

# **Bright, Precious Days Study Guide**

**Bright, Precious Days by Jay McInerney**

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# Plot Summary

The complex relationship between Russell Calloway, his wife Corrine, and his deceased former best friend Jeff as hinted at in his book *Youth and Beauty* is introduced first in the novel to give an idea about that Calloway's complicated marital issues. The revelation that Corrine engaged in an affair in the wake of September 11 closely follows to further upset their relationship. When Russell, an editor and publisher, hosts a dinner party to welcome his newest author, Jack Carson, to New York City, it comes to light that Corrine's sister, Hilary, is their children's biological mother, revealing Corrine's strained relationship with her family.

As time passes, the romance between Russell and Corrine wanes, resulting her rekindling her affair with Luke, a wealthy man she met while volunteering after 9/11. Russell bets his financial future on the success of a book deal with an author, Phillip Kohout, who dumped him years ago. He also nurtures his budding author, Jack, whose debut novel is met with great success. Jack's rising literary celebrity encourages his drug habit, straining his interactions with Russell.

As the affair between Corrine and Luke heats up, the sordid relationships between the Calloways' married friends come to light. Russell's best friend, Washington Lee, has been sleeping with Corrine's best friend, Casey Reynes, occasionally for the last two decades, and their affair crescendos with the events leading up to the subprime mortgage crisis. In the early stages of Washington's renewed infidelity, he and his wife, Veronica, go to dinner with Russell and Corrine. At the dinner Washington causes Russell to doubt the book deal with Kohout after learning Washington's publishing house, along with several other, passed on the deal.

These doubts lead to the beginning of Russell's emotional decline and midlife crisis. Corrine's relationship with Luke continues to progress, to the point where Luke leaves his wife to pursue her. To compound Russell's worries about the success of Kohout's book, Jack's decline into drug addiction jeopardizes his future as an artist, reminding Russell of his former best friend Jeff, a successful author who died of an overdose years before. Washington's affair with Casey peaks at a charity event they both attend with their spouses, when Veronica discovers his infidelity and they enter a period of separation.

Russell's troubles reach a new high when it is revealed Kohout's story about being held hostage by infidels in Pakistan is a lie. The book deal based on the memoir of that story implodes, and with it, Russell's hopes for a secure financial future. He must now worry about being able to afford their increasingly expensive TriBeCa apartment and keeping his business afloat. In addition to the Kohout scandal, Jack drops Russell as his editor and publisher due to Russell's heavy-handed editing style.

Corrine's affair continues, with Luke's efforts to get her to leave her husband causing her to retreat from the relationship marginally. Once Luke returns to live in New York City after selling his winery in South Africa, they become bolder with their meetings,



arranging dates under the guise of girls' nights out or weekend getaways with Casey. Corrine begins to suspect Russell knows about her infidelity after his demeanor changes following the Kohout scandal.

Jack's drug addiction leads to his death in a car crash with famous artist Tony Duplex, a friend of Jeff's in the 1980s. Russell learns of his demise on the same day he learns of Corrine's affair. He kicks her out of their loft and resists all attempts to repair their marriage for months after. Corrine leaves their apartment that night and ends her relationship with Luke. The night of the 2008 presidential election marks the beginning of their reconciliation.

Just when Russell is unable to keep funding his business due to his main investor pulling out after the failure of Kohout's book deal, Washington offers to personally invest half a million dollars to keep the publishing company running. Russell quickly learns the money is actually from Corrine, and their ensuing interactions lead to the end of their separation.

Months later, Corrine runs into Luke at an art exhibit and they have an awkward, stilted conversation highlighting the less than amiable end to their relationship. The screenplay for *Youth and Beauty* that Corrine has been working on for decades is finally produced. The book concludes with Corrine, Russell, and their friends at the screening. Corrine's desire to enjoy the walk home with Russell instead of rushing to the party celebrating her success illustrates her personal growth throughout the novel and the love she has for her husband.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

The novel begins by introducing Russell Calloway as a middle-aged editor and publisher who moved to New York in his youth, like so many others, to partake in the city's rich artistic and literary culture. The third person narrator explains that Russell abandoned his dream of writing the great American novel in favor of editing the up and coming writers around him after becoming disillusioned with his own writing talents.

In his early days as an editor Russell published a book written by his best friend, Jeff Pierce, after his death. The book, *Youth and Beauty*, centered on a love triangle based on Jeff, Russell, and Russell's wife Corrine, and was very popular when it was first released. Not long after, though, it faded into obscurity just like most fads from the 1980s.

In the present, Russell is approached by the creator of a Jeff Pierce fan website who has become interested in the book during its recent resurgence in popularity for an interview regarding the novel and his relationship to Jeff. Russell takes Astrid, the twenty-something creator of the website, to a gastropub near his office to conduct the interview where she asks him about how he met Jeff and Corrine and how he edited the book after Jeff died given that the Russell character in the book is an unflattering representation.

While at the pub, both Russell and Astrid become drunk and the conversation becomes flirtatious. Russell finds it harmless and flattering, and at one point as they discuss etiquette and formality he "opened his mouth and closed his lips around her digit" to play along with a joke (14). At the end of the interview Astrid bluntly suggests they get a hotel room, with the implication that they would have sex, and he politely turns her down.

After she has left, Russell reflects on his having rejected her proposition and "that he might never again experience the incomparable thrill of exploring a foreign body" (16). The incident along with the large amount of wine he consumes at dinner leaves him with an increased libido, and he has sex with his wife that night for the first time in months. The first chapter ends with Russell experiencing shortness of breath while making love to his wife to the point where he believes he is going to die.

The second chapter focuses on Corrine Calloway reflecting on the sex described in the previous chapter and the state of her marriage. These thoughts are quickly replaced by Corrine's critical thoughts of her aging appearance as she gets ready for a charity gala her friend Casey invited her to.

The narrator details the disparities between Corrine's middle class life and Casey's glamorous upper class life despite their similar upbringings. The narration, Corrine's



thoughts told in third person, depict her struggles wanting more money for her family and for her philanthropic passions. When explaining to her children where she is going she feels like a “fraud, a pretender, a hypocrite” because she is attending a charity function but will not be contributing any money toward the cause (20).

At the gala Corrine encounters Luke, who her friend Casey refers to as “your Luke” and who it is revealed she has shared bodily fluids (21). The two make small talk about his time in South Africa and their children and then are joined by their spouses. Throughout the conversation, both Corrine’s thoughts and words avoid their shared romantic history.

The conversation ends when the event begins and everyone is summoned to be seated. At the table Corrine and the others seated at the table talk about Luke, his charity, a car accident he was in years before, and South Africa. This conversation is ended by Luke giving a speech as the host of the evening.

As Luke is speaking Corrine’s thoughts are drawn to the time they spent together just after 9/11. When he calls for donation in his speech she is the first person to make a pledge, which she knows she and Russell cannot afford. The large donation inspires in Corrine a renewed feeling of life. She knows Russell will be upset with her for ruining their budget, and plans to sleep with him to make up for it. However, Corrine knows that she will be thinking about Luke while having sex with Russell.

## Analysis

From the beginning of the novel McInerney uses literary references to denote Russell’s increasingly outdated lifestyle and his fixation on aging. The novel begins with the narrator using the rich and storied literary history of New York City to describe why young aspiring litterateurs flocked to the city in the recent past. The authors McInerney includes are not so old that they are unrecognizable to today’s audience, but long ago enough that it is clear the culture being described is no longer present in New York. This motif of outdated references continues throughout the chapter, but is most poignant during the discussion between Russell and Astrid in his office.

Part of the interview with Astrid revolves around her asking him about the pictures in his office. The final picture described is a photograph of Keith Richards from the Rolling Stones, who Astrid fails to recognize. Russell’s disbelief of her not knowing who Keith Richards is demonstrates that he is living in the past. When she questions the significance of the photo he replies, “It’s Keith fucking Richards,” showing his unwillingness to accept that the artists he loved decades ago eventually become irrelevant (8).

Weight is used as an indicator of wealth and privilege in the second chapter of the novel. While reflecting about wanting more money Corrine describes New York as “this wealthy, skinny island” where people need more money to survive than elsewhere (19). This need to have more becomes especially apparent as she chooses her outfit for the gala and wishes she had more than two appropriate outfits for all of the upper class



functions she attends. Though her rich friend Casey pays most of the expenses for the Calloways to attend the event Corrine remarks that “associating with the rich is always expensive, even when they are ostensibly paying” (19). Because she cannot afford to buy the costly dresses required at such occasions she worries about if her dress is tighter than the last time she wore it because she cannot afford to buy a new one.

Corrine’s affair with Luke is mostly implied throughout the chapter, only truly being stated near the end in a way that suggests Corrine is ambivalent about the issue. Luke’s first appearance in the novel, when Casey tells Corrine that the charity is Luke’s, “your Luke,” is not further clarified for the reader (21). This ambiguity for the reader parallels Corrine’s conflicting feelings about Luke. When she makes a donation at the end of the chapter the narration reveals “she hardly knew why she’d done it” and goes on to suggest perhaps to impress her former lover, which shows she is slightly aware of her feelings for him but is unwilling to fully acknowledge those feelings (29). The reference to Luke being her former lover is only the second time the affair between the two is directly stated demonstrating Corrine’s ambivalence because if she truly knew how she felt the language of the narration, which reflects her thoughts, would be more direct and certain.

Both chapters center on infidelity and the main characters’ views on it. The topic is shielded away from much more than is expected, which makes the language used in the novel clear that the Calloways only truly disapprove of adultery because of their morals and not because of their love for each other.

Russell’s actions and inner thoughts during and after the interview with Astrid demonstrate his openness to the idea of cheating on his wife. For example, when she first begins to flirt with him at the restaurant, he licks her grease-coated fingers because “he felt it would be unchivalrous to embarrass her and reject what was, after all, a relatively cute and harmless gesture” (14). That he would engage in such intimate contact with a relative stranger shows his willingness to go far beyond the realm of polite social interaction with a flirtatious girl. The “relatively” in front of the “cute and harmless” show that he knows what they are doing is against the vows of fidelity he swore to his wife.

Russell’s reasoning for rejecting Astrid’s proposal to get a hotel room also illustrates that he only refuses to have sex with her because he knows it is the right thing to do, not because he loves his wife so much he would never consider it. As Astrid’s cab drives away Russell feels “amazed that he’s been so sensible, proud of himself” (16). His use of sensible, and not relieved, suggests that he adheres to a moral code that prevents infidelity, but not that he fully subscribes to that moral code. Russell is proud of himself for not cheating on his wife, illuminating the audience to his desire to give into temptation. A man need not feel proud of himself for doing what he knows is right if he does not overcome some internal struggle to get to that decision.

Corrine’s actions and thoughts surrounding her interaction with Luke show that she believes, like Russell, that it is wrong to commit adultery for ethical reasons. The narration in Chapter 2, which reveals Corrine’s innermost thoughts, rarely acknowledges that an





affair between her and Luke actually occurred. That the affair itself is only directly stated in the chapter three times, with each mention less oblique than the last, suggests a reluctance within Corrine's own mind to acknowledge her former indiscretion.

The chapter ending with Corrine thinking about having sex with Russell while thinking about Luke later that night makes it very clear that she avoids remembering her affair and reconnecting with Luke out of a sense of moral obligation to Russell instead of love for him. She wants to be with Luke, is much more attracted to Luke than her husband, but she knows that having sex outside her marriage is wrong and thus works to resist the temptation. Even in her own thoughts, Corrine avoids thinking about her time with Luke right after 9/11 and the possibility of rekindling that romance. When she finally admits to herself that she still has feelings for him, she expresses those feelings by redirecting them toward her husband.

## Discussion Question 1

Jeff Pierce's book, *Youth and Beauty*, depicts characters based on himself, Russell, and Corrine Calloway embroiled in the love triangle. Based on the first chapter, do you think this was based on real events?

## Discussion Question 2

While having sex with his wife at the end of the first chapter Russell experiences heart-attack-like symptoms. What is the significance of this scene?

## Discussion Question 3

Throughout the second chapter Corinne, and the narration by extension, repeatedly brings up what it means to be wealthy, especially in New York. What is Corinne's relationship to this society and the wealthy people that constitute it given her friendships with many of them?

## Vocabulary

marginalia, acolyte, scrupulous, scythed, abetted, modicum, desideratum, cuckolded, surfeit, quotidian, ostensibly, undulant, debouched, edifice, visceral, insipidity, interlocutor, comportment, rusticated, bespoke, florid, sisal, melanistic, ontological



## Chapters 3-4

### Summary

Luke McGavock awakens the morning after the charity gala thinking about Corrine. He ruminates on the direction his life has taken because of their relationship years prior. Along with having “taken himself to the other side of the world in no small part to get away from her” he married a South African woman nearly 20 years his junior who he later realized greatly resembles Corrine.

After sending off his wife to the airport for her return trip to their estate in South Africa, he texts Corrine to arrange a meeting. She agrees to have coffee with him at a cafe in Little Italy that they went to during their earlier affair. At the cafe they talk about the feelings they shared for each other years ago, the car accident that nearly killed Luke, and Corrine’s charitable organization.

When Corrine has to leave to distribute vegetables to a housing project in the Bronx, Luke accompanies her to volunteer his time and to spend the day with her. He spends a while passing out cucumbers to the needy, until the supplies run out because some have rotted. Corrine gives a strung-out looking woman with two young children \$10 because she feels bad about the food stock running short. This offends the woman, who does not want Corrine’s pity, and causes jealousy among the other hungry people there.

When they are finished handing out food, Luke tries to get Corrine to spend more time with him. She brushes off his attempts to do something else, saying she has a meeting to attend. Luke does manage to get her to agree to have a drink with him after work, but not long before they are supposed to meet she cancels.

At the end of the third chapter the narration reveals Luke intends to pursue another affair with Corrine. After she cancels on their drink date he lies to her and tells her he is just interested in catching up with her, when in reality he is “consumed with the need to find out” if reviving their romance will sate his desire for her (41).

The fourth chapter begins with Russell cooking an elaborate meal involving duck. Storey interrupts him looking for his immersion blender to tattle on her brother Jeremy for playing video games on a weekday. Corrine volunteers to talk to him.

As she goes to his room, the narration turns to a vivid description of the Calloway’s TriBeCa apartment. Corrine thinks about her desire to own a house instead of renting an apartment her family is rapidly outgrowing, and how Russell’s attachment to the idealized fantasy of the bohemian lifestyle that comes with living in downtown Manhattan is stopping that desire from ever becoming reality. She reflects on the changes to the neighborhood that equate Russell’s reluctance to move with his constant idealization of the past.



Jack Carson, Russell's "new literary prodigy," knocks on the door before Corrine makes it to Jeremy's room. She welcomes him in and they make small talk about the movie screenplay she wrote years before. During the conversation, Jack's southern accent reminds her of Luke, who is from Tennessee and who went back to South Africa a few days earlier.

Corrine then goes to Jeremy's room to reprimand him for playing video games when he knows he is not supposed to. Mother and son move to the other room to join the dinner party. Corrine's sister, Hilary, and her fiancé, Dan, arrive and it is revealed that the gathering is for Corrine's 50th birthday. Tension rises between Corrine and Hilary about the overly affectionate way Hilary treats Corrine's children.

Russell's best friend, Washington Lee, and his wife Veronica show up. A parallel is established between Jack and Jeff Pierce during the introductions following the Lees' arrival. The conversation turns to politics and gun control, which leads to Dan, a police officer, showing off his handgun.

As dinner is about to begin, Nancy Turner enters. She has just returned from producing the television adaptation of her latest book. Everyone sits down for dinner and discusses living in the city as opposed to living in the suburbs. Their agreement that city living is preferable leads the conversation to the gentrification New York has experienced in the last two decades. Corrine is reminded of Jeff and his drug addiction during the talk of the drug epidemic that swept the city during the 1980s.

## Analysis

Because chapter three is narrated from Luke's perspective it allows for insight into his character and his determination to restart his affair with Corrine. Though the chapter details fewer of Luke's inner thoughts than the previous chapters did their respective focal characters', those included show that McInerney uses Luke to embody infatuation as opposed to true love. Most indicative of this is the final sentence of the chapter.

After Luke tells Corrine that he only wants to catch up with her when she asks him what he wants from her it is revealed that his motives are far more impure. Chapter three closes with: "He didn't know if sleeping with her one more time would sate his desire or fuel it, but he found himself consumed with the need to find out" (41). This, in conjunction with his actions throughout the chapter, which mostly involve trying to spend time with Corrine, show that he is driven by his desire for her. That he is driven solely by his attraction to her shows he is infatuated with her, not that he has any sort of real love for her. Because his whole character centers around this desire, Luke is the personification of infatuation.

McInerney focuses heavily in the fourth chapter on the way time has affected New York City. The loft apartment that Russell and Corrine were once so in love with is now no longer suited to their needs, and the excitement of the dangerous city has faded to an appreciation of the benefits of gentrification. The description of the Calloway's



apartment and the reminiscing about New York in the 1980s are a metaphor for the Calloways growing up and Corrine developing needs that Russell cannot meet.

Growing up occasionally means the growing out of certain relationships. When the narration describes the Calloway's loft from Corrine's perspective it becomes clear that she desperately wants to move to a larger space that would better accommodate her family's needs. She reflects on how outdated both the loft and their presence in the neighborhood feels. This outdated feeling she attributes to Russell clinging "to an outdated version of himself as a downtown bohemian" (44). By not moving on to a larger property Russell is keeping Corrine from what she wants in life. Like that apartment that is becoming increasingly unsuitable, McInerney suggests that Russell's outdated vision of himself is becoming increasingly unsuitable for Corrine. His failure to give her what she needs is part of what draws her to Luke.

The conversation at the dinner party about the differences between New York City in the 1980s and the early 2000s further demonstrates the ways that Corrine and Russell are growing apart. When the rest of the dinner party is talking about how much they enjoy living in New York Russell states, "nobody loves New York more than I do, but the city's getting suburbanized itself. Less diversified, less edgy," which moves the conversation to the improvements this suburbanization has brought (51). Russell glorifies the city of his youth, where drugs and crime were commonplace, and has trouble appreciating the benefits the gentrification of New York has brought. In response to this Corrine tells him not to "get nostalgic for the era of muggings and graffiti and crack vials in the hallway" which suggests her view about the change differs greatly from his (51). These fundamentally different ways of looking at life and progress show that Corrine and Russell are growing apart. Corrine is ready to move to a new stage in life, while Russell seems to never want time to move so that he can live the same life he had in his prime instead of gracefully accepting the world changing around him.

## Discussion Question 1

At the end of Chapter 3, Corrine gives money to a strung-out looking mother. Why might she do this? Why does she single out this woman in particular?

## Discussion Question 2

In the beginning of the third chapter Luke remarks on his wife having a similar appearance to Corrine. What is the significance of this?

## Discussion Question 3

The fourth chapter concludes with a discussion about living in the city as opposed to living in the suburbs. Why do all of the characters attending the Calloways dinner party believe that living in the city is better than living in the suburbs?

## Vocabulary

redolant, strident, untenable, pedantry, erudition, hagiographic, effusive, dilettante, fracas, palimpsest, natty, olfactory



# Chapters 5-6

## Summary

Chapter 5 begins with a flashback to the summer after Corrine, Russell, and Jeff graduated from Brown University. Jeff is living in SoHo, which at the time was a popular place for bohemian artists, Corrine is living on the Upper East Side and working at Sotheby's, and Russell is doing a fellowship abroad at Oxford. Corrine visits Jeff's loft as a way of feeling closer to Russell.

When Corrine arrives at Jeff's apartment he drops the keys down to her from his window, and once she is inside they begin a conversation about the messy state of it. The narration, given in Corrine's perspective, illuminates Jeff's character, stating "it's his whole identity: Jeff Pierce, the writer" which encompasses his very cool and artistic manner (55). It is revealed that Jeff comes from a very wealthy, established family, and that he wears his grandfather's Longines watch to remind himself of his roots while he reinvents himself as a writer.

They make small talk about his typewriter and the way Jeff wears his button-up shirts. The conversation turns to drug use, and Jeff offers Corrine cocaine. To seem worldly and cool, she accepts the offer and snorts two lines of cocaine to his six. After this they talk about music and literature, and then Jeff confesses that he thinks she is beautiful.

Though she is in a relationship with Russell, Corrine realizes she wants Jeff physically. The two kiss and then have sex. Afterwards she wonders if she agreed to have sex with Jeff solely because she was high or because of her infatuation with Jeff that began when they met. She decides, in the moment, it was because she wanted to feel closer to Russell, but the chapter ends with, "she will later question the postcoital conviction that she was somehow bringing herself closer to Russell by fucking his best friend. That just might have been the drugs talking" (60).

Chapter 6 switches back the dinner party started in Chapter 4 with the narrative perspective of Jack Carson, Russell's up-and-coming new author. The chapter starts with his reflection that he feels very out of place. The discussion picks up where it left off in the fourth chapter, with everyone talking about living through the 1980s. Nancy Turner reveals that the Calloways have been hosting elegant dinner parties just like the one they are at since then.

Once the meal has commenced Russell makes a toast to old friends and welcomes Jack to the city, which makes Jack even more uncomfortable. The conversation turns to politics and wine, and Jack starts to get drunk after having too much to drink to calm his nerves. As the dinner progresses, Jack and Corrine start a conversation about Jack working with Russell, which quickly turns into Jack entertaining Corrine with exaggerated stories of his life in the South. He plays up being a hick because, "as both



a southerner and a fiction writer, he hated for the facts to get in the way” (64). Around them everyone else is still talking about politics.

As Jack is telling Corrine about the prevalence of meth where he grew up, Washington Lee chimes in that in New York meth is the drug of choice for the gay community. A columnist at an old newspaper told him that, which moves the conversation to Norman Mailer because he started that publication.

The party then moves to the living room, so everybody can watch CNN to be informed about the midterm election results. Jack’s thoughts turn to his attraction to Corrine and how a relationship between them would never be possible because they are from very different worlds.

A story appears on the news regarding a reporter, Phillip Kohout, who Russell used to work with, who was just released from captivity in Pakistan, where he was being held hostage by jihadists. Then Storey, Russell and Corrine’s daughter comes into the room and asks why Hilary, Corrine’s sister, claims that she is the children’s mother. This leads Russell to curse at Hilary, which drives her fiance to hit Russell. Washington ends the fight by kicking Hilary and her fiance out of the apartment. Upon seeing this drama, Jack feels at ease, realizing he is not so different from them.

## Analysis

The fifth chapter sets Russell and Jeff up as foils to one another. Russell is an editor who doubts his writing skills, while Jeff is an aspiring author who is so sure of himself it borders on cockiness. Russell is away on an education adventure while Jeff is at home in Manhattan, having a drug fueled adventure. Russell has the girl and Jeff wants the girl. Beyond revealing that Corrine’s affair with Luke was not her first transgression in her marriage, this chapter illuminates the tensions between Corrine and Jeff, and especially between Russell and Jeff hinted at in earlier chapters.

McInerney also uses structure in Chapter 5 to emphasize the differences between Russell and Jeff. From the first paragraph of the section McInerney makes the reader believe the narration will be from Jeff’s perspective because the opening sentences are reminiscent of the introduction of the first three chapters, which are narrated from the perspectives of the characters first mentioned in each section. This suggests that Jeff, unlike Russell, can steal Corrine’s focus. Though she loves Russell, as evidenced by their enduring marriage, both in this chapter and in the second chapter she spends little time thinking of Russell. In contrast, in Chapter 5 Corrine thinks so much of Jeff it seems like he is the narrative focus of the chapter at first.

The beginning of Chapter 5 also continues the idea that Russell has been failing to meet Corrine’s needs for a long time. Russell’s absence clearly affects Corrine strongly, because without the sense of loneliness she would not be so eager for an adventure with Jeff. The differences in their ways of thought are shown in this section as more evidence that they are not compatible with each other. The discussion mentioned



regarding their beliefs of the level of their relationship demonstrates this incompatibility: “In his mind they’re already engaged, but she’s been very specific in telling him to see how he feels after eight months apart” (53). Even before they were married, Corrine has been pulling away from Russell. Despite her love for him, clearly shown by her guilt about her indiscretions and her staying with him for more than 20 years, Corrine is much less invested in her relationship with Russell. Though she misses him, and justifies her visit to Jeff to feel closer to him, it is very clearly shown in this chapter that their relationship has been falling apart for many years.

Because Jack is not a main character, or romantically involved with one of the main characters like Luke, his perspective most closely reflects the audience’s point of view. He is not a part of the Calloway’s world and thus the narration in the sixth chapter is McInerney’s way of showing the main characters, Corrine and Russell, in the most seemingly unbiased way so far in the novel.

Jack’s excessive use of contractions and vulgarities in this language, both thought and spoken, demonstrate his representation of the unsophisticated hicks that populate every part of the country outside of New York. Throughout the chapter Jack exaggerates his Southern accent to entertain Corrine and to reinforce stereotypes about the South. He uses more profanity than any other character in the section, let alone the novel thus far, like when he is talking to Corrine about being published by her husband, ““Shitfire, ma’am, pardon my French, but I grew up readin’ the books he published . . . Gettin’ published by Russell, it’s like signin’ with the fuckin’ Yankees”” (63). By dropping the “g” at the end of every word ending with “ing” Jack uses the lazy way of speaking stereotypical of those living in the southern states. With this he projects the image of himself as embodying the other traits, like being low-class and unintelligent, stereotypical of Southerners. That he is the only person present at the dinner party who is not from New York shows the is being used to contrast the rest of the country with the city.

Jack’s embodiment of typical America is seeded in Chapter 4 when the narration states Russell “believed in his heart that America was elsewhere, off in the South or the West, the big sprawling vistas beyond the tired ramparts of the Appalachians” (48) and which takes root in Chapter 6 with Jack’s inner commentary on the unusual elegance of the dinner party. The first paragraph of the section illustrates this when Jack does not “know quite what to expect from a Manhattan dinner party, but so far he felt like a rube - which was actually pretty much what he’s expected. He felt like he was watching a movie, an updated version of one of those Depression-era New York flicks in which all the characters were ridiculously good-looking and witty” (61). His comparison of the dinner party to an old movie shows that the gathering is unrealistic to him, McInerney’s embodiment of middle America. Because Jack remarks that it is a Manhattan dinner party, not Russell’s dinner party, McInerney extends this elevated sophistication to all of Manhattan. The disparity between Jack and the Calloways represents the disparity between New York City and the rest of the country. The point is further emphasized when Dan, Hilary’s fiance, says ““just remember, New York isn’t America”” (63).





## Discussion Question 1

What might be Corrine's motivation for her attraction to Jeff? What does she get from being with him?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Jack tell Corrine exaggerated stories from his past that paint his upbringing and the area he comes from in such a negative light?

## Discussion Question 3

Why might Hilary tell Storey that she is her and Jeremy's mother?

## Vocabulary

raffish, wantonness, eschewing, adenoidal, ardor, rube



# Chapters 7-8

## Summary

Chapter 7 begins with Corrine waking up the morning after the disastrous dinner party anxious about how to tell her children that Hilary is, in fact, their biological mother. She and Russell agree to tell them at dinner and that Hilary is no longer welcome in their home. As the morning progresses with the entire Calloway family quiet and subdued, the narration, told in Corrine's perspective, recounts the events that lead to Hilary donating her eggs to help Corrine and Russell start the family they desperately wanted.

After dropping the kids off at school and going to work, Corrine reflects on the career path, having gone from stockbroker to screenwriter to philanthropist in the wake of September 11th. Nancy Turner calls her to talk about going for a drink with Jack Carson after leaving the Calloway's the night before and the lack of sexual escapades resulting from that outing. It is revealed that Nancy is bulimic.

Corrine picks the kids up from school and they go home, where Russell is cooking chicken fingers because it is their favorite meal. The family sits down to dinner and discusses the situation with Hilary. Russell and Corrine explain to their children that Hilary gave them some of her eggs so they could have children since Corrine's were not viable. They make it very clear that, although Hilary might be their biological mother, Corrine is their mother and that Hilary could never take them away.

Later that night, Corrine feels more connected and in love with Russell after his great parenting earlier than she has in a very long time. She initiates sex, the first encounter in months, and falls asleep afterwards happier than she has been in a long while.

In Chapter 8, the story has moved forward to the holiday season. The Calloways enjoy their traditional holiday activities: Thanksgiving dinner with the Lee and Reynes families, The Nutcracker at Lincoln Center, Russell's and Corrine's respective office holiday parties, and the selection of the Christmas tree.

Picking out the perfect Christmas tree with his children is a ritual passed down to Russell from his father, which is implied in the book to be the most important tradition of the year. Russell tells an abbreviated version of Macbeth to Jeremy and Storey as they search for their tree, and they later spend the evening decorating it.

Right after Christmas, the family spends a week at Casey and Tom Reynes house in Saint Barth's. While there Russell runs into the journalist who was kidnapped in Pakistan, Phillip Kohout. They make awkward small talk, as Kohout had dumped Russell as an editor, and they agree they should meet up sometime back in Manhattan.

The story then jumps to Valentine's Day. Corrine and Russell leave the kids with the nanny to enjoy their traditional Valentine's Day date of dinner at an upscale restaurant near their loft. In the middle of dinner Corrine bursts out crying, lamenting, "Where's the



romance? Whatever happened to the romance?” (82). Russell is stunned by this outburst and by the thought that Corrine feels their relationship lacks romance. He realizes he does not know his wife as well as he thought he did, which rattles him.

## Analysis

Chapters 7 and 8 are much more expositional than any of the previous chapters. The narrative is moved along by more traditional third person narration of the events occurring and the characters' thoughts about those events instead of by dialogue. This expositional writing creates a larger distance between the reader and the characters. In previous chapters their internal struggles draw the audience in and make them empathize. These chapters do the opposite, they push the audience away and convey the subdued nature of the characters experience in this part of the book. Chapter 8, especially, because it skips forward through time so quickly. In one paragraph the Calloways are having Thanksgiving dinner, and in the next they are celebrating their Christmas traditions. Within the span of two pages the novel moves from Thanksgiving to Valentine's Day, which does not afford McInerney much room for description and therefore does not allow the reader to become more invested in the characters.

McInerney uses tone in Chapter 7 as a way of putting the reader in Corrine's head, as the lack of dialogue and inner reflection in contrast with earlier chapters to serves to do the opposite. The conversation between Corrine and Nancy in the seventh chapter stands out because its tone differs so much from the somber, subdued tone that dominates the rest of the chapter. In contrast to the other discussions Corrine has throughout the chapter, which all center around the situation with Hilary, the phone call with Nancy is an oasis of humor and lightheartedness. Despite the call being a vehicle for McInerney to bring up the epidemic of eating disorders among New York's wealthy women, the majority of the discussion between the friends is about nothing more serious than Nancy's alcohol fueled antics the night before. The casual homophobia when Nancy says, “Then I went to some after-hours place where some fan boy tried to seduce me, but even as drunk as I was, I got a bisexual vibe from him, and I stopped doing that. I mean, what is it about me that attracts fags? . . . Do I seem like a fag hag to you?” is a clear departure from the tone of the rest of the chapter, which is very much colored by Corrine's anxiety (73). By including this departure from the muted tone McInerney is able to emphasize that muted quality, allowing the reader to better understand that the tone of this section reflects Corrine's inner turmoil.

The end of Chapter 8, when Corrine bursts into tears, mourning the death of romance in their marriage, and Russell's reaction is the stunned realization that he does not understand Corrine as well as he thought he did, McInerney demonstrates humanity's inability to truly know someone completely. The last sentence of the chapter emphasizes this point, “And while he believed, after all these years, that he knew her better than he knew anyone on earth, he sometimes suspected there were parts of her psyche that were inaccessible to him, vast regions beyond the beacon of his understanding” (82). The events of the novel thus far, in particular Corrine's affairs, have been building up to this revelation from Russell. McInerney plays with this concept when



he delays the reader's knowledge of vital background information of the main characters. In the second chapter, it is not directly stated that Corrine has an affair with Luke until the end; in the fourth chapter, it is not revealed until the end that Corrine slept with Jeff; in the sixth chapter is not revealed until the end that Hilary is the children's biological mother. This delay of knowledge not only builds suspense it shows that truly understanding someone takes time, if it is even possible.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why did Corrine choose her sister to be her egg donor, and what evidence from the text supports your argument?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Corrine believes Russell is her soulmate, as stated on page 77, so why does she engage in her affairs over the years?

## **Discussion Question 3**

The bulk of the eighth chapter revolves around the Calloways' family traditions. What significance do these traditions have for the Calloways? Why does McInerney devote the better part of a chapter to them?

## **Vocabulary**

menidcant, obsequiousness, furtive, verdant, troth, sommelier



# Chapters 9-10

## Summary

Chapter 9 begins with Russell on a fishing trip in the Bahamas with Kip Taylor, his chief investor. They discuss whether or not fishing is better than sex. They agree that sex is not the most important thing in life at their age. Russell tells Kip about the proposition he turned down in the first chapter. When Kip asks if the girl was someone from the office, Russell reveals that he has cheated on Corrine with someone from the office in the past.

Russell and Kip's friendship began five years prior, though they knew each other at Brown. They bond over literature, because Kip, who is a hedge fund manager, always wondered what would have happened if he had pursued his passion for books. Kip helped Russell purchase the published house he worked for when it went up for sale not long after 9/11.

They attend a dinner hosted by the owner of the fishing camp, Matthew Soames, they are at and talk about the book Phillip Kohout is writing about his time being held hostage in Pakistan. Russell convinces Kip to put up \$750,000 so he can buy the rights to the book, which he thinks will be a huge success based on the amount of media attention Kohout is receiving. They then resume their discussion about the importance of sex with the owner of the fishing camp, who says that the secret to happiness is the never get married.

Matthew and Russell go fishing the next day and talk more about that topic. They do not talk much, as it would distract them from fishing, but when they do Matthew claims that marrying a woman turns sex into work: "Doesn't always do to turn your passion into your work. It's a bit like marrying your mistress, innit?" (91).

Corrine meets Casey for lunch in Chapter 10. They talk about keeping Hilary out of Corrine and her family's lives before they spot Carol Ricard and talk about her anorexia. The conversation turns toward Luke, who called Corrine earlier that day.

Corrine tells Casey that Luke invited her to the Hamptons for the weekend. Casey encourages Corrine to explore the relationship and tells her that she will cover with Russell so that Corrine can go. It is revealed that Casey's marriage to her husband Tom suffers from the same lack of sex that Corrine's marriage to Russell does.

Luke offered Corrine a ride to the Hamptons, but she refused and takes a bus, called a jitney, there instead. She feels guilty about agreeing to go and calls Casey for reassurance. Casey convinces her that she needs resolution either way and the only means of getting it is to sleep with Luke.

Luis, Luke's caretaker, picks Corrine up from the post office in Bridgehampton where the bus drops her off. Once at the house, Luke gives her a tour and the ritzy decoration



makes her miss the rich lifestyle she enjoyed in her youth. It is revealed that her grandfather gave all his money away, which is why the privilege Corrine had when she was younger is just a memory.

When looking at the pictures of his ex-wives, Corrine feels self-conscious and inadequate before finding a copy of the book she wrote the screenplay for reassures her. Luke makes them both peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, just like he had had the first day they met volunteering in the wake of 9/11. They reminisce about the smells and the people from back then. They then discuss why Luke is so intent on pursuing this relationship.

He tells her how he never stopped thinking about her. He recounts his time after the end of their last affair, which leads to him explaining his former business of private equity to her. They take a walk on the beach, the same beach she had walked with Russell and the kids, which makes her rethink her being there. She convinces herself she made the right decision when Russell calls to tell her Jeremy has appendicitis. Luke flies her home only two hours after she arrived.

## Analysis

Chapter 9 is the introduction Kip Taylor, Russell's chief investor who believes that hobbies bring more fulfillment than sex. Matthew Soames is also introduced in this chapter as the embodiment of the stereotypical view that with marriage comes the end of sex. These characters are the manifestation of the idea that sex is for young, unmarried people.

The importance of sex is a major recurring theme throughout the novel, and this chapter showcases Russell's beliefs on the matter. Kip Taylor is the personification that one must choose between finding alternative sources of pleasure beyond sex because as one grows older and marries sex becomes less frequent and less important in a relationship. In their discussion about the topic, he says, "Sex no longer rules your life. There was a time you would've been all over that. God knows I was. Secretaries and waitresses were my big hobbies then. Why do you think I got divorced twice?" (85). This sentiment is the vocalization of why Russell turned down the potential affair in the first chapter. Kip's entire character in this chapter centers around this idea, which makes him the embodiment of age-faded libido.

Matthew Soames, on the other hand, represents the idea that a person's sex drive only disappears with marriage. He believes it keeps both parties in a relationship interested and from becoming complacent. When he says, "In terms of men and women, if that's what you mean, my secret [to happiness] is not to get married. I'm convinced if we tie the knot, it would spoil things between us," he is parroting the idea that marriage ruins a relationship common to those with commitment-phobia. This idea is explored in the early chapters in the novel with Luke and Corrine's affair because they needed to look outside of their respective marriages for sexual fulfillment. Matthew's representation of



waning libido due to marriage relates to Corrine's beliefs while Kip's portrayal of other interests being prioritized over sex as one gets older relates to Russell's beliefs.

Corrine's hesitance to continue her affair with Luke demonstrates her improving relationship with Russell. In Chapter 10, Casey has to talk Corrine into going away with Luke, which is particularly clear when she says, "Because I don't think you're really over him. And I don't think he's over you" (96). That Corrine needs someone else to tell her she still has feelings for Luke shows that she is ready to put those feelings behind her. The entire conversation between Corrine and Casey illustrates Corrine is ambivalent about continuing to see Luke, and that Casey is a major contributing factor to Corrine and Luke's relationship. That she is much more unsure about going away with Luke suggests that she is happier with Russell, as she was more interested in Luke in earlier chapters when she felt less connected to Russell.

McInerney uses the phone call from Russell at the end of the chapter to convey the inevitable failure of Luke and Corrine's relationship. The call serves as a deus-ex-machina to end the trip so that Corrine does not have to face the complicated emotions and consequences that would follow her seeing the trip through. Just after she is feeling guilty about being with Luke on the same beach she visited with her family she is called back home, which is a little too convenient. The chapter ends with a description of New York City looking like the personification of guilt with her view of "the Manhattan skyline rising the undulant sea of headstones, surprised anew by its disfigurement, altered like a familiar smile marred by missing teeth" (105). Corrine seeing the city this way shows her guilt-twisted worldview as she travels back to her family with her lover. This guilt signifies her waning compulsion to be with Luke, which is the only reason the affair was rekindled. Without Corrine's interest, their relationship is doomed to fail.

## Discussion Question 1

Kip invests in Russell's company because he always wondered what his life would have been like if he had pursued his literary interests. The company quickly turned a profit and Russell believes this is a win for the Love and Art team. Is Russell and Kip profiting off their love for books a win for the Love and Art team or for the Power and Money team?

## Discussion Question 2

Is it possible that Russell and Kip truly think fishing is more important in their lives than sex given that they spend so much time talking about sex in Chapter 9?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the discussion about Carol Ricard and her anorexia?

## Vocabulary

perfunctory, visceral, aggregate, effluvia, neologism, flotilla, sere





# Chapters 11-12

## Summary

Chapter 11 begins with Russell getting the kids ready for school. His conversation with Storey during breakfast leaves him concerned with her recent weight gain and obsession with food. After dropping the children at school he goes to work. On the way, he passes a beautiful young woman and fantasizes about a reality where he is a master of seduction.

At work he prepares to make Phillip Kohout's agent an offer for his upcoming book. When he calls Kip for reassurance that spending so much money is worth it Kip tells him to trust his instincts. Russell negotiates with Kohout's agent, Briskin, and they agree after arguing back and forth over price for a while to take Russell's offer of \$150,000. During the negotiations, Russell's staff remarks that the book is very unlike the kinds of books they typically publish.

In Chapter 12, Jeremy is excited to go to an event to see a liger (the offspring of a lion and a tiger) at the Fifth Avenue townhouse of the president of Wildlife Society that Casey got extra tickets for. The event reminds Corrine of Luke, who is spending the week at a South African game park.

When they arrive the narration compares the expensive Asian-inspired decor with the Versailles-like decor that Corrine remembers it having in the '80s. She encounters Sasha McGavock, Luke's ex-wife, who engaged in a series of embarrassing affairs throughout their marriage and is now with the business rival of her main affair. They find Casey and her daughter, Amber, who Jeremy has a crush on.

There is a news broadcast at the event, and the broadcaster is Trina Cox, who tried to help Russell buy out his former employer in the '80s. Corrine suspects they slept together during that time. The host of the event, Minky, gives a commencement speech about the importance of the Wildlife Society before introducing Lionel the liger and his trainer.

Throughout the event the liger eyes Jeremy like he is prey. Eventually the trainer notices Lionel tracking Jeremy and fruitlessly tries to stop it. Corrine quickly becomes worried about the wild animal attacking her son and they leave. It is revealed at the end that on the way to Minky's townhouse Lionel mauled a jogger unprovoked.

## Analysis

The passage in the eleventh chapter when Russell creates a fantastical scenario about the beautiful woman he passes on the way to work shows McInerney uses Russell to personify wishful thinking. This paragraph is the only one so far that breaks away from reality to create a fantasy world. When the narration states, "he encountered many trolls



and one princess, a lovely creature in a white leather jacket whose porcelain face was framed by shiny blue-black tresses. . . . Somewhere in the metropolis was a Russell Calloway whose life was devoted to seduction” it is the only time thus far in the novel that an extended metaphor is used (108). In this case, the metaphor represents the self Russell Calloway that he wants to exist. Russell worries so much about his sex drive, or lack thereof, that he imagines a world where he is a master of seduction whose whole existence revolves around pursuing his carnal urges and where this works out well for him.

The negotiation process in Chapter 11 is used to foreshadow some big upcoming event. There are several times when Russell's doubting thoughts resonate as something more than character insight when viewed in conjunction with the occasions which this book deal is brought up earlier in the novel. Phillip Kohout is characterized as a backstabbing person when he is introduced in Chapter 6: “‘Couldn't have happened to a more deserving fellow,’ Corrine said” in reference to his having been kidnapped (68). Though Corrine is especially biased against him because of her marriage to Russell, Kohout is clearly set up to be not a good character from the beginning. This combined with Russell thinking “‘Maybe he'd just dodged a bullet” when Briskin is considering the offer after the first round of negotiations (111). There is too much doubt and negative characterization surrounding Kohout for Russell's lack of confidence in the book deal to be insignificant going forward with the story.

A full page in Chapter 12 is dedicated to Luke's ex-wife Sasha, which brings clarity about his character. McInerney uses Sasha's messy romantic history to suggest Luke's infatuation with Corrine is partly based upon her being a put-together, self-confident woman in comparison to his wife at the time when their relationship first began. Sasha's entire identity is wrapped up in the men she is involved with, meaning that she is incapable of standing on her own as a character, whereas Corrine's family and charity make her the opposite: an independent, fully-matured adult whose life is complete enough that she is her own character without a man. This contrast between the two make it clear why Luke is attracted to Corrine beyond her beauty.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the liger hunting Jeremy in Chapter 12?

## Discussion Question 2

It is revealed in Chapter 12 that Corrine suspects Russell has cheated on her in the past with Trina Cox. Do you think this has influenced her affair with Luke?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the description of Russell's meal during the negotiations with Briskin in Chapter 11?

## Vocabulary

inured, plebeian, extant, lugubrious, zaftig



# Chapters 13-14

## Summary

Chapter 13 begins with the Calloway family going to the Hamptons for the summer. They rent an old farmhouse, same as they have done for many years, to spend to summer socializing with all of the wealthy and famous people that also summer in the Hamptons. Corrine, whose perspective the chapter is told from, and Russell celebrate their 25th anniversary at a steakhouse on the highway along with their friends Tom and Casey Reynes, whose own anniversary is only months away.

Russell spends Monday through Thursday in the city working, while Corrine and the kids enjoy their summer vacation. The wealthy mindset of the company they keep is infectious and they have to discourage Storey's desire to keep a horse at a nearby stable like her friends do.

The Calloways throw their traditional Labor Day party, which is most likely going to be their last, as the owners of the farmhouse they are renting are trying to sell it. The week of the party, Cody Erhardt stays with them to help Corrine rewrite the screenplay for *Youth and Beauty*. Cody is a director and an old acquaintance of the family.

A couple arrives at the Labor Day party unfashionably early so they can brag about another gathering they will be attending later that evening. The party is a huge success, with more people in attendance than expected. One such person is Tug Barkley, who is the actor presumed to play the Jeff character in *Youth and Beauty* if it is ever made. Tony Duplex, an old artist friend of Jeff's, shows up with gallery owner Gary Arkadian.

Luke comes with Kip, who he is staying with for the weekend. Corrine tells him to call her after his wife leaves later in the week. Russell and Corrine then run into a book reviewer who panned *Youth and Beauty* when it was first published. Russell gets into a heated verbal altercation with him and eventually kicks in out of the party. Despite the outburst, the party is hailed as a raving success, and is even mentioned in the gossip column *Page Six* the following Tuesday.

Chapter 14 begins with a description of the beauty and social events typical of New York in the fall. Russell, in whose perspective is the narration, is waiting for the advance copy of the *New York Times Book Review* which contains a review of Jack Carson's book. Jack's behavior has been increasingly erratic and Russell worries about how that will affect his reputation.

The day before going to pick Jack up from his hotel for a book reading and publishing party, he rereads the disparaging review about Jeff's novel that sparked the fight at the Labor Day party. The review comes in and it is a rave. Russell goes to pick Jack up and finds him in a kitschy redneck bar drinking away his nerves about doing the book reading.



On the way to the party, Jack's drug dealer shows up and they all go to the church where the reading is being held together. Jack's reading is moving and Russell reflects on editing the book. When the reading is done, Russell, Jack, and Cara take a cab to the pub where the publication party is being held. Russell does not stay at the party for long.

Russell finds out from his staff the next day that the party got wild after he left. Jack left fairly early and called one of Russell's staff members in the early hours of the morning looking for cash for drugs. Russell worries about Jack's ability to handle his rising fame.

## Analysis

Chapter 13 focuses heavily on the socio-economic disparity between the Calloways and their friends. McInerney uses this to show that Russell and Corrine do not fit in with their friends. Though Russell and Corrine like to throw elegant parties and attend exclusive charity events, they are unable to partake in such gatherings as often as their friends because they are not wealthy. It is stated in the chapter that "unless they were included by someone who'd purchased a table, they had to find clever excuses for declining invitations to the charity benefits that had spread east to the Hamptons in recent years," demonstrating that they envy the money they surround themselves with (124). That they need "clever excuses" instead of honesty when turning down invitations to events they cannot afford suggests embarrassment. McInerney uses this implication of embarrassment as a way of separating the Calloways from the world they have chosen to inhabit. It also serves to show them clinging to the past because unlike all the friends they keep who also went to an Ivy League university, they seem to be the only ones struggling financially. They hold on to these friends and the lifestyle they all enjoyed in their youth when they could potentially be happier associating with people in their own socio-economic class.

The character of Cody Erhardt also shows the Calloways clinging to the past as he is the embodiment of old Hollywood. His introduction in the novel is, "Once upon a time he'd been a notorious badass, a hard-drinking, skirt chasing American ninja - also the title of his best-known movie" (126). These characteristics, combined with the incident at the Labor Day party when one of the girls who accompanies Tug Barkley meets Cody and does not know who he is but then recognizes only his most famous movie, illustrate his fading old-Hollywood relevance. Corrine using him to help her rewrite the screenplay for *Youth and Beauty* shows her clinging to the past. She is trying to get a movie made in the early 2000s, not the 1980s, so her choosing to have a director who does not seem to have made any popular movies recently is clearly her holding onto the past.

Chapter 14 completes Jack Carson's transformation into Jeff Pierce. Jack's increasing drug use and the rising success of his book are the obvious parallels, but their relationships with Russell also create a connection between the two. In his interview with Astrid Russell sums up his relationship with Jeff as, "And sometimes I was angry with Jeff, and sometimes hurt. But he was my friend and he was a very good writer, potentially maybe even a great one, and my first and only duty was to him and his book"



(15). Russell demonstrates the frustration with Jeff that followed his drug addiction with his stating his duty to Jeff's book. In comparison, at the end of Chapter 14 Russell expresses similar sentiments about Jack: "For all his belief in Jack, he was kind of amazed at the rapidity of his rise, and slightly worried about how the young author would handle it" (145). Jack and Russell are not the close friends that Russell and Jeff were, but Russell still cares enough about Jack to be worried by his worsening drug problem. The chapter ends with Russell choosing to ignore this worry in favor of offering Jack an opportunity to further advance his career. In this regard he recognizes his first duty if to Jack and his book, just like it was with Jeff. Jack's rapidly rising literary star is paralleled by Jeff's resurgent fame. By the end of the fourteenth chapter Jack Carson is essentially the new Jeff Pierce.

## Discussion Question 1

What might the description of Russell and Corrine's 25th wedding anniversary foreshadow?"

## Discussion Question 2

What does Russell's outburst at Toby Barnes, the reviewer who gave *Youth and Beauty* a bad review when it was first published, reveal about his character?

## Discussion Question 3

What might Russell's insistence at hosting the publication party at a small venue suggest?

## Vocabulary

sumptuary, grist, torpor, epistolary, stentorian, inchoate



# Chapters 15-16

## Summary

Chapter 15, narrated from Corrine's perspective, begins with Corrine, Russell, and Washington Lee at Tony Duplex's art show in Gary Arkadian's gallery. Corrine overhears two people talking about the resurgence of drugs, and then finds Washington talking to a young woman about art is the '80s. Corrine scares her off by recounting how dangerous living in New York was back then.

Corrine tells Washington about the time she rescued Tony and Jeff from a drug den, but Washington does not believe her. Russell finds them, and they move to a smaller room where the older paintings are hanging. Most of the paintings depict drug use or are a scathing commentary on the wealthy.

As they are enjoying the art, they see a man with a bandana covering his face spray painting one of the paintings. He is caught by a guard before he can ruin more than one. The group questions whether or not the vandalism was planned to generate buzz about the show. It had the desired effect, and it is revealed that Russell was interviewed by Entertainment Tonight. The chapter ends with Washington summoning Russell to the after-party, as Corrine wanted to stay home with the kids.

The Chapter 16 begins with a flashback of the story Corrine told Washington about rescuing Tony and Jeff from the last chapter. It begins with Jeff calling Corrine in the middle of the night, Russell still being in Europe for his fellowship. She takes the gold twenty-dollar coins her grandfather gave her for her eighteenth birthday and withdraws her limit from the nearest ATM. She takes a taxi to the Lower East Side, though she has trouble finding one because several refuse to go to that dangerous area at that time of night.

She arrives at the drug den and sees Jeff and Tony sitting on a couch, very high, next to a middle-aged Hispanic man. She gives him the money, after explaining that the twenty-dollar coins are worth much more because of the price of gold, which she knows because she works as a broker for Merrill Lynch.

Corrine leaves the drug den with Tony and Jeff and they proceed to bring her to a drag bar to have a drink and watch drag queens perform. She is furious with Jeff, and eventually leaves when he fails to apologize or even offer an explanation. He follows her out of the bar where they get into an argument about Jeff needing to take better care of himself. Jeff asks Corrine to come home with him so they can sleep together, but she refuses, kissing him before getting into the cab. The next morning one of Tony's paintings is delivered to her apartment with a note from Jeff saying that the painting reminds him of them.



It is revealed that she never spoke of that incident to anyone, including Jeff. She moved the painting to her mother's house where it still remains. She realizes that it might be worth a lot of money now, with Tony's comeback.

## Analysis

The technique McInerney uses to introduce Chapter 15 and Tony Duplex works to show his relationship to the main characters. Corrine overhears two people talking about his drug addiction and how Gary Arkadian found him in rags in the Lower East Side and sent him to rehab. Though Tony has been mentioned in previous chapters this is the first real introduction the audience gets of him. That the closest Corrine gets to learning more about Tony, despite having known him for at least 20 years, is by overhearing two strangers gossiping at his art show demonstrates how distant a relationship she, like Russell and Washington, has with him.

Corrine's reflections throughout the chapter on the glamorizing of the past show the opposite side of the theme of clinging to the past prominent in the novel. In previous chapters Corrine and Russell, especially, are depicted as refusing to accept the changes time has brought in favor of living as they did in their youth. The elegant dinner party in Chapter 4 is one example of this. Chapter 15 is the first time the opposite concept is featured.

The artwork prevalent in the 1980s is described in this chapter as inspired by the rough side of New York City. When the young woman Washington talks to in the beginning of the chapter brings up graffiti art, Corrine remembers real graffiti from the time: "She remembered when every urban surface was covered with strange names and slogans, and how it reflected the dread and menace that was the psychic weather of the city back then" (147). Her connoting the art with her memories of the gritty side of the city shows she is not romanticizing the past as the exhibit does. Corrine clearly feels like life in New York has improved since then, which is one of the few times in this book that a character openly accepts change.

In contrast, the insight the reader gets into Russell's view of the exhibit demonstrates that exact glamorizing of the past that Corrine actively rejects in this chapter. After the group moves into the smaller room with the older works, Russell "wistfully" comments, "I used to see these fucking things plastered all over the subway stations" in reference to captioned figurative cartoons (149). That he is wistful about these inconsequential drawings shows he yearns for life to remain unchanging. He clearly takes comfort from things from his past, things that Corrine equates with rougher times. This disconnect provides a deeper look into the differences between Corrine and Russell.

McInerney also uses the interesting technique of not making it immediately clear to the reader at the beginning of Chapter 16 that the scene is a flashback. This approach gives the reader the impression that Corrine is consumed by her reminiscing. The first sentence of the section is, "When the phone rings hours after Corrine fell asleep, she assumes it's Russell calling from the Frankfurt Book Fair" which gives no indication to





the time period. Often the chapters skip ahead weeks or months, so at first it appears like Russell went away to Germany on a trip, which would not be implausible as there has already been a trip Saint Barth's in the novel. The last flashback, in Chapter 5, was introduced in much the same way, suggesting that McInerney intends for the reader to get lost in Corrine's memories with her.

## Discussion Question 1

There is a reference in Chapter 15 to Jeff having contracted AIDS before his death, which casts doubt on his having died of an overdose. Which cause of death seems more likely, based on what is known about Jeff so far. Why might the author allow his death to have this level of ambiguity to it?

## Discussion Question 2

What does Corrine's action of parting with the precious gold coins her grandfather gave her in order to save Jeff suggest?

## Discussion Question 3

What reason could Corrine have for keeping the Tony Duplex painting Jeff gives her when there is a chance, no matter how small, of Russell discovering it?

## Vocabulary

recrudescence, malignancy, fetid



# Chapters 17-18

## Summary

In Chapter 17 Russell manages to book a reservation at an exclusive, underground restaurant that requires a referral to get the phone number. He invites Washington and his wife to join him and Corrine. When explaining to Corrine the concept of the restaurant she remarks that it seems incredibly pretentious.

They meet the Lees outside of the unmarked door to the restaurant. They sit down for dinner and agree to not talk about the upcoming primary election between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Russell orders the house cocktail for the table, which irritates Corrine, who hates being ordered for. The cocktails and the first course arrive while the couples discuss tasting menus and the disadvantages of reading reviews before experiencing something.

The first course is live shrimp, which disgusts the women. The conversation turns to the book deal with Phillip Kohout, which Washington's publishing company - along with several others - passed on. This revelation causes Russell to doubt his decision to pursue the deal with such fervor. He changes the subject to Manhattan real estate to get advice from Washington and Veronica who are both much more successful financially. Russell wants to own property, while Corrine is satisfied with renting an apartment.

Their conversation is interrupted by more courses of disgusting food that Corrine refuses to eat. After they leave the restaurant Russell and Corrine discuss the influence Russell's epicurean interest in food might have on Storey's eating issues, as she recently put on some weight. Their discussion about weight leads the conversation to why they have not had sex in seven weeks. They arrive back at their apartment upset with each other.

After they get ready for bed, they read for a while before Corrine falls asleep. Russell has trouble falling asleep, so he takes a sleeping pill, warms up a glass of milk, and drinks it on the couch while thinking about the apartment and how he might be no longer able to afford it. He goes to bed when the sleeping pill takes effect, and wakes up the next morning regretting some of the food he had eaten the night before. His last thought before the chapter ends is wondering why Washington passed on Kohout's book.

Chapter 18 begins with Luke thinking about the valley in South Africa where his vineyard resides and how much he misses New York. He associates the city with Corrine, not missing it much from the time he worked there, as he had little time to enjoy it because of his obsession with work back then.

Luke checks his emails and finds one from his ex-wife, Sasha, about their daughter's worsening eating disorder. She implores him to talk to her and to stay with her for the summer because Sasha will be going to the Hamptons and does not want Ashley, their



daughter, to be left alone. He replies, agreeing to take any necessary actions to help Ashley get better.

The power goes out, which is common when armed gangs raid the houses of white families, though it is just another blackout and not something more insidious. This further solidifies Luke's desire to the return to New York. A friend calls to make sure they are okay, which wakes Giselle up.

Luke thinks about how beautiful Giselle is as she talks about wanting to move to the U.S. with him to escape a country that terrorizes its white inhabitants. Luke balks at moving to New York with her, and she tells him she wants to start a family with him. He tells her the idea scares him a little because he never really considered it, but his thoughts reveal his feelings for Corrine are holding him back from even thinking about it. They have sex and for a little while Luke is freed from his anxieties.

Luke makes Giselle breakfast and they make small talk about the day's upcoming activities. She instructs him to think about starting a life away from South Africa and having children, to which he replies that he just cannot.

## Analysis

The scene at the end of Chapter 17 is indicative of Russell entering his midlife crisis. His trouble sleeping is due to his unhappiness with various aspects of his life, in particular his worries about being able to afford a decent place to live and the doubts about the Kohout book deal that linger in the back of his mind.

When he questions Washington about the Manhattan real estate market earlier in the chapter he says, "I'm fifty years old and I've never owned any real estate . . . How pathetic is that?" (162). This issue about not having progressed as far in that area of life has been going on for chapters, and it comes up whenever the book deal with Kohout does. His anxieties about never being able to own a home are thus clearly wrapped up with his doubts about the book deal, which become much more solid in this chapter after Washington tells him several publishing houses passed on it. The underlying uncertainty is brought forth in the last sentence of the chapter, ". . . Why had Washington passed on Kohout's book?" (167). It's placement at the end of the chapter allows it to linger in the reader's mind, just as it does in Russell's. These compounding worries signify Russell reaching a point in his life where his decisions feel very critical, like his entire future rests on the success of the book, which is why he has trouble resting.

Corrine's concerns with her daughter's weight offer insight into her classist worldview. Where Russell has an obsession with food, Corrine has a preoccupation with weight. Her argument with Russell about his influence on Storey's recent weight gain show her to be as concerned with body image, her own and her family's, as her upper class friends are. This issue is mentioned several times earlier in the novel, most commonly when Corrine is dining with her wealthy friends. In Chapter 17 it becomes very clear



just how concerned she is with Storey's weight. That she argues with Russell about it is indicative of her disproportional amount of interest in Storey staying thin. The narrator, who knows Russell's perspective in this chapter, remarks that corpulence is "one of her few prejudices" (164). This knowledge, in conjunction with her upper class upbringing, and the comment in Chapter 10 about the severely anorexic Mrs. Ricard ("Corrine looked over at the skeletal Mrs. Ricard with a certain fascination, not entirely disapproving. She was not immune to the dream of leaving behind the heavy cloak of flesh" (94)), show Corrine to have an unhealthy obsession with weight. Her complex about weight is surely more unhealthy than Storey's growing interest in food.

The conversation between Luke and Giselle in Chapter 18 about moving out of South Africa where Luke argues for staying, in direct opposition with his earlier thoughts, shows that Luke wants to create conflict and distance between them. Because he wants to take a trip to New York earlier in the novel to deal with his daughter and, more importantly, see Corrine, his position in the argument for staying seems out of character. He admits to himself, "he was arguing for a position in which he no longer believed. He'd lost much of his enthusiasm for his adoptive home" (172). Luke arguing to stay in a place he no longer enjoys living in suggests the desire to be contrary to his wife. This desire creates distance between the two because it would mean they want fundamentally different things in life, which is proven later in the chapter when Giselle brings up wanting to start a family with Luke. After she tells him that he thinks, "If he were truly being honest with himself, he would have to say he didn't want to be a father again, that he hoped the issue might be equivocated indefinitely, but she was determined to force his hand" (174). Initially, he tells that he needs to get used to the idea, but by the end of the chapter he is honest with her about his inability to even consider the idea. Luke's pulling away from her emotionally is mirrored in this chapter by his pulling away from her physically at the end, when he tells her he "just can't" and walks her to the door so she can go to the vet (175).

The incident in Chapter 18 when the power goes out and Luke has to wonder if his home will be invaded is McInerney's way of espousing America's greatness by contrasting it with the negatives of life in South Africa. The power outage occurs not long after Luke yearningly thinks about returning to New York. That he has to worry about "rape, torture, and mutilation" whenever the power goes out because "Eskom, the power company, was notoriously unreliable" makes going to back to New York even more enticing (171). When Luke and Giselle argue about moving to the United States a little later in the chapter she says, "Luke, you know I want to start a family., but I don't want to raise my children in a country that doesn't want them, a country where they'll be blamed for the sins of their ancestors, always seen as colonialists and usurpers" (173). Luke admits to understanding that part of her argument, which furthers the contrast between South Africa and America. In this chapter McInerney uses the civil unrest in South Africa to make America, specifically, New York seem like a utopia.

## Discussion Question 1

What purpose does the exotic food serve in Chapter 17?



## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the of artifacts describes at the beginning of Chapter 18?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the connection the author creates with characters through the discussion of weight? Whose weight is discussed and why?

## Vocabulary

prognostications, chatelain, inexorable, obdurately



# Chapters 19-20

## Summary

In Chapter 19 Russell goes on a fishing trip to Montauk in the Hamptons with Jack and his old friend Deke, who is a fishing guide. Deke worked for Atlantic Records in the '80s, which sparks a conversation between him and Jack about the drug scene back then. Once they are out on the water the fish are plentiful and large. Russell hooks one fairly quickly and releases it. Jack comments on not understanding letting go of the fish.

When Jack has trouble getting a fish to bite, Russell tells him to slow down when reeling in. Jack takes offense to Russell offering unsolicited advice, which hurts Russell's feelings. Russell's anger over the fishing morphs into bitterness for the lack of credit he has received as editor for the success of Jack's book. Jack eventually catches a fish and apologizes to Russell about snapping at him.

Relations between the two are slightly tense after Jack's rudeness. Once they decide to stop fishing for the day, they go to a local bar where they convince the chef to cook the bass Jack caught. The conversation between Deke and Jack about drugs from earlier resumes. Deke is a recovering drug addict who reminisces about the fun he had doing cocaine.

On the way back to the city Jack tells Russell he has signed Marty Briskin, Phillip Kohout's agent, to be his agent. Russell is a little upset, mostly because he dislikes Briskin. Jack also reveals that he got a story published in *The New Yorker*, which surprises Russell because he did not edit the story. Jack tells Russell he feels like his work lost his voice after Russell's heavy-handed editing, and they essentially end their working relationship.

The next day Russell receives a call from an old college friend who deals in rare books. He claims to have an original manuscript of Jack's book that shows the extent of Russell's editing, which he says are such that it could be considered coauthorship. He offers Russell the first chance to buy before anyone else can get it and throw the validity of Jack's success into question. Russell tells his friend that he needs to think about it, but that he does not want the manuscript in circulation.

Corrine meets Veronica Lee and Nancy Turner for lunch at an upscale restaurant frequented by famous people for lunch in Chapter 20. They make small talk for a little while before Corrine finds out the lunch is an intervention to save her relationship with Hilary, who had reached out to Veronica and Nancy. Corrine is upset by the ambush.

It is revealed a year has passed since they have seen each other. They catch up on each other's lives a bit before Russell shows up with Phillip Kohout for a lunch meeting. Kohout flirts with all of the women, especially Hilary. Corrine remarks on how hot she feels, to which the others reply that it must be a hot flash because they are all freezing.



Hilary reveals that she broke up with her fiancé, in part because he is from a lower social class. She claims to be working on a TV pilot, and Nancy offers to try to get her a part in the upcoming movie adaptation of one of her books.

After the lunch, Corrine goes to her office and realizes she is moved enough by her sister's efforts that they can begin to repair their relationship. Then she picks Jeremy up from his karate class and later goes on her Monday night date night with Russell. They go to Odeon, their traditional date night venue and discuss the lunch with Hilary and the possibility of letting her back into their lives. They also discuss Kohout and Corrine's doubts about the book deal because she thinks he is not a good person. Corrine's period begins at the end of the chapter and she is happy that she has not fully entered menopause.

## Analysis

The beginning of Chapter 19 diverges from the pattern where the third person narration has limited omniscience centered on the focal character of the chapter. This change in structure allows the reader to better see the differences between the two characters and understand the failure of their relationship later in the chapter. In Chapter 19 the reader is offered the innermost thoughts of both Jack and Russell, though the narration mainly focuses on Russell. When they arrive in Montauk and the narration details their respective viewpoints on the fishing trip it is stated, "As a fly fisherman, Russell would be suspect, an elitist with a wandlike rod throwing dainty feathered hooks. For his part, Jack wanted no part of this hoity-toitiness. Where he came from, dynamite was a part of the fisherman's arsenal, but in this case he could settle for a stout spinning rod" (177). Though that first sentence does not directly reference Russell's thoughts, it is something he would think, and certainly not something Jack would be thinking. Later in the chapter Russell's inner thoughts are stated much more directly.

The character of Deke is an embodiment of the power of addiction in this chapter. For a man who is sober most of what he says in Chapter 19 is about drugs and drug use. He does not advocate for sobriety, as one might expect a recovering drug addict might to a burgeoning drug addict. Instead, Jack describes him as "Fucking guy's like the bard of cocaine" meaning that he actively encourages Jack's drug habit by sharing his good memories of his drug use (182). Deke appears to be simply a vehicle in this section to reveal how quickly Jack's drug habit has escalated. He presents the stereotypical characteristics of a drug addict in recovery: "You never lose the desire, the compulsion, the yearning. Instead, I go to a meeting every day" (181). It is a common saying that once a person is addicted to a substance he or she is always an addict. Deke embodies this idea, as it is made very clear in this chapter that he would gladly continue to do cocaine and heroin if it were not detrimental to his health.

Corrine beginning menopause in Chapter 20 exposes her fear of aging. The last paragraph of the chapter shows Corrine clings to her youth with a fervor that suggests she has a fear of aging: "Corrine excused herself, feeling her period arrive all at once, and walked gingerly to the ladies' room. For better, and worse, she was still in the game,



despite her dear friends' eagerness to perform last rites on her womanhood" (197). The use of the phrase "still in the game" illustrates Corrine's desire to remain young, as it connotes an athlete who overcomes adversity to play the game. In this situation, aging is the adversity Corrine faces, which is indicative of her attitude toward it.

The structure of the paragraph on page 194 in which Corrine is at her office is used to reflect her mental state during the scene. The tone comes across as fractured and scattered, which aligns with the racing mind of a woman who has just been ambushed into reconciling with her sister by her friends. The topic abruptly changes halfway through, changing from getting produce to irritation about the lunch with two thoughts joined by a semicolon. The short paragraph stands out on the page as well as being out of place, which furthers its function as giving the impression of an overwhelmed mind that cannot focus on one subject for very long.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does McInerney describe Montauk in such detail at the beginning of Chapter 19?

## Discussion Question 2

Chapter 19 is the second chapter thus far in the novel that includes detailed descriptions of a fishing trip. Why might McInerney devote so many words in the book to fishing? What might this represent?

## Discussion Question 3

Could Corrine's disdain of Kohout in Chapter 20 be at all influenced by her financial future resting on the success of his book?

## Vocabulary

isthmus, munificence, penitent, eponymous, patina





# Chapters 21-22

## Summary

Phillip Kohout and Russell attend one of Jack's book readings in Chapter 21. Phillip recounts his life as a rising literary celebrity after the reading is over. He reminisces about how he enjoyed cocaine because it made him feel normal. He then goes on to talk about the lying necessitated by cocaine use and how good he was at lying right after his first book was published. It is revealed that Russell participated in an intervention back then to get Kohout off drugs.

Phillip explains that he broke his contract with Russell to publish his second book because he knew he could get more money from another publisher. He also details the failure of that book as being obviously disingenuous about redemption after drug addiction. The chapter ends with Kohout leaving with a fan who recognizes him as Jack sits down at the table and remarks that Kohout is "full of shit" (201). Russell fears this being true and leaves 20 minutes later, after there is no sign that Kohout will return.

Chapter 22 starts with Corrine meeting Casey for lunch and deciding not to tell her about her date with Luke. After they are seated, it is revealed that Casey's off and on affair with Washington has been rekindled. Corrine tells Casey about her upcoming date with Luke, despite her desire earlier to not.

Corrine tells Casey they will be meeting at the hotel Luke is staying in. Casey asks Corrine about Luke's impending divorce, which Corrine attributes to Luke and Giselle's differing views on wanting children. Corrine states she does not want to be the cause of the divorce. They also discuss Storey's food obsession and how Corrine does not want Storey to have bulimia like she did when she was in school. The conversation turns toward aging, and Casey advises Corrine to look into plastic surgery before her age really starts to show.

After she gets ready to see Luke, which her family thinks is a girls' night out, Russell and Storey comment that she looks particularly dressed up, and she thinks they might be suspicious of her. She runs into one of her neighbors on the way out, and he candidly remarks that his life is not how he imagined it would turn out.

Corrine arrives at Luke's hotel room, where he compliments her dress and she tells him she is mad at him for actively continuing the relationship, and at herself for wanting it. They lightly discuss his divorce and the upcoming Democratic primary election. Luke admits Corrine is part of why he left Giselle and that he wants to pursue a real relationship with her.

They kiss and are interrupted by room service. After they quickly usher the man out they proceed to have sex. Corrine is angry that sex with Luke is as good as she



remembered, implying that makes it harder to walk away from him, and suggests they move on with their separate lives. Luke tells he is not not sure he can do that.

## Analysis

In Chapter 21 McInerney solidifies the idea that fame inevitably leads to drug use. Before this chapter Kohout was the only author introduced in the novel who is not known for abusing mind-altering substances. Jeff Pierce was addicted to heroin, Jack Carson is a heavy user of cocaine, and even Corrine's writer friend likes to go out and get blackout drunk, as evidenced in Chapter 7. All of the writers McInerney includes in the novel have achieved a significant degree of literary fame. The beginning of Chapter 21, the bulk of the dialogue is devoted to Kohout reminiscing about his drug use not long after his first book was published and he gained a modicum of fame. The idea that fame leads to drug abuse is introduced very early in the novel with Jeff, and continues most clearly with Jack Carson's storyline. Kohout's recounting of his experience with drugs - "I'd dabbled in coke before, but now that I had money and a modicum of celebrity, I was hitting it hard" - states directly what McInerney only hinted at before (198).

Chapter 21 also sets up the idea that Russell may not be a very good editor. The idea is seeded in Chapter 19 when Jack gives Russell the impression that their working relationship is over. The reader has known since Chapter 6 that Kohout dropped Russell as an editor for his second book. Very little is known about the rest of Russell's authors. Jack tells him that he feels Russell's edits take away from the voice in his writing, which Russell disagrees with, and Kohout tells him "we all knew I could get more money elsewhere" (200). Jack's comment suggests that Russell contributes too much to an author's work to truly be considered editing, which is supported at the end of Chapter 19 with the manuscript showing how much he contributed to Jack's book. Kohout's comment shows that Russell is not a good enough business man to ever be a really successful editor and publisher because his inability to get his authors as much money as his competition makes it hard to retain the successful ones. Kohout's apology to Russell in Chapter 21 shows he is not as good an editor and publisher as he thinks he is.

When Corrine questions how Casey can continue her affair with Washington in Chapter 22, she proves that she dissociates her own infidelity from her person. By doing this McInerney shows that Corrine does not take full responsibility for her actions with Luke and Jeff. During their conversation about Casey restarting her off and on affair with Washington, Corrine asks her about the decision making process that preceded their sleeping together because, "Strangely, she wanted to know all the preliminary details. Even after engaging in an affair of her own, it seemed amazing to her that married adults could end up in bed with people who weren't their spouses" (204). Her amazement shows her inability to fully recognize her own infidelities. As someone who has engaged in multiple affairs she should be able to fully understand how married people end up in bed with someone who is not their spouse. Instead, she seems to be unable to reconcile her actions with the person she sees herself as which is evidenced



by this lack of understanding. Because she cannot bring herself to fully associate her action with herself, she cannot take responsibility for them.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What purpose does scene in Chapter 21 detailing Kohout's intervention serve?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Does McInerney use Casey and Washington's affair to draw any parallels between Luke and Corrine's affair? If so, what are the parallels? If not, what differences prevent such a parallel?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does McInerney include the incident with the neighbor who shocks Corrine by answering her polite question honestly?

## **Vocabulary**

garrulously, putative, mendacity, perfidy, malfeasance, desiderata, inchoate



# Chapters 23-24

## Summary

Chapter 23 begins with the narrative quickly recapping the Calloway's holiday season. It covers Halloween, Thanksgiving, before moving to Christmas. The story picks up at the end of a dinner at a hip new restaurant Russell, Corinne, Washington, and Veronica are at. Corrine and Veronica discuss Christmas shopping and plans as the men divide up the bill.

On the way home Corrine recalls an incident when she stopped to give money and her scarf to a cold young boy huddled in a doorway. The novel then jumps to Corrine at her mother's house the day before Christmas Eve. Her mother, Jessie, has a vodka at four in the afternoon and they talk about Corrine reconciling with her sister. Jessie brings the conversation to a halt with her comment about her husband running off with her best friend, which, it is remarked in the section, is her usual conversational habit.

Corrine excuses herself to go unpack. She retreats to her room, where she hung up many grave rubbings from a nearby cemetery when she was an adolescent. She digs around in her closet until she finds the Tony Duplex painting Jeff gave her after she rescued them from the drug den. She then pulls out a box of mementoes Jeff had given her before he died, mostly books with passages underlined. These objects, which are all declarations of Jeff's love for her, cause her to reflect on her capacity to love more than one person at a time.

Chapter 24 features the third-person omniscient narrator focusing on Washington Lee as he continues his affair with Casey Reynes. They have agreed to get a hotel room at the hostel the Nourish New York event that they are both attending with their spouses is being held. Washington thinks the plan is crazy and very risky, but finds himself unable to say no to Casey. Casey thinks the plan is perfect because no private detective would follow her if she is with her husband.

Washington and Veronica say goodbye to their children the night of the event and go to the event. Washington immediately drinks two martinis to calm his nerves. Casey finds him before long and tells him to meet her at the room she booked. He does, and they have sex.

As they are getting redressed to go back down to the charity event, Washington notices two of his studs have popped out. Casey helps him find them and put them back on and she tells him that she will be thinking of their encounter during the speeches. Washington checks his phone in the elevator on the way down and notices he accidentally called his wife while having sex with Casey.

Despite his hopes that she did not hear her phone, when Washington rejoins his wife at their table and texts her to find out whether or not she knows about his affair she lets



him know she heard everything. The chapter ends with Washington wishing the speeches at the event would never end.

## Analysis

When Corrine's mother, Jessie, brings up her husband running off with her best friend, McInerney creates a parallel between Jessie and Russell. Although Corrine has not left Russell, in many ways she is no longer fully invested in their relationship due to her relationship with Luke. When Jessie tells her daughter, 'One big happy family. . . . Enjoy it, because you never know when your husband will run off with her best friend', she is warning the wrong party in Corrine's situation (216). Russell is the one who is in danger of being left, as Luke has made it very clear he would like to be with Corrine. Corrine actually slept with Russell's best friend, though she had no intention of leaving Russell for him, as detailed in Chapter 5. McInerney uses this parallel to suggest the seriousness of Corrine's affair and its potential effects on her husband.

McInerney uses the message of the medieval text, *The Art of Courtly Love*, that Jeff sent to Corrine regarding the differences between the love one has for a spouse and the love one has for a lover to illustrate one of the reasons behind Corrine's affairs over the years. The text posits that "love by definition cannot obtain between man and wife, who are duty-bound to each other, but only between lovers, who choose each other freely, and whose jealousy is concomitant of their love" (219). This means that love only exists between two people who choose each other freely and whose love exists concurrently with their jealousy. McInerney uses this second part of the definition to create a contrast between Corrine's relationship with Luke and her relationship with Russell. It is mentioned previously in the novel that Corrine suspects Russell has cheated on her at least once, but that mention lacked any sense of jealousy surrounding the idea of Russell with another woman. In contrast, it is implied in the early chapters of the novel that Corrine is jealous of Luke's current wife, just as she was jealous of his ex-wife during their earlier affair. Using the definition of love from the book Jeff sent Corrine, that McInerney uses to summarize their relationship, Corrine truly loves Luke while she is merely duty-bound to Russell. This is complicated by her having freely chosen Russell, just as she freely chose Jeff and Luke, but it nevertheless has a small grain of truth to it.

McInerney portrays Washington as the embodiment of the stereotype of the person driven by hormones in Chapter 24. In contrast to Luke, whose interest in Corrine is driven by both his hormones and the infatuation he has with her, Washington's affair with Casey is purely physical. Washington feels guilt about sleeping with Casey, but is unable to control his reaction to her: "The last time he found himself undressing in her presence, he'd actually felt a brief twinge of conscience, a kind of yearning to the the right thing, although Casey had quickly obliterated these thoughts with action" (221). His inability to say no when actively experiencing guilt because of Casey's actions show him to be completely consumed by his hormones when around her. In this way he functions as the representation of the stereotype of the man who thinks with his nether regions instead of listening to the thoughts in his head.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Corrine recall the young homeless boy on her walk home from dinner in Chapter 23? What is the significance of that scene?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Corrine pull out the painting and other gifts from Jeff in Chapter 23?

## Discussion Question 3

Why might McInerney have had Veronica find out about Washington sleeping with Casey?

## Vocabulary

phalanx, concomitant, apposite, bibelot, maladroit



# Chapters 25-26

## Summary

Russell and Corrine go out to dinner during the Wisconsin primary election in Chapter 25 where they see Washington dining with a young woman. They talk about Veronica kicking Washington out of the house and how it takes both spouses to derail a marriage. Corrine argues what Russell considers the male point of view that both people are culpable in the case of an affair.

They then discuss their landlord converting their apartment building into condos, which they would barely be able to afford. Corrine proposes moving to New Jersey, or the Upper East Side, or Brooklyn. Russell balks, very attached to the idea of living in Manhattan, even at the sacrifice of the quality of his children's education. Corrine also questions their habit of eating out several times a week, which costs far more than they can afford to waste.

When she suggests moving to Harlem, Russell is slightly more amenable to the idea, because at least Harlem is part of Manhattan. Corrine tells Russell that if he cannot face looking for another place she will start looking on her own. After her declaration, Russell reflects on how much living in Manhattan means to his identity as a New Yorker and the greatness of the city.

Chapter 26 begins with Luke calling Corrine on Valentine's Day asking to meet with her. He suggests going away for the weekend, to which Corrine replies that she cannot because of her family. She then calls Casey, who implores her to get Washington to call her.

Russell and Corrine go out to dinner, where Russell reveals he had lunch with Washington. He asks if Corrine knew about the affair, and she admits she did and did not tell him because she felt she was held to the strictest confidence. They then discuss the differences between male and female friendships.

When they talk about how Casey is doing after dinner Corrine tells Russell that she wants to spend the weekend with Casey to help her through this difficult time, when she will really be with Luke. Russell agrees, albeit reluctantly. Corrine then asks about Kohout's book and Russell reveals that he still does not have the final draft even though it is scheduled to be published in three months. When they get home Corrine worries about having to have sex with Russell since it is Valentine's Day, but they go to bed after sharing a chaste kiss.

The weekend getaway arrives and Luke flies Corrine to Vermont in the middle of a terrible snowstorm. He takes her to the house of one of his former professors where they share a premade meal and have sex. She reflects on how she will never feel this level of desire again.



That night, she asks him to engage in anal sex, which they do, and they then spend the night sleeping in each other's embrace. When Corrine wakes up the next morning to smell Luke cooking bacon in the kitchen, she looks at his prescriptions and finds, among other things, Adderall, which surprises her.

After breakfast, Luke takes her to an art museum because it houses Corrine's favorite painting. She is touched that he remembers and they share stories from their youth that relate to the works of art they enjoy. After the art gallery, they have lunch together where Corrine gets mad at Luke for reading the menu as she tells him a story from her past. He admits he has ADD.

During their last night away Luke tells Corrine he still wants to be with her in a permanent way, which she counters with the only reason he still wants her is because he does not have her yet. At the airport after their flight home they run into Kip Taylor, Russell's investor. Corrine worries that he will tell Russell, but Luke assures her they he has no reason to say anything. The encounter leaves Corrine feeling like the entire weekend has been tarnished because it is a reminder of the obligations she owes to her family.

## Analysis

When Russell terms Corrine's stance on cheating "the male point of view" McInerney makes a statement about the typically gendered nature of infidelity. During their discussion about Washington's affair with Casey and Veronica kicking him out of the house Corrine claims, "But, it takes two to derail a marriage. . . . I'm just saying I think she changed the rules on him. For years she turned a blind eye, then suddenly she drops the boom," which Russell thinks is her taking the man's side (230-231). The reader knows that she has first-hand experience of having an affair like Washington's, so her defending him makes sense because it is also her defending her own actions. In this scenario, Corrine is indeed looking at the situation from the male perspective, because they are discussing Washington. However, Russell's thoughts on this, that "this tendency to take the man's side, to see the male point of view," which then extends to her supporting Barack Obama instead of Hillary Clinton, are clearly McInerney gendering her opinions unnecessarily. Corrine supporting Obama is more likely explained by her favoring his campaign promises over Clinton's, just as arguing Washington's perspective during their discussion is more easily attributable to her own affair, than her tendency to take the man's side. Because of this, McInerney uses Russell to reflect the idea that cheating is more acceptable for a man, as the man's point of view is that the real wrongdoing was Veronica finally deciding she does not like Washington cheating on her.

Russell's reflections on his reasons for wanting to stay in Manhattan at the end of Chapter 25 make him the embodiment of the idea of New York as the center of culture. Corrine comments earlier in the chapter that the city has become more commercialized in recent years, that is not longer the "funky and cheap" place it used to be (232). In response to her remarks, Russell reflects on his refusal to accept the truth he knows





she is speaking: “He refused to believe that the city no longer had room for people like themselves, refused to concede New York to the Power and Money team. It needed the Art and Love team, goddamn it” (234). His belief that New York needs the Art and Love team supports the idea of the city as teeming with artistic culture, because at one point the city was a haven for the artists and bohemians who gave the city its culture demonstrates the idea that it is the capital of culture. Russell’s reluctance to concede the continuation of the city being the center of culture that draws artistic “people like themselves” from around the world shows him to be the embodiment of idea that New York is a cultural hub and a haven for artists.

The revelation that Luke has ADD in Chapter 26 suggests the fleeting nature of his relationship with Corrine. Until this point in the novel, the only indication that Luke has a problem maintaining focus on something is his multiple marriages. This, however, is mitigated by his lasting attraction to Corrine. Introducing his struggle with Attention Deficit Disorder in this chapter hints at the impending end to the relationship between Luke and Corrine. On their last night together in Vermont, Corrine backs this foreshadowing up when she says to him, “I love that you feel that way, but trust me, it will pass” (251). Chapter 26 seeds the inevitable end to their affair because Corrine has been resisting his advances for the most part before this point, she certainly rejects any offer he has of taking their relationship to the next level because of her family, and Luke is revealed to have a psychological condition that makes maintaining focus difficult. Luke’s ADD works as a metaphor for his ultimately passing interest in Corrine.

## Discussion Question 1

Washington is described as feeling guilty in Chapter 24 about his affair with Casey. However, Corrine and Russell later see him having dinner with a young woman who is definitely not his wife. What can be inferred about Washington's character?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Washington never told Russell about his affair with Casey, given that it was on and off for 20 years?

## Discussion Question 3

Does Corrine forgetting her former favorite painting in Chapter 26 signify her maturation and growth as a person?

## Vocabulary

shambolic, accretion, sublimate



# Chapters 27-28

## Summary

Russell has a smoke with Chessie Steyl, a famous actress with whom he has a casual acquaintance, outside a premiere party for her latest movie. He compliments her performance and she asks him what she should read next. He recommends Jack Carson's book, and invites her to the launch party the following week.

Back inside, Russell runs into Steve Sanders, the cultural reporter for the New York Times who brought the journalist who gave *Youth and Beauty* a bad review to the Labor Day party. Sanders tells Russell he has tried calling him and Kohout several times about one of his sources saying Kohout was never really kidnapped in Pakistan and that his whole story is a lie.

Sanders asks Russell about what kind of vetting he did for Kohout's story and Russell counters with *The New Yorker* story that is supposed to run the next week. Sanders informs him that the magazine has pulled the article because of questions about the story's authenticity. Russell refuses to comment about the allegations, and promises to look into them and get back to Sanders in the morning. As Russell is leaving the party he almost collides with a camera crew that is filming Chessie promoting Kohout's book.

After failing to reach Kohout or Briskin, his agent, Russell goes to Kohout's apartment to find him. He is especially anxious because he wrote Kohout a check for a quarter of a million dollars two days prior. When he does not get any response, he remembers an old contact, Trish, at *The New Yorker* who lives only a few blocks away and who he used to have a casual affair with.

Trish opens the door in a T-shirt and underwear. He asks her for help, and she asks him if he came intending to have sex with her. When he tells her only came because of the Kohout scandal she becomes sexually aggressive and he flees. Trish chases after him, until he decides he has had enough and confronts her. Trish is hurt that their affair ended without any parting words, like he just forgot her. He attempts to go home, but she follows him. He gets into a cab to prevent her from following him all the way home, but she jumps onto the windshield, and the driver kicks Russell out of the car. He continues to run home with Trish following him, and takes a convoluted route to throw her off his trail. He arrives home, and Corrine asks him what is wrong, to which his reply is that he is in so much trouble.

Chapter 28 starts with Corrine talking to two stay-at-home mothers while they wait for their children to get out of school. She dislikes these women for their disingenuous attitudes and it is revealed that the Kohout scandal has become worse since the last chapter. They discuss the scandal and the conversation ends with Corrine making a veiled insult.



On the way home Corrine explains to her children that their father's bad decision was a mistake, that they should not believe what their friends or the news say about it. Jeremy admits he always thought Kohout was a jerk and a phony. Corrine lets her children know that she is not mad at Russell, she just feels bad for him, and her thoughts reflect how badly she feels about their family's financial future.

While Jeremy is at his karate class Corrine takes Storey shopping. They clash over Storey's fashion choices. Once they are home, Corrine calls Luke to confide in him about the situation. She realizes during the call that phoning him was a mistake. Storey overhears her telling Luke that she loves him, and asks Corrine who she was talking to. Corrine tells her daughter that she was talking to a friend. The conversation is hostile on Storey's part, and Corrine is left wondering what caused that at the end of the chapter.

## Analysis

McInerney uses the breaking of the Kohout scandal in Chapter 27 to further highlight Russell's failings in his relationship with Corrine. After his initial shock subsides, and he recognizes all of the red flags Kohout and Briskin sent up during the course of the deal, Russell realizes he is nervous to tell his wife the bad news: "Almost more than anything else, he dreaded telling Corrine. She'd been against his acquisition of the Kohout book from the start, and while she hadn't exactly questioned its authenticity, she'd certainly questioned the author's character, which was really the ultimate point at issue" (257). His not taking Corrine's opinion on the matter in the first place shows a lack of respect for her views on the matter. Placing so much of their financial future on this book deal was a decision Russell made essentially in spite of Corrine. If he had listened to her misgivings about Kohout and had taken them into account, he might have reached the same conclusion that Washington and several other publishing houses reached: that Kohout is not to be trusted and the book deal is too big a risk. Russell's refusal to listen to Corrine's doubts regarding the deal their future rests on is a clear example of one of his failings as a husband. Marriage is supposed to be a partnership, but Russell acted as the sole decision maker, effectively removing Corrine as his partner during this major decision.

Chapter 27 also offers the first real introduction into one of Russell's past dalliances. It is mentioned several times throughout the novel that Russell has a history of engaging in short, casual affairs. The introduction of Trish shows the only woman thus far in the novel he has confirmed he used to sleep with. Her character also shows that Russell's affairs never affected him on an emotional level, because he cut off contact with her without so much as a word of explanation or farewell. The relationship between Trish and Russell also creates a contrast between the relationship between Corrine and Luke, as Russell only used Trish for sex, while Corrine and Luke have an emotional attachment to each other in addition to using each other for sex. This contrast in relationships leads to a contrast between Russell and Corrine, in which Russell is shown to be much more invested in his marriage and the love he has for his spouse than Corrine does.



Corrine calls Luke in Chapter 28 to talk about the Kohout situation, which she admits several times is not a good idea. Her reasoning, and her admission to herself that her reasoning makes little sense, provides insight into Corrine's complicated views about her marriage. Right after she calls Luke to talk, she knows it was the wrong thing to do: "On reflection, she saw that her troubles were joint, marital property, that sharing them with Luke would be disloyal to Russell, a principle she clung to even though it was rendered absurd by the fact of her serial betrayals" (267). Despite her willingness to engage in affairs, Corrine's reluctance to betray certain aspect of her marriage suggest that she separates the various parts of her marriage so that she can remain faithful in some ways. This is also evidenced by her unwillingness to ever leave Russell due the consequences her family unit would suffer. Like the financial problems she does not want to share with Luke, her children are another facet of her marriage that she is unwilling to compromise on in the pursuit of her own happiness. The scene in this chapter detailing Luke and Corrine's phone conversation provide the reader a clearer look into Corrine's moral code in relation to her marriage.

## Discussion Question 1

What does the character of Chessie Steyl add to the novel? Why is she included here?

## Discussion Question 2

What might Corrine's disdain of Sara and Athena, the mothers she talks to when waiting for her children, be influenced by? What does this tell readers about Corrine's character?

## Discussion Question 3

Does Storey's hostile attitude toward her mother at the end of Chapter 28 suggest she is suspicious of her mother cheating on her father?

## Vocabulary

métier, perfunctory



# Chapters 29-30

## Summary

Russell meets Tom Reynes at an exorbitantly expensive restaurant in Chapter 29 to ask him to invest in his publishing house. Tom and Russell bond over wine, as the restaurant has a 100,000 bottle wine cellar, and playing a game of who knows more about wine with a table of traders from Goldman Sachs by sending bottles to their table in retaliation for the bottles they have sent over. Tom, Casey's husband, is a very successful investment banker who grew up very privileged.

Russell asks him to invest half a million dollars after Tom questions his doubts about Kohout when initially taking the deal. Tom tells him to stick to the market he knows, literary fiction, and agrees to help him. They then discuss their marriages, as their wives are best friends. Russell admits things at home could be better because he and Corrine have not had sex in a long time. Near the end of dinner, Russell asks Tom where he goes for sex because he mentioned earlier he only sleeps with Casey three times a year. He tells him that he goes to a whorehouse and invites Russell to join him after dinner is finished. Russell tells Tom he could not, but Tom insists that he must if they are to go into business together to build trust.

Tom tries to convince Russell that paying for sex removes any chance of emotional infidelity, which is what really matters. They then go to the brothel Tom frequents. Tom immediately goes off with a prostitute, and the madame tells Russell his girl is coming. The girl intended for Russell walks in, and it turns out to be his sister-in-law, Hilary.

Corrine arrives late to work after missing her subway train in Chapter 30. Once she arrives she sees Luke handing out food with the other volunteers and reveals she has not spoken to him in a week and has not seen him in two months. He comes up to her and asks her to go to lunch with him, and she tells him she will consider it.

At the end of the shift she agrees to go to lunch with him and they go to a Salvadorian restaurant close by because Luke let his car go for the morning. After sitting down, Luke comments that some of the volunteers he was working with earlier will soon need handouts themselves, because they work for Bear Stearns which collapsed the previous month. Corrine orders just a coffee and Luke remarks how interesting it is that someone with food issues like Corrine spends her time feeding the needy.

This begins a discussion about her food issues, which then leads to Luke suggesting they open a foundation together to effect greater change. He uses the idea to entice Corrine into leaving her husband for him and all the things his money could do for her family. She then realizes he mentioned having children with her and tells him she thought he did not want any more children. He replies he did not want children with Giselle, but is interested in taking on Corrine and her children as family. The chapter ends with Luke telling Corrine he loves her.



## Analysis

McInerney uses the game of one upmanship between Tom and the Goldman investors to show how out of his depths Russell is during that meeting, and what his ideal life would be like. The defining feature of Russell's character is his appreciation of wine. From the dinner scene in Chapter 6 and various other points earlier in the novel, to looking at the wine lists at the restaurant while waiting for Tom, Russell is shown to be a wine aficionado. The game that Tom plays with the men from Goldman Sachs puts them on a much different level of wine appreciation than Russell, which serves to highlight their wealth and the extent to which Russell does not fit in. The narrator, who reflects Russell's perspective in this chapter, describes the room as, "Although there were several couples spread around the room, it had the air of a gentleman's club; instead of squash, the sport here was competitive oenophilia" (274). As Russell is only a self-described enthusiast of wine, the sport Tom engages in at their dinner, where he and his opponents trade bottles worth hundreds or thousands of dollars, prove that Russell is deeply out of his element in terms of the wealth and privilege required to be a part of the crowd there. That Russell is there to ask for money after a failed deal he hoped would make him rich demonstrates his desire to have at least a small portion of the riches necessary to fit in at that restaurant. McInerney uses all of the expensive wines throughout the chapter to contrast Russell with the opulence around him and to show his longing to be part of that opulence.

The open-ended question at the end of Chapter 29 of whether or not Russell slept with his sister-in-law is used to illustrate Russell's desperation. The last sentence of the chapter is "Russell turned and saw, framed in the arched doorway, wearing a leopard print robe, his sister-in-law, Hilary" (280). By not revealing what happens next McInerney poses a question to the reader: did Russell have sex with Hilary to secure the deal with Tom or did he not? Another question this scene brings up is whether or not Tom also recognizes Hilary, as his wife is her sister's best friend. These questions lead the reader to wonder how desperate Russell would have to be to cheat on his wife with her sister.

The end of Chapter 30, when Luke suggests starting a foundation with Corrine, demonstrating their disparaging levels of involvement in their relationship. It is clear throughout the earlier parts of the novel that Luke is more invested in their relationship than Corrine is. His proposition to create a charitable foundation to entice her to be with him shows how much he cares for her and how much he wants to be with her in a real, committed relationship. That he knows her passion for philanthropy suggests he knows what makes her happy and wants to continue that happiness. The offer itself is practically a bribe, however, which suggests that he knows he is more interested in her than she is in him. Her inner debate about whether or not to seriously consider his offer suggests that it further drives her away from him: "And yet she still subscribed to the values on which she'd based her life, still believed that the acquisitive instinct was one of the lower impulses on the scale of human values" (286). Though his offer to allocate a lot of money to charity and to bring her the comforts in life only available to those with financial stability shows he knows what she wants, it also shows that he does not



understand what fundamentally drives her character. Corrine is firmly on the Art and Love team, despite her yearning for the perks of the Power and Money team, and all Luke can offer her are those perks. But by doing so, he reveals himself to be a member of that team, illustrating their underlying differences. It is because of these differences that Luke feels much more strongly about Corrine than she feels about him.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Tom mentions having very few conjugal relations with his wife, such that he mostly has sex at a brothel. Do you think this suggests that he knows about his wife's affair with Washington?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What actually tempts Corrine to leave Russell for Luke? Does it appear that she ever actually will follow through? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Corrine take Luke to the Salvadoran restaurant to see his reaction?

## **Vocabulary**

patinated, polyglot, exigencies, ameliorating, chatelaine, oenophilia



# Chapters 31-32

## Summary

Jack lands at LaGuardia airport and immediately contacts his drug dealer in Chapter 31. He takes a cab to Chelsea to meet his dealer and buys heroin and cocaine before going to Russell and Corrine's apartment for dinner. He took some of the cocaine an hour before he was supposed to be there and ended up arriving an hour late using the excuse of the flight being delayed.

At the dinner he is excited to see Washington and forgets who Nancy Turner is for a moment. Also at the dinner party are a middle-aged painter and his boyfriend Tab, a much younger actor. Jack dislikes the painter because he comes off as full of himself. A little later, Madison Dall, a famous indie-movie actress arrives, and Jack is immediately very attracted to her. The Calloway children appear and dinner begins.

Jack scoffs at the almost absurd levels of sophistication the party engages in, with Russell in a velvet smoking jacket and place cards at the table. Jack talks to Madison about his book, with Russell chiming in, while the other end of the table discusses 9/11. He goes to the bathroom to do more drugs because he is not interested in talking about September 11. He takes two lines of the heroin he bought earlier and finds himself unable to do the lines of coke afterward. Instead he sits on the floor of the bathroom and sees Madison in the doorway asking him if he has anything he can share.

Before he can muster up the energy to give her the coke, she starts giving him a blow job and Jeremy walks in on that. When he returns to the table, knowing that everyone else knows what he and Madison had been doing, only Nancy addresses it, until Storey announced Jeremy saw two people having oral sex in the bathroom.

Right after, Jack feels something furry brush against his leg and he stomps on it. The creature turns out to be the Calloway's pet ferret, which devastates the entire family. Russell kicks Jack out of the apartment, and Madison leaves with him. In the elevator on the way out, Jack reveals to Madison that he was going to fire Russell as his editor that night.

At the monthly food giveaway in Harlem Corrine's organization puts on, Corrine asks her realtor friend, Carol, to talk afterward. Carol got into real estate because her husband quit his teaching job at Columbia to join a Hasidic Jewish sect in Brooklyn. Carol tells Corrine that she should consider buying a townhouse in Harlem.

Corrine toured several homes with Carol two months ago, and the idea of having a townhouse in Harlem has become an increasingly enticing prospect since. She is enamored with one of the homes she saw, and thinks to herself that if she could live there she would be happy with her lot, and her marriage, and she would never wish for anything more.





## Analysis

In Chapter 31 Jack Carson is portrayed as the stereotypical drug addict. McInerney uses his behavior and thought processes to portray the addiction. This is first demonstrated at the very beginning of the chapter, when the first thing Jack does after getting off the plane is to contact his dealer to get a fresh supply of drugs. The next incident that details his descent into addiction is when he meets the painter's boyfriend, Tab. His response to the name is to ask, "Tab? As in acid?" showing that his thoughts will go to drugs before anything else (290). The most clear evidence of Jack embodying addiction is when he leaves the table in the middle of dinner to do more heroin and cocaine. Because he is bored at the table his way to entertain himself is to get high. It has been only a few hours at that point, which is a distinct sign of addiction. Jack's many thoughts and actions revolving around drugs show McInerney uses his character to illustrate drug addiction.

Carol's life story in Chapter 32 is the embodiment of fate housewives fear. She explains her path to being a real estate agent as her husband becoming almost a different person, since he became "ultra-Zionist and insists we keep kosher, and he wants to send the kids to Hebrew school, and eventually he quits his job and moves out of the house and joins this Hasidic sect in Brooklyn. Suddenly I've got no husband and no income. So that's how I got into real estate" (298). The stereotypical housewife's deepest fear is that her husband will leave her and she will have to find a job. In this situation, McInerney uses the absurdity that Carol's husband left her for religion to downplay this underlying characterization. However, her role as the embodiment of the former housewife working because her husband left her is still poignant in this chapter, where very little occurs outside of Corrine's interactions with her and Corrine's inner thoughts about how much she wants to move to the townhouse in Harlem.

Corrine's desire to buy the townhouse in Harlem detailed at the end of Chapter 32 shows her desperation to leave her current living situation, which is one of the few things Luke is able to use to his advantage to sway her into being with this. However, Corrine reveals in this chapter that what Luke could give her is the one thing that would get her to be happy with Russell: "She'd never been one to yearn beyond her means, but she desperately wanted this house and told herself if she could only find a way to get her family there, she would be happy with her lot, and with the man she's married, and never wish for more" (300). In Chapter 30 Luke is able to tempt Corrine with the promise of financial stability if she leaves Russell for him. This passage reveals that financial stability, which would enable the purchase of the townhouse in Harlem, would ensure she stays with Russell though. McInerney uses this conundrum of wanting what Luke can give her but really only with Russell to further demonstrate Corrine pulling away from Luke.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does McInerney describe the effects of the drugs Jack takes with such detail?



## Discussion Question 2

What purpose does Madison Dall serve?

## Discussion Question 3

Chapter 32 reads as almost an ode to New York City. What purpose does this serve to further the story?

## Vocabulary

fetid, majeure



## Chapters 33-34

### Summary

Russell arrives home from work and cooks the children dinner while Corrine is staying late at the office in Chapter 33. Storey has become a vegetarian and insists they all give up meat at least one day a week, so he makes pasta. As Russell is cooking, and Jeremy is doing his homework, Storey reveals she sometimes talks on the phone with Hilary.

When Corrine comes home, Russell notices Storey ignores her as Jeremy soaks up her attention like a puppy. Throughout dinner Russell drinks a bottle of wine by himself because Corrine is taking a break from drinking. As he pours the last glass, he remembers the letter he received from Jack and opens it. Jack's letter thanks Russell for his time and effort as editor for his first book, but claims he stifled Jack's voice as a writer. Jack tells Russell he can no longer let himself be pushed around and so they cannot work together any more. The postscript apologizes for killing their family ferret.

Corrine leaves work during a rainstorm and takes the subway home in Chapter 34. While on the train, she sees Russell in the same car. She notices how worn-down he looks, almost like a different person. She also notes that he is not reading, which is very unusual for him. It unsettles her so much she exits the train at the next station and takes the next one.

When she gets home, she find him and Jeremy watching television together. Russell looks slightly more like his normal self than he had on the subway, but she still sees something off about his appearance. She walks to her room without saying anything and bursts into tears over the changes she notices in her husband.

Later that evening, Jeremy asks her what is wrong with Russell, noting that he does not seem happy. They come to the conclusion that he is probably still just sad about Kohout's book. In the middle of that night, Corrine wakes up to find herself alone in bed. She gets up and discovers Russell watching infomercials, something he scorned in the past. She asks him what is wrong, and he replies that nothing is wrong. She does not believe him, but leaves him and goes back to bed.

In bed, Corrine wonders if her relationship with Luke distracted her from noticing these changes in her husband as they were happening. She also wonders if Russell knows about her affair, and if that contributed to Russell unhappiness. Deciding it is more likely just continued stress from the failure of Kohout's book deal, she decides he does not know about her affair and that she will not tell him about it. When he eventually comes back to bed, she pretends to be asleep, and they lay awake next to each other unable to break the silence between them.



## Analysis

McInerney presents Storey's relationship with Hilary as a possible explanation for her hostile attitude toward her mother. Several times earlier in the novel, Storey is shown to have developed a very tense relationship with Corrine, and it is suggested that it is caused by just her becoming a young adult, or that perhaps she suspects her mother of having an affair. Chapter 33 offers another potential explanation: her relationship with Hilary, her biological mother, is complicating her feelings for Corrine. That Corrine does not like Hilary very much and does not approve of her children building a relationship with her suggests that she would be upset with Storey for doing so. Storey's attitude toward Corrine may be a reaction to her dislike of Storey's birth mother, someone she clearly cares about. It is shown that Storey cares about Hilary because she is willing to talk on the phone with her because she seems lonely. Corrine's lack of sympathy for Hilary is used as a reason for Storey treating Corrine poorly.

The end of Chapter 34 shows just how far apart Russell and Corrine have grown. The final paragraph in the chapter details them lying next to each other, unable to communicate: "When he finally came back to bed, she pretended to be asleep, though she remained awake beside him, sensing that he, too, was awake but incapable of breaking the silence between them" (307). Instead of a married couple with three decades of history between them, this sentence makes them seem almost like strangers. The scene McInerney paints shows Corrine and Russell lacking the one thing that could save their marriage: communication. This entire chapter focuses on the consequences to their relationship that their failure to communicate has brought. That Corrine reflects on Russell having transformed into a worn-out version of himself demonstrates that they have been living very separate lives, especially Corrine with her affair, which has led them to grow apart. Change is never very noticeable in small increments, which is why Corrine is shocked to see how unhappy Russell has become. His unhappiness has been building throughout the novel, but Corrine was so focused on her own life she never noticed Russell's struggles. Her failure to break the silence between them at the end of the chapter suggests the imminent failure of their marriage, as it is not possible to close the distance between them without communication.

## Discussion Question 1

Does the defeat of Hillary Clinton in the primaries serve to show yet another reason for Russell's unhappiness?

## Discussion Question 2

If Jack claims his killing of the Calloway's pet ferret in Chapter 31 means he cannot fire Russell, why does he write a letter to him doing just that?



## Discussion Question 3

What reason, other than Russell's unhappiness, does Corrine have for suspecting he knows about her affair? What does her thought process about Russell's unhappiness demonstrate about her character?

## Vocabulary

grievances, assiduously, reproach, heralded



# Chapters 35-36

## Summary

Chapter 35 begins with Washington taking his daughter, Zora, and Storey to the movies while Russell stays at the Calloway's apartment reading manuscripts and watching the boys, Jeremy and Mingus. During the movie he receives a text from Casey asking him to meet her at a hotel. He ignores that text and several others while he goes to dinner with the Calloways and the kids.

When he drops his children off at the loft, which he misses since Veronica kicked him out, she reveals she is worried about work because the situation at Lehman Brothers has become worse since the crash of the housing market. Afterward, he gets another text from Casey while he waits for a cab and decides to meet her. He goes to the front desk of the hotel to ask which room she's in when she walks through the front door. They head to her room and she kisses him in the elevator.

As they walk down the hallway to the room they run into Tom, Casey's husband, with another woman. He introduces her as his girlfriend, which sends Casey into a jealous rage. Tom tells Washington he is glad the other man is sleeping with his wife. Casey threatens to ruin Tom's social life, which Washington doubts is possible.

Upon watching the scene between Tom and Casey, Washington realizes he belongs with his wife. He leaves Casey at the hotel and goes back to the loft, where he practices what he is going to say while he waits for Veronica to open the door.

Corrine wakes up to a phone call from Casey asking to meet because Tom left her in Chapter 36. Casey details the encounter from the previous chapter, with a few inaccuracies. Corrine advises Casey not to act hastily, as she will probably forgive him eventually. She counsels Casey to remember that marriages go through dark periods, but they can be fixed.

Corrine reflects that Casey's indignation about Tom's affair is mitigated by her own indiscretions over the years, which makes it hard for Corrine to sympathize. She then relates Casey's situation to her own, and wonders if Russell also has a secret life. Casey breaks this chain of thought by declaring she will take Tom for all he is worth because they have no prenuptial agreement. Before they leave, Casey reveals that Tom is supposed to lend Russell a lot of money to keep his business going and that Jack dumped Russell as his editor.

After dinner Corrine and Russell have a conversation about their marriage, sparked by their discussion about Tom and Casey's situation. When she confronts him about his sudden change in demeanor and his keeping Jack leaving him a secret he starts to cry and she comforts him. Russell finally shares his worries about his failing business with



her, which makes Corrine grateful for the opportunity to be his partner again. At the end of the chapter she decides to stay with Russell and repair their marriage.

## Analysis

McInerney uses the fight between Casey and Tom after she discovers his girlfriend to portray the differences between the relationships of the upper class and the upper-middle class. Washington is by no means poor, having been described as more financially savvy than Russell, with a wife who works at Lehman Brothers, making his family very much upper-middle class. But the Reynes embody the stereotypical upper-class family, with more money than most people could ever dream of making in a lifetime. Veronica's reaction to Washington's affair is to kick him out of the house and consider divorce. The love for one another is clearly represented in this chapter because she cares enough to still share some of her troubles with him when he drops the kids off, and he realizes he wants to save their marriage at the end of the chapter.

Casey's reaction to Tom's affair is very different, and it shows her marriage to Tom was predicted on their shared socio-economic standing. In Chapter 35 she threatens to ruin his social reputation by telling people what he did, which implies that aspect of their lives is very important to both of them. When she says, "You won't be welcome anywhere in this town after I tell people how you treated me" it demonstrates that Tom and Casey care about how they are perceived (312). That Tom would be concerned if she damaged his social standing clearly illustrates that part of their relationship was based on that social standing. When Casey tells Corrine she is going to "take him for everything he's worth" she implies the money was one of the reasons she stayed with Tom (316). That it would hurt him to take so much of his money, when he has more than he could ever spend in his life, demonstrates how much they both care about their wealth. The fight between Tom and Casey embodies the stereotypical upper-class marriage based on money and social reputation.

Washington's efforts to reconcile with Veronica in Chapter 35 and Russell sharing his problems with Corrine in Chapter 36 are used to demonstrate the necessity of communication in a marriage. At the end of Chapter 35 Washington leaves Casey to talk to his wife because he realized during the Reynes fight that his place is with Veronica: "Twenty minutes later he was standing outside the door of the loft in TriBeCa, practicing his speech as he waited for Veronica to open the door" (313). The importance McInerney places on Washington's speech, as only the right words will convince Veronica to forgive him, shows how vital communication is fixing their relationship. They would never get back together if they did not reopen their lines of communication with each other. Similarly, Corrine and Russell's relationship begins to be repaired in the next chapter after Russell tells Corrine his worries.

Only when Corrine finally confronts the problems in their marriage, which both she and Russell have been avoiding, do they begin to close the distance that has been growing between them. Russell opening up to Corrine reminds her of her commitment to him as his wife and partner: "As worried as she was about Russell, and about his business, in a



possibly perverse way she was grateful for this crisis, for the opportunity to weather it with him. If she'd been looking for a sign, this might well be it" (319). Without him having shared his problems, they would never have been able to begin to repair the damage to their marriage, because one of the ways Russell failed in his marital responsibilities was by not treating Corrine as his equal partner in life when he kept his problems to himself. His opening up to her gave her the sign she needed to know that her marriage is worth saving. The emphasis on communication as a necessity for a successful marriage shows McInerney uses the reconciliation between the Lees and the Calloways to embody this concept.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Washington go see Casey after ignoring her texts most of the day?

## Discussion Question 2

Why are the inconsistencies with Casey's retelling of events to Corrine brushed off?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Casey's reaction to Tom leaving her reveal about her character? About Tom's character?

## Vocabulary

priapic, mein, codicil, pernicious





# Chapters 37-38

## Summary

The Calloways return to their traditional Hamptons rental for one last summer in Chapter 37, and Russell is not excited to spend the season surrounded by the only people in the city who care about his business. Their landlord recently offered to let them buy their loft for

\$1.5 million, and so Russell is forced to admit the family will have to move out of downtown Manhattan. He still works four days a week, and cherishes the time alone in the city, often having dinner with Washington and his other friends. He spends his nights in front of the television, often falling asleep in the middle of a show and awakening in the early hours of the morning to reflect on the sorry state of his life.

The Hampton rental is bought in July by a young banker who plans to tear it down. His plans mean that it really will be their last summer in that house. The banker's plans cause Russell to further reflect on his eroding self-esteem. In August, Russell stays at the beach, and for the first time in many years declines to play in the artists' and writers' annual softball game. That month he focuses on enjoying simple pleasures and avoids most of the big social events he usually attends with Corrine. She talks him into agreeing to throw their annual Labor Day party, which Washington offers to pay for.

The day Russell agrees to host the party, he allows himself to be persuaded to join the softball game. The game goes well, until a critical play in the third inning, when he fails to catch the ball and prevent a grand slam. Russell gets benched for the rest of the game and takes the team's loss hard because the opposing side's lead never widened beyond the points they scored during that play.

Russell's spirits are slightly revived when the Labor Day party is a huge success. He is touched by the "graying literary lions" who came to the party to pay their respects (327). The aftermath of the party dampens his mood with its bills for damages and clean up and a description of him in a magazine mentioning the Kohout scandal.

Corrine wakes up disoriented on the morning of September 11, 2008, and recalls the events of that day seven years prior when she turns on the news. Luke calls as she drinks her morning coffee, and they agree to meet the next day for drinks.

Storey startles her while she gets ready for her date with Luke. When Storey asks her where she is going, Corrine lies and says she is meeting a friend from work for dinner. She finds Russell in the kitchen having a cocktail, and tells him the same lie. Storey then interrogates her about how dressed up she is for a casual dinner with a friend. Corrine wonders why Storey is so mistrustful, even as she knows her daughters' suspicions are correct. She leaves, and thinks that Storey's ploy to shame her into not going is a mistake.



Corrine meets Luke at a building she is certain she met Jeff at years ago. When Luke buzzes her in she is reminded of Jeff dropping the key out the window for her all that time ago. They have a glass of champagne and talk about the imminent downfall of Lehman Brothers. Luke advises her to liquidate any stock she has in the banking industry. They then have sex, despite Corrine's intentions to leave him.

Afterward, Luke pressures her to make the choice between him and Russell, and invites her to go away with him for the weekend. She does not respond to his offer, realizing she wants to go home to her family. When she gets home, everyone is asleep, Russell having fallen asleep reading a manuscript. Corrine is happy at finding the familiar scene.

## Analysis

Chapter 37 shows Russell embodying a midlife crisis. It has been building for several chapters, becoming more prominent as more and more bad things happen in his life, but this chapter shows him fully ensconced in his midlife crisis. The description of his change in worldview clearly demonstrates this, "He'd always been an optimist, able to convince himself that the best was still ahead, that every day held the promise of new adventure, but now he was increasingly conscious of his failures and anxious about the future" (322). McInerney uses this shift from optimist to pessimist to make Russell the embodiment of a midlife crisis, where the future, once an infinite sea of possibilities, is now a narrow corridor of regrets and worries. Russell's midlife crisis comes with depression, shown through his unwillingness to engage in his usual pastimes. This depression is used to highlight the symptoms and draw more attention to Russell's struggles.

There are several hints in Chapter 38 that Corrine intends to use her date with Luke to break up with him, meaning that she is over him. The first hint is dropped when she is getting ready for the get together, "It would have been simpler, less nerve-racking, less fatal to her sense of the innocence of her intentions, to go to Luke directly from the office" (329). This sentence suggests her initial intentions had nothing to do with sex, as she would not have gotten dressed up, and everything to do with ending the affair. The only possibility that her intentions are "innocent" are if they are to end the relationship, as it is shown she is inclined to do in several earlier chapters.

The second hint come when she accepts his offer of champagne. She takes the offer because "It was something to do, a way of postponing serious conversation or action" (332). The serious conversation or action is implied to be the breakup or sex. Given that she wants to postpone either option suggests a reluctance to hurt his feelings or an reluctance to have sex with him. Both show that she wants to end the affair because not wanting to hurt his feelings demonstrates her desire to leave him, and her not wanting to have sex with him also shows she does not want to be drawn back into their complicated relationship.



The final hint is given at the end of the chapter when Corrine leaves Luke after not responding to his offer of a weekend away to the Berkshires: “She kissed his forehead. Suddenly, she realized, she couldn’t wait to get home to her husband and children” (334). That she is thinking of her family when she is with him clearly shows she has distanced herself from their relationship. This sentence has a sense of finality to it, like Corrine finally got Luke out of her system as she has been trying to do since the beginning of the novel. Her thoughts are no longer consumed by Luke, her family has taken his place as her main focus.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why might Russell enjoy of his time alone in the city during the summer so much? What does it offer him?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is the purpose of including the softball scene? What does it scene show readers?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is the significance of Luke being in the same building that Jeff had lived in?

## **Vocabulary**

straitened, decanted, palliative



# Chapters 39-40

## Summary

Chapter 39 begins with Jack's third night of celebrating a three-book deal he landed. The last two nights have been filled with drugs and sex, and Jack is content to live his life that way. He is at the Beatrice, a bar that lets him do anything he wants inside. Also at the bar is Tony Duplex, who has ended his sobriety. They greet each other and leave to score more drugs.

At Tony's building, which he refers to as a loft, they discuss cars, as he has a Lamborghini in the middle of the space, and heroin. They wait for Jack's dealer, who is taking too long for their liking to get to Tony's place. Tony suggests they go to his dealer in Harlem, and Jack is desperate enough to agree to drive up there with him. Tony's assistant tries to stop them, but they drive off anyway.

Chapter 40 starts with Storey behaving strangely, and Russell has to scold her for speaking disrespectfully to her mother. After Corrine leaves to take a run, Storey tells her father she found an email on Corrine's computer showing she is cheating on Russell. He questions what she knows and how she obtained that knowledge until Washington arrives with his kids. Russell tells Storey not to say anything yet, and then fully realizes what Corrine has done.

When Storey goes to greet Washington, he looks at the email again and searches Corrine's hamper to find the clothes she wore to meet Luke the night before. He places her bra over the laptop screen before going out to join everyone. Washington informs him that Jack Carson died in a car crash with Tony Duplex the previous night. Russell is in a state of disbelief.

Washington offers the choice between seeing a movie with their daughters or staying in the apartment with their sons, and Russell chooses to stay. Just before Washington leaves, Corrine comes back from her run and notices something is off about Russell. Washington tells her it is due to him just learning about Jack's death and asks her to take the girls to the movie. She declines, saying she has to go to work. They then discuss how Veronica is dealing with the possible failure of Lehman Brothers.

When Corrine goes to the bedroom to change, Russell wonders how long it will take for her to notice the email and the bra, and that he knows what she has done. He avoids her for the next hour, and drinks vodka until Washington and the girls return. Washington notices Russell is still off, and Russell tells him about Corrine's affair. After the Lees leave, Storey asks her father if he and Corrine will get a divorce, the idea upsetting her. The chapter ends with Russell making a joke to comfort her.



## Analysis

McInerney uses Jack and Tony to embody the impaired judgment that comes with drug use and addiction. Their dependency on drugs leads them to their deaths between the end of Chapter 39 and Chapter 40. Despite knowing and acknowledging that driving under the influence is not a smart idea, Jack is still willing to put his life at risk to buy more drugs: "This sounded like a bad idea, but Jack was getting desperate, and he'd never let the fact of being impaired keep him from going somewhere to get more impaired" (338). His desperation to continue his high leads directly to his death, clearly showing the worst consequences of drug addiction.

Russell's actions when he discovers Corrine's infidelity exemplifies passive aggression. His putting her bra from the night before over her laptop screen as a way of letting her know without telling her that he knows about her affair is very passive aggressive. The description of his actions illuminates his intentions, "On a sudden, malicious impulse, he hung the bra over the screen of the laptop and walked out into the hall, pulling the door closed behind him" (341). That his motivation is "malicious" demonstrates his desire to let Corrine worry about whether or not he knows, just like as he worries about the details of her affair. Russell spends a majority of the chapter consumed by thoughts of Corrine and Luke. He enjoys thinking that finding the bra and the email brings Corrine pain and anxiety, so that she might feel what he is experiencing: "Would she ostensibly put the two disparate pieces of evidence together? Ripped bra, incriminating e-mail? This prospect brought, if not exactly pleasure, at least a brief cessation of pain. Did he want her to suffer? Yes, he decided, he did, just as he was suffering" (344). Passive aggression is characterized by indirect hostility, like leaving a ripped bra on a laptop screen instead of having an argument that could lead to open and helpful communication.

Washington's reaction to Russell's revelation that Corrine is cheating on him highlights the differences between male and female friendships. In Chapter 36, Corrine and Casey talk at length about Tom's infidelity. Similarly, the two women often discuss their affairs with each other throughout the novel. When Russell tells Washington that his wife is having an affair his reaction is to tell Russell he never would have predicted that and gives him a hug. The hug shows Washington wishes to comfort or console Russell, but the brevity of it highlights the contrast between his reaction and Corrine's reaction when Casey shares similar news. McInerney shows that men help each other process difficult situations very differently than women do. Russell's apparent need to not talk about finding out Corrine is cheating on him is in direct opposition to Casey's need to talk about her situation with Corrine.

## Discussion Question 1

What is McInerney trying to show with the description of the Beatrice Inn?



## Discussion Question 2

What does having Storey learn about Corrine's affair before Russell accomplish?

## Discussion Question 3

Based on his comment to Storey at the end of Chapter 40, do you think Russell plans to divorce Corrine?

## Vocabulary

prelapsarian, unequivocally

# Chapters 41-42

## Summary

Chapter 41 begins with Corrine reflecting on the shock of Jack's death and finding her ripped bra placed over her laptop. Lifting it up, she sees the email from Luke about how amazing the night before was. She realizes that Russell must have seen the message, as she remembers putting the bra away the previous night, meaning he must have put it on her laptop after reading the email. She recognizes that she must stop lying to her family and tell Russell everything, no matter how difficult it will be.

She leaves for work to postpone the inevitable conversation, seeing Russell subtly very upset on her way out. Corrine cannot stop thinking about whether or not Russell knows, convincing herself there is a chance he does not, so she goes home early. When she arrives back at the apartment, she finds Russell has sent the kids to stay with the Lees so they can discuss the situation. Their conversation goes poorly and ends with Russell kicking Corrine out of the loft.

Corrine goes to Luke's and tells him what happened. As she is talking his attention wavers between her and the news of the financial crisis, which causes her to realize she is truly over him. She stays at Luke's apartment for an hour as he tries to comfort her by telling her Russell knowing is a good thing and they can finally be together. The chapter ends with Corrine listening to him and hearing him as if from a great distance.

Russell watches the news of the economic crisis at the beginning of Chapter 42, feeling a perverse satisfaction after his own personal crisis. The next morning the full betrayal of Corrine's actions hits him. He tells his kids that they will see if their mother will be coming home that night as he gets them ready for school. After dropping the kids off and going to work, he and his team go through the requests for interviews following Jack's death. Kohout calls and Russell refuses to take it.

At the end of the day Corrine has not called, like Russell thought she would. As he leaves work he finds Hilary, who has been waiting for him outside his office. She begs him for money, and reveals he paid her a month's rent when he encountered her at the whorehouse with Tom. He refuses to give her money, giving all of his troubles as reasons. Eventually he gives her most of the money in his wallet to get her to go away and reflects on his attraction to her as they part ways.

Russell goes to a gentlemen's club to meet Tom. The club is filled with an air of gloom due to the economic crisis. Tom and Russell talk about the failing banks and how Corrine is staying with Casey. They also discuss Tom's divorce and his happiness with his girlfriend. Tom informs Russell he can no longer invest the money he was going to because his assets are frozen with the divorce.



As Russell is walking to the subway to go home, Corrine calls him to arrange seeing the children. She apologizes to him before they end the call. At dinner Russell explains why Corrine is staying with Casey to Jeremy, as Storey already knows. He falls asleep in front of the television again later that night, and awakens during a news story about the deaths of Tony Duplex and Jack Carson. After a bad night of sleep, Russell calls Washington to meet him for lunch. At lunch he proposes that Washington's publishing house buy his, which Washington agrees to try to make happen. The chapter ends with Hilary calling to apologize.

## Analysis

McInerney uses Luke's ADD and failure to pay full attention to Corrine in her time of need to show the difference between love and infatuation. When Corrine goes to Luke after being kicked out her home by her husband, he attempts to be supportive. After he asks her what happened "he glanced up at the television screen. And later, she would realize that was the moment he lost her" (349). The difference between real love and the infatuation Corrine and Luke share is that love is all consuming, it leaves no room for distractions. So when Luke's attention is divided between her and the news, she understands that he is not capable of loving her the way she loves Russell. Despite her affair with Luke, she never stopped loving Russell and thinking about him even when with Luke. His inability to truly focus all of his attention on her parallels his inability to fully love her.

Luke's incapacity to love Corrine is contrasted in Chapter 42 with Russell's inability to stop loving her. Despite her betrayals and his hurt, Russell's thoughts are constantly filled with Corrine throughout the chapter. At work the day after kicking her out of the apartment, he goes to work where "He tried to imagine what he was supposed to do. He wanted to call Corrine and berate her, demand that she explain herself. He also wanted to punish her with silence, to make her suffer the agonies of wondering what he was thinking" (351). McInerney contrasts Luke's inability to focus on Corrine with Russell's inability to stop thinking about her. Though the thoughts are mostly negative, as Russell is deeply wounded by her infidelity, that he cares enough about her to wish she could feel the suffering he feels shows his love. If he did not continue to love his wife, Russell would not want to call her for an explanation or want to punish her for hurting him. His strong reaction reveals the depth of his love for her, just as Luke watching television while she tells him what happened shows the shallowness of his infatuation for her.

McInerney uses Russell's encounters with Hilary and Tom in Chapter 42 to demonstrate the far-reaching effects the economic crisis. Hilary accosting Russell outside his office to ask for money shows how hard the subprime mortgage crisis hit people. Though Hilary is never described as having a steady job throughout the novel, until the crisis hit she never asked her family for handouts. Her coming to Russell clearly shows her desperation, and Russell telling her all of his problems clearly shows his. He willingly tells Hilary what he reluctantly told Corrine. In the situation with Hilary, he is the one with the power and the money, less affected by the housing market crash. However, when Russell meets with Tom his role is reversed.





Tom, despite being in the banking industry, which was hit hardest by the crisis, appears “cheery, as if invigorated by crisis” when Russell goes to meet him (354). Tom is wealthy enough that even losing most of his money puts him in the upper class, where Russell struggles to keep his business afloat. It is not until Tom tells him he cannot give him any money that Russell feels the full effects of the crisis: “Until a few moments ago, the collapse of a major investment bank had seemed somewhat remote, but now he felt a sinking, sickening feeling in his gut as he understood that he was collateral damage” (356). Although he was just in Tom’s position with Hilary, he now experiences the urgency she felt that caused her to come to him. McInerney uses this flip in Russell’s position of power to illustrate the desperation the economic crisis inspired.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Corrine avoid Russell before leaving for work if she thinks it is best to stop lying to him? Does this not count as a lie of omission?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Kohout call Russell?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Hilary calling to apologize at the end of Chapter 42?

## Vocabulary

peccadillo, enervated



## Chapters 43-44

### Summary

The entirety of Chapter 43 is an apology letter addressed to Russell. The writer, it is not immediately clear who, tells Russell he is at Silver Meadows, which is implied to be a rehab facility as the writer mentions step nine of the 12-step program. The writer then goes on to explain the failure of his third book as an attempt at journalism gone awry.

The letter details the writer's struggles to land a job in the Middle East covering the war. He goes on to explain that he ended up in Lahore, in Pakistan, for a friend's wedding. While attending the wedding the writer went on a drug bender and holed up in an apartment for four weeks with an English girl after discovering opium.

Briskin reported the writer missing, and it now becomes abundantly clear that the author of the letter is Phillip Kohout. When the story of his kidnapping ended up on the news and a jihadist group took credit, he decided to take advantage of the opportunity and hide out for a while longer. Three weeks later he did get kidnapped and assaulted while trying to buy drugs, but managed to escape within a day.

Nine weeks after arriving in Pakistan the writer went to the consulate, injured from the drug dealers' beating, and stuck with the kidnapped story. He was interrogated by the consulate and later by the CIA. They released him when it was clear he had no useful information, and though he suspected they know his story is fictional, he continued to spread the lie with Marty Briskin's help.

Kohout claims Briskin never asked him whether or not his claims were true, but suspected Briskin knew he was lying. Kohout writes that he started to believe his own falsehoods, which was partially helped by his continued drug use. He tells Russell that once his lies were exposed he felt relieved and apologizes once more for the position he put Russell in.

Chapter 44 begins by detailing the city during the 2008 presidential election night. Russell has the Lees over to watch the news coverage of the results and makes dinner. Washington, Veronica, and Russell discuss the possibility of Obama winning. They continue to keep track of the results during dinner, and after, when the kids disappear into the bedrooms they talk about Washington's publishing house buying Russell's and Corrine.

They move the conversation to the economic crisis before the Ohio votes come in. They then turn their full attention back to the election until Obama is declared the winner. The kids come back out and they all celebrate, just like the others on the street that they can hear. They go down to celebrate with everyone else. Later that night Corrine calls to talk about the election and to start repairing their relationship.



## Analysis

McInerney does not make it immediately clear who the author of the letter in chapter 43 is to give the reader a better idea of the unexpected turn Russell's life has taken. The first sentences of the letter read such that it could have been from Corrine: "I wanted to say I was sorry about Jack, but really, that's the least of it. I'm not sure how to apologize for what I did to you, but I have to if I'm going to move on" (360). At the very beginning of the chapter the reader could very easily think the letter is from Corrine because the opening of the letter makes few references to the wrong committed. Indeed, given the more recent revelation of Corrine's betrayal, it would follow that she would send him an apology letter. By having the letter come from Kohout, McInerney has the reader experience Russell's implied surprise, as his reaction is never revealed in the novel. This surprise can be extended to Russell's feelings about the other upheavals in his life, such as his wife's infidelity and his business's impending failure.

McInerney beginning Chapter 44 as though it is the start of a new story suggests the chapter ushers in the potential for major change, not just on the national scale with the election, but on the personal level for Russell. The first two paragraphs of the section read like the opening lines of a novel. No names are mentioned, the scene is being set, and some idea of the characters' views are hinted at. This effect shows that the 2008 election serves as more than just a way to mark the time within the book, that Obama being elected president allows for the change he used as his campaign slogan. When Corrine calls Russell that night and asks if there is any hope for their marriage, he responds, "I guess anything's possible," which is the feeling of infinite potential Obama's win has produced at the end of the chapter (369). The conversation is indicative of that feeling manifesting on an individual level, instead of the collective level shown when people are celebrating together in the streets earlier.

Both chapters present a very liberal view of major American events in the early 2000s. Kohout's letter demonstrates a Democratic mindset, especially during his debriefing in Washington D.C., while the entire tone of Chapter 44 with the election skews Democratic. McInerney is clearly not concerned with bipartisanship in these sections of the book. Kohout's comment to the CIA agent interrogating him displays his liberal point of view: "Weren't you the guys who claimed there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq?" (362). His disdain for the war on terrorism is stereotypically Democratic, as a more common conservative school of thought defends the belief going to war over non-existent weapons of mass destruction was justified. The Democratic point of view becomes much more prevalent in the following chapter as Russell and the Lees watch the election results fervently with the hope that Obama wins. Their support of the Democratic nominee is a clear demonstration of McInerney presenting the liberal inclinations of the characters. By not offering the opposing viewpoint, he implies his own Democratic leanings.



## **Discussion Question 1**

Did Kohout want to go to Pakistan to continue his career or to continue his drug habit?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What might be Storey's reasons or influence for her unhealthy eating habits?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does McInerney accomplish with the small scene between Russell and his neighbor Zoe?

## **Vocabulary**

bacchanals, dispensation, incipient, apparatchiks



# Chapters 45-46

## Summary

Casey and Corrine attend an auction in Chapter 45. Casey is selling a small Warhol painting. She has Corrine accompany her so she is not alone at such an important social event. Most of the paintings sell for less than their estimated values, and several do not sell at all. The descriptions of the pieces reminds Corrine of a time when Russell had flipped through an auction catalog and mocked the descriptions.

Corrine takes in the subdued mood of the room as the auction progresses. A lot from the former head of Lehman Brothers is met with boos from the crowd. Casey's painting fails to sell, though Casey reveals the auction house guaranteed her three millions dollars no matter what. Corrine insists they stay to see what the Tony Duplex painting sells for since she owns one. They notice Tony's dealer, Gary Arkadian, bidding to raise the price of the painting so that others will sell higher later. It ends up going for about a million dollars, the only piece to sell for significantly more than its high estimate.

Chapter 46 begins with a description of the effects of the economic crisis on New York City, which leads to how it is affecting Russell. The bolstered posthumous sales of Jack's book are keeping him from bankruptcy temporarily but the funds are running out. Like his finances, Russell's emotional reserve are tapped out. He and Corrine have been trying to reconcile, but the more Russell learns the less he is inclined to forgive her.

They have agreed that Corrine will take the kids for Thanksgiving, while Russell celebrates with the Lees. After dinner, Russell and Washington take a walk, during which Washington offers to become personally become a partner in Russell's business. He shorted the housing market before it crashed and made a lot of money.

Christmas comes with the Calloways still separated, straining their relationship with their children. The kids spend Christmas Eve with Corrine, Casey, and Casey's daughter, Christmas Day with Russell, and the few days afterward with Corrine at her mother's house. A couple of days before Christmas, Hilary calls Russell to thank him for helping her get a job at HBO and he invites her to spend the holiday with him and the kids.

When Russell tells the kids that Hilary will be joining them for Christmas, Storey argues her mother's side and resists the idea. Hilary arrives for dinner Christmas Day to a cold welcome from her niece. The dinner conversation is subdued and uncomfortable. After, Russell and Hilary discuss the situation with Corrine, and Hilary reveals Corrine knew about Russell's indiscretions over the years. Christmas ends with Jeremy declaring his anger at both of his parents.

Washington invests the money he promised to through an LLC named Love and Art, LLC, which causes Russell to suspect Corrine gave him the money. Washington denies



it, and they discuss the possibility of their families sharing a townhouse. When Russell claims he and Corrine are no longer an “us,” Washington tells him that he is making a mistake and reveals the money actually did come from Corrine.

Russell initially wants to return the money, but decides he needs it too much. They continue to talk often, but avoid their marital problems. They have a heated conversation the day before Valentine’s Day where Corrine informs him she got the money from selling her Tony Duplex painting and he accuses her of sleeping with him to get it 20 years ago.

The next morning he receives an envelope from Corrine at work containing two letters. The first is a letter from her apologizing and asking for forgiveness. The second letter is one he had sent her a few years before she rescued Jeff and Tony from the drug den. It is a love letter he sent her during his time in Europe detailing his initial impression of her and their timeless love. He is saddened by the letters, especially the second one. The chapter ends with Russell starting to write a letter to Corrine.

## Analysis

McInerney uses the irony of Casey selling a painting of Mao, the communist revolutionary of China, to maintain her wealth to characterize the auction they are at. Casey and Corrine attend an art auction, which is the epitome of the capitalism Mao detested, as art is a luxury good only the rich can afford. Though the wealthy people in attendance of the event are affected by the crisis, their financial struggles are inconsequential in comparison with the people like Russell who are barely holding on to their homes and livelihoods. The estimated values of the paintings being sold at the auction is typically in the millions, which means those selling them are millionaires. That Casey is guaranteed three million dollars for her painting highlights the point of the auction, to sell useless works of art to other rich people to stay rich. The irony that she uses an image of Mao to continue the consolidation of wealth highlights just the kind of unfairness that capitalism perpetuates.

Russell’s inability to listen to Corrine’s side of the story in Chapter 46 demonstrates the importance of both halves of communication, the speaking and the listening. Corrine’s efforts to repair their marriage in this section show that she is trying to communicate with Russell, but that he is emotionally unable to receive that communication. Without the ability to take in what she is saying, there is no hope of reconciliation. His unwillingness to listen is explained as “the more she told him, the less he felt inclined to forgive her” (376). Forgiveness is not an easy process, and without hearing her side of the story Russell is unable to take the necessary steps toward forgiving her. The way she finally gets through to him at the end of the chapter shows just how difficult it is for him to listen to her in this situation. The words that ultimately break through are his own. It takes Russell reading a letter that he wrote more than two decades earlier to remember his love for Corrine and finally find the will to listen to what she has to say.



McInerney uses the name of the corporation Corrine forms to give Russell the money he needs to save his company to show just how well she knows him and how much she loves him. When Russell first learns the name of the company that is formed with the sole purpose of purchasing part of Russell's publishing house he correctly suspects his wife of being the one who is giving him the money. That she names it "Love and Art, LLC" shows she knows just what those words mean to him (381). For Russell his "theory about the two teams in life. Love and Art, Power and Money" represents more than the classification of two different kinds of people who prioritize different things, it gives him his identity. Throughout the novel, Russell has been shown to characterize himself as an artist, someone whose purpose in life is to make the world better through his contributions to literature. Corrine helping him do this by saving his company and naming the vehicle she uses to do so after the name he uses to define the people in life who share his ideals shows her deep understanding of what makes Russell the man he is. Her acting on this understanding illustrates just how deeply she cares for him. That she would sacrifice her chance at getting the home of her dreams to keep his business afloat is a clear demonstration of her love for him.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does McInerney include a lot from the head of Lehman Brothers in the auction? What purpose does that scene serve?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Washington agree to lie to Russell about where the money comes from?

## Discussion Question 3

The events of Russell's adventure at the brothel with Tom are never fully revealed. Does Hilary's mention of that incident mean he slept with her or another prostitute that night?

## Vocabulary

arbitrageur, torpor



# Chapters 47-48

## Summary

Chapter 47 starts with Luke reflection on how much New York City has changed since the economic crisis began. He goes to an art show between meetings and finds himself attracted to a woman who turns out to be Corrine. They make awkward small talk about the art show and briefly catch up on each others lives. While they are talking, Luke reflects that the quirks he used to enjoy about her he now thinks are grating. He notes how much older she looks and realizes he got over her.

After talking about things like well-being of their children, she invites him to get coffee. He politely makes an excuse, and she leaves as soon as their conversation is over. That night he is short-tempered with his girlfriend, who he breaks up with a few days later.

The beginning of Chapter 48 describes a scene between a couple who has been separated coming back together after the death of the woman's lover. This is the penultimate scene in Corrine's fifth draft of *Youth and Beauty*, which has finally been made into a movie. Corrine is happy with how the final scene turned out, as it heavily relies on the lead actor's ability to convey her intentions.

After the screening is over, she asks Russell what he thinks. He replies that the last scene is powerful, and she feels a rise of affection for him for supporting her through the process, which must have stirred up painful memories for him. Before she leaves the theater, Corrine reflects on how Jeff and Luke merged into the same person while writing the screenplay.

Corrine's friends and family have all turned out to congratulate her success, despite the complications their various entanglements cause, like Casey not being able to attend the after party to respect Veronica's feelings. Russell introduces Corrine to Astrid Kladstrup, the curator of Jeff Pierce's website who interviewed him in the first chapter.

The reunited couple join Washington and Veronica and they all head home to the townhouse in Harlem they share. Washington gets a taxi, but Corrine tells him she and Russell are going to walk back. They walk through the neighborhood they used to live in, and Corrine relishes the private interlude they are sharing. Corrine reflects that it will be the walk she remembers much later, not the party, as she and Russell walk through the city.

## Analysis

Narrating the penultimate chapter from Luke's point of view clearly demonstrates the fickleness and fleetingness of infatuation in comparison to real love. Luke and Corrine's interaction in Chapter 47 shows how easily they were both able to get over each other.





Though the reader is only privy to Luke's inner thoughts, the dialogue between the two clearly illustrates the lack of enduring romantic feelings. Their stilted conversation is characterized by keeping to neutral, banal topics, and they frequently seem "to have run out of things to say" (389). Because they are no longer fully at ease with one another, like they were when they were lovers, their exchange lacks the familiarity it once did. Instead, the tone of their dialogue reads as though they do not quite know what to say to each other, and what not to say. That McInerney chose to put the narration in Luke's perspective, essentially a fleeting character in Corrine's life, reflects the fleeting nature of their relationship, one of the major focal points of the novel.

The end of the novel marks the return to normal for Corrine and Russell. Their reconciliation is not detailed in the novel, but is reflected in the scene of Youth and Beauty described at the beginning of the final chapter. Despite the absolute trust that will never exist again between them, they are once again a married couple: "She remembers then that they're a couple; that she is, in addition to being a lover and a mother, half of this unit: Russell & Corrine" (396). This last chapter is the first time in the entire novel that this is entirely true. Throughout the rest of the book, Corrine is not really part of the unit that she and her husband form. By showing this marked difference in their relationship, McInerney contrasts a healthy marriage with the slowly destructing marriage that is described earlier in the novel.

The final scene of the novel, when Corrine and Russell are walking home together is the embodiment of taking the time to appreciate the small things in life. After they leave the party, Corrine declines to share a taxi home with Washington and Veronica because she wants to stretch out the celebratory night. She realizes she wants to spend the night enjoying the time alone with her husband: "She knows that later it won't be the party she will remember so much as this, the walk with her husband in the crisp autumn air, bathed in the yellow metropolitan light spilling from thousands of windows, this suspended moment of anticipation before arrival" (397). Because the scene focuses on the walk and not the screening party for Youth and Beauty, it emphasizes the appreciation Corrine has for the simple things in her life. In particular, McInerney focuses on her appreciation for what she almost lost, her marriage, which makes the scene much more poignant. Her taking the time to acknowledge what she nearly lost embodies the necessity of appreciating the small things in life that are often taken for granted.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Luke short-tempered with his girlfriend after he encounters Corrine at the art exhibit?

## Discussion Question 2

Does Corrine having the Jeff character in Youth and Beauty in a car crash conflate Jack with Jeff?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does McInerney include Astrid in the final chapter?

## Vocabulary

intrauterine, erudition



# Characters

## Russell Calloway

Russell is a middle-aged editor who runs his own publishing house. He grew up in Michigan and attended Brown, earning a degree in English. He and his family live in a dilapidated loft in TriBeCa, which he wants to sell to buy a house. These dreams of owning property are complicated by his sacrificed earning potential as an editor and publisher because of his love of literature.

He has been married to Corrine for 23 years at the beginning of the novel, and they have two children together. The most successful author he published before Jack Carson, who quickly takes that mantle, is his deceased best friend Jeff Pierce. Because of Jeff's drug related death, Russell dislikes drug use and disapproves of drug users, which sometimes strains his relationships with his drug-using friends.

Russell is shown to be a good, attentive father and a lackluster husband. He also is depicted as having an epicurean interest in food, often cooking elaborate meals and going to upscale and unusual restaurants. His enjoyment of fishing often serves as a replacement for his increasingly uncommon sexual relations with Corrine.

## Corrine Calloway

Corrine is a middle-aged philanthropist who runs a charity organization that fights hunger in New York City. She has a strained relationship with her sister, Hilary, who was the egg-donor for her children, Storey and Jeremy. Corrine grew up in a wealthy family on the Upper East side of Manhattan, and laments the less affluent lifestyle she and Russell lead.

Corrine has engaged in various affairs throughout her relationship with Russell. The earliest affair mentioned in the novel is with her husband's best friend Jeff Pierce, who died not long in the 1980s, and the most recent with Luke McGavock, who she met volunteering after the devastation of September 11th terrorist attack.

Like most of her wealthier friends, Corrine has a fixation about weight and staying skinny. She worries about her daughter weight throughout the novel, and disapproves of Russell's passion for fine dining. Her job at a philanthropic organization that feeds the hungry of New York is paradoxical with her food issues.

## Luke McGavock

Luke is a very wealthy former financier in his late fifties who left that industry to open a vineyard and charity in South Africa, where he met his second wife, Giselle. He has a daughter at Vassar who struggles with an eating disorder and a pill addiction. He



engaged in an affair with Corrine Calloway when they volunteered together to help the victims of the devastation of 9/11.

Luke maintains an obsession with Corrine, with the narration stating he married Giselle in part because she reminded him of Corrine. When Giselle asks him for children he dissolves their relationship to pursue a real relationship with Corrine. His ADD is used as a metaphor for why he is unable to convince Corrine to leave Russell for him.

## Jack Carson

Jack Carson is an up-and-coming author first published by Russell Calloway. He is from Tennessee, which inspires his much-lauded writing and to which he attributes the beginning of his drug abuse. As the novel progresses, he drifts away from Russell, who had taken him under his wing when he first came to New York, and becomes increasingly similar to Jeff Pierce in his decline into drug addiction. His drugs of choice are heroin and cocaine, often in conjunction. He dies in a car crash with Tony Duplex after they drive impaired to get more drugs.

## Jeff Pierce

Jeff was a drug addled writer who cultivated a friendship with Russell Calloway during their years together at Brown University. He had an affair with Russell's wife while he was away at Oxford for a year, and he introduced Corrine to his unsavory lifestyle. His drug habit led to him contracting HIV. He was in love with Corrine and communicated it by giving her books with passages underlined and a painting by his famous artist friend, Tony Duplex.

Jeff's most famous work, *Youth and Beauty*, which Russell published after his death was popular in the 1980s and has become popular again during the time of the novel. The book revolves around characters he based on himself and the Calloways, who were all involved in a love triangle. Corrine succeeds in turning the book into a movie at the end of the novel, after writing five drafts of the screenplay over the course of about 20 years.

## Casey Reynes

Casey is Corrine's childhood friend who often pays for Corrine and Russell to attend expensive, upper-class charity events. She is instrumental in reuniting Corrine and Luke, having secretly invited Corrine to one of Luke's charity events so that they could reconnect. Casey has been having an affair with another married friend of the Calloways: Washington Lee. She represents the life that Corrine might have had if she had not married Russell.



## Storey Calloway

Storey is one of the Calloway's 11-year-old children. Her only sibling is her twin brother Jeremy. She learns early in the novel that Corrine is not her biological mother, resulting in the beginning of her weight issues. She is the one who discovers Corrine's affair with Luke and tells her father.

## Jeremy Calloway

Jeremy is one of the Calloway's 11-year-old twins. He is shown to be interested in video games and ligers (the offspring of a lion and a tiger). At the event in the novel when he gets to see a liger, the animal begins to hunt him, representing his naïveté and innocence.

## Washington Lee

Russell's best friend since Jeff died, Washington is a black man who also works in the publishing industry. He is described as being better than Russell in financial matters, which leads Russell to harbor some jealousy. His affair with Casey Reynes leads to a temporary separation with his wife.

## Hilary

Hilary is Corrine's sister who donated her eggs to her sister and her husband so they might have children. She desires a relationship with her biological children, which is a point of contention between the sisters. She works as a prostitute when her television career in Hollywood does not work out.

## Giselle McGavock

Giselle is Luke's 30-year-old second wife, who is from South Africa. Physically, she is described as beautiful and resembling a younger Corrine Calloway. She wants to start a family with Luke, which is ultimately what pushes him to leave her for Corrine.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Fishing

Each of Russell's two fishing trips in the novel illuminates the declination of one of his relationships, the first with Corrine and the second with Jack. McInerney uses fishing as a replacement for the needs filled by important relationships, like his sexual relationship with Corrine and his mentorship with Jack.

## Food

McInerney uses food to highlight the classism the characters exhibit with their upper-middle class lifestyle. Corrine's charity gives leftover restaurant produce to those in need, which contrasts with Russell's passion for gourmet eating. The contrast between Russell's epicurean interest in food and Corrine's passion for feeding the needy, while still being concerned with being thin, like all the other women in her social circle, shows how food is used to symbolize socio-economic class.

## Art

Physical art embodies yearning for what one cannot have, while the concept of art is used to differentiate two groups of people's priorities. Each time one of the major characters - typically Corrine - encounters a work of art in the novel, it represents the desire to bring two incompatible things, or people, together. Russell uses the general notion of art to divide the world into two teams, Love and Art against Power and Money. The team Russell identifies with, Love and Art, embodies the prioritization of humanity and art above the drive to accumulate money and social status that drives the Power and Money team.

## New York City

New York City is both the setting of the novel and an important symbol of inevitable change. Though the characters in the novel often reminisce about their pasts, the ever-changing city they live in forces them to remain in the present. The gentrification of Manhattan makes the characters, especially Corrine and Russell, deal with the changes their lives are going through by limiting the time they have to adjust to the changes around them.

## Liger

The liger in Chapter 12 represents the dangers living such an opulent lifestyle that one becomes out of touch with reality. When Corrine and Jeremy go see the liger at



someone's townhouse on the Upper East Side it is repeatedly stated that the liger poses no danger to the guest at the event. This is proven incorrect when the liger begins to hunt Jeremy, and is revealed at the end of the chapter to have mauled a jogger with no provocation. That the wealthy people in attendance of the event truly believe such a wild animal is not a threat shows just how out of touch they are with reality.

## Youth and Beauty

Jeff's novel, titled *Youth and Beauty*, functions as a reminder of his complicated relationship with his friends Russell and Corrine Calloway. For Russell, the book symbolizes his guilt that he was unable to stop Jeff's drug addiction. For Corrine, it symbolizes her complex relationship with him. That Russell edited the novel and Corrine wrote the screenplay for it embodies their complex feelings about the man who wrote the book that detailed his love for his best friend's wife.

## Wine

Wine is used as a metaphor for wealth throughout the novel. Russell's interest in wine shows his aspirations for the kind of money that Luke or Tom Reynes have. The meeting Russell has with Tom in which Tom uses wine as a symbol of his wealth and power with some other bankers shows that wine embodies that wealth and power. That Luke owns a vineyard shows his excessive riches, because he bought it as a way to spend his time after retiring from his former career. Wine is a luxury good, with quality wine being very expensive and not necessary to survival, making it a powerful symbol for wealth.

## Tony Duplex

The character of Tony Duplex symbolizes the power of drug addiction and acts to conflate Jack Carson with Jeff Pierce. Tony is only mentioned in conjunction with either Jeff, Jack, or drugs. His presence with Jeff at the drug den and with Jack at the time of his death shows him to be a symbol of drug addiction. That he was briefly sober before relapsing demonstrates the power that addiction has.

## Bill Sugerman

Bill Sugerman, the neighbor that Corrine encounters on her way to meet Luke in Chapter 22, symbolizes the way that life never seems to go as planned. His candid answer to her polite question into his well-being reflects the unexpected path that most lives follow. Her odd chance meeting with him embodies the surprise turns that life takes because she never expected him to give more than a perfunctory answer to her perfunctory question.

## **The subprime mortgage crisis**

The subprime mortgage crisis of the late 2000s is symbolic of Corrine and Russell's marriage. The crisis occurred because people were getting greedy and no longer following the procedures to ensure the continued success of the mortgage business. Just like the mortgage crisis, Russell and Corrine's marriage experienced a crisis because they stopped following the proper procedures to continue their healthy marriage. Corrine cheating on her husband and Russell keeping secrets from his wife is very similar to the causes of the economic crisis, which was caused by the industry lying about the subprime mortgages that formed the mortgage bonds.





# Settings

## Manhattan

Most of the novel takes place in downtown Manhattan. It is described to have once been a haven for artists and off-center people to thrive that is now a gentrified, upscale shopping center for those who work on Wall Street. It serves as the idealized center for culture and wealth, which the characters identify with. The city embodies change as it forces the Calloways to accept New York is not the same rough, cultured city they adored in the 1980s.

## The Hamptons

The Hamptons are the Calloways' tradition summer destination. During the summers they are populated by wealthy Manhattanites, and during the rest of the year are home to middle-class people like the rest of the world. The exhibition of privilege and opulence during the summers is contrasted with the much more modest fishing trip Russell and Jack take. The Hamptons function as a retreat from the real world and all of its problems throughout the novel. Though the Calloways are unable to truly escape their troubles in the Hamptons, they seem blunted there.

## Saint Barth's

When the Calloways go to Saint Barth's after the holidays it functions as a way for them to deal with their issues. Russell, especially, faces his failing sexual relationship during his fishing retreat with Kip Taylor. The distance from their home allows for new insights into old problems.

## Vermont

The trip Corrine takes with Luke to Vermont, where he went to college, serves highlight the mystical quality of New York that makes their relationship less real. It is in Vermont that Corrine feels the most guilty about her affair and realizes that she and Luke are nothing more than lovers, not truly people in love.

## South Africa

South Africa serves to emphasize the greatness of New York and America in general. The descriptions of South Africa paint the country as the beautiful home of constant danger and rebellion.



# Themes and Motifs

## Marriage

Marriage is the central theme of the novel and it is used to convey the importance of communication and compromise to the survival of a relationship. The Calloways' marriage struggles when Corrine and Russell fail to meet each other's basic needs. Corrine turns to engaging in extramarital affairs to fulfill her needs for companionship, partnership, and her need to feel desired. Russell pulls away from their marriage when their sex life wanes and ends up facing his midlife crisis alone because of his refusal to share his troubles with his wife. They only begin to repair their relationship when they open lines of communication between them. The breakdown and rehabilitation of the Calloways' marriage shows the necessity of open communication in a healthy relationship. McInerney uses the various marital problems of the Calloways and their friends to accomplish this.

When marriage issues arise with the Calloways' friends, like Washington and Casey, it is used to emphasize the problems between Corrine and Russell that have yet to surface. McInerney introduces the affair between Corrine and Russell's best friends early and the heightening of their relationship parallels the heightening of the Calloways' marital problems. In this way, the romantic relationships of the minor characters serves as an extended metaphor that highlights the destruction of the marriage of the main characters.

The novel revolves around the relationship between Corrine and Russell which results from their disconnection from one another. Their failure to communicate with each other, demonstrated to be essential to the continued health of a relationship, shows the reader the work required to maintain a marriage. Throughout the novel almost all of the characters surrounding the Calloways experience marital crises caused by seeking a need not being met in their marriages. McInerney shows that these issues could have been prevented if the spouses treated each other as partners instead of taking each other for granted with the Calloways' and the Lee's reconciliations.

## Money

McInerney uses the contrast between the Calloways and their much wealthier friends to accentuate the problematic consequences that accompany being excessively rich. Their money concerns function to juxtapose their upper class aspirations with their wealthy friends' reality. One of the main reasons for Russell's emotional struggle near the end of the novel is his lack of money. His interests in wine and fine dining are an example of his tendency to live beyond his means as the owner of a small, failing publishing house. McInerney contrasts his struggles with the opulence several of his friends exhibit, like during the meeting with Tom Reynes at the extravagant restaurant with the extensive wine cellars. Though Corrine is more cognizant of their inability to live with the same



level of careless spending as those they associate with, she contributes to their financial problems with the charity galas she attends.

Their money concerns stem from living beyond their means, which McInerney uses to showcase the struggle of many American families who long for the life of the extremely wealthy and go broke trying to experience it. At several points throughout the novel it is noted that Corrine and Russell are jealous of their friends' financial success and that they run into trouble trying to fake that same success. This is best seen during their summers in the Hamptons, when they are surrounded by even more wealth than normal. Their Labor Day party is one of the clearest ways McInerney shows the Calloways being negatively influenced by the opulence around them as they overspend on a party every year.

One of the biggest conflicts throughout the novel is the detrimental impact that lacking money has on Russell. Though the conflict is internal, Russell's most significant struggle in the book, apart from his failing marriage, is his stagnated career. His midlife crisis is largely due to his desire to have progressed further in his career, and thus financially, than he has. He judges his success in comparison with that of his friends, instead of considering all of his accomplishments on their own. The contrast between the Calloways, especially Russell, and those they associate with showcases the negative results of living beyond one's means.

## Time/Change

Corrine and Russell's obsession with the past reveals their resistance to the changes that time brings, which leads to much of their avoidable unhappiness. Corrine has trouble accepting her aging body several times within the novel, but generally welcomes change in the other areas of her life. This dislike of her aging appearance contributes to the decline of her marriage, as it makes her less inclined to engage in sexual relations with her husband. She has internalized her resistance and has difficulties reconciling her image of herself, which is stuck in the past, with the truth of who she has become. People often resist aging because they do not feel as old as they look. In Corrine's case, McInerney presents a gendered view of resistance to change because Corrine can accept the world around her but cannot accept that her body reflects the effects of time passing. Russell, in contrast, accepts himself, at least physically, but has trouble dealing with the changes in his environment.

Russell resists the changes in New York that force his family to eventually move to Harlem and the change in his relationship with Corrine that drives her to have an affair with Luke. His reluctance to acknowledge the increasing real estate values in TriBeCa leads to his snowballing financial problems within the novel. These compounded issues result in his midlife crisis. Time and the resistance to the change that follows it function as the impetus for the actions of the characters. Nearly all of what they do in the book is driven by their reactions to the unavoidable shifts in the world around them.



The main characters' actions being driven by their reluctance to accept the inevitable changes that time brings highlights the human tendency to fear change. The unknown is often feared, and McInerney does his best to accurately depict the normal human reaction to change. He presents two contrasting, gendered views that both struggle to accept change to show the normalcy of that struggle.

## Weight

McInerney uses Corrine's obsession with weight to highlight the value society has placed on skinniness. Rarely, does Corrine have more than a passing negative thought about her own weight throughout the novel. Instead, her fixation is shown when she comments, internally or verbally, about someone else's weight. These women are exclusively very wealthy, which is remarked to be linked to their weight issues. Eating disorders are mentioned several times in the book, each time being correlated to the upper class. Corrine's struggle with bulimia supports this, as her eating disorder began during her childhood, which she spent surrounded by the kind of wealth that her friends embody in the present, illustrating the societal value being placed on being thin

Throughout the novel Corrine struggles with her daughter's weight as well as her own. These weight issues are indicative of the emphasis that the wealthy society Corrine is from and continues to associate with puts in being thin. That Corrine does not want Storey to be overweight because she thinks being overweight is a sign of weakness that her peers could use as fodder for their cruelty shows her own issues with weight and the kind of people Corrine associates with.

Corrine's concerns with her own weight most often appear when she is in the company of the friends who are rich enough to afford outside help maintaining their ideal bodies. When Casey recommends plastic surgery to prevent crow's feet around her eyes, she demonstrates that she, like many of Corrine's other friends, can afford surgical intervention to fit society's ideal image of womanhood. With this revelation, McInerney makes it clear that the wealthy place a lot of value on being thin.

## Drugs

McInerney uses drug addiction to showcase the negative consequences of fame. None of the people detailed in the novel as drug addicts end up successful, despite the success they are shown to have had earlier. Drug use and addiction are prevalent throughout the novel in the successful writers Russell associates with. This drug abuse highlights the dangers that come with fame and money.

By making the characters imbued with the most fame in the novel die drug related deaths he conveys the dangers of fame. Jeff Pierce, Jack Carson, and Tony Duplex all die because of their drug use, which illustrates the worst of its potential consequences. Phillip Kohout winds up disgraced and without a career because his drug dependency led him to build a career on lies. One thing all of these characters have in common is that they are celebrated artists. Though their drug use preceded their fame, their

success and the money that followed is what allowed their addiction to spiral out of control.

By showcasing the most extreme consequence of drug abuse as the most frequent result of the famous characters' drug addiction, McInerney conveys the importance of not doing drugs. The effects of drug abuse spread beyond the characters doing drugs, most especially to Russell. He takes Jeff Pierce's death very hard and Kohout's book scandal jeopardizes his career, leading to his midlife crisis. McInerney includes the ripple effect of drug abuse to further highlight the dangers of drug use.



# Styles

## Point of View

The narration of the novel is in the third-person with a limited omniscient narrator who focuses on one of the major characters in each chapter. The subject of the narrator's omniscience often changes from chapter to chapter, mainly switching between Corrine and Russell. There are several chapters scattered throughout the book that center on Jack Carson, Luke McGavock, or Washington Lee. In each of these chapters the reader is privy to the focal character's inner thoughts. Only one chapter deviates from this pattern: Chapter 43. This chapter is written as an apology and explanation letter from Phillip Kohout to Russell. The break from the norm reflects the abnormal period of life Russell experiences during that section of the novel.

## Language and Meaning

McInerney takes on the tone of the focal character in each chapter to give the impression that the narration comes from the mind of the character on which the chapter centers. Though the narrator is not any of the characters, the language McInerney uses makes it very clear that the narrator is privy to the inner-most thoughts of whichever character the chapter is about. The lack of colloquialisms in the descriptions of the characters thoughts and feelings make it clear that the narrator is not the character.

## Structure

With the exception of two chapters, the novel takes place between 2006 and 2008. These two chapters are flashbacks Corrine experiences about her illicit relationship with Russell's deceased former best friend, Jeff Pierce. They give the reader insight into her history of infidelity and how far back her relationship problems with Russell stretch. They also bring clarity to her actions in the present day of the novel.



## Quotes

Though the city seemed in many ways diminished from the capital of his youth, Russell Calloway had never quite fallen out of love with it, nor with his sense of his own place here. The backdrop of Manhattan, it seemed to him, gave every gesture an added grandeur, a metropolitan gravitas.

-- Narrator (chapter 1)

**Importance:** This quote reveals the importance of Manhattan for Russell Calloway and gives the setting of the novel the sense of being more important than just the place in which the action of the novel occurs.

Russell liked, especially after a few drinks, to divide humanity into two opposing teams: Art and Love versus Power and Money. It was kind of corny, but she was proud he believed it, and of his loyalty to his team. For better and for worse, it was her team, too.

-- Narrator (chapter 2)

**Importance:** By stating the defining feature of Russell's worldview, this quote introduces both Russell and Corrine and their most fundamental belief system.

'We were city kids,' Washington said, 'Veronica and I. We both grew up in fucking Queens, man. The dream was to trade the tenement for a house with a yard. And it's like we had to live out our parents' immigrant dream to escape the suburbs. It was encoded in us, ever since Veronica's mother fled Budapest after the revolution and my mom stowed away on a boat from Port of Spain: Go to America, work hard, eat shit, scrub floors, and someday your children will live in Westchester. And Veronica's mom - ever since she was a little girl she wanted her daughter to live in New Canaan. Anyway, it's over, our little American dream turned nightmare, We're back baby. Solid concrete and asphalt underfoot. Skyscrapers and everything. Just like I pictured it. Yellow limos at my beck and call. Doorman standing at attention, building superintendent at the other end of the intercom whenever you blow a fuse or a fucking lightbulb. City life's the life for me.

-- Washington Lee (chapter 4)

**Importance:** Not only is this an introduction to Washington's character, it emphasizes the importance New York City has for all of the characters.

That doesn't define you. You're so much more than that. I don't believe in types, I believe in individuals. I believe in you. You're like no one else. I don't know anyone else at all like you. You don't judge. You're the least judgmental, least prejudiced person I know. You take everyone at his own worth. You look at a picture and see things nobody else does. You're smart. You're funny. You don't accept conventional wisdom. You're beautiful.

-- Jeff Pierce (chapter 5)



**Importance:** Jeff's speech to Corrine about how he sees her shows the traits that attract people to Corrine and give a complete, if not biased, summary of her character.

So impressed was she with Russell's performance that night, and the night before, that she felt an upwelling of love and desire she sometimes feared had gone extinct, and that had lately been eclipsed by Luke's reappearance. But tonight she felt a rekindling of the belief that this was her soul mate, the one person on the planet made especially for her, her Platonic twin.

-- Narrator (chapter 7)

**Importance:** This quote established the deep love Corrine has for Russell, which complicates her relationship with Luke and explains why she does not leave Russell for him.

Oh, Russell, is this it? Roses once a year and maybe an obligatory drunken fuck? We're fifty years old. Where's the romance? Whatever happened to the romance?

-- Corrine Calloway (chapter 8)

**Importance:** Corrine's outburst reveals the fundamental issue she has with her relationship with Russell and the decline of their marriage.

The proximity to so much wealth could be infectious; only last year Russell had talked about buying into a bankrupt vineyard. Likewise, unless they were included by someone who'd purchased a table, they had to find clever excuses for declining invitations to the charity benefits that had spread east to the Hamptons in recent years, some of which ran to a thousand bucks a head.

-- Narrator (chapter 13)

**Importance:** This quote sets up the Calloways as being surrounded by people much wealthier than they are, and thus explains their desire for more money and their tendency to act like they have more money than they do.

The first time I ever did coke, I knew I'd found my drug, my own best self. I felt normal, like I could walk into a room and imagine that I belonged among the other humans without any degree of self-consciousness.

-- Phillip Kohout (chapter 21)

**Importance:** Kohout's explanation about the effects of cocaine provides insight into why so many of the characters in the novel abuse drugs. This insight from one drug user illuminates the use of the other users in the novel.

Much as Corrine hated to see Storey overweight, she was terrified that she might transmit her own issues to her daughter. She knew in moments of clarity, that she had to be careful. When she was at Miss Porter's, she'd been hospitalized with bulimia, and she still struggled against the occasional purging impulse. Or rather, still succumbed, occasionally. Hardly ever, though. It has been months.

-- Narrator (chapter 22)





**Importance:** This quote reveals the start of Corrine's food issues and details part of her strained relationship with her daughter.

Back in her school days, she would not have believed it was possible to love two people, but she learned that it was. And the sadder truth was that possession blunted desire, while the unattainable lover shimmered at the edge of the mind like a brilliant star, festered in the heart like a shard of crystal.

-- Narrator (chapter 23)

**Importance:** This quote reveals one of the major reasons behind Corrine's affairs throughout her relationship with Russell.

He refused to believe that the city no longer had room for people like themselves, refused to concede New York to the Power and Money team. It needed the Love and Art team, goddamn it: actors who were not yet famous, used bookstores and the people who worked in them, and professional waiters and dog walkers and piano tuners. It needed bassoon players and chorus line dancers as well as the corps de ballet, watchmakers and furniture restorers and cobblers and dealers in rare coins and stamps. It needed underpaid blue bloods with degrees from Brown who fed the undernourished, and midwestern refugees who published literary fiction. It needed them, This was the city he'd chosen of all the places in the world, to live anywhere else would feel like exile.

-- Narrator/Russell Calloway (chapter 25)

**Importance:** Russell's resistance to move from downtown Manhattan reveals how closely his identity has become intertwined with living in the city. His belief that New York needs artists shows that he thinks of himself as an artist and a valuable contributor to the city's culture.

I've actually been going through a whole moral dilemma about that anyway. Ever since Washington told me about Russell losing Jack Carson, I was in this really weird position where I didn't feel like I could tell Tom, but at the same time it did seem relevant to McCane, Slade's fiscal health. Oh, shit,' she said, seeing Corrine's face. 'You didn't know about that, either?

-- Casey Reynes (chapter 36)

**Importance:** Casey revealing the failure of Russell's business shows that Corrine is not the only one actively ruining her marriage. Russell keeping secrets that impact both of their lives is just as damaging to the health of their relationship as her affair.

He'd always been an optimist, able to convince himself that the best was still ahead, that every day held the promise of new adventure, but now he seemed increasingly conscious of his failures and anxious about the future. It was impossible to be optimistic at three-forty-five in the morning, at the age of fifty-one, and there were times when he was absolutely terrified at the prospect of his own extinction.

-- Narrator (chapter 37)



**Importance:** This quote shows Russell in the midst of his mid-life crisis.

Perhaps you can't forgive me, or ever be able to entirely trust me again. But isn't it possible that even in this diminished form, our marriage is still worth preserving, that however damaged, it's better than most other marriages at their best, that ours is still one of the great love stories, especially if we can survive this crisis?

-- Corrine Calloway (chapter 46)

**Importance:** Corrine's plea to Russell to work with her to save their marriage demonstrates the importance of communication within a healthy relationship, and how important their marriage is to her.

The screening room is womblike, as are the dark, pillowy seats, which seem to soak up the light and swallow the sitter, sucking her down into the imaginary realm, making it hard for her to stand up and regain her sense of place. It's a chapel of make-believe, an intermediate space between the dream world of the screen and the chaotic quotidian tumult of the world, which serves as an endless source of raw material, to be reshaped and interpreted and improved upon. As long as you're here, daily life can seem subsidiary to its transubstantiated representation. In the immediate afterglow, the images on the screen are more real than whatever's waiting for her outside.

-- Narrator (chapter 48)

**Importance:** This quote shows the power art and media have to allow a person to escape from the world and their troubles for a time. It's a comparison of sitting in a movie theater to a being in a dream acts to make art a powerful force of escapism.