

Ashes of Roses Study Guide

Ashes of Roses by Mary Jane Auch

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

Contents

Ashes of Roses Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
chapters 1-5.....	5
chapters 6-12.....	8
chapters 13-18.....	12
chapters 19-24.....	15
chapters 25-32.....	18
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	25
Themes.....	28
Style.....	30
Quotes.....	32
Topics for Discussion.....	33

Plot Summary

"Ashes of Roses" by Mary Jane Auch tells the tale of an Irish immigrant family that comes to New York with hopes of finding their fortune. Michael Nolan, his wife Margaret, and their four children - Margaret Rose, Maureen, Bridget and Joseph - travel from Limerick to America aboard a ship filled with immigrants. Margaret Rose, the main character, details the trip, comparing their two weeks in steerage to being sardines in a can. It is February and Margaret Rose claims that she has forgotten what the sun looks like. Unable to sleep, Margaret Rose sneaks out of the bunk she shares with Bridget and goes up on deck. The only person there in the gray dawn is the same man that is always up on deck. He points out the Narrows to Margaret Rose and tells her that New York Harbor is right on the other side. Margaret Rose runs back to the sleeping compartment to wake her family and to tell them about the arrival. Margaret Rose is desperate to see the Statue of Liberty. The statue captivates Margaret Rose.

The family disembarks after a long wait. Margaret Rose describes Ellis Island.

"We had heard many tales of Ellis Island - the place where the immigration officials decided whether or not ye were fit to enter America's gates." (Chapter 2, p. 11).

The medical examinations at Ellis Island are not pleasant. It is learned that Joseph is ill and did not pass the examination. Joseph will not be allowed to enter America. Margaret Rose fears that the trip has been in vain. Michael decides to return to Ireland with the baby and promises to return as soon as he can.

The rest of the family makes their way to Michael's brother Patrick's apartment. Patrick shares the apartment with his wife, Elsa, her daughters and their son. No one but Patrick is happy to see the Nolans. The situation is immediately tense and goes quickly from bad to worse. The situation comes to an abrupt end after Elsa catches the Nolans making paper flowers in her kitchen. She says that running a sweatshop in their apartment has brought shame to the family. The family is asked to leave. Although Patrick offers to pay for new lodgings, Margaret wants to go back to Ireland.

Rose and Maureen badger and beg Margaret to stay in America. Margaret, beaten down, reluctantly agrees. The girls go off on their own and find a place to stay, breaking the promise to return to Patrick's.

The girls rent from Mr. Garoff, a Russian Jew, and his daughter, Gussie. After a terrifying experience with her boss, Rose goes to work at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Rose begins to love life in America.

Not long after Rose and Maureen start to work at the factory, the famous fire breaks out. 146 people are killed in the fire, including Gussie. Rose and Maureen will never be the same. For a brief moment the girls consider returning to Ireland. Then Maureen sums up their decision to stay by saying,

"We should stay here in America. I think we'll be all right from now on. Because, as long as we live, we'll never have another day as terrible as the twenty-fifth of March 1911" (Chapter 31, p. 233).

The girls decide to stay. Rose realizes the importance of Gussie's work with the union and decides to take up the work and to move forward.

chapters 1-5

chapters 1-5 Summary

Chapter 1 begins with a family crossing over the Atlantic from Ireland to America. The main character is Margaret Rose who is traveling from Cork, Ireland to New York. The story is shared from Margaret's perspective: "There was no use tryin' to sleep. This was the last night we'd be tossed by the waves in our narrow bunks. We were due to pull into New York Harbor at dawn, puttin' an end to the most unbearable two weeks of my life" (p. 3).

Margaret Rose's mother, younger sisters Maureen and Bridget, and baby brother, Joseph also are traveling. The voyage had taken two weeks and Margaret Rose declared that those two weeks had been unbearable, particularly because the family was staying in steerage with many other people and their families, headed to New York in search of a better life.

The quarters in steerage were extremely cramped. It is February and Margaret Rose claims she has forgotten what the sun looks like. Unable to sleep, Margaret Rose sneaks out of the bunk she shares with Bridget and goes up on deck. The only person there in the gray dawn is the same man that is always up on deck. He points out the Narrows to Margaret Rose and tells her that New York Harbor is right on the other side. Margaret Rose runs back to the sleeping compartment to wake her family and to tell them about the arrival. Margaret Rose is desperate to see the Statue of Liberty. "Ma" insists that the children make themselves presentable and pack their belongings before going up on deck.

On the top deck everyone is crammed to the low side of the deck to see Lady Liberty. The boat lists with the weight and some think that the boat is going to sink. People ignore orders to move back toward the center of the boat. Margaret Rose disobeys Ma and takes Bridget to the spot where she can see the Statue of Liberty for the first time. The statue captivates Margaret Rose.

In Chapter 2, it is time to disembark. First and second class passengers exit onto the dock while the steerage passengers go to Ellis Island. It is a two hour wait before the family can leave the ship. Margaret Rose observes Ellis Island, "We had heard many tales of Ellis Island - the place where the immigration officials decided whether or not ye were fit to enter America's gates" (p. 11).

The medical examinations at Ellis Island are not pleasant. Margaret Rose tries to be brave but flinches at the eye exam. It is learned that Joseph is ill and did not pass the examination. Joseph will not be allowed to enter America. Margaret Rose fears that the trip has been in vain.



In Chapter 3, Michael (Da) decides that he will be the one to take Joseph back to Ireland. Michael says he will work to pay for a return trip. If Joseph is well by then, he will bring the baby with him otherwise, Joseph will be left in the care of his mother. Margaret (Ma) argues that her baby should not be taken away from her. Michael argues that it makes sense. At six months old, Joseph will be fine. Margaret needs to care for the children; besides there is not enough money for everyone to return to Ireland.

The examiner separates the family. Michael takes Joseph away while the rest of the family goes into another waiting room.

In Chapter 4, the family is finally called to answer a final set of questions. The examiner does not want to allow them to enter without Michael, who is their only real means of support. Margaret finally convinces the man that she and Margaret Rose are seamstresses and that seems to satisfy the man. On the spot Margaret Rose decides to change her name to Rose because she wants to be different. Finally, the family is allowed to leave and meet Michael's brother Patrick.

In Chapter 5, Patrick is not waiting for the family on the pier. People that do not have family or someone to meet them are not permitted to leave. Margaret makes a snap decision and pretends to be a part of a pretend family so that they can leave. Margaret says they will find Patrick and his family on their own.

A policeman saves the family from being swindled by some men from a boarding house. He gives Margaret money for the subway and gives her directions to Patrick's house.

Rose is amazed at the man's kindness and says, "The stories we'd heard back in Ireland were true. The streets in America were indeed paved with gold" (p. 38).

chapters 1-5 Analysis

Margaret Rose and her family are representative of all immigrants that came to the United States in that there is a large amount of eagerness and anxiety to leaving their homeland and starting anew in a strange country. This is more difficult for Ma because her husband is located in the men's quarters, which means the majority of the burden of caring for the children falls on Ma's shoulders. Ma relies heavily on Margaret Rose to help with the children and belongings.

The trip is made difficult by the tight quarters. Margaret Rose compares steerage to fish in a tin.

Leaving Ireland is difficult for many of the passengers. The men joke about being the last to leave the country but not long after the ship sails the men are drinking pints of ale and longing for their homeland. Grandma Nolan had told her son, Margaret Rose's father, that he may be leaving the country but Ireland will always tug at the heart until one returns home. The men on board show Margaret Rose that this is true.



While the children, particularly Margaret Rose and Maureen, are excited about the arrival, Ma takes her time to make sure that everything is in order. If Ma is as excited as the children, she does not show it but rather acts as a determined and organized woman on the brink of a new life.

In Chapter 2, the author's description captures the essence of what it must have been like to arrive at Ellis Island through the eyes of a sixteen-year-old girl.

"Soon we could see Ellis Island up ahead. It looked like a confection, with its four domed turrets and dozens of arched windows edged with cream-colored bricks. It was hard to imagine that this pretty place could hold such terrible disappointment for some of the people on board with us" (Chapter 2, p. 11-12).

Margaret Rose asks Da why he did not warn her and the others about the eye examination. Da wisely says that he did not want her to worry the entire length of the trip. It was feared that Joseph is ill, which explains his wailing day and night on board the ship. It is immediately clear that he will not be permitted to pass. The family has to think quickly about what to do. Margaret Rose's fear of having to return to Ireland is justified.

In Chapter 3, Margaret Rose knows that she is the most logical person to take Joseph back to Ireland. However, she swears that she will jump into the harbor and swim ashore before anyone can force her to get back on the boat. Margaret Rose wants a chance at a good life in New York.

Margaret is inconsolable at the loss of her child and husband, albeit temporary. The thought of her mother-in-law raising her son is unbearable. It will be up to Margaret Rose to hold everything together.

In Chapter 4, Margaret goes through a range of emotions including fear and anger during the time of the questioning. It seems that they will be turned away again when it is learned that Michael has returned to Ireland with Joseph. Margaret's temper flairs but she manages to keep it in check. Rose is relieved when they can finally enter the city.

In Chapter 5, it is Margaret's quick thinking that allows the family to leave the pier. Although Maureen's "sass" often gets her into trouble, it saves the family from being swindled. The cop reinforces Maureen's attitude. Rose is stunned that the policeman is so kind.

chapters 6-12

chapters 6-12 Summary

In Chapter 6, the family arrives at Patrick's house. It turns out that Patrick had never received Michael's letter and so he did not know the family was arriving from Ireland. Patrick's wife, Elsa, and her two daughters, Trudy and Hildegard, are clearly not pleased at having company during dinner. Elsa is even less pleased when she learns that the family will be staying with them until Michael returns from Ireland. Patrick is kind and jovial and says they are delighted to have family from Ireland.

Elsa serves sauerkraut and rye bread for dinner. Rose thinks that the sauerkraut is the worst thing she has ever tasted. Margaret is so excited to be in New York that she does not notice the taste of the food. She and Patrick talk excitedly about the people back in Limerick while Elsa and her daughters exchange looks at the dinner table. The eldest daughter, Trudy, seems to be saying with her eyes that she wants these people to leave immediately.

In Chapter 7, Trudy continues to pull her mother aside to complain. She says the new family smells like goats and it is hard to tell what type of vermin came along from the ship. Trudy and Elsa beat the feather bed for half an hour until they are sure it was satisfactorily clean. Rose eavesdrops on Elsa and Trudy and works hard to keep her temper in check.

The new family is amazed by the invention of indoor plumbing. Rose refers to it as "magic hot water" and is careful not to use more than her share. As Rose falls asleep she tries to sort out the events of the day, saying, "Except Uncle Patrick, they all looked on us as foreigners, and dirty ones at that. I should have felt safe here, but I had a strange dread about our stay with our new American family" (p. 50).

In Chapter 8, the family arises early and gets ready for mass. It seems strange that Uncle Patrick's family is not awake yet. Rose is eager to go outside and look at the neighborhood. Maureen joins her and they talk about their new cousins. Rose tries to assure Maureen that everything will be fine once they get to know each other.

When the girls return to the apartment, it is clear that something is wrong. Elsa is making breakfast. Margaret is chastising Patrick for not going to mass. Patrick says the family is Lutheran. Margaret acts as if someone has struck her. Rudeness and bad behavior are disagreeable but taking Patrick away from the church is another thing entirely. Patrick offers to give Margaret directions to the nearest Catholic Church. Margaret says she will not take directions from a heathen.

In Chapter 9, the family takes off down the street in search of a Catholic Church. Ma is determined to find a place on her own even though she has no idea where she is going. Rose compares her to a soldier on a mission. Eventually, the family finds a Catholic



Church and each feels at ease with the familiar sights and sounds that remind everyone of the church back in Limerick.

On the way home, the family stops at a bakery and purchases a cake with the intention of eating it for lunch. When they arrive at the apartment, Ma sees a note from Elsa saying she has left breakfast on the stove and that it can be reheated.

In Chapter 10, Rose notes that Elsa's demeanor is cold even though she pretends to be gracious about having guests and playing hostess. Rose thinks Elsa has an ulterior motive, saying, "Even though her words were delivered with a smile, there was somethin' in her manner that made me feel she wanted us to appear lazy" (p. 61).

Rose and the others barely see Trudy and Hildegard. Rose mentions going to school. Elsa says it is unwise to start in the middle of a school year. Rose finds out that her cousins go to a fancy private school on Fifth Avenue and are probably worried that Rose, Maureen and Bridget will try to tag along.

Rose eavesdrops on Elsa and Patrick as they talk in the bathroom. Elsa talks about Trudy and her beau, Walter, and how there is no place for them to court now that the guests have taken up the parlor. Patrick says Trudy and Walter can court at his house. Elsa gives up the argument but it is clear that she wants the Irish cousins to leave. She says, "So the real reason Trudy didn't like us was that we were crampin' her style with her beau" (p. 64).

Rose sees her mother cry which is disconcerting. Rose insists on going to look for work. Ma argues but eventually concedes.

In Chapter 11, she says, "I couldn't believe Ma had agreed to let me go out and look for work, but then it occurred to me that she didn't think I'd find anything" (p. 67).

Rose sets out in the morning after Elsa leaves and begins to look for work. She tries to get hired at several locations, some of which are less than friendly. She eventually wanders into a bakery and gets advice from the owner. Rose goes to Chrystie Street to find work at a paper flower operation owned by Mr. Moscovitz. The shop is in a bad part of town. Rose is greeted with derision by the other workers and is called a "greenie." Tessa, one of the other workers, warns Rose that Mr. Moscovitz is a lecherous man and will try to take advantage of her.

In Chapter 12, Mr. Moscovitz learns that Rose lied about being able to make flowers. One of the other girls teaches her. Rose becomes friendly with Tessa, a girl from Russia. Tessa talks about her immigrant father.

Rose tells Mr. Moscovitz that she must be home for dinner. Moscovitz says the shop runs until 8 PM. Rose promises that she will not leave early next time.



chapters 6-12 Analysis

In Chapter 6, it is clear from the beginning that the Nolan family is not welcome at Patrick and Elsa Nolan's home. Patrick is gracious but his wife and step daughters are rude and unwelcoming. It is clear that it will not be long before there is a conflict between the two families.

In Chapter 7, perhaps it is Trudy's unrelenting rudeness that causes Elsa to be slightly more hospitable by offering special soap to Rose. It is clear that the entire American family, save Patrick, wants nothing to do with this immigrant family. Sensing that the daughters are especially concerned about being put out of their rooms, Margaret says they will sleep on the feather bed in the living room. This seems to appease the Americans.

It is unclear at this point if Patrick is aware of the behavior of his wife and step daughters. As Friedrich is a baby, he has no opinion on the matter.

In Chapter 8, Rose begins to feel safe and comfortable now that she knows the family will be going to mass. The church is one place Margaret knows she will find a family of sorts. Learning that Patrick has converted is a major blow to Margaret and she cannot imagine how Michael will react. Margaret blames Elsa for this blasphemy.

In Chapter 9, Ma is finding it harder and harder to cope at Patrick and Elsa's house. Her temper often gets the best of her, a trait she tries to stifle in Maureen. Ma regrets the outburst with Patrick, although she finds it inexcusable that he would leave the Catholic Church.

The family takes great comfort in the Catholic Church and for the first time in a long time, each is filled with a sense of peace.

In Chapter 10, it is clear that there is a division between Elsa and Patrick when it comes to having the Nolans in residence. Patrick is truly happy to play host to his brother's family while Elsa can barely manage to be civil. There is some belief that having the immigrant family under their roof will sully Patrick and Elsa's reputation and cast a shadow upon the children. Elsa is focused on getting Trudy married off and fears that having the other family there will ruin the proposal. Patrick thinks it is nonsense.

The reader may surmise that the situation will come to a head soon and that the families will go their separate ways.

In Chapter 11, Margaret is beginning to break down. Her resistance to the demands of Rose is weakening which can be seen when Margaret gives into Rose's idea to find work. Margaret does not approve but thinks that perhaps an income would shorten their time at Patrick's apartment.

Rose makes a grand effort to find work and is not discouraged by the rejections. It is clear that Rose does not fit in and does not meet the approval of many of the city

people. Colleen Murphy is a kind woman that offers to help. Mr. Moscovitz is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Although it is against Rose's upbringing, she lies to get a job.

In Chapter 12, Mr. Moscovitz catches on to Rose's lies quickly. Rose expects to be fired before she even begins but Moscovitz says he is always looking for people willing to learn. Rose's naiveté is going to be a problem for her if Moscovitz attempts to take advantage of her. Rose is lucky to have Tessa, the only port in the storm with a group of other immigrant girls.

chapters 13-18

chapters 13-18 Summary

In Chapter 13, Rose returns home after work. Elsa shrieks at her, saying they were all worried sick because she was out on the street. Rose says she found work. Trudy says it is a sweatshop and Rose is forbidden to return. Margaret sticks up for Rose. And says she gave the girl permission to go to work.

Elsa rants, "Patrick will put an end to this when he gets home. If Rose's father is not here, then Patrick will decide what's best for her."

Margaret coldly states that she will make decisions for Rose, not Patrick. Elsa tells Margaret that she has no sense at all. Meanwhile, Maureen stands in the background mimicking Elsa.

Margaret finally says that if the place is unsafe then Rose will not return. Rose objects but it falls on deaf ears. Rose goes outside to get some fresh air. Hildegard irritates Rose and Rose snaps at her, calling the girl a dimwit.

Maureen goes out to the fire escape. Rose wants to be alone. Eventually, Trudy puts in her two cents and calls Rose a fool. Trudy says that Rose has humiliated her family.

In Chapter 14, Elsa takes a long time to get ready in the morning which makes Rose late for work. Mr. Moscovitz fires Rose. Rose pleads for a chance to work at home, promising three times more production. Tessa and the other girls become angry, saying that Rose is cheating them out of work.

In Chapter 15, Rose rushes home after work to find Elsa at home. Margaret asks about Rose's walk, explaining to Elsa that Rose just wanted to see the neighborhood. Elsa is suspicious.

After Elsa goes out, Rose lays the flower supplies on the table and begins to teach Margaret and Maureen how to make flowers. Rose becomes uncharacteristically bossy and keeps reminding the others that this is not a game, it is a job.

The family comes home early with Walter in tow. The door opens and everyone sees the flower supplies on the table. Trudy shrieks and faints. Walter is sent home. Elsa tends to Trudy. Hildegard confronts the family and says they have brought shame upon them. Trudy believes that Walter will never want to marry her now. Maureen loses her temper and attacks Hildegard, stuffing her braids into her mouth. Later, Maureen apologizes. Margaret says, "'Well, I don't condone fightin', but that girl's been askin' to have her braids stuffed in her mouth since we got here. I couldn't have done a better job myself.'" (p. 101).

In Chapter 16, after the yelling stops, Patrick joins Margaret in the kitchen. Patrick and Margaret talk about Limerick and their childhoods. It is clear that Margaret and the girls will have to leave. Patrick offers to pay their expenses in a new apartment until Michael arrives and the family gets on its feet. Margaret says she wants to go back to Ireland. Margaret dislikes everything about America and needs to be with her husband and son. Rose panics.

Patrick buys second-class tickets for the family. The ship will sail the next morning. Rose thinks a great deal about what awaits her in Ireland. Rose thinks she will have a much better life in America and wants to stay. Rose does not think it will be possible to convince Ma that she can stay on her own but she is determined to try.

Ma is shocked when Rose proposes staying in New York on her own. Maureen also insists on staying.

Margaret says: "'Ye see what you've done to me America? Ye've taken my two sweet daughters and turned them into headstrong fools. What will ye do to me next?'" (Chapter 16, p. 113).

Rose manages to wear Ma down which is not difficult considering the woman's frame of mind. Rose argues that she cannot bear another two weeks in steerage. In the end, Rose and Maureen are permitted to stay if they promise to go to school, return to Patrick's, and write every day.

The girls begin to look for a place to live. Rose admits to Maureen that she never had any intention of going back to Patrick's apartment. The girls are tired and hungry.

In Chapter 17, Rose and Maureen try not to be discouraged by rejection as they look for a place. It is dark and the girls know they must find something. They find a room for rent by a man named Garoff. The man does not want the girls to stay as he already has a daughter to take care of and does not want more responsibility. The girls talk Garoff into letting them stay at least one night.

Rose and Maureen meet Gussie, Garoff's daughter. Gussie is a savvy young woman involved in the union movement. The girls like each other immediately. Garoff allows Rose and Maureen to stay.

In Chapter 18, Rose and Maureen attend Mass and then spend the rest of the day working on flowers. On Monday morning, Rose returns to the shop and gives the flowers to Moscovitz. Moscovitz tells Rose to come back later.

Rose returns at 8:00 PM after the shop is closed for the day. Moscovitz pretends that many of the flowers are not good enough, which Rose knows is not true. Moscovitz begins to talk about expanding his business and needing a manager. Then Moscovitz kisses Rose. Rose manages to get away and runs out of the shop.

chapters 13-18 Analysis

In Chapter 13, this is the beginning of the end for the Nolan family. Elsa's true colors come out and she confronts Margaret. Rose was right when she said that Elsa thinks they are ignorant. Margaret's temper flares and she is equally vocal with Elsa. While Margaret may not have realized that allowing Rose to go out and look for work could be so dangerous, she would not admit it to Elsa. Margaret does worry about keeping the peace, however, and being appropriately respectful to Elsa.

In Chapter 14, Rose's naivete shines through when she asks Moscovitz to take work home, not realizing that he most likely would pay her half of what he pays the other girls. Tessa is angry with Rose and thinks she is stupid for not understanding what is happening. Rose feels guilty but knows she must do whatever she can to make money and get the family out of Patrick's house.

In Chapter 15, Elsa and her daughters overreact when they catch the Nolans making flowers in the apartment. Trudy's histrionics pay off, however, when Elsa insists that the Nolans leave immediately.

It is up to Patrick to tell Margaret that she and the girls must leave. Patrick is a good man and there is obvious regret in his manner. Part of Patrick loves his new life in America but another part longs for the simplicity of Ireland. Patrick is gracious and kind to Margaret while Elsa hides out in the bedroom.

Chapter 16 is a turning point in the story. Margaret is truly beaten down by America and the situation. This is clear when she puts up relatively little argument to allowing Rose and Maureen to stay. Even Rose is stunned by the lack of argument. Maureen takes advantage of their mother's state of mind to assert herself. Rose believes that Margaret never gave America a chance. Margaret simply wants to return to her husband and a familiar land where things were easier.

It is obvious that Rose has no intention of returning to Patrick's house and will make it on her own. The reader can surmise that there will be difficulties ahead, particularly when it comes to caring for 12-year-old Maureen in a strange city.

In Chapter 17, Mr. Garoff takes pity on the girls although it is clear that he does not want any additional responsibility. While Garoff may seem hard and cold at first, it is clear that Gussie has him wrapped around her little finger and will do as she says. Gussie likes Rose and Maureen and is pleased to be able to help.

In Chapter 18, once again, Rose's naivete causes her a great deal of trouble. Moscovitz will say anything necessary to get what he wants from Rose. Rose becomes somewhat suspicious when Moscovitz begins to talk about managing a new shop. Rose does not understand why Moscovitz is being so nice. When Moscovitz makes a pass at Rose, Rose is horrified and sickened.

chapters 19-24

chapters 19-24 Summary

In Chapter 19, Rose returns home, extremely upset. She ran out of the shop so fast that she left behind her coat. Maureen tries to comfort Rose to no avail. Gussie sends Maureen off with her father and speaks to Rose about the situation. Gussie is angry about what happened and says, "It makes me furious. We fought so hard for our rights, but the owners of these shops don't care. They just do as they please, and nobody stops them" (p. 138).

Gussie says she will try to get Rose a job at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Gussie will teach Rose how to sew using a machine. Rose is heartened by the offer. Gussie insists that they go and confront Moscovitz.

In Chapter 20, Rose and Gussie go to the flower shop and confront Moscovitz. Rose spouts off about having Moscovitz arrested even though it is not a union shop. Rose retrieves her coat. The commotion stirs up the other girls. Moscovitz becomes flustered and pays Rose just to get her to leave.

Maureen is angry that Rose will not permit her to work. Gussie recommends getting Maureen into school as soon as possible.

In Chapter 21, Gussie returns home with Jacob Gerstein, a young man that works as a cutter at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory. Jacob carries a sewing machine that was borrowed for Rose's tutelage. Jacob tries to put Rose at ease but sewing with a machine is vastly different from sewing by hand and it takes Rose a little while to catch on. Maureen also wants to learn but Rose shoos her away.

Garoff comes home and raises a fuss about the sewing machine in the kitchen. Gussie tries to calm him. Jacob leaves. Garoff wants to know if Jacob is courting Gussie. Gussie says they are colleagues and that Jacob is showing Rose how to sew with a machine. Garoff wants Gussie to think about marriage but Gussie says she has far too much work to do.

Garoff replies, "Pah! You and your union. The mice in the walls think they own the whole house. The owners of that factory could fire you all tomorrow and hire what comes off the next boat. You fight a battle you cannot win." (Chapter 21, p. 153).

Gussie retorts, "No, Papa. We fight a battle we cannot lose" (p. 153).

In Chapter 22, it is Rose's first day at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Rose is terrified despite Gussie's attempts to make her feel better. Rose gets a glimpse of a part of the city she has not seen, including Washington Square Park. Rose asks a lot of questions about working at the factory and suddenly wishes that she had gone back to Ireland.



Rose tries to steel herself, reminding herself that this is what she wanted and why she had stayed.

Rose meets three other workers. She learns that Gussie has been demoted due to the trip to Moscovitz's shop.

Rose becomes increasingly nervous. Gussie sits next to Rose and shows her how to operate the machine. Rose says the work is too hard but Gussie assures her that she will catch on. Rose stabs her finger with a needle and ruins a piece of fabric. Mary, who applies first aid, says that it happens to everyone at one time or another.

In Chapter 23, Garoff is upset when he sees that Rose has been injured. Rose goes to her room and listens to the many questions Maureen has about working at the factory. Maureen pokes fun at Rose for sewing her finger.

Rose retorts, "'Ye don't know what it's like. Things aren't as simple as ye think'" (p. 166).

Rose goes back to work and finds that it is easier now that she is becoming accustomed to the routine. Gussie says she has to go to a union meeting at lunch. Rose decides to eat at her machine. Another girl invites Rose to have lunch with her another girl. All three girls are named Rose so they decide to go by their last names. Rose jokes that Klein, Nolan and Bellini sounds like a Vaudeville act. Rose thoroughly enjoys chatting with her new friends. Gussie warns Rose that they are there to work not carry on. Rose likes Gussie but wishes she wasn't always so serious.

Rose is given her first dime store novel to read and is invited to go to the Nickelodeon to see a movie on the weekend.

In Chapter 24, Gussie is upset that Rose left her behind and walked home with the other girls. Gussie says she was worried that Rose might not know the way home. Gussie says that Rose needs to be more serious; Rose says Gussie needs to lighten up and have some fun. Gussie tries to explain the issues at the factory but Rose is not interested. Gussie tells the story of her father's poor eyesight and health and how she is supporting the factory because he cannot work. Gussie is saving to bring her mother and sisters from Russia. That and the union are her only focus. Rose is happy with her work and does not understand Gussie's complaints.

chapters 19-24 Analysis

In Chapter 19, Gussie is much savvier about the way things work in the labor force. Rose is impressed that Gussie knows so much and is enthralled by the stories of the strikes. The thought of confronting Moscovitz is scary but somehow Rose has come to trust Gussie in this short period of time.

Chapter 20 shows that the squeaky wheel does in fact get the grease. Moscovitz only paid Rose off to get her to leave. In the end, she was awarded \$3, which equaled a

week's pay for many. Rose is stunned at what has happened and gains strength from it. Rose feels empowered and is eager to start her new job.

In Chapter 21, Rose is awkward with the machine and also because she is so close to Jacob. Rose is not used to being so close to a man and it makes her uncomfortable. Rose wonders if Gussie has eyes for Jacob but Gussie denies it.

Garoff raises a fuss about the sewing school in his kitchen. Although reminiscent of Elsa's outburst, Garoff is much easier to appease.

Jacob's comments about the man's health spark questions about the situation at the Garoff house. Rose assumes that Gussie supports the family and that Garoff is worried about his daughter's future.

In Chapter 22, Rose is inundated by the new experience of going to work at the factory. Rose has never ridden in an elevator which is frightening. The factory is even scarier than Moscovitz's shop because of the sheer number of people. The forelady, Anna Gullo, says little. Gussie's presence is Rose's saving grace and it is clear that without Gussie by her side, Rose would have fled. Unlike Moscovitz's shop, the girls seem to band together and no one makes fun of Rose's foible. It is unclear whether Rose will stick with the job although it is the best one she is likely to get.

In Chapter 23, things turn around for Rose in this chapter. She meets new friends who want to introduce her to life in America. The other Roses encourage Rose to have some fun and to enjoy the fruits of her labor. Rose thinks about how her life is changing and relishes her new identity as an American working girl.

In Chapter 24, Gussie is upset with Rose and worries about her indulging in frivolous pursuits such as the novel and the nickelodeon. The thought of having fun appeases Maureen, which is a relief to Rose. Rose feels bad about Garoff and the home situation but still wishes that Gussie would have some fun. Gussie's concerns fall on deaf ears. The infractions at the factory will surely cause a problem at some point.

chapters 25-32

chapters 25-32 Summary

In Chapter 25, Rose and Maureen go to the Nickelodeon with Klein and Bellini. Rose is mesmerized by the entire scene, from the movie posters to the throngs of people. Klein flirts with two boys outside the theater. Rose is in awe of Klein's ease with boys as she is always tongue-tied and awkward. Jacob approaches Rose in the crowd. Jacob tries to make conversation but Rose only answers with one word each time Jacob asks a question. Rose wonders if Jacob is attracted to her. Jacob asks questions about Gussie which makes Rose think that he is interested in her.

Maureen talks non-stop and must be reminded to be quiet inside the theater. Rose is excited and stunned at the concept of moving pictures and giggles uncontrollably until an usher tells her to leave. Rose settles down and enjoys the movie.

Rose and Maureen return home. Garoff chastises them for being so late. Rose explains that they went to the Nickelodeon. Garoff scoffs at the activity. Gussie returns home and gets into an argument with Garoff because she has worked on Shabbes. Gussie explains that she has to work the extra day to make up for the cut in pay. Garoff says she did not have to work for the union afterward, that it is sacrilege to work on Shabbes. Gussie explains that the union work came after Shabbes was over. Garoff starts to blame Rose and Maureen - the shiksas - for corrupting Gussie. Gussie sticks up for them, which surprises Rose.

In Chapter 26, Rose enjoys reading the dime store novel given to her at work. She reads it aloud to Maureen although the material may not be appropriate for a 12-year-old. For the first time, Rose is glad to have the company.

Rose thoroughly enjoys working at the factory and has met more girls. She still wishes Gussie would participate and have fun rather than being so serious all the time. The girls joke about their common name and learn that there are seventeen Roses that work at Triangle. Klein gives Rose a new book to read. The girls talk Rose into going to the Nickelodeon again the next weekend. Rose frets about spending money.

Rose finally writes to Ma and Da. She tells them about Garoff and Gussie and her new job as well as seeing her first moving picture.

Rose is at work when she spots Maureen on the shop floor. Rose asks Gussie who is with Maureen. Gussie says it is a subcontractor who hires people to work and then takes part of their pay. Rose is furious and starts to leave her station. Gussie tells Rose to sit down and not to make a scene. If she takes Maureen kicking and screaming from the factory, Maureen will only fight harder and Rose will lose her job. Gussie suggests confronting Maureen at home. Rose is insistent that Maureen will go back to school the next day.

There is a knock-down and dragged-out fight between Rose and Maureen at home. Maureen gives in but refuses to return to school. In the end Rose gives in and tells Maureen that she can work at the factory.

In Chapter 27, it is Saturday. Everyone at the factory is abuzz with plans for the weekend. Rose wears her ashes of roses dress to work since the group is going to go to the Nickelodeon afterward. The day drags on. Rose receives her first pay envelope. It contains \$12 which seems like a fortune. Gussie warns her not to spend it all in one place.

The girls primp in the dressing room, showing off their new spring outfits. Rose wishes she had something nicer to wear although the girls admire her dress and Ma's workmanship.

As everyone is preparing to leave, a fire breaks out and chaos ensues. People are trampled, including Rose. Gussie saves Rose and then attends to an older woman. The workers are locked inside the room. The only way out is to jump from the windows. The firemen's ladders cannot reach the ninth floor. The blankets held by people below are not strong enough to catch jumpers, not are the nets. People plummet to the ground. At the last minute, Rose decides not to jump and watches as her friends fall to their deaths.

In Chapter 28, Rose knows that she cannot survive a jump from the ninth story window. She decides that the only way is to make it to the elevator, which meant running through the flames. Rose dowses herself with water from one of the fire buckets and runs into the crowd. The elevator is making its last trip down. Rose jumps on top of the elevator. Other girls follow, some of which are knocked unconscious by the fall. Rose thinks she is going to make it. Then she remembers Maureen.

In Chapter 29, Rose is frantic and tries to get to Maureen although there is no way of knowing where she might be. Rose sees many dead, including Klein. Rose also thinks about Gussie and wonders where she is and if she is safe. Rose is pushed away from the scene. She goes back to the apartment but it is empty. Rose knows she must return to the scene of the fire.

In Chapter 30, Rose stays at the Asch Building for a long time, clutching Bellini's hat. Rose thinks that she will give the hat to Bellini's family if she ever meets them. Rose continues to look for Maureen but cannot find her. Even though Rose knows staying at the scene is fruitless, she cannot force herself to leave until she learns that information is being given out at a local police station. There is no one there that fits Maureen's description. Rose sees a scrap of her dress in the pile of belongings and nearly faints.

In the crown, Rose hears her name. Maureen and Mr. Garoff approach her. Maureen explains that she went to the dressing room on the ninth floor as Rose had directed her. When the fire broke out, fireman told the girls to go up to the roof. The boys from the university extended a ladder between rooftops and guided the girls to safety.



Garoff asks about Gussie. Rose remembers Gussie had stopped to help the old Italian woman. Rose tries to reassure Garoff. Garoff says he knows in his heart that Gussie is dead.

In Chapter 31, Garoff begins the walk to Twenty-sixth Street where a morgue is set up. Rose and Maureen go with him. Maureen does not want to go but is afraid to be alone. The street is crowded with people looking for their loved ones. Rose thinks how nice it would be to run to Patrick's house to be comforted but knows that Garoff needs her. Maureen stays close to Rose.

Police call out information about artifacts found at the scene. Rose, Maureen and Garoff walk through the crowd. Rose sees Klein and Bellini and identifies them to an officer. Garoff holds Rose up and they walk on.

Maureen spots Gussie. She is burned so badly that she is almost unrecognizable but Maureen recognizes her repaired shoe. Garoff is inconsolable with grief. Rose and Maureen decide that Garoff no longer needs them to help look for Gussie now that she has been found. Rose and Maureen go outside. They discuss what to do next. Rose says she needs time to figure it out. Both girls decide that they want to stay in America even though Ma and Da will never return.

In Chapter 32, Rose and Maureen return to the apartment. They hear voices behind the door. A woman and two men from the morgue are with Garoff. The woman tries to comfort the girls. The woman, whose name is Leah, feeds the girls. Rose and Maureen try to comfort Garoff who is too grief-stricken to say much. Leah tells the girls to get some sleep but the girls are too scared to sleep. Leah sits with them on the feather bed and sings in Yiddish. The girls sleep.

The next morning Rose realizes that she has been battered from the fire. She and Maureen take a long walk. They are afraid to be at the apartment in case Gussie's body is brought back. The girls see Jacob on the street. Jacob is grief stricken. Jacob tells Rose that he was out of the building when the fire started. Jacob also tells Rose that he had proposed to Gussie but that it was a secret.

The little group walks by the union hall. Jacob says he will take Maureen back to the apartment so that Rose can stay at the union hall. Rose thinks about everything that Gussie had said. Rose decides that she will join the union and only work in a union shop. Then she decides that people need to know what happened at the factory and is determined to tell everyone that will listen.

chapters 25-32 Analysis

In Chapter 25, although Gussie does not approve of Rose's frivolousness, she sticks up for her with Garoff. Garoff is afraid that his daughter is losing respect for her heritage.

In Chapter 26, Rose begins to realize how difficult it is to raise one child and is amazed that her mother has raised four children. Rose is pleased to have family nearby and

wonders what Patrick and his family would think if they knew Rose and Maureen had stayed in New York.

Rose is furious with Maureen for disobeying her and not going to school. Maureen makes a good argument about sending money home to Ireland. Although Rose knows it is not wise to allow Maureen to work and not go to school, she sees no way to stop her.

In Chapter 27, a lovely spring Saturday turns tragic when a fire breaks out in the factory. It is unclear if the workers are locked in by accident or on purpose. Rose is panicked but knows that if she jumps she will die. If she stays inside the factory, she will almost surely die. The choice is impossible. The horror of watching friends and co-workers hit the pavement is almost too much to bear.

Chapter 28 is an extremely tense chapter.

Rose manages to make the right decision despite the chaos that surrounds her. Rose has seen many people die already and is determined not to be one of them. The risk to get to the elevator pays off and Rose receives a little comfort when the fireman tells her everything will be okay. Rose is stunned that she had forgotten about Maureen.

In Chapter 29, the scene at the fire is filled with unspeakable horrors - horrors so great that they do not penetrate Rose's mind. Rose berates herself for not thinking of Maureen. She tries to rationalize that someone probably took Maureen to safety.

In Chapter 30, Rose is in shock. When she sees the piece of her dress she nearly faints. The policeman prays that more girls will be safe.

Rose's relief at seeing Maureen is immeasurable. Rose knows that Garoff is probably right, that Gussie is dead. It is ironic that one of the few people that have fought hard for good working conditions may be one of the ones that die because of the infractions.

In Chapter 31, father's intuition is correct. Gussie is dead. Garoff's grief is immeasurable. Rose still has to take charge despite the horrible situation. Maureen shows maturity beyond her years.

In Chapter 32, Rose is incensed that life seems to go on the day after the fire. Jacob says Gussie would be proud of Rose's speech to the girls on the street. Rose still feels helpless and tries to deal with the guilt of Gussie's death. In the end, Gussie does not die in vain as Rose will surely become the next big union supporter.

Characters

Margaret Rose Nolan

Margaret Rose Nolan is the main character in Mary Jane Auch's "Ashes of Roses." Margaret Rose is traveling from Limerick to America with the hope of starting a better life in a country where the streets are paved with gold. The family will stay with Margaret Rose's Uncle Patrick, her father's brother, until Michael Nolan can get on his feet.

Margaret Rose is a 16-year-old girl. She is a good Catholic girl with traditional roots and respect for her parents. Margaret Rose tells the story of arriving in America through her own eyes.

Upon arriving in America, Margaret Rose changes her name to Rose to differentiate herself from all the Marys and Margarets coming from Ireland. Rose is determined to make her way in New York. New York offers untold opportunities for a young woman. In Limerick, Rose would simply finish school, marry, and raise a family. New York offered so much more and Rose is excited to see what the rest of the world outside Ireland has to offer.

Rose's personality begins to change the moment she stands up to her mother and argues for the opportunity to work. Rose learns that she will need every ounce of backbone possible if she is going to stand up to the likes of Trudy and Hildegard. Rose will need to become much savvier if she is going to brave the less than respectable people in the city, such as Mr. Moscovitz. Still, Rose is determined to stay in America, even when Margaret and Bridget return to Ireland. Rose is concerned about caring for Maureen, who is only 12, but manages as best she can.

Rose begins to truly enjoy life when the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire occurs. Rose witnesses unbearable tragedy and manages to survive a day that will change her life forever.

Union Workers

Gussela Garoff is a Woman of Industry. She spends all of her free time campaigning for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and safer conditions for the workers in New York's garment district. Gussie is very serious about the union and often attends meetings to recruit other people that might be interested in joining the union and fighting for safer working conditions, reasonable hours and fair wages.

Rose thinks Gussie is far too serious. Garoff wishes Gussie would focus on getting married so that she will have someone to take care of her. Garoff thinks Gussie is wasting her time.

Garoff replies: "'Pah! You and your union. The mice in the walls think they own the whole house. The owners of that factory could fire you all tomorrow and hire what comes off the next boat. You fight a battle you cannot win'" (Chapter 21, p. 153).

Gussie retorts: "'No, Papa. We fight a battle we cannot lose'" (Chapter 21, p. 153).

Gussie says she has far too much work to do. Gussie schools Rose on the union and the strikes and is frustrated when Rose shows no interest. Rose learns the hard way that unions are necessary and in the end, joins the union to help fight corruption and greed. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire never should have happened and Rose intends to fight so that such a tragedy may never happen again.

Maureen Nolan

Maureen Nolan is the 12-year-old daughter of Michael and Margaret Nolan. Maureen follows in her sister Rose's footsteps and argues that she wants to stay in America. Maureen decides to quit school and goes to work in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory where she barely escapes with her life.

Margaret Nolan

Margaret Nolan is the mother to Rose, Maureen, Bridget, and Joseph Nolan. She is the wife of Michael Nolan. Margaret is a proud and intelligent woman who becomes beaten down by the difficult life of an immigrant and decides to return home to Limerick.

Michael Nolan

Michael Nolan is the father to Rose, Maureen, Bridget, and Joseph Nolan. He is the husband of Margaret Nolan. Michael was the one who most desperately wanted to come to America and to follow in the footsteps of his successful brother. Michael must return to Ireland when Joseph is refused admittance into the country due to an illness.

Patrick Nolan

Patrick Nolan is Michael Nolan's brother. Patrick is a testament to the immigrants' dream of becoming successful in America. Patrick started out as a dock worker and ended up working as a prestigious politician.

Elsa Nolan

Elsa is Patrick Nolan's wife, mother to Trudy, Hildegard, and Friedrich. Elsa is a self-important and overbearing woman who makes life extremely difficult for Margaret and the children.

Mr. Garoff

Mr. Garoff is a Russian Jew who lives in New York with his daughter, Gussela. Mr. Garoff is somewhat grumpy but kind. The man's health suffers from poor working conditions and he must rely upon his daughter for support. After Gussie dies, Garoff decides to return to Russia.

Gussie Garoff

Gussela "Gussie" Garoff is the 18-year-old daughter to Mr. Garoff, the landlord to Rose and Maureen. Gussela Garoff is a Woman of Industry. She spends all of her free time campaigning for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and safer conditions for the workers in New York's garment district. Gussie is very serious about the union and often attends meetings to recruit other people that might be interested in joining the union and fighting for safer working conditions, reasonable hours, and fair wages.

Jacob Gerstein

Jacob Gerstein is the young man that taught Rose how to sew on a machine prior to her work at the Triangle. Jacob secretly loves Gussie. Gussie says it is not time to accept his proposal. Jacob is inconsolable when Gussie is killed in the fire.

Objects/Places

New York City

The majority of the story in "Ashes of Roses" by Mary Jane Auch takes place in various parts of New York City. There are some references to specific landmarks that may be known to the reader. The author mentions some universally recognized places such as Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, Fifth Avenue, the Bowery, Washington Square Park, the Hudson River, the East River, Greenwich Village, Governor's Island, Christopher, Chrystie and Broom Streets, and the Asch Building.

The beginning of the story details what it was like sailing on a ship from Europe to America. The Nolans are in steerage which is much like being a sardine in a can. The trip takes two weeks and is miserable.

The immigrant characters are fascinated and frightened by the streets of New York. Elsa constantly warns them about being in unsafe parts of the city. The Nolans, particularly Rose and Maureen, are unafraid, perhaps more out of naiveté than fearlessness.

The author paints a vivid picture of New York in 1911 with its high fashion, crowded streets, and vendors.

The housing situation is well explained with one-room rentals and small apartments. Many of the immigrants are forced to live in slums due to the poverty level.

Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 is the main event in the book although it takes place at the end of the story. It is the event that changes the lives of many, including Rose Nolan, Maureen, Nolan, Jacob Gerstein, and Mr. Garoff. It is responsible for ending the lives of 146 workers that were either trapped in the building or had jumped to their deaths from the upper floors of the Asch Building.

It is not mentioned what started the fire although it is suspicious in nature. The fire occurred on March 25, 1911. The tragedy is well documented. The author states that a documentary on the tragedy is what inspired her to write the story. At the end of the book, Auch discusses her desire to write the story after being haunted by images of the fire. It was a common misconception that the majority of the workers at the factory were Irish. In fact, there were immigrants from many countries including Germany, Poland, Russia, and Ireland.

In the story it is mentioned that when the workers tried to get out, the doors were locked. The owners of the company were indicted but later acquitted as it could not be proven that the men had ordered the doors to be locked.

Asch Building

The Asch Building is the home of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory and the scene of the tragic 1911 fire that killed 146 people.

Ellis Island

Ellis Island is the first stop made by the immigrants upon their arrival to America. At Ellis Island, people are examined, recorded, and catalogued before being permitted to enter the U.S. or being sent back whence they came.

Chrystie Street

Chrystie Street is the location of Mr. Moscovitz's florist shop.

Limerick, Ireland

Limerick, Ireland is the hometown of the Nolan family.

Uncle Patrick's Apartment

When the Nolans arrive from Limerick they go to Uncle Patrick's Apartment. Patrick is Michael Nolan's brother who had promised to give the family a place to stay upon their arrival and until they could get on their feet in America.

Mr. Garoff's Apartment

Rose and Maureen find a room to let with Mr. Garoff and his daughter, Gussie. The single room is small but can accommodate the girls until they can afford something of their own.

Union

Gussie is a supporter of the union and of unionization of factories. Gussie tries to explain to anyone that will listen that factory conditions are unsafe, the bosses unfair, and that nothing will change without intervention. Rose joins the union after Gussie's death.

Washington Square

Rose and Maureen are enthralled with Washington Square, particularly the arch and all of the activity.

Themes

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 is the main event in the book although it takes place at the end of the story. It is the event that changes the lives of many, including Rose Nolan, Maureen, Nolan, Jacob Gerstein, and Mr. Garoff. It is responsible for ending the lives of 146 workers that were either trapped in the building or had jumped to their deaths from the upper floors of the Asch Building.

It is not mentioned what started the fire although it is suspicious in nature. The fire occurred on March 25, 1911. The tragedy is well documented. The author states that a documentary on the tragedy is what inspired her to write the story. At the end of the book, Auch discusses her desire to write the story after being haunted by images of the fire. It was a common misconception that the majority of the workers at the factory were Irish. In fact, there were immigrants from many countries including Germany, Poland, Russia, and Ireland.

In the story it is mentioned that when the workers tried to get out, the doors were locked. The owners of the company were indicted but later acquitted as it could not be proven that the men had ordered the doors to be locked.

Unions

Gussela Garoff is a Woman of Industry. She spends all of her free time campaigning for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and safer conditions for the workers in New York's garment district. Gussie is very serious about the union and often attends meetings to recruit other people that might be interested in joining the union and fighting for safer working conditions, reasonable hours and fair wages. Rose thinks Gussie is far too serious. Garoff wishes Gussie would focus on getting married so that she will have someone to take care of her. Garoff thinks Gussie is wasting her time.

Garoff replies: "Pah! You and your union. The mice in the walls think they own the whole house. The owners of that factory could fire you all tomorrow and hire what comes off the next boat. You fight a battle you cannot win" (Chapter 21, p. 153).

Gussie retorts: "No, Papa. We fight a battle we cannot lose" (Chapter 21, p. 153).

Gussie says that she has far too much work to do. Gussie schools Rose on the union and the strikes and is frustrated when Rose shows no interest. Rose learns the hard way that unions are necessary and in the end, joins the union to help fight corruption and greed. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire never should have happened and Rose intends to fight so that such a tragedy may never happen again.

Immigrants

Immigrants play a large part in the story. The story begins with the observations of Margaret Rose Nolan, the 16 year old daughter of Margaret and Michael Nolan, who are traveling from Limerick, Ireland to New York to begin a new life in a country where the streets are paved with gold:

"There was no use tryin' to sleep. This was the last night we'd be tossed by the waves in our narrow bunks. We were due to pull into New York Harbor at dawn, puttin' an end to the most unbearable two weeks of my life" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

While the trip is horrible, every single person on the ship believes it will be worth it. It is expensive to go to America but everyone wants the chance for a better life.

The author details the experiences of the immigrants at Ellis Island from the medical examination to the acceptance or refusal of the people depending on the state of their health. It is a heavy blow when baby Joseph is refused and Michael must return to Ireland with him, leaving his wife and four daughters behind.

Perhaps the most sympathetic person to the family is Patrick Nolan, Michael's brother. Patrick is a testament to the immigrants' dream of becoming successful in America. Patrick started out as a dock worker and ended up working as a prestigious politician. The rest of the Nolans want that kind of success but must overcome great barriers to make their way.

Style

Point of View

"Ashes of Roses" by Mary Jane Auch is written in the first-person point of view, through the eyes of the main character, Margaret Rose Nolan, an Irish immigrant. The use of the first person in the story works well in that the reader is able to understand the world of immigrants as well as the point of view of a young woman in a foreign country. The use of first person makes the story relatable to the reader as each can experience the excitement, fear, courage, and determination of a young woman set on becoming all that she can be in America. The experience changes Rose almost immediately. As the story goes on, Rose becomes savvier to the ways of the world and realizes that her journey is going to be much more difficult than she had imagined.

The use of the first person point of view is remarkably powerful during the chapters in which Rose and the others battle for their lives in the Asch Building. Only a first person point of view can accurately portray emotions that would be experienced in such a harrowing situation.

The third-person omniscient point of view may have enabled the reader to get a broader perspective of an Irish immigrant in New York City. However, the use of the first person perspective lends an air of authenticity to the story and allows the character of Rose Nolan to become real.

Setting

The majority of the story in "Ashes of Roses" by Mary Jane Auch takes place in various parts of New York City. There are some references to specific landmarks that may be known to the reader. The author mentions some universally recognized places such as Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, Fifth Avenue, the Bowery, Washington Square Park, the Hudson River, the East River, Greenwich Village, Governor's Island, Christopher, Chrystie, Broom Streets, and the Asch Building.

The beginning of the story details what it was like sailing on a ship from Europe to America. The Nolans are in steerage which is much like being a sardine in a can. The trip takes two weeks and is miserable.

The immigrant characters are fascinated and frightened by the streets of New York. Elsa constantly warns them about being in unsafe parts of the city. The Nolans, particularly Rose and Maureen, are unafraid, perhaps more out of naiveté than fearlessness.

The author paints a vivid picture of New York in 1911 with its high fashion, crowded streets, and vendors.

The housing situation is well explained with one-room rentals and small apartments. Many of the immigrants are forced to live in slums due to the poverty level.

Language and Meaning

The language and meaning used throughout "Ashes of Roses" by Mary Jane Auch reflects on the historical period in a number of ways. It is clear that the people in the stories live in the 1910s, as they speak of particular events and fashions of the time as well as the newness of factory work and moving pictures. Auch does not use a great deal of slang or any language that would date the work in a negative way. There are many examples of the immigrants peppering their speech with slang from their native tongue such as Garoff's use of the word "shiksa" or the ever-present "ye" that is contained in the speech of the newly arrived Irish immigrants.

Auch is a master of language and is not afraid to exercise her vocabulary. There is a marked absence of sex, violence, and vulgarity throughout the stories and it is rare to see any use of profanity. This may be due to the fact that this is a young adult book and the use of those items was not commonplace in the time.

It is easy to see the progression of the work both in the structure and language. The language is more formal in the beginning of the collection and becomes more informal toward the end.

Structure

"Ashes of Roses" by Mary Jane Auch is a work of fiction with a great deal of historical fact added. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 is well documented. A documentary on the tragedy is what inspired Auch to write the story. At the end of the book, Auch discusses her desire to write the story after being haunted by images of the fire. It was a common misconception that the majority of the workers at the factory were Irish. In fact, there were immigrants from many countries including Germany, Poland, Russia, and Ireland.

The story is chronological in nature, beginning with the Nolan's trip from Limerick to New York aboard a ship. The trip is miserable and not everyone survives. Some, like little Joseph, become ill and are rejected at Ellis Island.

The story moves through to the return of Joseph and Michael Nolan and the journey of the rest of the family to Patrick Nolan's house. Rose and Maureen stay in New York after Margaret and Bridget return. Despite difficult situations and the ultimate tragedy, Rose and Maureen decide to make their way in the new world.

The book is broken down into 32 chapters. The shortest chapter is 3 pages in length while the longest chapter is 16 pages in length. The average number of pages in a chapter is approximately 8. There are 246 pages in total.

Quotes

"There was no use tryin' to sleep. This was the last night we'd be tossed by the waves in our narrow bunks. We were due to pull into New York Harbor at dawn, puttin' an end to the most unbearable two weeks of my life" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"We had heard many tales of Ellis Island - the place where the immigration officials decided whether or not ye were fit to enter America's gates" (Chapter 2, p. 11).

"Soon we could see Ellis Island up ahead. It looked like a confection, with its four domed turrets and dozens of arched windows edged with cream-colored bricks. It was hard to imagine that this pretty place could hold such terrible disappointment for some of the people on board with us" (Chapter 2, p. 11-12).

"The stories we'd heard back in Ireland were true. The streets in America were indeed paved with gold" (Chapter 5, p. 38).

"Even though her words were delivered with a smile, there was somethin' in her manner that made me feel she wanted us to appear lazy" (Chapter 10, p. 61).

"So the real reason Trudy didn't like us was that we were crampin' her style with her beau" (Chapter 10, p. 64).

"I couldn't believe Ma had agreed to let me go out and look for work, but then it occurred to me that she didn't think I'd find anything" (Chapter 11, p. 67).

"Well, I don't condone fightin', but that girl's been askin' to have her braids stuffed in her mouth since we got here. I couldn't have done a better job myself" (Chapter 15, p. 101).

"Ye see what you've done to me America? Ye've taken my two sweet daughters and turned them into headstrong fools. What will ye do to me next?" (Chapter 16, p. 113).

"It makes me furious. We fought so hard for our rights, but the owners of these shops don't care. They just do as they please, and nobody stops them" (Chapter 19, p. 138).

"Pah! You and your union. The mice in the walls think they own the whole house. The owners of that factory could fire you all tomorrow and hire what comes off the next boat. You fight a battle you cannot win" (Chapter 21, p. 153).

"Ye don't know what it's like. Things aren't as simple as ye think" (Chapter 23, p. 166).

Topics for Discussion

What made the Nolans decide to come to America? Whose idea was it? What was the opinion of each of the family members? Was it a wise decision?

Examine the process at Ellis Island. What does each person have to go through to be admitted to the US? What happens with the Nolan family? What is the solution?

Discuss what might have happened if Michael and Joseph had stayed. How do you think the family would have fared? Would Margaret still want to return to Limerick?

Elsa, Trudy and Hildegard are painted as villains regarding their treatment of the immigrant cousins. Examine the story from their point of view.

Discuss the presence and formation of unions in the early 1900s. Examine the strikes discussed by Gussie. How did the strikes affect the workers?

Examine the tragedy at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. What do you think was the cause? Do you think the workers were purposely locked inside? If so, why?

What do you think happens with Rose and Maureen after the fire? Where will they go? Will they stay in New York? How might Rose become a union devotee?