008 by Stackpole Books)

Fort	Location	Years of Service	Named for
Ft. Randall	Pickstown, South Dakota	1856-1892	Col. Daniel Randall, the late deputy paymaster general
Purpose: Provisions; protection for locals and travelers (p. 77-79)			
Ft. Pierre (Chouteau) is mentioned but would have been abandoned as this former fur post had deteriorated due to fleas and termites – only in service a few months until 1857 – (not worth \$45,000 cost)			
Ft. Berthold	Garrison, North Dakota	1865-1866	Berthold - Merchant and fur trader
Purpose: “protect the peaceful Arikara, Mandan and Hidatsa tribes from their Sioux enemies” helped with Missouri River traffic; then later gold prospectors; (p. 92-132).			
Ft. Union	Williston, North Dakota	1828-1867	Post for American Fur Company
Trading post – replaced by Ft. Buford which was built three miles to the East; can visit this fort today			
Ft. Buford	Williston, North Dakota	1866-1895	Maj. Gen. John Buford died of typhoid fever - Gettysburg hero
Defended those traveling through Dakota and Montana territories against the Sioux			
Ft. Stevenson (Ft. Berthold)	Garrison, North Dakota	1867-1883	renamed for Brig. Gen. Thomas G. Stevenson (died Battle of Spotsylvania.)
Ft. Rice	Fort Rice, North Dakota	1864-1878	named for Gen. James Clay Rice (died Battle of Spotsylvania 1864 VA)
Rough, unhealthy conditions at first – men died; operational base for Sully's Expeditions; councils			
Ft. Sully	Pierre, South Dakota	1863-1866-1894	General Alfred Sully
Protection for settlers on the Missouri River East Bank; new one constructed thirty miles upriver			
Ft. Thompson (native camp?)	Buffalo County, SD	(Wikipedia info)	Named for Clark W. Thompson, Superintendent of Indian Affairs

Information from the website, Legends of America.

<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/fort-peck-montana/>

<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/camp-cooke-montana/>

Fort	Location	Years of Service	Named for
Fort Peck	Poplar, Montana (trading)	1867-1877	Colonel Campbell Kennedy Peck
Colonel Campbell Kennedy Peck	Located on the Missouri River, just upstream from the Judith River in Montana Territory	July 1866- March 31, 1870 (Nothing is left today)	“Brigadier General Philip St. George Cooke, who was in command of the Department of the Platte at the time.”
Purpose: “Its purpose was to control the area Indians, protect the steamboat traffic en route to Fort Benton, and emigrants crossing the extensive eastern Montana plains, to reach the goldfields. The post also served as a supply point for steamboat traffic, but the only occurred during the high-water months of May, June, and July.”			

### Additional Discussion Lieutenant's Lady Discussion Questions

*The Lieutenant's Lady*, which was published in 1942 during World War 2, met to critical acclaim. After reading reviews in dozens of newspapers, few had anything negative to say at all. Here are four different newspaper reviews that were printed in papers back in 1942 and 1943.

<p>“Pleasant, pioneer-romance, with setting in the Indian and buffalo country in the Upper Missouri during the late 1860’s – so any reader can guess that “The Lieutenant’s Lady” is a moving and bewildering book. Moved by her own love for the lieutenant, lady-like Linnie Colsworth journeys up the Missouri to tell him that he has been jilted. The plot deepens into a period and dramatic background well done.”<sup>10</sup></p>	<p>“The title of Bess Streeter Aldrich’s new novel, ‘The Lieutenant’s Lady’ might lead one to think it is a war book, and it is not. It is about a loveless marriage arranged 75 years ago between a girl and a lieutenant who was fighting Indians and it has affecting moments and a good deal of color, all applied with Mrs. Aldrich’s usual skill.”<sup>11</sup></p>	<p>“A new book, her latest, just released from the publishers, ‘The Lieutenant’s Lady’ by Bess Streeter Aldrich has just been bought for the Osmond Library. This tale dates back 75 years ago when Omaha was just a thriving new town. Just a simple story of long ago with the not new theme of two women loving the same man. In this case, the right woman got her man, and everything ended happily.”<sup>12</sup></p> <p>“Usually when a new book by Bess Streeter Aldrich is announced, there is a waiting list to borrow it, but this year, no one seems interested in ‘The Lieutenant’s Lady’ and it is merely a shelf warmer.”<sup>13</sup></p>
--	---	---

- 1) Which opinions do you agree with? Which do you disagree with?
- 2) Which review do you think expresses the public’s opinion more accurately? Would it change today?
- 3) What details do you think are missing in the reviews?
- 4) Do you think any of the reviewers did not actually read the book?
- 5) Why do you think no one was checking out Aldrich’s latest book in January 1943?
- 6) What would you want to include in your review?
- 7) How does one write a good review for *The Lieutenant’s Lady* without including spoilers?

Hint: Several of Aldrich’s books, including this one, are still available, either in print or e-book. You can still review them. 😊

---

<sup>10</sup> *Alexander City Outlook* Alexander City, AL. 26 Nov 1942  
<sup>11</sup> *South Idaho Press*. Burley, Idaho. 24 Sept 1942  
<sup>12</sup> *Osmond Republican*. Osmond, Nebraska. 30 Sept 1942  
<sup>13</sup> *Gretna Breeze*. Gretna, Nebraska. 14 Jan 1943



James Whitson Aldrich (1912 -1972) was the firstborn son (second child) of Charles and Bess Aldrich. He grew up in Elmwood, Nebraska, then he moved to New York City to become a commercial artist. Little is documented about many of his projects, but he is known to have illustrated dust jackets and book interiors. Four of the books that he illustrated were written by his mother.

<p><i>Song of Years</i> was published in 1939. New York: D. Appleton-Century</p>	<p><i>The Drum Goes Dead</i> was published in 1941. New York: D. Appleton - Century</p>	<p><i>The Lieutenant's Lady</i> was published in 1942. New York: D. Appleton-Century</p>	<p><i>Journey into Christmas</i> was published in 1949. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts</p>

- 1) Which one of the four covers appeals to you more aesthetically?
- 2) Which covers are the most alike?
- 3) Which covers are the most different?
- 4) Since the books came out over a ten-year period, were there any changes that might have take place during that time to affect artwork?
- 5) Do you think that James had access to the manuscripts before he illustrated his covers?
- 6) Half of the covers feature a daytime scene, but the other half take place at night. Do you think this was intentional?
- 7) Do you think Mrs. Aldrich expressed ideas for her covers, or did she let her son create whatever image he thought reflected the books?

Note: This question is purely opinion. We do know that Mrs. Aldrich seems to be proud of her son's contributions. According to one newspaper article, she expressed that she felt like he was a part of the project. "The book is rather a family affair for the jacket and illustrations are done by my son, James Aldrich, a commercial artist in New York."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Chicago Tribune* "Mrs. Aldrich Star Writer of Yule Tales" (No other author noted) 4 December 1949 Part 4- Page 6