

Beautiful Ruins Study Guide

Beautiful Ruins

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Plot Summary

Beautiful Ruins is a novel by Jess Walter. This novel moves back and forth in time, telling the story of the lives of five separate characters. Each character will interact with the others in unique and fascinating ways. It all revolves around an actor and the starlet who loves him. Beautiful Ruins is a novel that highlights the apparent insignificance of a single life while exploring the many ways in which one person can unwittingly impact the lives of many others.

Pasquale Tursi is a young man who has recently left college to care for his elderly mother in the aftermath of his father's death. With his mother, come an eccentric aunt and a hotel on the most inhospitable village off of the coast of Italy. Pasquale spends his days trying to figure out ways to entice visitors to his hotel, including the building of a beach and a tennis court. The hotel rarely has visitors. Therefore, Pasquale is surprised when a young American starlet comes to the hotel.

The starlet, Dee Moray, is an actress from the film shooting in Rome, Cleopatra. Dee is sick, however, and has been sent to stay on the village until a friend can meet her and together they can move on to Switzerland where she will receive treatments for her illness. However, in the course of her stay, Pasquale discovers that she is not ill with cancer, as she believes, but that she is pregnant. When Dee's friend never arrives, Pasquale takes it upon himself to travel to Rome and find him. Pasquale confronts Michael Deane, the man whose name appears on a paper directing Dee to his hotel. Pasquale thinks Deane is the friend Dee is waiting for.

Deane confirms that Dee is pregnant and that the doctor told her she had cancer as a favor to Deane. Deane had planned to send Dee to Switzerland to receive an abortion without her knowledge. Deane gives Pasquale an envelope full of money for himself and Dee. Before Pasquale can leave, someone takes him to speak with Richard Burton, the actor. Burton tells Deane that he is Dee's lover and the baby is his. Pasquale agrees to take Burton to Dee, but when they arrive at Pasquale's hotel, Dee is gone. The owner of a nearby hotel on another village has convinced Dee that she was taken to the wrong hotel and her friend is waiting on the other village. Pasquale takes Burton to Dee on the other village.

A few days later, Pasquale's mother dies. A writer, Alvis Bender, arrives for his annual vacation. Deane and Burton return, searching for Dee. After Burton and Deane leave, Pasquale walks up to an old World War II bunker he showed to Dee during her stay and finds her hiding there. Pasquale takes Dee back to his hotel and introduces her to Bender. The following day, Pasquale leaves, but not before asking Bender to make sure Dee makes it back to America safely.

Many years later, Michael Deane is a successful movie producer who has fallen on bad times. In the past ten years, he has only had two hits and one is a questionable reality show. His chief development assistant, Claire Silver, has become so disillusioned by the lack of good film scripts that she is considering taking another job. Claire decides that



she will make her decision based on whether or not a good movie script will be presented to her during Wild Pitch Friday. However, it does not go well and she has almost decided not only to change jobs, but to break up with her boyfriend as well, when she returns to the office and finds Shane, a script writer, and Pasquale Tursi waiting for her.

Pasquale tells Claire that he is looking for Dee Moray and he wants Deane's help finding her. When Deane hears the name, he rushes to the office to speak to Pasquale. Shane has stayed to help translate Pasquale's Italian. Shane insists on pitching his movie before he will agree to stay the weekend as Pasquale's translator. Claire finds Shane's pitch ridiculous, but Deane agrees to produce it. Claire later realizes that Deane wants to use Shane's pitch as a way of getting out of his contract with the movie studio. Shane does not mind since he will make a significant amount of money out of it.

Deane's private detective finds Dee Moray quickly. Dee's real name is Debra Moore Bender. She left Italy without getting an abortion and gave birth to a son she named Pasquale but calls Pat. She then married Alvis Bender, but he died in a car accident less than four years into their marriage. Dee then became a high school drama and Italian teacher. Pat grew up to become a failed rock musician and an addict. Pat turned his life around, however, and now lives with his mother and girlfriend in Idaho where they run a community theater program together. Dee is dying of cancer.

When Deane, Pasquale, Claire, and Shane arrive at Dee's house, everyone becomes aware immediately that Deane has arranged this meeting with the idea of exploiting the fact that Pat is Richard Burton's son. Dee has not told Pat the truth of his paternity, so she is forced to do so. Pat and his girlfriend decide to sell the rights to a play she wrote, but not to sell the rights to Pat's life. Dee and Pasquale make a visit to Italy where Dee meets Pasquale's children and grandchildren. Claire decides to remain with Michael Deane productions where she produces the movie version of the play Pat's girlfriend wrote. Shane uses the money he made from his movie pitch to pay back his ex-wife and to focus on his writing.



Chapters 1-4

Summary

Chapter 1. The Dying Actress. April 1962. Porto Vergogna, Italy.

Pasquale Tursi is working on the cliffs outside his family's hotel, Adequate View Hotel, on his man-made beach. Pasquale spots his friend, Orenzio, piloting his boat toward the village. Orenzio pilots his boat for Gualfredo, the rich hotelier who runs hotels on the nearby village of Portovenere. Therefore, Pasquale assumes Orenzio has made a mistake when he stops at Porto Vergogna. No one ever comes to the Adequate View Hotel despite the efforts of Pasquale's father to create a resort for American tourists. In fact, the only foreign guest they ever get is a car salesman from America who comes once a year to work on his novel about World War II.

When Orenzio greets Pasquale, Pasquale asks if Orenzio has come to the right place. Orenzio shows Pasquale a paper directing this woman to his hotel. The woman, whose name is Dee Moray, is an American actress working on the film Cleopatra, which is filming in Rome. Orenzio tells Pasquale that Dee is sick and she has come here to rest and to wait for a friend to join her before going on to Switzerland. Pasquale helps the woman up to the hotel, falling in love immediately with her unique beauty.

Chapter 2. The Last Pitch. Recently. Hollywood, California.

Claire Silver wakes early when the sprinklers come on outside her bedroom window. Claire is annoyed with her boyfriend who clearly spent too much time at the strip clubs the night before and snuck in after she went to bed. As Claire stirs, she checks her phone for messages. A message from the Museum of American Screen Culture immediately catches her attention. It is in regards to an interview she had for the curator's job at the museum. Claire is pleased to see that they want to see her again. Claire believes this means she will be offered the job. However, Claire still has not decided if she wants the job. Claire is the chief development assistant to Michael Deane. Claire began her career with Deane in the hopes of making a good movie. So far, however, they have only made one movie and a reality television show, neither of which Claire feels is good. She still has hope. For this reason, she decides to put off her decision until after Wild Pitch Friday. She hopes someone will make a pitch for a good film and she can remain a part of film making instead of a curator of past films.

As Claire decides to put off her career decision, Shane Wheeler prepares to fly to California to make a pitch to Claire. Shane has had a difficult year, beginning with his divorce, his disillusionment in regards to his family motto, 'act as if ye have faith and it shall be given to you', and the failure of his recent book of short stories. Shane hopes this movie pitch will be his salvation as a writer and a man. However, Shane gets lost on the way to Deane's offices. Claire leaves when he does not show up. When Shane finally arrives, he finds Pasquale Tursi waiting outside the office door. Claire returns to



the office to pick up a tape for her boyfriend and finds the two men waiting. Not eager to go home to a boyfriend she is considering breaking up with, she allows the men to come inside. Claire thinks Pasquale is there to present a movie idea, so she is confused when he starts talking about Dee Moray. Shane, who spent a semester in Italy, translates and gets the idea across to Claire that Pasquale is looking for an actual person.

Chapter 3. The Hotel Adequate View. April 1962. Porto Vergogna, Italy.

Pasquale waits around for Dee Moray to come downstairs her first day there, but she spends most of the day in her room. In the evening, he takes her some of the soup his aunt made, but she refuses. The fishermen who eat at the trattoria gossip about Dee as they have their dinner. Pasquale ignores them, finding their sexual comments offensive. Pasquale visits his mother who has taken to her bed with depression. Pasquale's mother has heard about Dee's arrival and she encourages Pasquale to marry her.

Orenzio returns, this time with Gualfredo, the hotelier from Portovenere. Gualfredo accuses Pasquale of stealing a guest meant to stay at his hotel. Pasquale argues. However, when Gualfredo also tells Pasquale that he was supposed to pay a security tax, Pasquale becomes frightened of Gualfredo's large security guard, Pelle, and pays the fee.

Dee comes out on the porch early the next morning. Dee and Pasquale have a conversation in English that is stilted on Pasquale's part. However, he understands most of Dee's philosophizing. Dee talks about how she is unsure where her story begins in life. She also talks about her desire to be an actress and how the people in her small community theater raised the money to send her to Hollywood. Dee tells Pasquale how excited she was to get a job on the movie, Cleopatra, and how disappointed she is now that her illness has caused her dream to end.

Pasquale had two brothers. Both his brothers died during World War II. It was while consoling his wife over the death of her sons that Pasquale was conceived. Considered a miracle child, Pasquale's parents moved to Porto Vergogna in order to raise him in a protected environment. It took a great deal of persuasion to convince his parents to allow him to attend university in Florence. When his father died, Pasquale was forced to return to Porto Vergogna to care for his mother.

During the night, Pasquale hears Dee Moray getting sick in the bathroom upstairs. Pasquale goes to her. Pasquale summons his aunt to help her and then sends the fisherman Tommaso to get the doctor. The doctor examines Dee and tells Pasquale that he does not believe she has stomach cancer as her American doctor has told her. Instead, the doctor believes Dee is simply pregnant and having unusually severe symptoms.

Chapter 4. The Smile of Heaven. April 1945. Near La Spezia, Italy. The first chapter of Alvis Bender's unfinished book.



It is spring and the war is ending. Alvis and his squad are marching through Italy. Alvis's is having difficulty with his feet. No matter how often he changes his socks, his feet are always wet and covered with bugs. The pain is so bad that Alvis thinks about shooting himself in the foot so that he might go home immediately. Alvis shares this idea with his good friend, Richards. The day Alvis decides to do this, he meets an Italian girl. This girl is walking home close to where Alvis and Richards have set up an OP. Alvis is so happy to see a friendly face that he decides to walk the girl home. Alvis and the girl talk. He learns her name is Maria and she has several brothers who have each gone off to war. She worries they are all dead. Alvis tells her of the novel he hopes to write based on his experiences in the war. Alvis then attempts to steal a kiss or two. Maria stimulates him manually and then allows him to cry against her breasts. It is a moment Alvis has never forgotten. A short time later, Richards dies of an infection. Alvis is overwhelmed with survivors guilt because he has nothing waiting for him at home but a job at his father's car dealership, but Richards had a wife and son. Alvis delivers a Luger to Richards' son he knew Richards admired.

Analysis

The early chapters of this novel introduce all of the central characters. The first is Pasquale Tursi. Pasquale is the young son of a failed hotelier. Carlos, Pasquale's father, bought a hotel in a village north of Cinque Terre, five beautiful villages that are popular with tourists. Carlos' village, however, is a rocky village that has no luxuries. In fact, it was once a place where prostitutes lived, earning it the name of Vergogna, meaning shame. It was Carlos's dream to turn his hotel into a destination for American tourists and Pasquale tries to carry on this dream by building a beach and scheming to build a tennis court above the cliffs. Pasquale once dreamed of a life off the village, but his father's death and his mother's subsequent depression have required him to come home.

Dee Moray is an actress whose first acting job was as a lady's maid to Cleopatra in the movie, Cleopatra. However, Dee has become ill and has been told by an American doctor that she has stomach cancer. Pasquale, who fell in love with Dee from the moment she stepped off the boat at his dock, tries to take care of her. In order to do this, he must call for a doctor in the middle of the night when Dee becomes very sick. The doctor tells Pasquale that Dee is more likely pregnant than suffering cancer. This suggests a secret and manipulation on the part of whoever sent Dee to Pasquale's village.

Claire Silver is chief development assistant to Michael Deane, a movie producer. Claire has always wanted to make an important, quality film and this is why she took this job. However, after ten years, all Claire has produced is a popular horror film and a reality television series. Claire has become disillusioned that she will ever produce the type of movie she wants. For this reason, Claire is considering taking another job. As she struggles with this decision, she meets Pasquale Tursi and becomes wrapped up in his story.



Shane Wheeler is a failed writer who wants to become a screenwriter. Shane is something of a loser, still living at home with his parents with a failed marriage under his belt before the age of thirty. However, Shane has been to Italy, so when he meets Paquale Tursi, he is able to translate for him. This gives Shane an in with Michael Deane and Claire Silver.

Michael Deane has not been introduced at this point of the novel. However, the reader learns that he is the man who sent Dee Moray to Porto Vergogna, but the reason for this is unclear. It is possible Deane is the father of Dee's child. Later, the reader learns that Deane is a movie producer who had great success in the seventies and eighties, but whose productions have been less than successful since.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Pasquale attempting to build a beach on stone? What does he hope will come of this beach? Is this the same reason he wants to build a tennis court on a cliff?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Dee Moray? What movie is she working on? Who else was in this movie? What is significant about this time period and the film?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Claire Silver? Why does she want to make good movies? What kind of movies has she made thus far? Why is she considering a change in profession? How is Claire's attitude about her work similar to Shane Wheeler's?

Vocabulary

Luger, glorious, delicately, fruition, mastery, technique, maneuver, encounters, deflect, presence, snuffling, happened, caressing, managed, reminisce, hospitable, partisans, retreating, fortifications, normalcy, discomfort, bilingual, epilogue, economy, retreating, starving, identifying, insignia, wrestled, wayward, coveted, redeem, desertion, trained.



Chapters 5-8

Summary

Chapter 5. A Michael Deane Production. Recently. Hollywood Hills, California.

Michael Deane is lounging beside the pool behind his house when his Viagra pill kicks in. Deane goes into the house to find his much younger wife when the phone rings. It is Claire. Claire is speaking quickly and Deane cannot figure out what she wants. However, when she says the name Dee Moray, Deane drops the phone.

Claire and Shane wait for Deane outside his office, as requested. Deane asks about Pasquale Tursi as soon as he arrives, wondering what Pasquale has said. Deane speaks with Pasquale, with help from Shane, and learns that Pasquale wants to find Dee Moray. Deane apologizes for the way he acted all those years ago and promises to help Pasquale. Deane begins barking orders, including telling Claire to put Pasquale and Shane in a hotel. Shane, however, refuses to give any more help until Deane listens to his movie pitch.

Chapter 6. The Cave Paintings. April 1962. Porto Vergogna, Italy.

Pasquale takes Dee on a hike into the hills over his village. They reach the highest peak and look out at the beautiful view of the ocean. Then Pasquale takes Dee to a pillbox bunker built during the war by German soldiers to watch for enemy soldiers. Inside there are four paintings, two of the soldiers who were stationed there and two of the same, pretty girl. Dee and Pasquale guess that the pretty girl was the painter's girlfriend and she wonders if he made it back to her at the end of the war. This leads to a discussion of love. Dee admits to having a love whom she believes will meet her on Porto Vergogna soon. Pasquale tells her about his own love, a girl he left behind in Florence.

Dee's friend does not come the day he is expected. That night, Pasquale sits outside the bathroom, holding her hand as she vomits. Pasquale tries to reassure Dee even as she makes the decision to go on to Switzerland without her friend. Pasquale decides to go to Rome to find Dee's friend. He leaves his aunt in charge of Dee.

On the train, Pasquale thinks of Dee and her friend. He also thinks of his own love. When the train stops in Florence, Pasquale decides to get off. He waits for his girlfriend in the same spot he once waited for her. Amedea, Pasquale's girlfriend, is older than him. When she refused to marry the man her father chose for her, her father insisted that she remain unmarried for the rest of her life. Amedea would take lovers. Amedea seduced Pasquale while he was a student and taught him the joys of love making, but always laughed whenever he talked of a future together. When Amedea became pregnant, Pasquale suggested they get married, but Amedea refused. Instead, she went away during her pregnancy and then gave the baby to her parents to raise. Pasquale and Amedea share a cigarette and then she leaves.



Chapter 7. Eating Human Flesh. 1846. Truckee, California. Shane Wheeler's movie pitch: Donner!

William Eddy is a frontiersman who decides to move his family from Missouri to California. They join the Donner party. Eddy is aware that they have left too late and are making slow progress, but when he warns the leaders, they scoff at him. As the group attempts to cross the Rockies, they become trapped by heavy snow. Eddy is stuck with a group that was slightly ahead of the rest of the party. Eddy builds a cabin for his family. From the beginning they lose their food source when the snow buries their livestock. Eddy goes hunting each day, but the snows eventually scare off most of the game.

When their food is about to run out, Eddy decides to take a group out of the mountains to get help. On the walk out of the mountains, all but five women and three men die. Two of the men, Indian scouts, run away when the other male left, Foster, suggests they kill and eat the Indians as they did the bodies of the dead. Eddy eventually makes it to a settlement and sends help back to his group. When Eddy learns that soldiers who have gone into the mountains to rescue the rest of the party have left the weak and the children behind, Eddy and Foster return themselves. Foster's son is still alive, but Eddy discovers that his son has been killed and eaten by a German member of the party. Eddy remarries twice, but never overcomes the darkness of his past.

Chapter 8. The Grand Hotel. April 1962. Rome, Italy.

When Pasquale arrives at the Grand Hotel, he shows the paper with which Dee arrived at Porto Vergogna with Michael Deane's name on it. Pasquale is directed to a small ballroom where there is a long line of people. When it is Pasquale's turn, a man asks him several questions and then directs him to a bus. The bus takes Pasquale to an arena where he is put in line for a costume. Pasquale is approached by two people who ask him if he would be willing to play a slave. Pasquale explains to them that he does not want to be in the movie, he simply wants to talk to Michael Deane. When Pasquale mentions Dee Moray, the couple put him in a car and send him back to the Grand Hotel. There, Pasquale is forced to wait several hours before he is finally directed to Deane. Pasquale punches Deane in the chest the moment he sees him.

Deane explains to Pasquale that Dee Moray is pregnant and that he had a doctor lie to her about her illness in order to keep the news of her pregnancy from becoming public. Deane says that he intended for Dee to go to Switzerland to have an abortion without ever being aware she was pregnant. Deane then gives Pasquale several photographs from the set of the movie and an envelope stuffed with money. Deane asks him to send Dee to Switzerland with the message that her friend could not make it to Porto Vergogna. As Pasquale is leaving, a woman approaches him and tells him someone would like to speak to him.



Analysis

The reader finally meets Michael Deane. Deane has a profound reaction to the news that Pasquale Tursi is searching for Dee Moray. The reader, who knows that Deane is the one who sent her to Porto Vergogna, wonders if this is because he was the father of her child. Deane seems to confirm this idea when Pasquale later locates him and Deane tells him that Dee is, in fact, pregnant and that he was trying to send her to Switzerland to have an abortion without knowing she was pregnant. Deane is a cruel man, especially if this is his child, to treat Dee in such a way. The reader, however, should remember the time period in which this novel is set and how that might impact Deane's actions. At the same time, the reader must remember that Dee was working on a movie with some very famous actors at the time. It would have been difficult for the movie's publicity department to handle the scandal of an actress becoming pregnant out of wedlock.

Pasquale and Dee spend some time together. Pasquale clearly is attracted to Dee and feels empathy for her situation. Dee seems to like Pasquale, as well. They talk about life, about the movies, and about love. If nothing else, a strong friendship has developed. Pasquale is so concerned about Dee that he travels to Rome to find her friend in order to help her. On the way, Pasquale stops to visit his former girlfriend. It is then that the reader learns Pasquale has a son that he has chosen not to take responsibility for. This sheds a new light on Pasquale, highlighting his immaturity and his naivety.

Discussion Question 1

Why did German soldiers have a pillbox on Porto Vergogna? What was it used for? What does Pasquale show Dee inside the pillbox?

Discussion Question 2

How did Michael Deane know Dee Moray? What did he do to her? How does Pasquale know Deane? Why has Pasquale come to Deane to find Dee?

Discussion Question 3

What is Shane's movie pitch about? How does Eddy become a hero in the story? What is tragic about Eddy's story?

Vocabulary

Frozen, groan, interpreter, centurion, different, piazza, betrayals, responsibility, realization, remain, authenticity, actress, interesting, imagined, appeared, beautiful,

genuine, dissolving, cancer, advised, unwanted, accusing, dishonest, cruel, symptoms, analytical, sculpted, concentrated, obviously, intentions.



Chapters 9-12

Summary

Chapter 9. The Room. Recently. Universal City, California.

Claire begins to laugh almost hysterically after Shane finishes his pitch. She finds his story idea ridiculous. Deane, however, agrees to produce the film, ordering Claire to arrange a meeting with the studio on Monday and offering Shane ten thousand dollars to write the treatment.

Deane asks Pasquale if Dee Moray had her baby. Pasquale shows Deane a baby announcement with a personal note to Pasquale from Dee. Dee named her baby boy Pasquale. Claire walks Deane out, complaining about Shane's film. Claire then asks Deane if the baby is his. Deane says if there is a child, it is the only child he will ever have.

Chapter 10. The UK Tour. August 2008. Edinburgh, Scotland.

Pat Bender is a failed rock star. He once was the lead singer for the band the Reticents. They produced three albums, but then broke up. Pat has been making a living giving music lessons and performing a musical comedy routine in bars. One night Pat's show is seen by a young Scotsman, Joe. Joe tells Pat his show would sell well in Scotland and England. Joe tells Pat if he can get to London, he will arrange some gigs for him. Pat calls in some favors and gets a few friends to lend him money. When he arrives in London, Pat stays with Joe's friends Kurtis and Umi. Joe spends most of his days touring the free museums in London because he is broke and Joe's friends tend to sleep all day. One day Pat goes into a music store and asks for copies of his band's albums. The guy tells him the Reticents are no longer relevant. This leaves Pat depressed and he ends up sleeping with Umi.

Joe and Pat go to Edinburgh for the Fringe Festival. Pat does really well, steadily building an audience. However, Joe learns about Pat sleeping with Umi. Joe has a crush on Umi and this news devastates him. He disappears with Pat's paycheck. Pat bombs his next show and is fired. Pat manages to get back to London, but Kurtis punches him when Pat goes to Kurtis' apartment in search of Joe. Pat calls his mother only to have his former girlfriend, Lydia, answer the phone. Pat's mother has cancer and is undergoing chemo therapy again. Lydia is there to help her. Lydia hangs up on Pat.

Chapter 11. Dee of Troy. April 1962. Rome and Porto Vergogna, Italy.

Pasquale finds himself riding shotgun in a car driven by the legendary actor Richard Burton. It turns out that Michael Deane was not Dee's friend, Burton was. Burton had not known that Dee was pregnant or that Deane had sent her away in hopes of getting her an abortion before anyone found out. After Pasquale tells Burton his story, Burton insists that Pasquale take him to Dee. They drive to the coast, Burton drinking heavily



the whole way, and hire a boat to take them to Porto Vergogna. When they arrive in Porto Vergogna, they learn that Gualfredo returned and convinced Dee that she was brought to the wrong village. Gualfredo told her her friend was waiting on Portovenere for her. Dee went with them. Burton, Pasquale, and the fishermen decide they must rescue Dee immediately. For that reason, Pasquale, Burton, and Tommaso take Tommaso's boat to Portovenere. Burton is directed to Dee's room. Pasquale sits outside while Burton explains the situation to Dee. After a time, Dee comes out and tells Pasquale she is okay, but she is going to stay with Burton.

Chapter 12. The Tenth Pass. Recently. Los Angeles, California.

Claire wakes in a hotel room with Shane. They had drinks in the bar when they arrived the night before and began to make out. They moved to the room, but fell asleep before anything more happened. Claire looks at her phone and discovers that her boyfriend texted her multiple times during the night, leaving her feeling a little better about their relationship.

Claire receives a text from Michael Deane's business partner, Danny Roth. From the message, Claire realizes that Deane is not serious about Shane's movie pitch. Instead, Deane knows the pitch is bad and the studio will pass on it. This will be the tenth pitch they will pass on in five years, meaning that they have to let Deane out of his contract. Deane is using Shane. When Claire tells Shane this, he begins to think he could get more than ten thousand dollars out of Deane.

Analysis

Deane agrees to pursue Shane's movie even though Claire believes it is a bad movie. No one will want to see a movie where the hero loses everything. Therefore, it is hardly a surprise to the reader to see that Deane is only using Shane to get out of a contract that restricts his earning potential. Deane is clearly only interested in the fame and money that comes with his profession. This should warn the reader that Deane's intentions with Pasquale are not as honest as they appear.

Deane tells Claire that Dee's baby is his, but in a following chapter the reader learns that the baby was actually fathered by Richard Burton, the legendary actor. The reader must wonder if Deane honestly believed the child was his, or if his assertion that it is more metaphorical.

Richard Burton is a legendary actor who first began his career on the stage. Burton became a famous movie actor with the release of Cleopatra. However, what really got Burton's name in the public conscience was the affair he had with Elizabeth Taylor on the set. Taylor was married to her fourth husband at the time. That husband, Eddie Fisher, was a man Elizabeth Taylor took from his prior wife, Debbie Reynolds, and their two children. Taylor did not have a good reputation when it came to her romantic relationships. At the same time, however, Burton was also married to his first wife and also had two children. It was these complications, and the Taylor-Burton marriages that



followed, that kept the gossip mills jumping at the time. Therefore, the fact that Burton also got a minor actress on the set pregnant could have had long reaching consequences for everyone involved. This might explain the reason why Dee was lied to about her pregnancy and she was sent away.

The reader also learns that Dee had her child. It was a boy named Pasquale, Pat for short. Pat grew up to be a failed rock star and a drug addict who eventually burned so many bridges that he found himself stranded in London at one point. The reader also learns that, ironically, after believing she had stomach cancer as a young twenty-two year old, she has cancer for real now that she has reached her sixties or seventies.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Deane interested in knowing if Dee Moray had a child? Why does he tell Claire the child is his?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Deane want to pitch Shane's movie idea to the studio? How does Shane react to this news? What does this say about Deane's character? Shane's character?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Richard Burton? Why does he want to find Dee Moray? What news does he have for her? How does Dee respond?

Vocabulary

Familiar, natural, contract, fraud, preparing, furrowing, obligation, material, stipulates, period, developed, potentially, basically, development, intention, framing, temple, treatments, electronic, moronic, shorthand, tortured, wonder, cornucopias, cannibalism, escaped, optimistic, destroyed, unlikely, expensive, commercial.



Chapters 13-16

Summary

Chapter 13. Dee Sees a Movie. April 1978. Seattle, Washington.

Dee goes by her birth name now, Debra Moore. Dee is a widow who works as a high school drama and Italian teacher. She has a fifteen year old son. Dee has dated since the death of her husband over eleven years ago, but they do not last, in part because of her son. Tonight, Dee is going out with the PE teacher at her school, Steve. Before leaving, Dee stops to check on Pat. When Pat hides something in the drawer of his nightstand, she grows suspicious and checks the drawer. She finds a pot pipe in it. Pat swears he has not smoked pot in weeks, but Dee takes the pipe anyway. As Dee prepares to leave, she realizes Pat gave up the pipe too easily. She returns and discovers he was really hiding the notebook in which he writes his songs. Dee discovers he was hiding a song that he has been writing about his father, Alvis Bender.

Dee goes on her date. Steve asks her what movie she wants to see. Dee suggests *The Exorcist II*. Dee wants to see it because Richard Burton is in it. Dee is saddened by the movie, however, because Burton is too good for such a movie and he is showing signs of long term alcohol abuse. Afterward, Dee is lost in her thoughts. Steve calls her out on it, telling her she would be happier if she would let someone in.

Not long after she arrives home, Dee gets a phone call telling her Pat has been arrested after a car accident. Dee has a friend drive her to the police station. When she speaks to the cops, Dee learns that Pat had a girl in the car and that they found evidence of cocaine in the car. When she sees Pat, she is struck by how much like his biological father he is.

Chapter 14. *The Witches of Porto Vergogna*. April 1962. Porto Vergogna, Italy.

After returning to Porto Vergogna, Pasquale sleeps in. He goes to Dee's room and thinks about asking her to marry him, but then he thinks of how little difference there is between what Richard Burton is doing to Dee and what he did to Amedea and his own son.

Pasquale goes downstairs and finds his aunt in tears. The aunt tells Pasquale that his mother has died. Pasquale knows his mother was not really ill, just depressed, so he confront his aunt. Pasquale's aunt admits to backing bread with lye in it so that his mother could kill herself. She is now overwhelmed with guilt. Pasquale, despite his own anger, forgives her as he knows his mother would want him to. Tommaso takes Pasquale and his mother to La Spezia the next morning so Pasquale can arrange the funeral. When Pasquale returns to Porto Vergogna, he gets drunk while his aunt runs off. The following morning, Alvis Bender arrives for his annual vacation.



Alvis Bender recalls how he first came to Italy many years ago in an attempt to deal with the survivor's guilt that had caused him to become an alcoholic. His father gave him two months to figure things out. Bender traveled all over Italy, accepting free drinks from other veterans. He also decided to visit some of the places where he traveled with his squadron. Then Bender decided to go to Portovenere in an attempt to do some writing. He was so drunk when he gave instructions to the boatman that he ended up on Porto Vergogna. When he realized what the name of the village was, he felt it was fitting. After a long discussion with Carlos about his book, Alvis wrote twelve pages for the first time since he began attempting to write the book. Inspired by what he had written, Alvis decided to go find Maria, the girl he met during the war. Alvis found her in Genoa where she worked as a prostitute. Alvis told her who he was and how she had helped him, but she pretended not to know him.

Pasquale explains what has happened to his parents and settles Alvis in a room on the second floor. A short time later Deane and Burton arrive searching for Dee. Pasquale tells them he has not seen her.

Chapter 15. The Rejected First Chapter of Michael Deane's Memoir. 2006. Los Angeles, California.

Deane's first job was in the publicity offices at 20th Century Fox. Deane saved an actor's reputation one day when a photographer came to the studio gates with photos of the male actor performing a sexual act with another man. Deane quickly arranged for a female star to claim the actor was her boyfriend and planted rumors with several publications, successfully making the other pictures appear to be fakes. Due to his quick thinking, the head of the studio decided to send Deane to Italy to see if he could do anything to save the struggling production of *Cleopatra*.

When Deane arrives in Italy, he begins putting out fires as quickly as he can. However, when he learns that Taylor and Burton are having a fiery affair, he convinces the head of the studio that it would be better to allow the affair to be leaked to the press because it would inspire people to see the movie when it came out. To do this, Deane began tipping off reporters to the whereabouts of the young couple. The publicity appeared to work for a while, increasing interest not only in the couple, but the movie. However, when Taylor's husband, Eddie Fisher, learned of the affair he decided to come to Italy to attempt to save his marriage. While he was there, Burton felt pushed out, so he returned to his former mistress, Dee Moray. To discourage this affair, Deane arranged for Burton to leave Italy to film scenes for the movie, *The Longest Day*. While Burton was gone, Deane became aware that Dee Moray was sick. Deane arranged for Dee to see Taylor's physician, Dr. Crane. However, Deane asks the doctor to lie to Dee about her ailment to make it easier to hide the truth not only from Dee, but Burton and the press. The doctor tells Dee she has cancer. Due to a family history of cancer, Dee panics. Deane sends her to Porto Vergogna and tells her that he will send Burton there when he returns from filming *The Longest Day*. Instead, Deane sends Burton to Portovenere.



When Deane learns that Dee and Burton have seen one another and Dee knows about the pregnancy, he again arranges for Burton to leave the country. Deane then visits Dee and tells her that Burton wants her to abort the baby. Dee reluctantly believes him and allows him to take her to the train station so that she can travel to Switzerland alone. Deane leaves her there, unaware if she got on the train or not. The following day, Deane pretends he knows nothing about Dee's whereabouts when Burton returns. Deane then persuaded Burton that he needed to focus on Taylor, not Dee.

At the end of the chapter, there are notes from the publisher explaining why the book cannot be published as is. One of the problems is that Deane is unaware if a child was ever born and knows nothing about what happened to Dee Moray. There is also no great lesson learned for Deane in this chapter.

Chapter 16. After the Fall. September 1967. Seattle, Washington.

Dee is playing the lead role in a play for the community theater. The director is a man Dee had a brief affair with before she left for Los Angeles, before she was cast in Cleopatra. The director behaves as though he is attempting to make the play about his relationship with Dee and she resents it, especially since she is married now.

Dee and Alvis got to know one another their last day on Porto Vergogna. Alvis escorted her to Rome so that she could catch a plane back to America. Months later, after Dee had Pat, Alvis came to see her at the lunch counter where she worked. They began dating and got married so after. Alvis' father opened a dealership in Seattle, which Alvis ran.

After the play rehearsal, Dee walks to meet Alvis at a local restaurant. Alvis is already drunk, but they have an enjoyable evening anyway. After dinner, Alvis drives Dee back to her car. They follow each other down the street to their home. Dee pulls up along Alvis at a red light to tease him about the monstrosity of a car he drives. Alvis has access to any Chevrolet he could want, including a Corvette, but he prefers the Biscayne because it is big enough to safely transport Pat. When the light turns green, Alvis pulls into the intersection. A drunk driver comes out of nowhere and plows into him.

Analysis

The reader learns some of what happened to Dee Moray after she left Italy. Dee gave birth to a son in her native Seattle after returning to her family. Not long after, Dee reunites with Alvis Bender, the writer who visited the Adequate View Hotel each year in an attempt to write a novel. Alvis has only succeeded in writing a single chapter of his book, but he returns each year anyway. Alvis and Dee hit it off. Soon after, they are married. Alvis, however, continues to drink heavily. Ironically, however, he is killed in a car accident but it is not his fault. It is the fault of another drunk driver.

Dee remains alone after Alvis's death. She attempts to date, but struggles to find a man who will accept her son as well as her. Dee's son is difficult, too charming and smart for



his own good. Pat also has a drug problem that began when he was young. Dee is also still, if not in love, than in infatuation with Richard Burton. Dee has never told her son who his biological father is and has allowed him to believe Alvis was his father. This could present a problem for Dee as the plot progresses as the reader knows that several people who know the truth are about to find her.

The reader learns the truth behind Dee and Burton's relationship from an unpublished chapter of Michael Deane's memoir. The chapter is surprisingly honest, perhaps because much of it makes Deane look like the savior of the classic movie, Cleopatra. In the chapter, Deane claims that he was sent to Italy to save the film and he chose to do so by exploiting the controversial relationship between the movie's stars, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. In order to do this, however, Deane found himself in a position in which he was forced to hide the relationship between Burton and Dee Moray, as well as her pregnancy. Deane convinced Dee that Burton wanted her to have the abortion and he took her to the train. However, Deane does not know if Dee got on the train. The reader, however, knows.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Pat Bender's biological father? How is Pat like his father? How is he different? How does her continuing affection for Pat's father cause Dee to treat him too leniently?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Alvis Bender? What role does he play in Pasquale's life? How does he come to meet Dee? How do they end up married?

Discussion Question 3

What is Cleopatra? What is most notable about the film? Why does Deane claim credit for the gossip surrounding the film? Why did he promote such gossip?

Vocabulary

Memory, intersection, lingering, faraway, reassuring, mesmerized, outgrow, consuming, reflection, broadly, buttoned, feature, mentioned, eventually, director, agitation, motivation, wasting, opportunities, opinion, prescribe, theater, arrival, escape, pretend, lecture, significant, accomplishment, alcoholism, outgrown, insecure.



Chapters 17-21

Summary

Chapter 17. The Battle for Porto Vergogna. April 1962. Porto Vergogna, Italy.

As Deane and Burton left, Pasquale's aunt arrived at the hotel and began screaming a curse at them. Pasquale calms her down. Pasquale then hikes into the hills and finds Dee hiding in the pillbox. They talk for a minute about the young soldier and his beloved in the paintings. Pasquale then walks her back to the hotel and sends her upstairs to rest.

Gualfredo and Pelle arrive. Pasquale goes out to confront him. Gualfredo wants Pasquale to pay him for the money he missed out on while Dee was staying at the Adequate View Hotel. Pasquale refuses. A fight begins. Pasquale struggles, but Alvis joins in. Then one of the fishermen comes with a gun and shoots Pelle in the foot. This ends the fight. Gualfredo backs off, but promises to come back until the fisherman promises to kill him if he does.

Chapter 18. Front Man. Recently. Sandpoint, Idaho.

Claire Silver, Michael Deane, Shane Wheeler, and Pasquale Tursi arrive in Sandpoint, Idaho where Debra Moore lives and runs the local community theater. The theater is putting on a play called Front Man. It is a play written by Lydia and it is about her relationship with Pat and how he hit rock bottom when he was stranded in London. Claire, Deane, Pasquale, and Shane are blown away by the play and Deane wants to buy it. Deane and his companions attend the after party for the play until they learn that Pat, Lydia, and Dee will not be attending.

Chapter 19. The Requiem. April 1962. Porto Vergogna, Italy.

Pasquale wakes early the following day and asks Tommaso if he will take him to La Spieza for his mother's funeral. Pasquale then speaks with Alvis, making him promise that he will make sure Dee is taken care of and that she gets back to America safe. Pasquale also gives Alvis the money Deane left for Dee on his last visit. Finally, Pasquale goes upstairs to speak with Dee. Pasquale does not tell Dee he is leaving or that his mother has died. He simply tells her how happy he was to see her again.

Pasquale travels to La Spieza and attends the funeral alone. Afterward, he goes to Florence. Pasquale has decided he must do the responsible thing rather than the thing his heart wants. Pasquale goes to Amedea's home and asks for her hand in marriage.

Chapter 20. The Infinite Blaze. Recently. Sandpoint, Italy.

Debra Moore Bender, or Dee, is dying of cancer. However, she feels fairly well now. She likes to lay outside on her back porch of her home, so Pat arranged several heaters to



keep her warm. She is sleeping there when she hears Pat and Lydia return from the theater. She gets up and goes inside because she knows Pat will be hungry after the performance. They spend some time together. It is clear that Pat is recovering from his addiction and doing much better in his life. Lydia has forgiven Pat's transgressions earlier in their relationship and is content to take her place in the theater with, and eventually for, Dee.

As they talk, Lydia, Pat, and Dee hear a car pull up outside. Pat goes down to see who it is and returns with Keith, a man from the theater, as well as Deane, Claire, Shane and Pasquale. Dee recognizes Pasquale immediately and is deeply happy to see him. Keith films their reunion, as well as everything else. Deane shows his true colors when he begins asking Lydia and Pat if they would be willing to sell their life story to him. Dee realizes what Deane is attempting to do and knows that she must tell Pat the truth about his paternity before Deane does. Dee takes Pat and Lydia upstairs. Pat throws Keith's camera away so that he will not film the confession.

Chapter 21. Beautiful Ruins.

Deane gets out of his studio contract and buys the rights to Lydia's play, though Pat refuses to sell the rights to his life story. Claire produces the movie. It is altered from its original format, the story so drastically changed that it is almost unrecognizable. However, the movie does well. Claire also decides to remain with her boyfriend. Shane takes the thirty thousand he got for Donner! and pays back his ex-wife. He continues to write and eventually gets involved with a production assistant named Wylie.

The German soldier who painted the walls of the pillbox on Porto Vergogna left the area and began walking toward Switzerland as the Americans approached. He was hoping to return home to be with the piano teacher whose memory got him through the worst of the war as well as his beloved sister. However, he was killed by a partisan before reaching safety.

Joe and Umi got married, but the marriage did not last. Pelle quits the security business and goes to work in a butcher shop. Gualfredo goes blind after contracting syphilis. The son of Alvis's friend, Richards, is wounded in Vietnam. Bruno Tursi works for a private firm cataloguing artifacts.

Pat continues to live in Idaho, keeping busy so that he can keep his mind from the pull of his addiction. He and Lydia are doing well, living in part off of the money they made from the movie of Front Man.

Dee returns to Italy with Pasquale. They catch up on each other's lives. Pasquale introduces Dee to his children and grandchildren, and learns about his marriage to Amedea, who died not long ago of complications to Alzheimer's disease.



Analysis

Deane and his companions finally locate Dee and Pat. Deane shows his true colors when he tries to buy the rights to Pat's life. This shows the reader why he considers Pat his kid, because he is hoping that Pat's story will be the ultimate production of his career. Pat, however, has cleaned himself up and has become stronger, so he refuses the offer. However, the situation forces Dee to tell Pat the truth about his paternity. Pat takes the news well and spends the next few years working to escape the draw of his addiction and getting to know the work of his biological father.

Dee and Pasquale are reunited after fifty years. They catch up on their lives. Pasquale married Amedea and raised their child together, as well as two more children. They had a good life together, but when Amedea died and Pasquale became depressed, his son encouraged him to go back to a time when he was happier. This is what inspired Pasquale to go in search of Dee Moray.

Although Dee is dying of cancer, she goes back to Italy with Pasquale. Dee meets Pasquale's family. As the author takes the reader through the characters and the things that happened to them, he touches on the theme of the book. Lives are so insignificant that individual people are often not remembered. However, they touch each other in such profound ways that even if a person is not remembered, his impact often is.

Discussion Question 1

What choice does Pasquale make when he leaves the Adequate View Hotel in chapter 17? How does this change his life? How does it impact Dee's life?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Deane want to buy the life story of Pat Bender? How does this show his darker side? How does Dee respond?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Pasquale come looking for Dee Moray? How does he respond when he finds her? How does Dee respond to him?

Vocabulary

Dizziness, assures, family, perception, recognizes, desires, ambitions, loneliness, possible, separate, sustain, preparing, distraught, allowed, return, cognition, unbearable, imagined, hesitation, comfortable, eventually, adoring, contented,

sentiment, communicate, summoned, depended, perverse, chronologically, option, profoundly.



Characters

Dee Moray/Debra Moore Bender

Dee Moray is a young actress whose first Hollywood job is to work on the film *Cleopatra* in Rome. Dee plays Cleopatra's lady in waiting. However, Dee becomes ill and is told she has stomach cancer. Dee goes to Porto Vergogna to await the arrival of her lover, Richard Burton, before traveling to Switzerland to receive treatment. In Porto Vergogna, Dee meets Pasquale. Pasquale falls in love with her and takes it upon himself to locate Dee's lover when he does not come to her as planned. Pasquale believes Michael Deane is Dee's lover, so he confronts him and punches him in the chest. However, Pasquale soon discovers that Richard Burton is Dee's lover and that Burton did not know of Dee's pregnancy.

Dee and Burton are reunited for a short time. However, Burton is called to France to work on another film. Deane comes and tells Dee that Burton wants her to have an abortion. Rather than going to Switzerland, however, Dee goes back to Porto Vergogna. From there, Dee returns to Seattle, Washington, her hometown. Dee returns to her maiden name, Debra Moore, and has her child, a son named Pasquale, Pat for short. Dee marries Alvis Bender, but Bender dies in a car accident less than four years later. Dee then becomes a high school drama and Italian teacher.

Dee remains single for the rest of her life, partly because her son becomes a difficult, drug addicted teen. When Dee is older she moves to Idaho to take over a community theater there. Dee becomes ill with cancer later in life and receives treatments for a long time before deciding to stop them. A short time later, Dee is reunited with Pasquale. Together they travel to Italy to relive old memories and renew their friendship.

Pasquale Tursi

Pasquale is a young man when the novel begins. He is in his early twenties, a college student who came home to care for his mother after the death of his father. Pasquale's family owns a hotel on a small village along the more luxurious cliff-side towns of Cinque Terre, the five lands. It was the dream of Carlo, Pasquale's father, to make his hotel a popular destination among Americans, but he did not live to see the dream come true. It has now fallen to Pasquale to make his father's dream come true. It seems within reach when American actress, Dee Moray, comes to visit.

Pasquale immediately falls under Dee's spell and finds himself dreaming of marrying her when he learns that she is pregnant and the father would rather the pregnancy disappear. However, Pasquale has also left a girlfriend who was pregnant and is sitting back while the girlfriend's parents raise his son. For this reason, Pasquale realizes that he must do the responsible thing even though his heart is leaning a different direction. Pasquale marries his girlfriend and raises his son along with two more children. After a



long life and strong marriage, Pasquale's wife dies of complications to Alzheimer's disease. Afterward, Pasquale falls into a dark depression. To help him, Pasquale's son suggests that Pasquale find a time in his past when he was happy and find a way to get back there. It is because of this that Pasquale goes in search of Dee Moray. Pasquale learns that Dee married his friend, Alvis Bender, and that she raised a son. Dee returns to Italy with Pasquale and they spend several weeks together.

Michael Deane

Michael Deane is a movie producer. However, Deane began his career in publicity for 20th Century Fox. As part of his job, Deane was sent to Rome to quash rumors surrounding the production of Cleopatra. When Deane discovered that the two stars of the film, Burton and Taylor, were having an affair, he convinced the studio that it would be better for the film if the rumors were made public. Deane arranged for photographers to find Taylor and Burton whenever they were together. However, the publicity backfired when Taylor's husband, Eddie Fisher, arrived in Italy to try to repair their marriage. This caused Burton to take up with another actress and get her pregnant. Deane could not allow that information to become public because it would ruin the work he did to promote the Burton-Taylor relationship. For this reason, Deane separated the young couple and did everything he could to end the pregnancy.

Deane went on to become a successful film producer. However, his career began to go downhill after the new millennium. Deane became committed to a contract with Universal Studios that gave the studio rights to any deals Deane made. For this reason, he began to look for ways to get out of the contract. Deane finds that and uses Shane Wheeler as the final pitch to get him out. After that, any deal Deane makes will be his production company's and no one else's. The first deal Deane wants to make is to buy the rights to Pat Bender's life story, to exploit the knowledge of his paternity. Pat refuses, but Deane still makes millions on a movie based on the play Lydia, Pat's girlfriend, wrote about their relationship.

Richard Burton

Richard Burton is an English actor who became well known for his work on both Broadway and in the movies. Burton was also well known for his two marriages to actress Elizabeth Taylor. Both Burton and Taylor were married at the time their affair began on the set of Cleopatra.

In this novel, Burton has an affair with actress Dee Moray before beginning his affair with Taylor. When Taylor's husband, Eddie Fisher, arrives in Rome to win his wife back, Burton becomes bored and takes back up with Dee. When Dee becomes pregnant, publicist Deane sends her to Porto Vergogna to hide her from Burton so that he can arrange for an abortion to take place before either Dee or Burton learn of the child. However, Pasquale goes to Rome to confront Deane and subsequently meets Burton, helping reunite the lovers. Deane interferes again, separating Burton and Dee long



enough to convince Dee that Burton wants her to have an abortion. Burton and Dee never see each other in person again.

Alvis Bender

Alvis Bender is an educated man who dreamed of becoming a writer before going to war during World War II. After the war, Bender is so consumed with survivor's guilt that he becomes an alcoholic. Several years after the war, Bender decides to return to Italy to try to deal with his writer's block and unresolved emotions with the war. Instead, however, Bender spends his time in Italy drinking with other veterans. Toward the end of his visit, Bender decides to go to a tourist island, Portovenere, to do some writing. Bender accidentally ends up on Porto Vergogna where he meets Carlo, the owner of the only hotel there. A discussion with Carlo motivates Bender to write the first chapter of a novel he has been working on for years. For this reason, Bender returns to Porto Vergogna each year.

During his final visit to Porto Vergogna, Bender meets actress Dee Moray. Bender helps Dee return to the states. Sometime later, while in Seattle scouting a site for a new car lot, Bender meets Dee again. They begin dating and get married soon after. Unfortunately, Bender dies in a car accident less than four years after they are married. Pat spends most of his life, however, believing that Bender is his biological father.

Claire Silver

Claire Silver is Michael Deane's chief development assistant. It is Claire's job to help Deane pick projects to develop. Deane never likes anything Claire picks and has only produced two projects since he hired her. One is a bad horror movie that did rather well in the box office. The other is a reality show that Claire liked, but did not expect to do as well as it did. Claire only wants to make a good movie, but she has come to the conclusion that this is not going to happen as long as she works with Deane. For this reason, Claire has begun to look for a new job.

Claire meets Pasquale Tursi when he comes to her office in search of Deane. Pasquale tells Claire that he is searching for an actress he once knew. When Claire learns there was a child involved, she immediately believes it is Deane's child. Instead, she learns later that the child was Richard Burton's. Claire finally finds her one good story in a play that Burton's illegitimate son developed with his girlfriend, Lydia. Even though the movie is much different from the play, Claire has her first hit and decides to continue working with Deane.

Shane Wheeler

Shane Wheeler is a want-to-be writer. Shane has lived his life based on the family motto of 'act as if ye have faith and it shall be given to you', believing the quote came from the Bible. However, as his marriage exploded, he learned from his soon-to-be ex-wife that it



was actually written by David Mamet, a movie writer and director. This, in addition to the end of his marriage and the failure of his book of short stories, caused Shane to momentarily lose his focus. However, it also convinced him that screenwriting was where he should be focusing his attention.

Shane, who has a strange fixation with starvation, flies to Hollywood to pitch a movie idea based off a member of the Donner party. Shane's movie pitch is ridiculous, but Michael Deane pays him thirty thousand dollars to pitch it to the studio and write a treatment. Shane uses the money to pay off his ex-wife and concentrate on his writing career.

Pasquale 'Pat' Bender

Pat is Dee Moray/Debra Moore's son. Pat is a difficult child from an early age. As a teen, Pat becomes addicted to drugs. Pat has dreams of being famous and he attempts multiple times to become a rock star. Pat experiences moderate success with his group, the Reticents, but it is fleeting flame. The band breaks up, in part because of Pat's behavior and his drug usage.

Pat begins a one man show in which he tells funny stories and sings original songs. A Scottish man hears his act one night and convinces him he would do well if he performed his shows in Scotland and England. Pat goes to England, but has a falling out with his new promoter over a girl. Pat is left destitute in England when he finally hits rock bottom and begins to clean up his act. Pat returns home to his long-time girlfriend, Lydia, and his mother. Pat devotes his time to helping his mother and Lydia with the community theater they run.

Pat's biological father is Richard Burton. Pat did not know this. Instead, Pat believed his father was a drunken car salesman named Alvis Bender. When Dee's past catches up to her, she finds herself forced to tell Pat the truth. Pat devotes some time to getting to know his father through his theatrical work and keeping busy so that he does not return to his old drug habits.

Lydia

Lydia is Pat's girlfriend. Lydia and Pat were together early in his career, but she finally broke up with him after catching him cheating on her one too many times. Lydia spends the next few years caring for her ailing stepfather and then caring for Pat's mother during cancer treatment. When Pat returns from England, he convinces Lydia to give him a second chance. Pat is no longer using drugs and he spends much of his time helping his mother and Lydia with the community theater they run. Lydia writes a play about her relationship with Pat. The play is bought by Deane Productions and becomes a hit movie even though much of the movie has been altered.

Joe

Joe is the Scottish man Pat meets one night while performing his musical comedy act in a bar. Joe is an amateur talent performer who convinces Pat he could sell his act in Scotland and England. Joe tells Pat if he can get himself to London, Joe will make him famous in a few months. Pat gets to England and does well at a festival in Edinburgh, Scotland until Joe finds out that Pat slept with Umi, the girlfriend of Joe's friend and a girl Joe is in love with. Joe abandons Pat, Pat loses his job, and ends up destitute in England for several weeks.



Symbols and Symbolism

Alvis's First Chapter

Alvis has been talking about writing a novel about his experiences in World War II since the end of the war. However, for many years it is only talk. When Alvis ends up on Porto Vergogna by accident, he is inspired by a conversation with Carlo Tursi to write the first chapter. For eight years afterward, Alvis returns and continuously tinkers with that one chapter. Finally, Alvis leaves the chapter behind and Dee Moray reads it during her stay in the hotel.

Paintings

There is a pillbox bunker on the cliff overlooking Porto Vergogna. Inside there are four paintings, one each of two German soldiers and two of the same girl. Dee and Pasquale imagine the girl is the painter's sweetheart, but the reader learns at the end of the novel that the girl was his sister.

Continuity Pictures

On movie sets, pictures are often taken to ensure the continuity of actor appearance. Deane arranges for Dee to receive several of these pictures to console her for the fact that she has had to drop out of the film. Dee gives one of these to Pasquale to remember her by.

Spanish Cigarettes

Pasquale smokes expensive Spanish cigarettes, a habit he began when dating girlfriend Amedea.

Wine

Burton is a heavy drinker. On the trip from Rome to Porto Vergogna, Burton drinks three bottles of wine, but shows little of its effect.

Envelopes

Each time Pasquale sees Deane, Deane gives him an envelope stuffed with money for himself and Dee. Pasquale gives the money to Dee each time.



Business Cards

Deane has a habit of giving out his business cards. These cards can be exchange for a single favor from Deane, which usually means the right to give a movie pitch to his chief development assistant, Claire. The oldest of these cards Claire ever sees is the one Pasquale Tursi gives her. It is from Deane's first job in movies, as a publicity assistant for 20th Century Fox.

Baby Announcements

Pasquale produces a baby announcement from Dee Moray to Deane after asking Deane to help him find Dee. Deane is thrilled to discover that Dee had her baby because he is only one of a few that know the baby is the illegitimate son of Richard Burton and he hopes to capitalize on the knowledge.

Pot Pipe

Dee finds a pot pipe in her fifteen year old son's bedroom at one point in the novel.

Deane's Memoir

Michael Deane wrote a memoir, but most of it could not be verified or it placed him in legal jeopardy. For this reason, Deane was assigned several ghost writers who turned his memoir into more of a how to get your movie made self-help book.



Settings

Porto Vergogna, Italy

Porto Vergogna is the cliff-side village where Pasquale lives and where his hotel, the Adequate View Hotel, sits. Porto Vergogna is north of the luxurious hotels that exist on the Cinque Terre, the five lands. For this reason, Porto Vergogna rarely receives visitors and most of Pasquale's customers are the fishermen who live in the village. Dee Moray is sent to Porto Vergogna by Michael Deane because he hopes she will disappear there long enough for him to convince Richard Burton that she is gone for good. Unfortunately, Burton learns the truth and visits Dee there, but Deane eventually wins out by convincing Dee that Burton wants her to abort the baby.

Florence, Italy

Pasquale attended school in Florence. Florence is also where Pasquale met Amedea. Pasquale visits Amedea in Florence once after their separation and catches a glimpse of their son, Bruno. After meeting Dee and judging Burton for his response to Dee's pregnancy, Pasquale returns to Florence to claim Amedea and his son.

Rome, Italy

The movie, Cleopatra, is being filmed in Rome in 1962. Pasquale goes to Rome to see Deane. Pasquale is under the mistaken impression that Deane is the father of Dee's unborn child. However, Pasquale also meets Burton in Rome and learns the truth of Dee's affair.

Hollywood, California

In the present, Michael Deane lives in Hollywood where he is a well-known movie producer. Pasquale goes to Hollywood to ask Deane's help in finding Dee Moray. Deane immediately jumps on the chance to help Pasquale because Deane is one of only a few people who know that Dee gave birth to Richard Burton's child. At the same time, Deane's chief development assistant struggles with her desire to make a good film and her role as Deane's assistant. There is also a movie scriptwriter struggling to find a producer for his movie.

Sandpoint, Idaho

Dee Moray, now known as Debra Moore Bender, moves to Sandpoint, Idaho to take over the local community theater. Dee now suffers from cancer and has come to a point where she has decided to stop fighting it. Dee lives with her son, Pat, and his girlfriend,

Lydia. It is in Sandpoint that Pasquale and Deane find Dee, forcing her to confess the truth of his paternity to her son, Pat.



Themes and Motifs

The Futility of One Life and the Impact of a Single Life on Others

Throughout the novel, several of the characters ponder the futility of their lives. Pasquale recognizes how little impact one life can have on the world. He feels insignificant in his little village, realizing that no matter what he does, nothing will be left in another decade or more. Pat Bender also finds himself struggling to make a name for himself, to create a legacy that will forever be remembered. However, when he is abandoned in Scotland, he begins to look around himself and realize that it is the desire of all men to build themselves up, but eventually no one will remember the individual, just the artifacts that remain. Dee Moray also worries about her impact on the world, but she finds herself more focused on the idea of knowing where her story begins, not where it ends.

Deane is also one of those who wants to give the people what they want in order to make himself bigger in the eyes of the world. However, Deane is willing to do things others are not, to climb to the top on the backs of others. Claire simply wants to leave a mark by making a movie that matters. Shane simply wants to be successful. They all, however, want to make a mark on the world.

As the novel comes to close, the author reviews the lives of each of the characters, even the few minor characters who had a small influence on the major characters. By taking the reader through these stories, the reader can begin to see what kind of influence each character had on the others, even if it was simply a minor impact, or even a misleading one. When the reader learns that the painter Dee and Pasquale talked so much about was not in love with the girl in the painting, but was a homosexual young man who dreamed of returning home to a man who did not even know about his love, it does little to take away the impact of the dream Dee and Pasquale had for him.

Every life touches another in some way. However, people often are not aware of the people who have, sometimes, the most impact on their lives. That is where the name of the novel comes from, Beautiful Ruins. People often look at ruins and wonder about the people who built them, who lived their lives in them, without realizing what an impact those people had on the past that shaped the present. It is the same with the way in which people touch each other's lives. Sometimes the true impact is not appreciated, but that does not mean it was not there.

Addiction

Several of the main characters of this novel have an addiction. Alvis Bender is an alcoholic, in part because of his overwhelming survivors' guilt after World War II. Bender was close to another soldier, Richards, who had a wife and child waiting for him after



the war. Bender had no one waiting for him except for a job at his father's car distributorship. Yet, Bender survived the war and Richards died of an infection. Bender took this very hard and lost himself in alcoholism for the rest of his life.

Richard Burton was also an alcoholic. The author does not attempt to explain where Burton's alcoholism came from, but the reader can see how deeply Burton was in his addiction as he drinks heavily each time he appears in the novel. The reader who is knowledgeable about the actor might also know that he died at a young age, possibly a result of his alcohol addiction.

Pat Bender is also an addict. With a biological father who was an alcoholic and a stepfather who drank heavily, it seems understandable that Pat would become an addict as well. Perhaps there is something genetic about the disorder. Pat struggles with both drugs and alcohol all his life, beginning as a teenager. However, Pat is the only one of the three addicts in this novel who eventually overcomes his addiction to remain sober, despite constant cravings, for a significant part of the time and finding solace in love. This leaves the reader wonder what might have happened to Bender or Burton had they, too, gotten past their addiction and settled down with the woman who loved them both.

Love

Love is a complicated thing. At the beginning of the novel, the reader meets Pasquale's mother, a woman who is so depressed after the death of her husband that she elects to kill herself rather than live without him. As the plot continues to develop, the reader watches as Pasquale falls in love with Dee Moray and considers what his life would be like if he married her and helped her raise her child. Although Pasquale's heart wants him to marry Dee, he realizes that he must do the responsible thing and care for the woman and child who came before. Pasquale marries his love, Amedea, and reclaims his son, Bruno. They have a good life together, and several more children, but Pasquale never forgets Dee.

Dee loves Richard Burton even though she knows he is not the kind of man who could ever love her the way she loves him. Dee tells Pasquale that Burton loves himself too much to love anyone else. Dee goes on to marry Alvis Bender. Seconds before Bender dies in a car accident, Dee tries to convince herself that the deep affection she feels for Bender is love. However, she knows that it is not.

Claire wants to love her boyfriend, Daryl, but is frustrated by his obsession with porn and strip clubs. Claire has nearly decided to break up with Daryl. She even spends the night with Shane. However, when Claire sees *Front Man*, the play by Lydia and Pat, she realizes that real love is much deeper than she ever realized. For this reason, Claire remains with Daryl and finds some happiness.

Love is complicated. It is not always about romance. It is about understanding and persistence, about forgiveness. Only a few of the characters in this novel ever really



experience true love. Dee and Pasquale have very different lives. He has a good life with his wife, while she is alone most of her life. However, they find their way to one another and experience a kind of love in each other's company that is not really about the romantic love both sought and never really found. They touched each other's lives and, in return, touched the lives of many others. It is this that makes love a theme of the novel.

Theme/Motif 5

Theme/Motif 3



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The author uses multiple characters to narrate his story. The novel begins with Pasquale Tursi as the narrator, a young Pasquale who has recently come home to his family business to care for his ailing mother. The novel then jumps fifty years into the future and the narration of Claire Silver, a disillusioned young film maker who is searching for a film that will have meaning to future generations, as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* had for her. Then the author introduces Shane Wheeler, a self-centered young writer-want-to-be. The author also uses Michael Deane, Pat Bender, and Debra Moore as narrators.

The point of view of this novel works well in the plot as the reader is introduced not only to many different characters in intimate and unique ways, but the story is introduced in such a way that it takes the reader a little longer to put together the many plot surprises that propel the story. The author uses his characters in such a way that they are able to hide their secrets until the author is ready to unveil them, leaving one character's nefarious motivations hidden until the last moment while another character keeps a secret that is only hidden from one other character. The point of view is well done and fits the plot of this novel perfectly.

Language and Meaning

The novel is set partially in Italy, therefore there are quite a few words and phrases that appear in the plot in Italian. However, the author is careful to be sure all these foreign words and phrases are translated, or their translation is implied in the text. The rest of the language is in a simple English that moves back and forth from the more sophisticated language of the 1940s and 1960s, to the easy slang of present times.

The language of this novel works well with the plot of the novel. The language is authentic to the characters. One character is an Italian man who understands a limited amount of English. However, the author handles his conversations with a perfect mix of English and Italian that does little to impede the reader's ability to follow the text. The language also often reflects the time period in which the novel is set, allowing the reader to feel as though they are a part of a time long past.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-one chapters. Each chapter is set in a different locale, and, often, a different time period. The novel begins in April of 1962 in the village of Porto Vergogna. It then moves to modern Hollywood, only to return to Italy. Although the novel skips around in time and place, the author does an excellent job of drawing all the activity together to tell one strong, cohesive story.



The novel contains several plots and subplots. The main plot follows the relationship between Pasquale Tursi and Dee Moray when Dee shows up unexpectedly in Pasquale's tiny village, the affair between Dee and legendary actor Richard Burton, and the attempt to cover it up. Another main plot follows Claire Silver as she attempts to decide if she should quit her job or continue to search for the perfect movie plot. A subplot follows Dee's return to the United States and her relationship not only with her son, Pat, but her husband, Alvis Bender. Another subplot follows the life of Dee's son, as well as the search for Dee and Pat by Pasquale and Deane. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

Twenty meters away, Pasquale Tursi watched the arrival of the woman as if in a dream. Or rather, he would think later, a dream's opposite: a burst of clarity after a lifetime of sleep.

-- Pasquale (Chapter 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: This is the first moment Pasquale sees Dee Moray. It will be this moment that begins the journey that will reunite Pasquale and Dee fifty years later.

Michael's constantly urging her to adjust her expectations, to set aside her highbrow pretensions, to accept the culture on its own terms, to expand her notions of what's good.

-- Claire Silver (chapter 2 paragraph 11)

Importance: This expresses Claire's frustration with Deane as he continuously refuses every project she thinks is good. The reader will later realize that Deane was doing this to help him get out of his contract with the studio by only presenting to them bad ideas.

I should have been pleased merely to be alive, but I was in the deepest misery of my war, afraid and alone and keenly aware of the barbarism around me.

-- Alvis Bender (chapter 4 paragraph 2)

Importance: This is from the only chapter Alvis Bender ever wrote of his novel. This describes how Alvis felt at the end of the war, just weeks before he would learn of the death of his friend, Richards. It is also shortly before he meets the young woman, Maria.

The artist had painted what looked like wooden frames around the paintings, too, and even though they had been done on concrete and the paint was faded and cracked, it was clear the artist had real talent.

-- Pasquale Tursi (chapter 6 paragraph 81)

Importance: This is from the first time Pasquale shows Dee the paintings inside the pillbox bunker. These paintings are like a secret that Dee and Pasquale share and it becomes something of an affirmation of romance in the world for them.

But now he wondered if there hadn't been a purpose to all that surviving: the second chance to do something...BIG.

-- Pat Bender (chapter 10 paragraph 18)

Importance: This introduces to the reader Pat Bender's desperate need to be famous, to leave his mark on the world. This goes a long way to describe the motivation for Pat to continuously hurt those who love him and fuel his drug addiction.

Richard Burton stuck out his lower lip and assumed a nasal voice: 'Dick, you will, of course, eventually have to make up your mind whether you wish to be a household



word or an ac-TOR

-- Richard Burton (chapter 11 paragraph 16)

Importance: Richard Burton tells Pasquale what Laurence Olivier told him while he was trying to decide if he should quit the Broadway play, Camelot, and join the cast of Cleopatra.

She'd liked Bald Marv, thought he stood a chance. He was older, in his late forties, had two older daughters from a failed marriage and was keen on 'blending the families'-- although he was decidedly less keen after he and Debra returned home one night to find Pat already blending, in bed with Marv's fifteen-year-old daughter, Janet.

-- Dee Moray/Debra Moore Bender (chapter 13 paragraph 6)

Importance: The quote illustrates how much trouble Pat was as a teen - he was fourteen at the time of this incident - and how it impacted Dee's life.

This is what happens when you live in dreams, he thought: you dream this and you dream that and you sleep right through your life.

-- Pasquale Tursi (chapter 14 paragraph 4)

Importance: Pasquale is thinking about Dee and his desire to be her hero, but at the same time realizing he is not much better than Richard Burton because he did not marry Amedea when she told him she was pregnant with his child.

Dick and Liz were gods. Pure talent and charisma and like gods they were terrible together. Awful. A gorgeous nightmare. Drunk and narcissistic and cruel to everyone around them. If only the movie had the drama of these two.

-- Michael Deane (chapter 15 paragraph 34)

Importance: This quote illustrates how big the relationship between Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor was. It also explains why Deane thought allowing the secret of their relationship to become public would help promote the movie, Cleopatra.

Was that what Ron made her feel--guilt (You use people), perhaps over the suggestion that, at a tough point in her life, she'd traded on her looks for an older man's love, for some security and a brand-new Corvair, given up on love for her own reflection in his lovesick eyes?

-- Dee Moray/Debra Moore Bender (chapter 16 paragraph 117)

Importance: These are Dee's thoughts as she ponders her relationship with Alvis Bender just moments before he is killed in a car accident.

Sir,' he said, 'I am Pasquale Tursi of Porto Vergogna. I am here to ask for the hand of your daughter, Amedea.' He cleared his throat. 'I am here for my son.

-- Pasquale Tursi (chapter 19 paragraph 71)

Importance: This is the moment the reader realizes why Pasquale has decided not to



ask Dee to marry him even though he clearly loves her. Pasquale has made the conscious decision to be a better man than Richard Burton, a choice that will impact not only his life, but many lives around him, including Dee, Alvis, and Pat.

He yells up the stairs every time he comes in the house and she pretends she doesn't know why. 'Still alive,' she's tempted to say, but it would sound harsh.

-- Dee Moray/Debra Moore Bender (chapter 20 paragraph 5)

Importance: Dee Moray/Debra Moore Bender is an old woman now. She has cancer and has recently decided to forgo treatment. Pat has recently returned to her life and is sober, trying to be the son he failed to be earlier in his life. Dee tries to understand Pat's concern, but this quote illustrates how she feels despite the reality that Pat has a right to be afraid of what he will find upon returning home one day.