

Beware of Pity Study Guide

Beware of Pity by Stefan Zweig

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Plot Summary

Beware of Pity by Stefan Zweig is a journey by the reader thorough his or her own reactions of pity to the characters in the story. The main character, Anton Hofmiller, is a military officer who is invited to the home of Herr Lajos von Kekesfalva, a wealthy aristocrat, for dinner one evening. He inadvertently asks the man's crippled daughter, Edith, to dance, and her reaction is one of anger and shame. Feeling pity for the woman, Hofmiller returns to the house the following day to bring her flowers. Over time, he becomes friends with the family, and his continued feelings of pity for Edith and her father, as well as for the rest of the inhabitants of the house, cause Hofmiller problems. Edith, in turn, begins to use her condition as a tool for manipulating those around her as their pity causes them to react in ways they otherwise would not. Kekesfalva, the father, uses his own story of his love for his daughter to evoke pity in Hofmiller, as well.

Hofmiller's pity for Edith eventually leads him to lie to her, telling her that her doctor, Condor, has a new treatment for her that may work. Condor is angered and confronts Hofmiller, and the two devise a plan that they will not reveal the truth to Edith, as her positive attitude may help her actually recover. However, soon Edith discloses that she has fallen in love with Hofmiller. On his part, Hofmiller is angry and ashamed, and does not want her love, but when Edith threatens suicide, Hofmiller relents. When Kekesfalva dejectedly comes to Hofmiller in fear for his daughter, Hofmiller agrees to marry Edith, provided she recovers from her illness. When asked about this engagement, however, Hofmiller lies yet again, and realizes he has inadvertently ended both his career and his life. He cannot return to the Kekesfalva's, nor his regiment, since both sides will know he has lied to them. He realizes he must ask Edith for forgiveness, but his message does not go through to her. Thinking Hofmiller has betrayed her, Edith commits suicide. Kekesfalva, destroyed by these events, soon dies as well, and Hofmiller is sent to the war front. He learns to forgive himself, but on returning home, a chance encounter with Condor makes him realize he can never fully forgive his crimes of pity.

Zweig uses the reader's own emotions as a weapon throughout the novel as the characters move between the pitied and the one feeling pity for another. The reader finds him or herself feeling sorry for Hofmiller, but later feeling angry and frustrated at his actions. Edith, too, evokes pity, but her treatment of others and her overall behaviors leave one moving between pity and anger. The same is true for all other characters in the story as more is revealed about these character's lives and their own use of deceit and emotional abuse to manipulate others. In addition, while the book is a wonderful in-depth study of pity, it is also a skillfully written book that one finds delightfully gripping.



Introduction and Pages 1 through 34.

Introduction and Pages 1 through 34. Summary

The novel *Beware of Pity* is about how the emotion of pity affects various characters in certain situations, and how pity can be a dangerous force in life. Anton Hofmiller, a military soldier, takes pity on young, crippled Edith, and this pity causes him to lie, deceive, and generally hurt everyone around him as he seeks only to make Edith feel better. In the end, he learns that to feel pity for another human being is a selfish act that can end with disastrous consequences.

In the Introduction, Joan Acocella gives a brief account of the novel and its origins. She explains that Zweig was a friend of Sigmund Freud, and therefore had much to say about the inner workings of the human mind and the inner motivations for actions. She explains that the book is about pity and how that emotion can be the cause for actions both positive and negative. Also, as a young Jew, Zweig surprisingly notes he felt little discrimination, unlike the "Eastern Jews". His depiction of Kekesfalva's early life is based on the Eastern Jew experience, not his own. In his own life, Zweig divorced his long-time wife for a very young, very naive secretary, Lotte, and Acocella believes Hofmiller in the story depicts Zweig, while Edith depicts Lotte. Acocella also notes the book is radical in that it teaches that pity in most forms is futile and useless. For his part, Zweig, unable to cope with the war in his country and being persecuted on all sides, fled to Brazil, where he and Lotte committed suicide in 1942. Another introduction follows by Zweig himself. Zweig explains that in Austrian military, a soldier was always a soldier and was taught never to let down the code of the military. This caused mental conflicts, as is shown through Hofmiller in the novel. Zweig continues to note that the story he is writing is a true account as given by the participant himself.

The book opens with Hofmiller noting that the entire thing started with a blunder on his part. He explains that he was forced into a military career and at one point finds himself in a small shop in Austria where a beautiful young woman comes in. After asking, he learns she is the niece of wealthy local aristocrat Herr Kekesfalva. Soon after, Hofmiller receives a dinner invitation to the castle of Kekesfalva. Hofmiller, being raised properly, thus arrives three days prior to the party to express his gratitude, but the family is not home. Two days later, he is thanked by the family for his graciousness, and the following day, attends dinner. He arrives late, but is welcomed by Kekesfalva and the others at the table. He meets Ilona, the beautiful young niece of Kekesfalva, and his daughter, Edith, seated at the table. He enjoys himself with food and dancing, and at the end of the evening, asks Edith to dance. She recoils in horror and begins to sob, and Hofmiller is perplexed. When asked, Ilona angrily explains that Edith is paralyzed. Hofmiller flees the home, ashamed and afraid of what others will say about his accidental actions. He sends flowers to the girl to make up for his blunder, and she responds with an invitation to tea. He arrives the next day in order to make sure everything is smoothed over in case his friends ask. The butler, Josef, shows him to the salon where Edith sits, smiling at him. She apologizes for her reaction to his request to



dance, explains that she loved dancing before her accident, and shows him secret pictures of dancers she has kept. Ilona returns with coffee, and the three have a lovely visit while Hofmiller notes their differences in his head. Ilona, he notes, is a woman one wishes to court, while Edith is an invalid one wishes to soothe and protect. Kekesfalva soon appears, and Josef, the butler, comes to take Edith for her exercises. She flies into a rage, and forces herself to walk, supported only by crutches and contraptions on her legs to keep them straight. Hofmiller notes she is showing them in defiance that yes, she is a cripple. Kekesfalva embarrassingly apologizes for her behavior, and Hofmiller, feeling pity, goes to the man and soothes him. The following day, he forces his men to trot on the horses out of respect for Edith, who cannot experience a full gallop. He realizes he has, inadvertently, already changed inside as a result of his pity for Edith's condition.

Introduction and Pages 1 through 34. Analysis

The Introduction to the novel is a valuable introduction to the concepts and themes within the novel, but is better read after the novel than before. Read before, the introduction prejudices the reader against Edith and Hofmiller and does not allow the reader to experience the rise and fall of emotion as the author intended. That being said, it does provide, after reading the book, a deeper analysis and a deeper understanding of why the book was written and of why the characters behave as they do.

In the first section of the book, readers are introduced to several characters and to several concepts that are used throughout the book. Anton Hofmiller at first seems to be a man whose loyalty to duty and honor makes him a virtual slave to proper behavior and politeness. In these first pages, however, Hofmiller has several thoughts related to how his actions appear to others, foreshadowing his obsession with such concepts later in the novel. It is clear he is not a mean man in this sense, but instead is simply a trained man whose entire upbringing and military background force him to constantly think of how he appears to others. Readers are already introduced to Hofmiller's new emotion, pity, and can already see it weighing on his conscience as he stops his officers from galloping. This foreshadows the growing problem Hofmiller has with pity. Even further, Hofmiller's thoughts about Edith in terms of her condition and his desire to care for her and soothe her foreshadow his honest efforts throughout the novel to help her, even if it means lying to her.

In addition, readers meet Edith, the crippled daughter of Kekesfalva. It is clear from these two brief scenes that Edith is a tormented young woman who uses her condition to garner sympathy from others. She consistently brings attention to her condition, and forces others to deal with it. Her manners are impeccable when she is trying to be polite, but this facade drops immediately when faced with a situation she doesn't like. This foreshadows events later in the novel as these behaviors simply increase in violence and in frequency as she manipulates everyone around her. Readers are also introduced to Herr Kekesfalva, the father of Edith. From the very beginning, Hofmiller notes the oddities of Kekesfalva, and his seemingly uncomfortableness with his own



wealth. This foreshadows information later in the novel when it is revealed that Kekesfalva was not born wealthy. Also, the second portion of this section reveals Kekesfalva as a faltering old man whose sorrow over his daughter's condition leads to a nearly full time state of despair. This despair, as is shown, is used to manipulate others into feeling pity and sympathy, and this foreshadows Kekesfalva's use of this technique throughout the novel. Ilona, Kekesfalva's niece, is also introduced in this section. From her brief appearances, it is clear Ilona is a loving, caring, devoted caretaker of Edith. She is kindhearted, caring, and clearly a defendant of Edith. While her role in the book is one of a side character, her actions in this brief introduction does show her as having both pity for Edith and a strong sense of patience and kindness for her.



Page 34 through 76.

Page 34 through 76. Summary

Hofmiller begins this section by noting that his actions with his regiment are the first signs of the poison his pity causes. He feels drawn to the emotion, and finds himself wishing to see Edith simply to evoke it. Days later, he is invited to dinner again and accepts. He dines with men twice his rank and treated as an equal. He sits with the women following dinner, and finds himself entertaining them thoroughly, while noting Kekesfalva watching intently. He finds Edith attractive in her happiness. At the end of the evening, Kekesfalva shows Hofmiller great gratitude in front of the other military men, and Hofmiller is again emotional. He begins to feel powerful as he is able to give so much pleasure, and finds himself liking his new emotions. He begins to spend more and more time at the Kekesfalva's. He enjoys the company of women, whom he rarely converses with on base, and enjoys the feeling of love and family. However, these feelings are tempered by Edith's habit of flaring in anger at the slightest suggestion that she requires assistance. Hofmiller finds himself feeling more emotion outside the Kekesfalva's as well. One evening, Kekesfalva insists that the car drive him home because of rain. Hofmiller is concerned of how arriving in a luxury car will appear to other soldiers, so he stops the driver outside of the barracks. The rain begins to fall again, and he finds rest in the cafe, only to find his friends there. They tease him mercilessly for his relations with the Kekesfalva's and for his lack of attention to them. In trying to pass things off, he inadvertently shows them his new gold cigarette case, a gift from the Kekesfalva's, and is ashamed. He finds himself angry at them as they part ways for their chiding. He admits to himself that he had tried to keep his two worlds separated, because one did not go well with the other. He suddenly wonders about his own motives, and is determined to stop the Kekesfalva's from continuing to spoil him, despite his inner feelings of familial love for the girls. He admits he cares for them as sisters.

The following night, he deliberately does not go to the castle and finds himself worrying all night. As he leaves the cafe, he sees Ilona walk past. She is clearly flustered and asks why he did not appear at the castle, to which Hofmiller lies. It is clear she does not believe him and is angry. The following day, when he does arrive, he is taken to the tower where he finds Edith asleep. He is bewitched by her sleeping form, but when she awakens, she is clearly angry with him, and demands an answer as to why he was absent the day before. He stumbles over an explanation, and she angrily tells him she knows he was in the cafe, is not afraid to admit she was worried, and that she finds it horrible that he has lied so blatantly. She notes that had he called to simply say he wouldn't be coming, she would have understood and been supportive. She chastises that everyone tries to shield her and everyone pities her, and she doesn't need their pity or their protection from reality. She ends her rant by noting that if he wants to come, then come, and if he doesn't, then he shouldn't, but above all, he shouldn't lie. She then calmly asks for a cigarette and can't understand why Hofmiller is so upset. Moments later, Kekesfalva arrives in the tower and ushers Edith out for dinner, noting he wishes



to speak with Hofmiller. Out in his office, Kekesfalva tells Hofmiller that he has sought all types of doctors for Edith, but that only one, Doctor Condor, has remained optimistic of her chances. He tells of Condor's love for people, and tells that Condor in fact married his wife out of pity for her blindness. Kekesfalva asks Hofmiller to come on the day the doctor is to arrive and asks him to speak with the doctor about his true belief of Edith's case. He does not believe the doctor is telling him everything. Hofmiller agrees to ask, and Kekesfalva offers to repay him with introductions to higher ranking officials. They then go to the house, where Edith appears to know something has occurred.

Page 34 through 76. Analysis

In this section, readers glean more of Hofmiller's personality and glimpse a bit more of Edith's, as well. Hofmiller likes his new capacity for care, and finds himself placing himself in positions to be with the Kekesfalva's to enjoy the feeling. He even admits that such a feeling is dangerous in that it is too powerful and becomes nearly an addiction. However, once he realizes how such actions look to others, he purposefully harms his new friends by worrying them and lying to them. Again, Zweig shows the theme of appearances and how such appearances influence the actions of individuals. Readers might also notice that Hofmiller's opinion of Edith seems to stem on how noticeable her disability is at the time. When Edith is happy and relaxed, and when she is asleep, Hofmiller finds her pretty and fresh, but when she is unhappy and not purposefully hiding her disability, Hofmiller finds her disability almost too much to handle. His admittance that he has refused to allow his worlds collide shows clearly his fear of how others perceive him. The fact that he admits caring for the women as sisters foreshadows events later in the novel when Hofmiller realizes Edith has fallen in love with him. The treatment of Hofmiller, in that he has received lavish gifts and much praise, foreshadow that fact, as well.

It is fairly clear from Ilona's actions outside the cafe that she was sent there by Edith to discover where Hofmiller was, and events later in this chapter confirm this. For her part, Edith's rant to Hofmiller about his behaviors shows her, for the first time, to be aware of how others see her, and craving of honesty when it comes to her disability. Her chastising of Hofmiller's lies and the lies of everyone around her signify her acceptance of her disfigurement and of her life. Her admittance that she would have accepted a simple call saying Hofmiller would not be to dinner shows her own level of maturity. Her demands, while childish in presentation, are those of a woman who simply asks to be told the truth. Her concern for Hofmiller, and her reactions to him in general, show to readers her level of love for him is building, foreshadowing events later in the novel.

Kekesfalva's character is also brought out further in this section. Kekesfalva is clearly a man who obsesses over the health, or lack thereof, of his daughter. He is profoundly crushed by his daughter's ailment and will spare nothing to cure her. Kekesfalva's admittance that he has done things to deserve such a penance from God foreshadows knowledge later that he achieved his position through deceit. His discussion of Condor introduces the character of the good doctor, and it is clear from Kekesfalva's discussion of Condor and his wife that the man must be a saint, as he married a poor, ugly woman



older than he because he failed to cure her blindness. This discussion foreshadows the later meeting of Condor's wife and the telling of the truth about their engagement and their relationship. Kekesfalva's request of Hofmiller, that he question Condor for the truth, shows not only his decreasing faith in Condor but also his increasing faith in Hofmiller. This changing of relationships foreshadows an increasing dependence on Hofmiller with a decreasing dependence on Condor. Edith's silence at dinner shows she is not in the least fooled by the actions of the men, again showing her own intelligence.



Page 76 through 112.

Page 76 through 112. Summary

This section begins with Hofmiller noting the importance of Kekesfalva's request, in that it shows he has faith in him. He realizes he dreams of when Edith can walk without difficulty. The following day, Hofmiller arrives at the Kekesfalva's to find the doctor not what he anticipated, in that he is a stocky, short, bald man in a crumpled suit. He eats noisily and offensively, but finally settles down to give his report following his examination of Edith. He reports that her exercises are going well, but that she seems to have a different mental state. He asks if another doctor is seeing her, and Kekesfalva vehemently denies this. Condor passes this change off, but does note it is noticeable and that something is just not right. She shows, he reports, resistance and frustration. He rises to leave, and Hofmiller follows. The two men walk, and Condor speaks of his concerns for Kekesfalva's health. When Hofmiller explains that it is too bad that the noble aristocrat is ill, Condor is surprised, and questions whether he has not heard rumor of Kekesfalva's shady past. Condor notes he is surprised, and also remarks he was mistaken, in that he believed Hofmiller was simply after Kekesfalva's money. Condor then invites Hofmiller to have a drink with him so he can explain Kekesfalva's background further. The two go to a quiet bar, and Condor explains that Kekesfalva used to be only a poor Jew named Leopold Kanitz. His father died, and his mother made ends meet however possible. He worked in a local shop and learned the art of buying and selling. He learned to read and write from a rabbi. He went to Vienna and worked for an insurance agent, as well as for many other agencies. People began to need his services, and he began to gain considerable wealth. While riding on a train one night, he hears of the death of Princess Orosvar. The princess left all her belongings to her companion, Annette Dietzenhof, rather than to her family. Her relatives contest, and Dietsenhof is left with only the Kekesfalva estate. Kanitz recalls many pieces of art worth money in that estate, and thus goes to see if he can buy them for a minimal amount. He arrives at the estate to find Dietsendhof, who is timid and meek. After conversing as they stroll through the house on the pretense that Kanitz is an insurance agent, Dietzenhof admits she doesn't know what to do with the property. Kanitz discusses how terrible owning property can be, and Dietzenhof finally admits she wants to sell it.

Page 76 through 112. Analysis

In this section, reader are introduced to Doctor Condor, who at first seems an overbearing oaf. However, on careful examination, it appears Condor is simply one who likes not to alarm others. He is genuinely concerned about Edith and about Kekesfalva, as is shown later in the section when he discusses the situation with Hofmiller. His note about Edith's mental state foreshadows his discovery later of her love for Hofmiller. This keen eye for detail shows Condor to be a good physician.

Condor also reveals much of Kekesfalva, or rather, or Kanitz, in this section. The information that Kekesfalva is really from poor, Jewish roots explains his discomfort with money, as well as his seemingly always ill-at-ease mannerisms. The exclamation by Dietzenhof that she wishes to sell the property, combined with the knowledge that Kanitz is a shrewd buyer and entrepreneur, foreshadows Kanitz's buying of the property in the next section. His fumbling at presuming Dietzenhof to be a servant, however, foreshadows his decision to marry her once he swindles her later in the novel.



Page 113 through 151.

Page 113 through 151. Summary

In this section, Kanitz helps Dietzenhof to determine a value for the house that is much undervalue, to his advantage. He tells her she can expect one hundred fifty pounds, which is only a third of the value, to which she responds in awe that it could be worth so much. He and the woman go to Vienna, where he tells her he has a buyer in mind, although he does not mention it is himself. He wines and dines her while the lawyer draws up the paperwork, helps her to invest her one hundred ninety crowns in safe bonds, and on the last evening, finds she is returning to her family when the sale is finished. Kanitz, however, finds himself feeling guilty following the sale, as Dietzenhof thanks him for his help and offers to pay him. When they part, and she looks on him with love and awe and pure gratitude, Kanitz is struck nearly dumb. The following morning, Kanitz goes to her hotel to inquire of her, and when he finds her plans are somewhat aimless and frightening to her, he suddenly asks her to be his wife. She flees the room, but returns, and two months later, they are married. They have a happy life and have a child, but his wife soon becomes ill with cancer and dies. Following her death, Kanitz, now known as Kekesfalva, cares only for his child. When she is afflicted with disease, he goes nearly insane, and seeks any doctor who can promise a cure. Condor notes that he tells Hofmiller this only so he understands and so he does not bow to gossip he may hear. Hofmiller is ashamed that he'd never inquired about Kekesfalva or his past.

One the walk to the station, Hofmiller asks if Edith is curable, and Condor chastises him, noting the to believe anyone is incurable is to deny them hope. He gives an example of diabetes, in that the disease was previously a death sentence, but is now a treatable illness. Condor finally admits he believes there may be hope for Edith, but also admits he has made no headway with her, and that the contraptions and methods he uses currently are only to fool the family into having hope. He admits this is sly, but also notes it is necessary to keep them believing, and to give them hope. He also tells Hofmiller he has read of a study done with paralysis and a new treatment where the new treatment was completely successful. He has written the doctor for more information. When pressed, however, the doctor becomes angry, noting that he makes no promises, and boards the train.

When Hofmiller arrives back at the barracks, he finds Kekesfalva waiting. Afraid he will be caught in the downpour that is about to occur, Hofmiller persuades him to go back to the car by telling him he was sure everything would be fine. Resisting, Kekesfalva forces Hofmiller to sit with him as he asks what Condor said. Hofmiller, feeling pity, begins talking to Kekesfalva, reassuring him, telling him of the new treatment, of its success, and of his assurance that this cure would work for Edith. Hofmiller admits he knows not what he said, for as Kekesfalva gained more hope through his words, he was driven to promise more things. Finally, the rain breaks the two apart and Kekesfalva returns to his car, takes Hofmiller's hands, and kisses them in gratitude.



Page 113 through 151. Analysis

This section explains how Kanitz became Kekesfalva, and explains much of why he is so obsessed with his daughter's recovery. Kanitz's reaction to the gratitude of Dietzenhof shows he is not, by nature, a cruel character, but simply a shrewd businessman. As Condor explains, he was not intending to swindle the woman, but simply took advantage of a situation. Unable to deal with his guilt and finding himself generally drawn to Dietzenhof, however, he marries her. The marriage is happy until her death, and it is at this time that Kekesfalva becomes obsessed with his daughter. When she too takes ill, Kekesfalva is nearly insane with despair, showing again he is not a cruel character.

Condor, in this section, is shown to be a loving and caring doctor, but one who is frustrated with the demands being placed on him by the Kekesfalva family. He admits he is somewhat deceiving the family, but honestly believes he is doing it for their benefit. He clearly cares for the case, and his concepts about new treatments show he is constantly attempting to find new methods. However, his inability to promise any form of cure foreshadows Edith's demise and his words of warning about discussing the new cure foreshadow Hofmiller's telling of the cure, and the eventually downfall of the situation as a result.

Kekesfalva's neediness at the end of this chapter serves two purposes. First, it shows how Kekesfalva uses his sorrow and concern for his daughter to manipulate others into doing as he asks. Secondly, it shows Hofmiller's response to such neediness, as he lies to Kekesfalva to make him feel better. This lie foreshadows Hofmiller's continuous lies throughout the rest of the story, and Condor's warning combined with this scene serve to send a warning to readers that such lies can never end in positive notes. Kekesfalva's show of gratitude at the end of this section, combined with Hofmiller's egotistical response also foreshadows continues lies in the novel.



Page 151 through 182.

Page 151 through 182. Summary

Hofmiller begins the next day with duty, thinking little of his conversation the night before, other than to feel very happy he was able to bring peace. When he arrives at Kekesfalva's, he is welcomed heroically, and finds Ilona and Edith singing happily in the tower. He is appalled to discover Kekesfalva returned to the castle the previous night only to wake his daughter and tell her of the miracle cure Hofmiller discussed with Condor. Hofmiller stumbles through his conversation with Condor, again making it seem more positive than Condor had stated. Hofmiller is clearly uncomfortable, and wonders how his words to Kekesfalva turned against him, making Edith believe in a false cure that may not even apply to her. Hofmiller tries to slow her enthusiasm, but is unsuccessful. To celebrate, Edith and Ilona plan a trip to the family stud farm via a large horse drawn carriage owned by the late princess, and they invite Hofmiller, as well. Edith's intoxication is catching, and Hofmiller finds himself believing in his own lies.

The following day finds everyone in a wonderful mood as they prepare for the trip. Onlookers are amazed as they travel to outlying towns. They stop for Mass in a small village, where Edith is treated like royalty and where Hofmiller notes Edith's prayers are fierce. Edith is then silent on the way to the stud farm, but comes alive as she plays with new foals while Hofmiller rides wild horses. On the way home, they are stopped by the wedding of locals in a small town and are welcomed as royalty. They eat and dine with the family and Edith gives them a wedding gift. She then visits with a gypsy, who tells her something that makes her weep with joy. They return to the castle, and Hofmiller returns to his barracks to find a telegram from Condor, who informs him he has been asked by the Kekesfalva's to visit and that he wants an explanation. Hofmiller immediately sobers up from his happy day and realizes he has lied and that Condor is about to call him out on those lies.

Condor arrives, and the two go to the same bar. Condor notes he has received both a telegram and a letter from the Kekesfalva's, and since they mention a new treatment, Condor knew Hofmiller had to be speaking to them about the treatment they discussed. Condor further tells him that after reviewing the evidence, the new treatment would not be effective on Edith. Condor admits he feels for Hofmiller, and realizes he acted only out of pity, but notes that pity is poison, and that those who are unversed in it should not put themselves in situations where pity is a constant. He explains that there are two kinds of pity. In one case, pity serves only to help the one feeling pity to rid themselves of a bad emotion, whereas the other means endless patience and love and care for the pitied, no matter what the price.

Condor notes they will have to tell the family the truth, but Hofmiller suggests they wait, so that Edith can continue to have hope, which may help her mentally have the strength to cure herself. Condor agrees, but fears that the end result, when she isn't cured, may be too much. Hofmiller agrees that he will be responsible for the outcome, and that he



will be the one to tell her, in the end, that he lied and deceived her. Condor admits he is not fond of delaying the truth, but counts on Hofmiller to do his duty when the time comes. Condor leaves, and several hours later Hofmiller receives a note that the family will leave for the new treatment in ten days.

Page 151 through 182. Analysis

This section begins to show the downfall of pity as a mechanism for hope. Hofmiller, in his eagerness to provide solace, lied to Kekesfalva, and this lie was then transferred to his daughter. The outing of the family shows the possibilities are there for Edith to enjoy her life, even as a crippled individual. However, her fatalistic view of the world holds her down, and it is only when she is falsely able to believe she might be cured that she can let down her guard and have fun. Her conversation and subsequent emotional outbursts after meeting with the gypsy as well as her fervent prayers show her strong desire to be cured. Unfortunately, this section shows that Edith is unable to accept her paralysis as a permanent condition, foreshadowing her suicide at the end of the novel. Edith has a huge hope for recovery that is now based on completely false information. While her spirits are certainly raised, Condor realizes this is false hope, and that the end result will be crushing misery for Edith and her family. Hofmiller, afraid of having to admit the truth of his actions, would prefer to delay the inevitable, even though Condor knows this will end worse than if they tell her the truth now.

Condor again shows himself to be a kind, caring person as he is not angry with Hofmiller for his actions, and shows he does understand that pity can cause one to act without thought. However, Condor also notes that Hofmiller has to be responsible for his own actions, and that Condor is counting on him to be man enough to admit his error, and to tell poor Edith the truth. This confidence, and Condor's admittance that it is probably overconfidence, foreshadows Hofmiller's inability to face his lies later in the novel.



Page 182 through 223.

Page 182 through 223. Summary

In this section, Hofmiller reads Arabian Nights, and finds similarities between his own story and the tale in the book. He sees Kekesfalva as the djinn in the story, and wonders if he is capable of being strong enough to continue his lie. At the Kekesfalva's, he is inundated with information Condor has given them, and with stories of Edith's own attempts of suicide at the idea that she would never be well. When Hofmiller does not respond in way she finds satisfactory, she becomes angry and tells him he will be free when they go away. Hofmiller notes his duties will keep him busy, and Edith asks when he will come join them at the sanitarium. Hofmiller responds sarcastically, noting that he can't really just decide not to be a soldier long enough to take a holiday, and that he can't really afford such a journey. When she passes the price off as minimal, he angrily details his poverty in great depth, and she responds, embarrassed, that he then buys her such nice flowers. Soon, she pulls herself together, however, and reminds him that her father can pay for his trip. He angrily notes he refuses to be kept, and Edith throws a temper tantrum. She asks why he bothers to come see them at all, and he notes that he enjoys their company, that he feels important to them, and that he believes she enjoys his company in comparison to being alone. Edith, crushed at the thought, angrily notes she does not need his pity, nor his biased, unreal friendship, and that she would rather commit suicide than have to endure he or anyone's self-sacrifice. She attempts to show him she can climb over the balcony to jump, and when he tries to stop her, she loses her balance and falls to a heap on the floor. She is taken away, sobbing, by the butler who returns to apologize and ask that he wait for Ilona. Ilona comes and asks that Hofmiller see Edith in her bedroom and reminds him he needs to be nice, since she hates herself after her tantrums. Hofmiller goes to Edith, who apologizes for her behaviors. She also notes she feels Condor is behaving oddly. She is forgiven by Hofmiller but becomes upset again when she notices she has spilled tea on Hofmiller's uniform. He kids her to stave off her outburst, noting a naughty child spilled tea. The two play verbally for a bit, and on his way out, Edith says the child usually gets a kiss before sleep. Hofmiller is uncomfortable, but goes to kiss her on the head. Edith moves his head, and forces him to kiss her lips, her breasts heaving upward for his touch. She then kisses him all over the head and neck, holding him fiercely, until she falls back, exhausted, turns from him, and, embarrassed, tells him to go.

He staggers from the room, realizing now Edith is in love with him. He admits he did not see Edith as a person capable of love, but only as a cripple to be pitied. He realizes he is to blame, and that because of his pity, his actions were misconstrued. He also realizes he is the only one not to see the truth prior to now. Ilona finds him and forces him to sit, while asking what happened. She realizes what has occurred, and asks if he really was unaware prior to this of her love for him. She admits she knew, and even encouraged the thought because while she knew he felt only pity, she could not bear to crush Edith's hopes. She laments that Edith feels true love and passion for him, and tells him Edith wakes everyone in the home in the middle of the night to ask if they think



Hofmiller is fond of her. She forces Ilona to go out to find Hofmiller to declare her love, only to call her back to beg her not to reveal her feelings. She begs him to accept Edith's feelings, but Hofmiller angrily notes he refused to "be loved like this", and notes he feels only pity. Ilona wonders how to break the news to Edith. Ilona helps him flee the house, and Hofmiller laments to himself that being loved by someone one does not love back is worse than the one loving. He feels powerless and does not want power over another, but knows love is a power unto its self. He realizes he cannot bear with her love.

Hofmiller meets friends in town who invite him to dinner with Balinkay, a man who supports the regiment. Balinkay at one point was in the regiment, but ran into some form of trouble. He left, married a wealthy widow, and has since supported the military. Hofmiller returns to his barracks to prepare for dinner, and a note arrives from Edith. She writes that she has held her love from him as long as possible, and that she does not expect him to love her in return, but she does ask that he not spurn her and that he continue to come and pretend as though nothing has happened. She asks him to remember that she is a cripple and vulnerable, and that she asks only for a word to show he forgives her. She notes there is no day or night without him, but only despair, and that she waits breathlessly for a small sign that he does not intend to now ignore her.

Page 182 through 223. Analysis

The first scene in this chapter is one filled with emotional tension and much information. From Hofmiller's analysis of Arabian Nights, it is clear he is beginning to feel trapped by Kekesfalva and the pity he is now engulfed with. Edith's revelations of her previous suicide attempts, as well as her near attempt in this section, serve to foreshadow her eventual choice to end her life rather than live without Hofmiller. When confronted with Edith's fury, Hofmiller actually tries to be honest in that he tells her of his feelings of home, of his happiness when at ease at the Kekesfalva's, and of his enjoyment of being cared about. Edith, however, takes this badly, foreshadowing her revelation that she loves him. At this point, Hofmiller is dismayed and confused at her reaction. For his part, Hofmiller is rightfully angry as Edith treats him the way she treats everyone, like a piece of property to be owned and bossed. Edith in this scene shows again that she is manipulative to the point of being dangerous, and that to her, people are simply objects in her world to obtain. She embarrasses herself by falling to the floor, but uses that to her advantage when she later lures him to her room and kisses him. Whether this was a deliberate plan or simply another sign of the shrewdness of Edith, the end result is that Hofmiller is made plainly aware of Edith's feelings. His reaction shows him to be less than kind as he refuses to accept the love of this person. Rather than seeing the love as a privilege and a blessing as some would, Hofmiller sees it as an unwanted affection. He openly rejects it, even though he realizes he is to blame for her misunderstanding the situation. Even Ilona knows that to tell Edith the truth would be to crush her, but Hofmiller seems not to care as he thinks only of himself. It is at this point that the reader begins to shift pity away from Hofmiller. Up through this point, readers have felt for



Hofmiller as he struggles to help Edith. However, his cruelty at shunning a woman who loves him is cause for a change of heart.

The letter from Edith yet again shows her own manipulation of situations. Several times in the letter she begs for forgiveness only to note she will kill herself if such forgiveness is not given. She laments about her condition again, as though reminding Hofmiller of her disability is necessary. Her request for one word from Hofmiller combined with the knowledge that Hofmiller is about to go to a formal dinner, foreshadows events in the next section as Hofmiller does not even give her this trifling show of affection. Finally, this chapter introduces Balinkay, who becomes important later in the novel as Hofmiller seeks refuge from his actions.



Page 223 through 273.

Page 223 through 273. Summary

Ferencz appears in Hofmiller's room, demanding he hurry lest they both be late. The two scamper to the dinner, but throughout, Hofmiller has trouble eating and drinking with the rest, as his thoughts are on the letter stowed in his pocket. He feels immense pity for her, and sorrow over what he has caused. Balinkay comes round to toast him, but he barely notices. Hofmiller takes an opportunity when no one will notice, and leaves the dinner.

On returning home, Hofmiller finds another letter, and fears Edith is trapping him. He thinks again of the evil djinn in *Arabian Nights*, and he fears she will destroy him. However, his fear that Edith has done something to harm herself and the fear that he will incur blame leads him to tear open the new letter. In it, Edith simply tells him not to come to the house and to forget everything she has said to him. She tells him to "think no more about it", which he finds an impossible and childish command. He is only able to forget the event when he is on duty, and even then he is called out for giving incorrect commands. He is pulled aside by the Colonel and sternly chastised for his behavior. He is dismissed from the field in shame. Ferencz attempts to console him, but he is rebuked.

Angry, Hofmiller seeks for a kind soul and finds Balinkay. He asks to speak with him, and the two go up to his room where Hofmiller asks for advice on leaving the military. Balinkay tells him not to, but when Hofmiller insists, Balinkay tells him of his own story of leaving military life. He was waiting tables in a hotel when he met his to-be wife, because he had been swindled out of all his money. He stood up to her brother-in-law, and impressed her. Later, when he was properly introduced, the two fell in love. Balinkay realizes Hofmiller is serious and takes him immediately to Vienna to meet his wife so the two can ask for a job.

Hofmiller and Balinkay arrive, and Balinkay talks to his wife while Hofmiller cleans up. Balinkay's wife determines it would be fine if Hofmiller joined one of the ships to learn the ropes. Balinkay tells Hofmiller he can either decide to join or not, that either decision is acceptable, and the two part ways. Hofmiller writes his resignation and imagines what the officers will think when he turns it in. He believes others will think it a result of being called out on the field and vainly thinks others will look fondly on the idea. When he presses the form in his pocket and feels the letters from Edith, however, he realizes he is running away from the Kekesfalva's. He decides to speak with Doctor Condor and immediately goes to his home, which is surprisingly in the poorer district.

Hofmiller is seated in a poor waiting room only to be approached by the blind wife of Condor, Klara, who chastises him, for he and other patients are always bothering the doctor and always taking him for granted. When Condor arrives, he thanks Klara for visiting with Hofmiller and explains that he is a friend, not a patient. Hofmiller notes he



treats Klara with tenderness and extreme patience. Condor and his wife go to dine, and Hofmiller dozes while waiting for the doctor to return. When he does, Hofmiller pours out the story of her kiss, her letter, and his dismay. The doctor first kicks himself for not realizing Edith was in love, then rebukes Hofmiller for thinking he can simply talk Edith out of loving him. He also tells Hofmiller to either tell him of his plan or leave. When Hofmiller does not respond, Condor guesses it is his plan to flee and chastises him, noting that he will, in all likelihood, then be responsible for the death of Edith, since she will commit suicide. He sees such a move as murder. Hofmiller notes he cannot feel something he does not feel, and won't. The doctor tells him to calm himself and asks what in particular he is so afraid of. Condor guesses that it is her disability that causes disgust, but Hofmiller denies this. Condor next guesses that Hofmiller is simply embarrassed because he knows what others will think when they discover Edith is in love with him. Condor accuses him of being afraid of looking ridiculous. Hofmiller admits to himself ashamed that this is, in fact, the truth, and that this is why he always chose not to mix his two lives. Condor sympathizes, and notes that he understands. He admits he knows because of his own marriage to a blind patient. He tells Hofmiller that his family and friends were furious when he married her, but that he never regrets his choice, for she would have died without him. He credits his marriage as the one thing he knows he did right, and his wife as the one person he knows he has saved. Hofmiller repeats his desire to run away, but when Condor tells him it is on his conscience, he tells Condor to tear up the resignation. Condor admits he does not trust Hofmiller, only because his emotions are too volatile. So, he states, he doesn't ask much, but only that Hofmiller continue, for one week, to act normally for Edith. Hofmiller agrees, and Condor warns him that, should anything happen, he must immediately come and tell him, since Condor is in a position to stop Edith from harming herself. Condor says warmly that he will always be ready to come to Hofmiller's aid, and asks that he not be ashamed. The two part to rejoin Condor's wife, whom he notes is frail and easily upset. In front of Klara, the doctor repeats how he is counting on Hofmiller, and Hofmiller repeats his promise. Klara apologizes for her earlier behavior and shows regret when he has to leave. Hofmiller questions what it is about him that causes people to count on him, and to care about him.

Page 223 through 273. Analysis

In this section, Ferencz shows himself to be a good friend, but again Hofmiller pushes him aside. Hofmiller's reactions in the beginning of this section to most issues shows him to be a selfish character, one who cares little for others. Instead of being grateful to Edith for her love, he is selfishly angry that she loves him so passionately. Instead of thanking Ferencz for his kind words on the field, he growls at him. Instead of being worried for Edith's safety, he selfishly worries she is trapping him with her love. It is only when Doctor Condor questions his reasons for his reaction to Edith's love that one sees the real reason for Hofmiller's discomfort. Again, his reason for his actions are the fear of what others will think of him. When he is berated on the field, he uses that for an excuse to leave the area, but realizes later this is a childish way of trying to avoid his responsibilities. His meeting with Balinkay, foreshadowed by the dinner party, is another example of Hofmiller's level of immaturity. Even when an experienced officer tells him of



his own difficulties outside of the military, Hofmiller vows to continue with his plan to leave and still does not stop to question his own motives. When writing his resignation, he feels proud that others will see him as bold. Again, readers see that most of what Hofmiller does is expressly designed to entertain, impress, or otherwise draw the attention of others who may look upon him with admiration.

The conversation with Balinkay, while seemingly pointless by the end of the novel, does serve a purpose. Balinkay's story is one that has been blown out of proportion by those who speak of him. Hofmiller has heard stories of his wife, and of their marriage. However, the story he hears from Balinkay is far different than that told by the gossips of the regiment. This serves to show again that what others think of a situation is not often the truth, and even Hofmiller can see that. However, when faced with the same likelihood of having people make fun of him, he chooses to become selfish and run away from ridicule instead of facing it as Balinkay has, showing again his selfishness and his inability to face the ridicule of his peers.

Condor reveals much about himself in this section as well, although his revelations are much more appealing. Condor is a good man, and one who works hard not to impress others but to save one person at a time. Condor is a truly giving person, whose devotion to his wife out of duty drawn by pity shows his own level of personal responsibility to his patients. Unable to consciously leave his patient to her blindness, Condor resigned himself to a married life with a fragile creature, and in this way knows he has done the right thing at least once in his life. Condor is not one who cares about how he looks to others, but rather one who answers only to his own heart. It is in watching this selflessness that Hofmiller is able to promise he will continue to lead Edith along for one week. However, the knowledge that Hofmiller's character is weak, combined with the warnings of Condor to tell him immediately if something goes awry, foreshadow the ending of the novel brilliantly.

The introduction of Klara, Condor's wife, in this section, serves three primary purposes. First, readers see another disabled person, and again, this person is prone to fits and outbursts. However, unlike Edith, Klara's outbursts appear to be based on her love for her husband and not on her own limitations. While she is presented with a fragility that Zweig appears to attribute to all the disabled, Klara is presented at least as a character who cares more for others than for herself. She is whining, but not because of her own disability, but on behalf of her husband. Secondly, the introduction of Klara allows the readers to see Condor in his most caring, loving form, and is able to see that his brand of pity is much more loving than that of Hofmiller's, and is much more rewarding to both the disabled and the doctor. Third, the introduction of Klara allows for Hofmiller to ask himself why he is so loved. This again shows Hofmiller to be so very selfish. Rather than feeling the warm glow of friendship, he places himself on a pedestal.



Page 273 through 353.

Page 273 through 353. Summary

Hofmiller goes to the Kekesfalva's and finds that Edith has smartly invited a few female friends over, so their first meeting is somewhat more relaxed. When the others leave, Hofmiller and Edith try to play chess, but Edith gives up, exasperated with the silence between them. She begins to have a fit, but one touch from Hofmiller soothes her. She takes his hand eventually and lovingly caresses it. Hofmiller is deeply moved by her tender touch, but eventually pulls away. When he does, Edith pouts and Hofmiller kisses her on the head to stave off her tantrum, but Edith realizes he does this only out of pity and embarrassment. Hofmiller keeps visiting, but by the fourth day it is obvious there is tension. Edith purposefully acts throughout the day as if Hofmiller is boring her. At dinner she ignores him and finally explodes at him. She notes that if he is unhappy coming, he should just not come. She throws a tantrum, but Hofmiller remains calm and collected. She reminds him that while he may be counting the days until they leave, sometimes people are wrong in their calculations. Edith is removed from the room, and Ilona begs Hofmiller to forgive her. He notes that he understands, and plans to return the following day.

However, while at mess the following day with his friends, Hofmiller receives a phone call from Ilona, noting that Edith is not feeling well, that he should not come, and that they will be delaying their departure to the sanitarium by a few days. Hofmiller is confused and somewhat angry, since there is now no end in sight. He argues with Ferencz when he returns to mess, but Hofmiller tries to pass it off. To vent his pent up anger, he asks if he can help break in the horse of a friend. He does, and is proud as he hears the positive comments about him by his friends as they watch. He takes the horse for a ride, and on the way back, sees Kekesfalva and Doctor Condor. Fearing something is wrong, he rushes back to his room to see if there is a letter. Instead, he finds Kekesfalva. After a brief hello, Hofmiller purposefully stops talking so as not to draw himself further into the Kekesfalva affairs. Kekesfalva, however, tells him Edith now refuses to go to the sanitarium for treatment and that she now states she doesn't want to be cured, that there is no point because Hofmiller only pities her and does not love her. Kekesfalva falls to his knees and begs Hofmiller to help his daughter. Hofmiller, embarrassed, says he will help and asks Kekesfalva what he would like him to do. Kekesfalva angrily notes he has been cruel by not saying anything to her about her love for him, and accuses him of driving her mad with his visits. He offers Hofmiller his wealth if only he will marry Edith. Hofmiller at first refuses, noting he cannot marry outside his station, for fear of others believing he married for money, and that Edith would always question his motives. Kekesfalva, in despair, turns to leave when Hofmiller calls him back out of pity. Hofmiller notes that he is fond of Edith, but that right now, she should focus on recovering. When Kekesfalva asks about what happens after her recovery, Hofmiller agrees he will come and ask Kekesfalva for Edith's hand in marriage. Kekesfalva is happy, and Hofmiller, believing Edith will never be cured, thinks



he has done a good deed. An hour later, when Edith writes to him that she will be his, always, he realizes he no longer belongs to himself.

Hofmiller returns to the Kekesfalva's the following day, having several drinks beforehand. He arrives to find the butler and Ilona joyfully appreciative of his gesture. When he reaches Edith, he is surprised and happy at the change in her, as she is happy, lively, and beautiful in her excitement. She thanks him for giving her a reason to live and to get well, and promises that if she does not get well, he will not have to bother with her. Kekesfalva cries in gratitude, and Josef, too, sobs with relief. Hofmiller, caught in the moment, kisses Edith on the lips. Moments later, she slips an engagement ring on his finger. Hofmiller compares himself in his head to God, and praises himself for "creating a human being". He holds himself responsible for saving the family from despair, and in saving Edith from herself. He kisses her again as he leaves. As he puts on his coat, however, he hears the tap-tap of Edith's crutches from the other room. The door flies open, and Edith is there. Launching from the door, she suddenly tries to walk with outstretched arms to Hofmiller without the aid of crutches. She makes it several steps, but falls at Hofmiller's feet. Instead of coming to her aid, Hofmiller cringes back in embarrassment.

As they take Edith away, Hofmiller feels he has lost his God status, and is now merely a man whose pity has caused despair to others. He knows he should go to Edith but instead, he flees the house. Upset and panicking at the thought that they "made him get engaged", he goes to a local tavern, where he falls asleep and imagines the reactions from his family and friends. He awakens and flees the tavern, only to find himself at the cafe where his friends immediately begin to raze him. Apparently, they have been told by the local apothecary that he is engaged to Edith. Unable to stand the idea of being embarrassed, he states he is not engaged, and that the apothecary is lying. The men talk excitedly, noting they knew he wouldn't be so foolish and that they sensed danger around the Kekesfalva's. Hofmiller, meanwhile, pays little attention as he realizes he must now have to do away with himself, since he has now hurt Edith, allowed Kekesfalva's name to be ruined, and called the apothecary a liar. He knows the whole regiment will know tomorrow of his actions. He leaves the cafe, determined to kill himself, but decides to tell Colonel Bubencic of his plans so he can help organize his affairs. The colonel listens to his story, but convinces him not to go through with the suicide. Instead, he plans to send Hofmiller to another regiment. He will also call the men from the tavern in to swear them to secrecy, and will report that Hofmiller was drunk when he agreed to marry Edith. Hofmiller moves on autopilot until he is put on the train, and then realizes he must tell Condor of the events. When his train stops in Vienna, he rushes to the doctor, who is not home. He writes a note, which Klara promises to give him. The note tells of the unfortunate incident and is honest. In it, Hofmiller notes that Condor is to inform Edith that if she can forgive him, he will marry her no matter if she cured. Hofmiller tells Condor he realizes now that he must do this for the woman who loved him. He arrives back at the station and boards the train, but suddenly fears Condor may not arrive at Kekesfalva's in time. Thus, in Brunn, he sends a telegram to Edith to tell her everything is fine, and that Condor will explain everything. He notices there is a large commotion at the station but pays little attention.



He arrives in Czaslau and goes to sleep, but is awakened by a call in the middle of the night from Vienna. The call, however, is dropped before he can pick it up. He worries all night, knowing it must be Condor. He rises the next morning to learn the call was canceled. The following morning, he arrives for duty to learn that the heir to the throne has been murdered, and that he and his fellow soldiers are to be sent to war. On a break, he receives a telegram that notes his own telegram was unable to be delivered, due to the busyness of the lines as the heir was killed. Hofmiller calls Condor, and learns that all is lost. Ferencz and his friends confronted the apothecary the night of the engagement for his lies. The apothecary therefore went to the home of Kekesfalva to find why he lied. Edith overheard that Hofmiller had lied about their engagement, and, after seeming to be fine to the family, threw herself from the balcony. She lived for a few hours, which is why Condor tried to reach Hofmiller. However, when she died at midnight, Condor had canceled the call.

Hofmiller, in a daze, notes that he goes off to war willingly, and sees it as a means of escape. He writes to his family and friends, as well as to Kekesfalva, but no one responds. He sees this originally as a sign of his crime, but over time, comes to realize this is not the case. Kekesfalva dies only days after Edith, and his father is busy with the war, as are his friends. During the war, he fights and is honored for bravery, but he believes his bravery to be merely a sign that he cares little for his own life. When he returns, there is no one left that knows of his deeds. However, one night at the opera, he sees Condor and his wife, and is reminded of his horrible actions. He realizes, as he flees, that he will never be free of his guilt.

Page 273 through 353. Analysis

The last section of the novel ties together many of the topics and themes throughout the novel. While Edith attempts to smooth over the situation at the beginning of the section, it is clear there is tension between her and Hofmiller. The fact that Hofmiller is able to calm her with a simple touch is proof of her love for him, and her tender caressing of his hand further shows her emotions. However, Hofmiller's inability to simply let her caress him shows his own inability to allow her to love him, foreshadowing events at the end of the novel. It is clear Hofmiller cares for Edith, but it is equally clear that he cares for himself more. When Edith's tension finally boils over, it is clear she plans to throw a wrench in Hofmiller's plans to be rid of the problem. Ilona again shows herself to be a loving caretaker of Edith as she attempts to persuade Hofmiller to forgive young Edith.

Hofmiller continues to show his true colors when the call comes from the Kekesfalva's that informs him the trip has been postponed. He is angry at the wait, and feels as though they are purposefully making him wait longer for his freedom. This again shows his selfish nature. Kekesfalva shows his manipulative nature as he persuades Hofmiller, almost unwittingly, to marry Edith when she is cured. Hofmiller, knowing there is no cure for Edith, agrees, again allowing pity to rule his decisions. His feelings at the house, too, betray his selfishness as he feels himself a God for helping Edith and her family. Even as he "helps" Edith, he listens to her swear loyalty to him knowing he will never marry her, and yet he selfishly continues with his lie, feeling good about his ability to make



people happy. He even voluntarily kisses her in the heat of the moment, again feeling as though he is helping. It is only when Edith, in a humiliating attempt to prove her willingness for a cure to him, falls to the ground that Hofmiller realizes the entire vision in his head is false. He finally realizes he is setting Edith up for the worst fall of her life, in that she will not be cured and will lose him as well. He shows himself again to be a coward, and to fear only what others think when he flees the house and thinks only of what others will say about him. The totality of his selfishness, however, is shown when he flatly lies to his friends about his engagement.

This selfishness continues when Hofmiller decides to commit suicide rather than face his lies. Again, he rashly makes a decision based on his emotions at the moment. While he is talked out of this by his Colonel, he shows again his weakness for strong emotion and his inability to deal with it. It is only at this point, the lowest point of his journey, that he finally understands that his only choice is to give himself up to the love of Edith. He tries to have Condor break the news to Edith that he has failed her, but is willing to spend his life with her, but his plans fail. Edith, unable to deal with the rejection of the man she loves, commits suicide, as foreshadowed throughout the novel. Kekesfalva's death shortly thereafter was also foreshadowed several times, since his daughter was all he lived for. In the end, Hofmiller learns that while he can escape his deeds momentarily, through war, he cannot forgive himself for the crimes he committed against Edith and her family.



Characters

Anton Hofmiller

Anton Hofmiller, or Toni, is a career military lieutenant, stationed in Austria. He is tall, handsome, from a middle class upbringing. He is a genuinely nice person, but cares much about what others think of him. He had little choice but to join the military, but believes strongly in the military code and in the idea of duty. When Hofmiller is invited to a wealthy aristocrat's home and accidentally upsets the hosts' crippled daughter, he makes every attempt to rectify the situation. In doing so, however, he finds himself at the mercy of the pity he feels for the young woman and her father. On several occasions, Hofmiller finds himself lying in a effort to spare their feelings. As they turn to him more and more for support and sympathy, Hofmiller finds himself both enjoying their attentions and loathing the constant feeling of pressure to perform. In the end, young Edith falls in love with Hofmiller. Unable to return the feelings, Hofmiller finds himself lying more and more to escape the reality of the situation. In the end, he learns that he must give up himself to save Edith, but his knowledge comes to late, as she commits suicide.

Edith Kekesfalva

Edith Kekesfalva is the seventeen-year-old daughter of a wealthy land owner. She is a smaller, young woman with thin auburn hair and gray, emotional eyes. Crippled by a disease, Edith is filled with rage and anger at her condition. Although she used to love to do things, her condition forces her to live within the walls of the castle, and her embarrassment at her condition forces her to stay inside. She lashes out at family and friends who aim only to help her, and she clings to ideas for cures. She is temperamental, frustrating, and often cruel. When Hofmiller begins showing her positive attentions, Edith mistakenly attributes his care as love, and falls in love with him. She tries to keep her infatuation quiet, but one evening tricks him into kissing her. She then asks him to allow her to love him, and manipulates him into becoming her fiancée. However, when Edith learns Hofmiller is capable only of pity and not of love, she kills herself. Edith uses her disability often throughout the book to manipulate characters into doing as she pleases. However, one cannot help but feel pity for the young woman as she struggles with new emotions of love, only to be hurt by that same individual she has such profound feelings for. Although she is cruel, Edith's character is the primary focus of Hofmiller's pity throughout the novel, and serves to show that pity can be a very dangerous and harmful emotion if not properly used.

Herr Lajos von Kekesfalva

Herr Lajos von Kekesfalva was originally a young Jewish boy named Kanitz who tried to work his way up in the world. He is a small man with spectacles, bony hands, and a



bony head with a receding hairline. Eventually he met a woman whom he talked into selling him her estate for a third of its value, thereby making him a wealthy land owner. Feeling bad about the deal, he married the young woman. Their only child, Edith, was a light in both their eyes. When his wife died of cancer, Kekesfalva transferred his love to his daughter and became nearly obsessed with her. When an illness took her ability to walk, he became obsessed with finding a cure. Kekesfalva uses his own pitiful obsession with his daughter often as a manipulation tool. In the novel, he often uses this against Hofmiller to coerce him into both continuing to come see his daughter and in marrying his daughter. In the end, however, Kekesfalva learns that Hofmiller is a selfish individual who cares little for others except for his pity for them. When his daughter commits suicide as a result of believing she has lost Hofmiller, Kekesfalva dies.

Ilona

Ilona is the niece of Kekesfalva, and a caretaker of Edith. A pretty woman with dark hair and a voluptuous figure, Ilona is at first a love interest of Hofmiller's until he learns she is engaged. Promised a large dowry if she postpones her own wedding plans to help care for Edith, Ilona never-the-less plays the role of a loving, honest, sincere caretaker of Edith. Unlike Hofmiller, who feels only a selfish pity for Edith, Ilona, like Condor, feels a genuine love and tenderness for the girl, as is shown in her defense of Edith's behaviors. Ilona is a loving, caring woman who wants only to see her cousin happy and most of all, well.

Doctor Condor

Doctor Condor's character plays the foil for Hofmiller, in that Doctor Condor is the opposite of the protagonist. He is short, stout, and has few manners. Condor feels pity for Edith, and for others; however, his pity causes him to do good in the world rather than to do bad. Whereas Hofmiller's pity causes him to lie and deceive in an effort to simply stop his own anguish, Condor's pity allows him to treat the sick and to give of himself endlessly and tirelessly. He gives freely of himself and is a constant reminder that care, love, and compassion are all good, provided they are done without selfishness. Condor's treatment of his wife is a direct contrast to Hofmiller's treatment of Edith, which further helps illustrate Hofmiller's selfishness. Further, Condor's treatment of Hofmiller himself shows him to be a kind individual who does not judge others.

Ferencz / Other Men of the Regiment

Ferencz and the other men of the regiment are the verbal component of Hofmiller's fears. Hofmiller fears what these men think of him, and their conversations throughout the novel serve to illustrate the types of comments Hofmiller can expect to hear about himself if the group learns of his relationship with Edith. However, Ferencz shows himself to be a good friend as he attempts to warn Hofmiller of the dangers of his



relations and as he shows a genuine care and concern for Hofmiller. Yet again, this show of friendship is often ignored by Hofmiller, showing his selfish nature.

Colonel Oberst

Colonel Oberst, while playing a small character in the novel, does serve a purpose. Oberst is the epitome of a military man, in that he plans to hush up the entire affair between the Kekesfalva's and Hofmiller. He forces Hofmiller to examine his reasons for suicide and to stop planning for his own death. He is the first force which causes Hofmiller to stop thinking only on his own self and to see that his actions affect the actions of others, as well.

Josef

Josef is another smaller character in the novel, with a large role. At the end of the novel, even Josef is emotionally touched by Hofmiller's gesture to marry Edith. This shows not only the depth of the love of this character for Edith, but also shows the hold Edith has over the entire family. It is clear throughout the novel that Josef is often the one to help Edith and is often the person called when her tantrums cause harm. Yet, like Ilona, Josef loves and respects Edith in such a way that he is able to ignore her outbursts and continue to love her and care for her.

Doctor Condor's wife, Klava

Klava, Doctor Condor's blind wife, serves as a supporting role to that of Edith. Both women are disabled and both women have some of the same characteristics, such as a propensity for drama and overreaction. However, unlike Edith's outbursts, which are generally self serving, Klava's outbursts are often in protection of her husband. It is clear she adores her husband and that he, in turn, adores her as well. The relationship between Condor and his wife serves as an example of how pity, when in the right person, can positively impact the lives of several individuals. Unfortunately, Hofmiller does not learn from these characters until it is too late.

Balinkay

Balinkay is a character whose own story has the potential to sway Hofmiller into disregarding public opinion, but whose story fails to do so. Balinkay too married a woman whom others found undeserving. Many said he married for money, just as they would have in the case of Hofmiller marrying Edith. However, as Balinkay notes, he cares not what people say because he loves his wife and is happy with her. While this story was designed to show Hofmiller that the perception of others was unimportant, Hofmiller was too distracted with his own selfishness to learn the lesson.



Objects/Places

Gaffe

A gaffe is a blunder done by a person, which often causes problems. In the book, the asking of Edith to dance by Hofmiller was a gaffe that began all of his later problems.

Austria

Austria is where Hofmiller is stationed in the book. Austria is a country in Central Europe, and in 1913 when the book was written, consisted of much more land than currently is allocated to the country.

Apothecary

In 1913, an apothecary was an individual who formulated and dispensed medicines for doctors, patients, and others, similar to today's pharmacist. However, an apothecary also gave medical advice, practiced some medicine, and often were midwives, as well.

Garrison

A garrison is a collection of military troops in a single area who are there to protect it or to use it as a base. The term is also used to denote military stations.

Schloss

A schloss is the German term for castle, or palace, and is used several times in the novel to represent Kekesfalva's home.

Sanatorium

A sanatorium is a hospital designed to treat chronic illness, nerve conditions, or mental disorders.

Bacillus

Bacillus is a genus of bacteria, and in the book is the reported cause of Edith's paralysis.



Coach-and-Four

A coach-and-four is a large carriage drawn by four horses with a driver, and in the book, is a vehicle used by the Kekesfalva's and Hofmiller to enjoy a day outing.

Balustrade

The balustrade is a rail with a row of posts supporting it that acts as a barrier in the tower between Edith and the six story drop.

Electric Bath

The electric bath was a device used in early medicine to combat disease. The patient's hands and feet were placed into tubs through which electric currents were passed.

Mufti

Mufti refers to a casual style of dress not worn by soldiers.



Themes

Pity

The primary theme in the novel is pity, and how pity can affect the ability of individuals to make decisions and how others use pity to manipulate the behaviors of those around them. In the beginning, Hofmiller feels pity for Edith, who he accidentally insults at a dinner party. This pity causes him to call on her the following day and to begin a relationship with the Kekesfalva's. This pity, however, also causes Hofmiller to lie to Herr Kekesfalva about a cure for his daughter. Hofmiller's pity for Herr Kekesfalva also causes him to agree to an engagement if Edith were to become well, and to allow himself to be engaged to Edith even when ill. It is clear that this pity causes Hofmiller to act in ways he would not do. He lies, and betrays those he cares about as a reaction to pity, and this nearly causes him his life.

Herr Kekesfalva also experiences pity, but throughout the novel he alters how he deals with and uses the emotion. Kekesfalva feels pity for Dietzenhof, the companion of the deceased princess, after he swindles her inheritance from her, and as a result, marries her. He realizes Hofmiller pities his daughter later in the novel, however, and uses that pity to sway Hofmiller into marrying Edith. It is clear Kekesfalva both feels pity and uses it to his advantage throughout the novel.

Edith too learns to use the feeling of pity for her advantage. Edith knows others pity her condition, and she uses that pity to manipulate their actions. Her father, Ilona, and Josef all pity Edith and her condition, and Edith often uses her condition to evoke more emotional responses from those around her. When she senses Hofmiller is beginning to question his own motives and his actions, Edith attempts to walk, thereby ensuring he will turn again to pity and continue to adore her. When he is unwilling to love her as she loves him, she uses threats of suicide and uses references to her crippled condition to evoke pity in him. That pity is eventually used to betroth him to her. In the end, Edith is left without Hofmiller to manipulate, and ends her life.

Doctor Condor, too, is moved throughout the novel by pity, but in his case, it is such pity that allows him to be the good doctor he is. The novel explains that there are two types of pity. One is the kind expressed by most throughout the novel, and that is the "weak and sentimental kind", which results in actions designed to rid the heart of such "painful emotion" as quickly as possible. This type of pity is simply an emotional response to the unhappiness of others. On the other hand, there is a type of pity that is not sentimental in nature, but is instead a creative kind of sympathy that allows the individual to patiently attend to the pitied with endless love and affection. This type of pity results in actions not meant to rid the scene of the pitied, or to make the host feel better, but instead results in actions intended to simply accept the pitied. Condor gives of himself endlessly, makes no promises to the ill that he cannot keep, and cares for the pitied with love and affection. His own wife, whom he married after being unable to stop her blindness, is not a pitied creature but a cared for loved one. Condor's patience for the



almost incomprehensible actions of Edith and his own wife show clearly his form of pity is not aimed at getting rid of the pitied, but instead on loving and soothing them as much and for as long as possible.

Pity too plays an important role in how the reader responds to the characters and the events in the novel. In the beginning, the reader feels terrible pity for both Hofmiller and Edith. As the novel moves forward, however, Hofmiller's character becomes despicable because of his actions, whether caused by his pity or not. One begins not to pity him, but instead to see him as a selfish creature whose motives, no matter how pure, actually stem from his own desire to rid himself of painful emotion, or to raise himself up to feelings of godlike power. On the other hand, pity for Edith soon turns to disgust as she uses her own illness to manipulate others. One feels for Kekesfalva, also, until it is revealed that he too has risen in life thanks to shrewd practices and manipulation of weaker characters. One's own pity changes from the weak, harmful type to the selfless kind in a matter of a few pages as the character's motives and personalities are revealed, making pity not only the main theme throughout the novel, but also a vital part of the reader's experience.

Manipulation

Manipulation is another theme running throughout the entire novel that plays a vital role in the behaviors of the characters. Edith is perhaps the primary manipulator in the story, as she is shown to manipulate everyone around her throughout the entire novel. She manipulates her father by using her condition as a weapon, forcing him to watch her as she attempts to walk, listen to her as she describes her agony, and painfully blame himself as she laments that she is incurable through his methods. Her actions force her father to blame himself for her condition, and to therefore seek as much help for her as possible. She also manipulates Ilona and even Josef, her butler, by using her condition to evoke pity in them. Edith doesn't do this innocently, as she does realize her actions are manipulative.

Kekesfalva too uses manipulation to get what he needs or desires. His pitiful actions and words manipulate Hofmiller throughout the novel, as he talks him into helping him with Condor, visit his daughter, and even promise to marry Edith. These actions are not the first examples of manipulation from Kekesfalva, either. Earlier in his life, Kekesfalva used manipulation to change his entire identity. He manipulated Dietzenhof into selling him her property for a third of its value, and then, because he pitied her, married her to make amends to himself. His taking of the Kekesfalva lands allowed him to forget his past and become a new man who was wealthy and a success. Kekesfalva's manipulation of events, in the end, however, only to result in disaster as his daughter is disappointed and commits suicide.

Hofmiller, too, is not innocent in terms of manipulation. His own actions manipulate those around him, even as he does not seem to notice. It is Hofmiller who, afraid to have to admit he lied about Edith's treatment, manipulates Condor to join with his deceit. It is Hofmiller who manipulates his commanding officer into helping him by



threatening to commit suicide, although he doesn't appear aware of this manipulation. He also manipulates Balinkay into hiring him as an employee in an attempt to escape the situation. While some of his manipulations are perhaps more unintentional than Edith's, the end result is that he too uses pity to manipulate others into doing what he wishes them to do.

Appearances

Another theme throughout the novel is appearances, or how characters perceive the way others view them and their concerns of these views. Hofmiller himself realizes as he progresses through the novel that his unwillingness to admit his feelings for the Kekesfalva's is that he feels his colleges will believe he is simply doting on the family to gain their wealth. He is unable to face the idea that his friends will laugh at him in the novel, and even goes so far as to deny his engagement to Edith in an effort to save face. He allows friends to bad mouth Kekesfalva, Edith, and even the apothecary who spoke nothing but the truth. His own fears of being looked down on by family and friends lead, in part, to his eventual demise. He fears disappointing Herr Kekesfalva, thus allowing himself both to lie to Edith and to manipulate Condor into lying about a new treatment for Edith.

Edith too has an issue with appearances, although it is almost dualistic in nature. On one hand, Edith has a tendency to have fits of rage when she doesn't get her way, and cares little at the time of what others think of her actions. She is childlike in her temper-tantrums, and in her reactions. On the other hand, once she has calmed down, Edith appears to severely regret her behaviors, and apologizes profusely to Hofmiller about her actions. In truth, this is likely simply her way of manipulating the situation so that Hofmiller is forgiving.

Condor, however, is the one character who seems to care little for appearances. He knowingly married a blind woman whom he loved, even though he realized such a love would be looked down upon by the masses. His home is in a poor part of town, and again, he seems to care little about such trivial things. He, instead, cares only for his patients, both wealthy and poor, and for his wife and loved ones. It is clear he cares much for Edith, not only because he enjoys the challenge of her case, but also because he is endeared by her condition. He knows Kekesfalva's past and is able to forgive him for it, unlike many others, simply because appearances mean so little to him.

Although appearances appear to play a minor role in the novel, it is in fact this fear of appearances that drives many of the characters to their downfall. From Hofmiller to Edith, it is appearance that seems to drive, along with pity, the actions of the characters, and appearances that lead to their ultimate demise.



Style

Point of View

In *Beware of Pity*, the author uses a first person perspective from the point of view of Anton Hofmiller, the protagonist of the story. This point of view helps the reader to see the world through the eyes of Anton, and to understand the motives behind his actions. Since the emotion of pity is such a primary focus of the novel, this point of view is necessary, so that readers can fully understand how Hofmiller feels this emotion. In addition, the first person point of view allows an outside view of Edith, the focus of Hofmiller's pity, and of Kekesfalva, the father and another source of Hofmiller's pity. These external views allow the reader to see manipulation as it happens, unlike Hofmiller, whose closeness to the situation only permits him to see things through his own gaze of pity and sorrow.

The first person view also helps during longer passages of descriptions. Several pages pass while Hofmiller describes his feelings for the military, how he came to be in the military, and his own feelings in general. Such a point of view allows Hofmiller's personality to be fully developed, which is vital to the movement from pity to other emotions in the reader. Each emotion is painstakingly clear through Hofmiller, making his account of the situation believable and reliable.

Setting

The story takes place, for the most part, in a garrison town in Austria, on the Hungarian front in 1913. The story takes the characters from the general store in the town to Hofmiller's own barracks to the castle of a wealthy aristocrat, Kekesfalva, on the edge of town. Also, the storyline places the characters in a smaller, military bar in several scenes, and in a small local tavern. On one occasion, Hofmiller and the Kekesfalva family travel outside the town to smaller, neighboring towns, as well. These areas are explained in great detail, so that one can understand the class issues within the small town and within this Austrian area, in general. While class issues do not play a vital role in the story, they do act as a cause for Hofmiller's actions on several occasions, and it is thus important that such differences in class are explained.

In addition to the garrison town, the storyline also takes Hofmiller to Vienna, where Doctor Condor lives in an impoverished area of town. The story also takes him to Czaslau, Brunn, Lundenburg, Limanova, Gorz, and other cities in France, Russia, and Germany as he fights in the war. All of these small towns, although not described in detail, serve to add depth to the story as one begins to understand Hofmiller's journey to forget his crimes against Edith and her family, as well as against his friends.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is somewhat formal, which can, on occasion, mask the true emotion of the characters. This actually serves a function in the novel, as Hofmiller, the main character, is a man born of military blood who hails duty over all else. He is not much for passion, or even love, but does have the emotional capacity for pity. His language often depicts the world as one big military conquest, and his emotional moments are often hidden by an overwhelming sense of duty and responsibility. On the other hand, Edith's emotional outbursts are shown clearly to be the outbursts of an immature child through the language Zweig uses to convey her situations. The endearing language used to explain her love of dancing, to explain how she feels, and her inability to tell others how she feels without emotional explosions conveys a sense of childish whim in her actions. At the same time, Kekesfalva's emotional manipulation is clearly conveyed as the author uses a very whining and insistent tone to describe his requests of Hofmiller. Finally, the author's use of softer, more patient language when discussing Doctor Condor show without doubt his intent to care for others without pity, but with honest emotion.

Structure

Beware of Pity consists of an Introduction by Joan Acocella, and the main portion of the book. The book is not divided into chapters, but instead reads as one long story. The only breaks in the novel to indicate a separation of place or topic are a few inserted blank lines in the text. The book is 353 pages in length, not including the twenty page introduction.

The novel's plot is extremely complex, with one primary plot and theme and several underlying, concurrent themes. The novel is centered around military man Anton, or Toni, Hofmiller, in a garrison town in pre-WWI Austria in 1913. Hofmiller is a genuine career military person whose loyalty runs only to duty and country. When he is exposed to pain and suffering for the first time in his life through his meeting of crippled girl Edith, Hofmiller experiences a painful change in perspective as he begins to feel pity. Hofmiller then spends the rest of the novel spiraling downward as a result of his inability to deal with such a powerful and painful emotion while still feeling as though he is accomplishing his duty.

The pace of the novel is easy without being too slow, and on occasion ramps up to vast speeds. There is much dialog, making the novel easy to keep reading, and the plot is engaging enough to keep the reader's attention throughout the novel. While little action actually is explained in the novel, the scenes are so detailed and so emotionally charged that these scenes seem to be huge events to all the characters. There are several instances of characters explaining back story, which helps to further the storyline.



Quotes

"I realized that there was no point in denying oneself a pleasure because it was denied another, in refusing to allow oneself to be happy because someone else was unhappy. I realized that all the time one was laughing and cracking silly jokes, somewhere in the world someone was lying at the point of death; that misery was lurking, people starving, behind a thousand windows; that there were such things as hospitals, quarries and coal-mines; that in factories, in offices, in prisons countless thousands toiled and moiled at every hour of the day, and that it would not relieve the distress of a single human being if yet another were to torment himself needlessly." p. 33

"It is never until one realizes that one means something to others that one feels there is any point or purpose in one's own existence." p. 42

"No envy is more mean than that of small-minded beings when they see a neighbor lifted, as though borne aloft by angels, out of the dull drudgery of their common existence; petty spirits are more ready to forgive a prince the most fabulous wealth rather than a fellow sufferer beneath the same yoke the smallest degree of freedom." p. 118

"For when one does another person an injustice, in some mysterious way it does one good to discover (or to persuade oneself) that the injured party has also behaved badly or unfairly in some little matter or other; it is always a relief to the conscience if one can apportion some measure of guilt to the person one has betrayed." p. 124

"It is always simple people who are most shocked at the realization that misfortune sometimes does not shrink from laying a grim hand even on the rich" p. 163

"It is only at first that pity, like morphia, is a solace to the invalid, a remedy, a drug, but unless you know the correct dosage and when to stop, it becomes a virulent poison." p. 176

"For the first time in my life I began to realize that it is not evil and brutality, but nearly always weakness, that is to blame for the worst things that happen in this world." p. 185

"It was only from this moment that I began to have an inkling of the fact...that the outcasts, the branded, the ugly, the withered, the deformed, the despised and rejected, desire with a more passionate, far more dangerous avidity than the happy; that they love with a fanatical, a baleful, a black love, and that no passion on earth rears its head so greedily, so desperately, as the forlorn and hopeless passion of these step-children of God, who feel that they can only justify their earthly existence by loving and being loved." p. 206

"A creature such as I, I know, has no right to love, and certainly no right to be loved. It is for such a creature to creep away into a corner and die and cease to make other



people's lives a burden with her presence. Oh yes, I know all that - I know it, and it is because I know it that I am a lost soul." p. 219

"All, all, all of them, and no one would have pity on the foolish slave of his own pity." p. 317

"I allowed myself to be commended for my blackguardly lie. I had perfidiously compromised a girl who loved me passionately, a suffering, helpless, unsuspecting creature; I had without a protest allowed her father to be blackguarded, and a stranger who had told the truth slanderously to be called a liar." p. 321

"Our decisions are to a much greater extent dependent on our desire to conform to the standards of our class and environment that we are inclined to admit." p. 335

"But ever since that moment I have realized afresh that no guilt is forgotten so long as the conscience still knows of it." p. 353



Topics for Discussion

Pity is the primary focus of the novel, and several characters use pity in different ways. Compare and contrast the way Edith and Hofmiller use pity. How does Hofmiller behave when he feels pity? What does pity make him do? Why do you think this reaction occurs? How does Edith deal with the pity of others? What does this pity allow her to do? Why do you think she does this? Be sure to use specific examples in the book.

Condor explains in the novel that Kekesfalva was once a poor, Jewish businessman. He also explains how he became a wealthy aristocrat. How did this happen? What do you think of Kekesfalva's methods? Why do you think he ended up marrying the woman he married? Knowing what you know of his past, do you feel pity for him in the case of his daughter? Why or why not?

How others see a person and how such appearances make some people behave is another topic within the story. Do you think the way others see you is important? Why or why not? Do you think the characters were concerned about such appearances? Which characters? Why? What did such concerns cause these characters to do? Do you think such actions were right or wrong? Why?

Doctor Condor makes a statement about the concept of "incurable". What is this statement? Do you agree with his idea? Why or why not? Do you think diseases can be so black and white as to be classified as curable or incurable? Why?

The novel makes a clear statement that there are two types of pity, one that is harmful for everyone involved, and one that forces people to act in ways that are positive for themselves and those around them. Do you think this is true? Do you think pity can be a positive as well as a negative force? Why? Give examples from the book of both types of pity.

Towards the beginning of the novel, Hofmiller notes that he believes "that there was no point in denying oneself a pleasure because it was denied another, in refusing to allow oneself to be happy because someone else was unhappy" (p. 33). Do you agree with such a statement? Why or why not? Does Hofmiller seem to continue to believe this by the end of the novel? Why do you think this is the case?

In the end, Edith commits suicide after believing Hofmiller has betrayed her. Do you think, had the telegram gone through, that Edith and Hofmiller could have made a life together, based on the emotions of Hofmiller by the end of the book? In other words, do you think Hofmiller's new found determination to marry Edith was one based on an emotion that could sustain a marriage? Why or why not? Do you think Edith would have been satisfied even if Hofmiller had married her? Why or why not?