

Britt-Marie Was Here Study Guide

Britt-Marie Was Here by Fredrik Backman

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Britt-Marie Was Here Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-3.....	4
Chapters 4-7.....	8
Chapter 8.....	12
Chapters 9-11.....	15
Chapters 12-14.....	18
Chapters 15-17.....	22
Chapters 18-20.....	26
Chapters 21-23.....	30
Chapters 24-26.....	34
Chapters 27-29.....	37
Chapters 30-31.....	41
Chapters 32-35.....	44
Chapters 36-38.....	47
Characters.....	50
Symbols and Symbolism.....	57
Settings.....	59
Themes and Motifs.....	61
Styles.....	66
Quotes.....	68



Plot Summary

NOTE: All citations in this Study Guide refer to the Atria Books version of *Britt-Marie Was Here*, published in 2014.

Britt-Marie, a lady with an obsession for cleaning and proper manners, turns out to be an unusual heroine in the novel *Britt-Marie Was Here* by Fredrik Backman, a rollicking novel about financial troubles, soccer and new beginnings. Without intending to, Britt-Marie brings hope to the small town in which she finds herself working after she leaves her cheating husband. In turn, the people of this unique village help give Britt-Marie the courage, as well as the gasoline, that she needs to follow her own dreams.

Britt-Marie is hired to work as the caretaker of the recreation center in Borg, a small village hard hit by a financial crisis, a crisis that Britt-Marie's husband has told her is over. The people of Borg, however, are still suffering from the crisis. All of the businesses with the exception of a pizzeria that serves as a post office, corner market and car workshop, and the recreation center, have been closed.

Although Britt-Marie wants nothing more than to go back her normal life, she is thrust into a life she never imagined. The children of the town persuade her to be their soccer coach so they can compete in an upcoming competition. Just as the people have lost hope that their town will recover from the financial crisis, they have also lost hope in their small soccer team made up only of players who did not transfer to the team in town when the soccer field in Borg was sold. They complain the team is no good.

Even though the team is not the best, the children are determined to participate in the tournament. They do not win but are ecstatic when one game ends in a tie, the first time the team in Borg has not lost a game in a long time. The simple act of the team going to the competition stirs a new hope in the village, as the people rally behind the players.

The town becomes even more united when Sami, the older brother of two of the players, is killed trying to stand up for his friend, Psycho, even though Psycho does not deserve Sami's loyalty. Because Britt-Marie lost her own sister in a car wreck, she understands how devastating the loss of a sibling can be. Vega, Sami's sister, once told Britt-Marie she did not feel pain when she was playing soccer. For that reason Britt-Marie campaigned to get a soccer field built in that town.

Meanwhile, Britt-Marie's husband, who claimed his affair was over, had come to Borg to try to convince Britt-Marie to come home with him. In Borg he discovers that the town policeman, Sven, and Britt-Marie have developed a friendship. Britt-Marie is faced with choosing between the familiarity of her husband and the possibility of compatibility that Sven offers. Just as the reader fears Britt-Marie will go home with her emotionally abusive husband, the children of Borg present her with a surprising third option.



Chapters 1-3

Summary

In Chapter 1, Britt-Marie sits in the unemployment office thinking about how life, like cutlery, should be arranged properly and this arrangement should not be changed. If her life had followed this rule, she would not be in an unemployment office being offered coffee in a plastic mug by a girl with extremely short hair. She is shocked when the girl does not offer her a coaster but instead tells her to put her mug anywhere. The girl tries to coax information out of Britt-Marie to fill in her registration forms. Britt-Marie has no higher education and little work experience because she has focused on her husband and his children ever since she was married.

Because Britt-Marie feels the girl thinks there is little to taking care of a home, Britt-Marie thinks of the care and concern she put into making a home for her family. Although Britt-Marie is obsessive about cleaning, Kent, her husband, makes fun of her obsessions. One of these obsessions is her belief that he must allow her to clean their mattress with baking soda before they leave their house to travel. She is afraid to leave the house with the mattress dirty because she is afraid they will die on their trip and people will think they lived in a dirty house.

After Britt-Marie is registered with the unemployment agency, the girl tells Britt-Marie they will be in touch. Britt-Marie insists on being given a specific time she will be contacted so she can put that time on her list. She decides for the girl that she will check back the following day. Britt-Marie goes home to the hostel room in which she is staying. She rubs the white mark on her ring finger where she once wore her wedding ring. There are two plastic plant boxes on the floor of the room. Britt-Marie brought the boxes from the balcony of her home. She is so accustomed to staying up and waiting for her husband that she stays up even though he will not be coming.

In Chapter 2, when Britt-Marie arrives at the unemployment office the following morning the girl is in a meeting and cannot see her. Looking at the soccer ball stickers on the girl's office door reminds Britt-Marie of Kent because he loved soccer. When the girl is finished with her meeting Britt-Marie confronts her again. Because the girl says she does not have time to see Britt-Marie that day, Britt-Marie tells the girl they will meet at 5 p.m. and have dinner during their meeting.

In Chapter 3, Britt-Marie went out shopping after arranging the meeting with the girl in the unemployment office. She is out of sorts because the grocery store did not have Faxin, her favorite cleaner. It is exactly 5 p.m. when she knocks on the door of the girl's office. She notices the girl has her coat on as if she is leaving. Britt-Maire orders to be shown to the kitchen where she begins cooking the potatoes and salmon she purchased.



The girl changes from being irritated to being concerned when she sees Britt-Marie's reaction to the disorganized cutlery drawer. The girl notices Britt-Marie rubbing the white mark on her finger and asks the older woman why she is really there. When she learns that Britt-Marie's husband had a heart attack she assumes the man is dead and offers sympathy. Britt-Marie tells her that Kent had been having an affair. She knew about it because she smelled the other's woman's perfume on his clothes. The girl is sympathetic to Britt-Marie and tells her it was nice of Britt-Marie to fix a meal for her.

Analysis

This novel is written in the third person point of view with an emphasis on Britt-Marie. The narrator gives the reader insight into Britt-Marie's thoughts and actions as well as her interactions with other people. The story is also told in the present tense so the action unfolds before the reader as if he were part of that action. Another significant fact the reader should take into consideration is that the book is a translation of the original book, which was written in Swedish. Knowing that the book was originally written in Swedish will help the reader understand the use of some unfamiliar terms, such as the reference to a soccer field as a pitch, that appear. It also helps the reader understand that the fictional village of Borg must be somewhere in Sweden.

The reader takes great care in developing Britt-Marie's personality. She could be described as obsessive-compulsive to the point that she comes off as being irritating in the first several pages of the novel. She is obsessed with cleanliness. For instance, she insists on cleaning the mattress with baking soda before she and her husband leave home for a trip. She is also obsessed with doing things in the proper way. For instance, coffee should not be served in a plastic mug and a person should not just set his drink down anywhere. One image that represents the proper way Britt-Marie believes things should be done is the arrangement of the cutlery drawer. The different utensils should be separated and stored with forks on the right, knives in the middle and spoons on the left. Unorganized cutlery drawers make Britt-Marie feel panicked. When Britt-Marie sees the state of the cutlery drawer in the unemployment office, for instance, she has to sit down and "looks on the verge of passing out" (18).

Britt-Marie is also very rigid. She believes once things, her life in particular, have been set up in particular order they should not be changed. Her lists seem to rule her life. When the girl cannot tell Britt-Marie a time she will have a job for her, Britt-Marie creates a time to keep from leaving that part of her life in question. She wants to be able to write the appointment to accept a job on her list. However, she cannot write on her list in pen because pen is permanent.

Despite Britt-Marie's irritating demeanor it is easy to feel empathy for her when she shares her story. She has been married to Kent, and has spent her life dedicated to making a home for him and his children from a prior marriage. None of them have appreciated the work she has done. She has no work experience or higher education because she has lived to support him in his dreams and desires. Although she dedicated herself to her husband, Kent had an affair. Britt-Marie knew about this affair



because he came in with his shirt smelling like another woman's perfume. To make matters worse, he had the audacity to complain when she washed his shirt at night so she would not have to smell the strange perfume. When the story begins Britt-Marie has apparently left her husband and is trying to start a life on her own. She is 63 and wants nothing but to go back to life as it was before.

The idea that it is important for others to know a person exists is introduced in this section of the novel. Britt-Marie tells the girl at the unemployment office that she wants a job because "I want someone to know I'm here" (21). Her initial concern is that as a single woman living alone, she could die and no one would miss her until she began to smell. This is an awful idea for a person as devoted to cleanliness as Britt-Marie is but the theme in general has a more universal meaning. Britt-Marie will realize as the action of the story progresses that she wants to be able to make an impression upon the lives of others by the type of life she has lived.

During her original meeting with Britt-Marie, the girl at the unemployment office notes that there are few jobs because of the financial crisis, a crisis that Britt-Marie believes does not exist because Kent has told her that the crisis is over. In this particular instance the financial crisis is affecting Britt-Marie because it means there are few jobs available for her. As the novel continues the reader will encounter more and more references to the way the area in which Britt-Marie has been hurt by the financial crisis that she believes no longer exists.

Even though Britt-Marie and her problems could be portrayed in a way that was deep and serious, the author chooses a humorous feel as he exaggerates Britt-Marie's personality and her reactions to uncleanliness and improperly organized cutlery. He uses a variety of literary techniques to further lighten the tone. For instance, the process of Britt-Marie having to register for a job is described as if she were "a criminal. As if she has come to steal a job rather than find one" (2). Personification is used to describe how the oven in the employment office "looks ashamed of itself" (20) when Britt-Marie criticizes it because the knobs are arranged differently from the ones on her oven. Similes also abound in the novel. The hair of the girl at the unemployment office is described as looking "short and spiky, like when someone has spilled orange juice on a shagpile rug" (13). Her desk is so beat up it "looks as if toddlers have been trying to eat potatoes off it. With pitchforks. In the dark" (3).

Phrases and object that bear a particular meaning will be repeated throughout the novel as a way of enforcing Britt-Marie's repetitive and obsessive personality. The image of the properly organized cutlery drawer will appear again and again as Britt-Marie uses this as a way to test if a person is a barbarian or not. Baking soda, a product that Britt-Marie uses in her endless cleaning, will also appear again and again. The reason that Britt-Marie settled on baking soda as a good cleaning will be described later on in the novel.



Discussion Question 1

What is your opinion of Britt-Marie so far in the novel? How has the author's tone and wording helped you to develop this opinion?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Britt-Marie's obsessions. Do you think she will be able to survive in the world even if she does get a job? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Consider that Britt-Marie knew long before the break up that her husband was having an affair. What does this say about Britt-Marie? Why does she want to go back to a life where her husband cheated on her?

Vocabulary

cutlery, diplomatically, entrepreneur, distinctive, vexes, preposterous, edifying



Chapters 4-7

Summary

In Chapter 4, Britt-Marie gets a job in Borg, a small community on a road that leads out of the town in both directions. Most of the businesses there are closed. Britt-Marie's job is at the recreation center. She will work there the remaining month that it will be open. The narrator indicates that soccer and the pizzeria are the only things that still exist in the town.

As Britt-Marie drives into the parking lot at the recreation center she believes there is an explosion in the passenger side of her car. The car stops in front of the pizzeria and Britt-Marie gets out. She uses her cell phone to call the girl at the unemployment office first to ask where the post office is and also to complain about her car blowing up. She cannot hear the girl so she hangs up and calls back. The girl suggests she is holding the phone upside down. When she has the phone properly oriented, Britt-Marie asks the girl where the cleaning supplies can be found. While they are talking Britt-Marie sees a huge rat and is then hit on the head by a soccer ball.

In Chapter 5, Britt-Marie is laying on a dirty floor. Somebody is talking to her, asking if she is dead. Britt-Marie smells pizza, a smell that reminds her of Kent. The day she left Kent, while he was still in the hospital, she took his shirt, which smelled like pizza and perfume. At home, she washed the shirt, cleaned the windows one last time with Faxin, packed up her balcony boxes and turned on the cell phone Kent had given her for the first time.

Meanwhile in the pizzeria, Somebody offers Britt-Marie vodka which she refers to as "second aid" (32). Britt-Marie notices that Somebody is in a wheelchair. Somebody tells Britt-Marie that she has been hit in the head with a soccer ball. Somebody explains the child who hit her did not do it on purpose because all the children are so bad at soccer they never hit what they aim at. A girl in her early teens wearing jeans torn across the thighs helps Britt-Marie stand up. The girl says her name is Vega. Both Vega and Somebody are surprised when Britt-Marie tells them she is the new caretaker for the recreation center. As Somebody is getting the key for Britt-Marie and a package for Karl, who has just walked into the pizzeria, Britt-Marie turns and runs into Karl. Karl growls at her. Somebody tells Britt-Marie to ignore him, that he has a "lemon up his arse" (35).

Before Somebody takes Britt-Marie to the recreation center, Britt-Marie asks if there is Faxin in the small grocery area she sees. Somebody tells Britt-Marie that Faxin has been discontinued.

In Chapter 6, as Britt-Marie walks to the recreation center she realizes the thumping sound she has been hearing is the sound of the children kicking a soccer ball against the fence. A ball rolls up to Britt-Marie. She lets it go past. Vega asks why she did not kick it back and does not seem to understand why Britt-Marie would not want to kick the



ball. Somebody explains to Britt-Marie that the kids no longer have a soccer pitch, or field, because it was sold for apartment buildings. When the soccer pitch was closed the soccer team was also closed and the good players went to the team in town. Before the financial crisis, the adults in the town had driven trucks to earn a living but the trucking company was closed down.

Somebody warns Britt-Maire she should move her car so it will not get hit by a soccer ball. When Britt-Marie tells her the car exploded Somebody points out a ball-shaped dent and comments that it was a “flying stone” (41). Somebody tells Britt-Marie she can fix the car for her.

Inside the recreation center, Britt-Marie cleans. She puts baking soda in the flower boxes she has brought with her. Even though they look like they just have dirt in them Britt-Marie knows that there are flowers in the dirt that will bloom in the spring. As she continues cleaning she notices there are pictures of soccer balls everywhere. She decides to try making coffee in the modern percolator. She winds up with coffee grounds and water all over her. In her anger she beats the percolator with a mop handle until she can no longer see. At that point she sits down and cries into a towel.

In Chapter 7, Britt-Marie sits in the dark in the recreation center her first night in Borg. She tries to figure out how things went so badly with Kent. She wonders when he stopped caring what other people thought about her. She had dedicated her life to him, helping him achieve his dreams and pushing her own dreams aside. She had only wished that once in a while Kent would notice her, appreciate her efforts without being asked. It never happened.

In the morning, Britt-Marie cleans the recreation center again. Somebody knocks on the door and offers Britt-Marie a box of wine as a welcome gift. She tries to call her only Britt but Britt-Marie tells her that her sister is the only one who calls her just Britt. In the kitchen, Somebody sees the coffee percolator and asks what happened. She looks at the mop and the mop-sized dents in the machine. When Britt-Marie tells her it was a flying stone Somebody begins to laugh. Britt-Marie is angered by the laughter and begins cleaning again.

Analysis

Britt-Marie does not get a good first impression of Borg. Her impression is not altered by the number of closed down businesses but instead the fact she believes her car “explodes” when she pulls into the parking lot of the recreation center at which she is to work. She is soon afterward hit in the head with a soccer ball and knocked unconscious. Things get even worse when Somebody tells Britt-Marie that Faxin, her favorite cleaner, has been discontinued.

The reader learns early on that Britt-Marie and the rest of humanity are divided as to their opinions of soccer. To the general public soccer is a mainstay of life. “Apart from that, the only two noticeable things in Borg are soccer and the pizzeria, because these



tend to be the last things to abandon humanity” (23). Britt-Marie, however, hates soccer. As she walks to the recreation center the ball being played with by the children rolls up to her and she does not kick it back. Vega cannot understand her actions as if there is something fundamentally wrong inside Britt-Marie if she has no desire to kick a soccer ball. Compare the way Britt-Marie reacts to the soccer ball with the way that Vega reacts to it. First it is described that Vega holds the ball “when that’s what you have to do to stop yourself from repeatedly kicking it” (34). At another point Vega is described as carrying the ball “as you do when you’re holding on to someone you love” (34).

The financial crisis has hit not only the businesses of Borg but also the beloved game of soccer. The soccer field and club was closed down and the best players have all gone to participate on the teams in town. The children who are left are not good. Somebody insists to Britt-Marie that the child who hit her with the ball was not aiming because they were not able to hit the things at which they aimed. As an example, as Britt-Marie heads for the recreation center, a boy “takes aim at the fence but instead manages to shoot the ball right back to Britt-Marie, which, if you consider the angle, is quite an impressive feat as far as underachievements go” (39).

Along with taking the best of the soccer players away from town, the financial crisis has impacted Borg in other ways. As Somebody explains to Britt-Marie when Britt-Marie tells her that Kent thinks the financial crisis is over: “Maybe financial crisis cleared out of the city, you know, but it likes Borg. It’s living here now, the bastard!” (40). The people in Borg do not like people from town because those in Borg have been so hard hit by the crisis. The only business that seems to still be open is the pizzeria and it serves whatever purpose it needs to. Somebody not only bakes pizza but also stocks groceries and handles the mail. “You know, they closed down that health center. Financial crisis. What a shit. So now, you know, we do what we can. But no worry. Have first aid!” (32) Somebody tells Britt-Marie after she wakes up from being hit by the soccer ball.

The idea of being seen is equated with the idea of being appreciated in these chapters. For Britt-Marie the idea of being seen is also tied up very closely with her relationship with Kent. She recognizes that her husband had stopped “seeing” her at some point in their relationship and wonders when that was. “That was back in the days when he still looked at her as if he knew she was there” (46). Not only does Britt-Marie believe her husband no longer sees her, she believes the world as a whole is blind to her. Even though she cleaned her windows daily with Faxin because she believed the advertisements, that this cleaner would clean her windows so well it would help her see the world, she believed that “the world did not see her” (36). Her wants seem to be simple. She wanted someone to appreciate the things she did for him and to occasionally help out or put dirty clothes in the basket without being asked. Instead, Kent made fun of her and criticized her. Britt-Marie took what he said about her as the truth.

The author continues to develop Britt-Marie’s personality in these chapters based on the idea that she takes what others say so literally. The things Kent has told her, for instance, are right even if there is overwhelming evidence they are wrong. This is so of the financial crisis. Even though Kent has told Britt-Marie the crisis is over, it is clearly



not based on the shape of the people and business in Borg. Britt-Marie also does not seem to have a good deal of common sense. When a soccer ball hits her car, for instance, she believes the car has exploded. There are a variety of habits and compulsions Britt-Marie exhibits regularly. These include her habit of gripping her purse tightly, straightening her skirt, straightening her hair, sucking in her cheeks and saying “ha” before speaking.

Britt-Marie appears to have a sense of humor but has trouble discerning when people are laughing at her and when they are laughing with her. This is true of the coffee machine incident. Somebody realizes the humor in Britt-Marie saying that the coffee machine in the recreation center had been hit by flying stones when in reality Britt-Marie had beaten it with a mop handle. When Somebody laughs at Britt-Marie’s explanation, Britt-Marie is offended.

The author continues with the similes in this section. The rat that Britt-Marie suspects lives in the recreation center is described as being “more or less as big as a normal-sized flowerpot” (29) while Somebody looks “as if she’s combed her hair with a terrified animal” (33). Another example of personification can be found as the “wallpaper of the recreation center looks indifferently at her” (43).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Britt-Marie’s attachment to her balcony boxes. Why does she take care of them so carefully? What do they symbolize?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Borg’s love for soccer with Britt-Marie’s hate for the sport.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the idea of being seen as it is presented in these chapters. Do you think Kent really ever saw Britt-Marie as she thought he did? Give reasons for your answer.

Vocabulary

pretense, hygienic, jovially, vexatious, prejudices, reproachful, abominable, appendage, desolate, curtly, conviction, deranged, amicably, nonchalantly, alluding, mortified, contours, oxidized, premises



Chapter 8

Summary

In Chapter 8, a green truck drives through Borg. It makes Britt-Marie think about Ingrid. She had seen a similar green truck on the day she had lost her childhood. Even though Ingrid had been told to put her seatbelt on, Ingrid had not done so. Britt-Marie had because she hoped her mother would notice, but she never did. The green truck hit their car from the right side. Before she passed out, Britt-Marie remembered wanting to clean up the mess of glass and blood in the backseat and make things nice again. Cleaning was what she did during the time of her sister's funeral, and then, ever since. Britt-Marie hoped her mother would come out of her bedroom one day and notice how clean everything was. She never did. She never forgave Britt-Marie for not being the daughter that died.

In the recreation center, Britt-Marie wonders how she plans to get the heavy box she bought at IKEA into the center. She begins cleaning again until she has used up almost all of her baking soda. As she heads to the pizzeria to see if Somebody sells baking soda Britt-Marie notices a yellow jersey with the word "Bank" and the number "10" on it. Below it is a picture of a man holding the jersey. As she opens the door she encounters a pest control worker with a mouth full of snuff. Britt-Marie sends the worker away and calls the girl at the unemployment office. Britt-Marie explains that she did not let the pest control worker take care of the rat because she did not want poison put out because it could kill someone. She also did not want a trap with chocolate in it on her clean floors.

Britt-Marie has to wait in line at the pizzeria. A woman wearing sunglasses and leading a dog is there. The woman turns and runs into Britt-Marie. She then demands to know if Britt-Marie is blind. Britt-Marie realizes it is instead the woman who is blind. Somebody tells her that the woman has a lemon stuck up her butt. The blind woman is Bank.

When Britt-Marie asks Somebody for baking soda, Vega pokes a boy who is with her and tells him that is her. He runs out and comes back with two bottles of Faxin. The boy, named Omar, tells Britt-Marie he can fix anything. Britt-Marie has a slight out of body experience when she sees the cleaner, but realizes that Omar has probably stolen it.

Before Britt-Marie leaves with her bag of Faxin and baking soda Somebody notices her looking at the yellow jersey hung in the pizzeria. It is just like the one in the recreation center. Somebody tells her the player was called Bank because having her play on their team was like having "money in the bank" (67). Bank's father had coached soccer in the past, but he had died a month ago.

While at the pizzeria, Britt-Marie also bought Snickers bars. She sits with the door open and the Snickers bar on a plate on top of a towel in the floor. When the rat appears she tells it that she will provide it with supper each day at 6 p.m. if it will agree not to let her lie in the floor and stink if she dies. She explains to the rat that she learned about



sodium bicarbonate, baking soda, when her sister died. Dead bodies stink because the body stops producing sodium bicarbonate.

Analysis

Even as a young child Britt-Marie hoped her mother would notice or “see” her, just as she wanted, as an adult, for her husband to see her. This desire to be noticed by her mother was present before Ingrid died. Britt-Marie had put on her seatbelt when she was asked because she hoped her mother would notice. After Ingrid died Britt-Marie still tried to get her mother to notice her, but it never happened. She wanted her mother to appreciate her willingness to do what she was told, and then later she hoped her mother would notice how clean she kept the house.

Britt-Marie’s cleaning obsession came as a result of the wreck. It was her way of trying to make things right again after her world was destroyed. “The last thing Britt-Marie remembered before she passed out was that she wanted to clean it up. Make it nice. And when she woke up at the hospital that is precisely what she did. Clean. Make things nice” (56). Britt-Marie’s love of baking soda is also a result of her sister’s death. She learned that once a person is dead their body stops producing sodium bicarbonate, the active chemical of baking soda.

Britt-Marie remembers the day her sister died as being the day she lost her childhood. There will be further references to the idea of a lost childhood as the book continues.

One significant object introduced in Chapter 7 is more fully described in this section of the novel. Britt-Marie has bought a piece of IKEA furniture because Kent has told her that women are incapable of putting things together by themselves. Even though Britt-Marie has no idea how she will get the box out of her car, and refuses any help offered her, she intends to put this piece of furniture together just to prove Kent wrong. This act of buying the furniture and her plans to put it together indicate that despite all she has been through, Britt-Marie still has some spunk left in her.

Despite the heaviness of the description of Britt-Marie suffering the loss of her sister and then being rejected by her mother, the overall tone of this section is light. One of the incidents that helps to lighten the tone of this section is Britt-Marie’s encounter with the pest control worker. Instead of allowing the rat to be killed with poison or a trap, because she does not like either of these options, Britt-Marie strikes up an agreement with the animal. She agrees to provide it with dinner every day at 6 p.m. she even presents its dinner in a proper way, with a napkin and plate. Also humorous is Omar’s occupation of “fixing” things. He is a young boy who apparently either steals merchandise from the trucks that stop at the gas station in town for refueling or buys them cheaply. Even with her lack of common sense Britt-Marie realizes that the cleaner the boy presents her with has probably been obtained illegally.

In this section, the doorbell at the pizzeria is personified. Even though Britt-Marie has just had a very unpleasant encounter with the woman who was once the town’s best



soccer player and daughter of the late soccer coach, the door bell rings merrily as this woman, who is known only by the nickname Bank, walks out. It is indicated in the narration that the doorbell “doesn’t have the sense to do anything else” (61).

Notice the use of names in this novel. Some characters are known by their given names, some by their nicknames, and some by no names at all. Britt-Marie insists on being called by her full name because her sister was the only one who called her only Britt. Vega and Omar appear to be the real names of the children that Britt-Marie has met so far. The woman who runs the pizzeria has no name except Somebody. Throughout the novel she is referred to as Somebody, as if no one has actually thought her important enough to call her by name. Bank is called only by her nickname even though it has been a long time since she was the town’s star soccer player. Even though she is now blind the nickname has stuck because Bank is who she was during the time she was most important to the town. She will always be known as that star soccer player.

Discussion Question 1

How does the death of Britt-Marie’s sister help you to better understand the type of person she has grown up to be?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the use of names in the novel.

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Bank encourages Omar’s habit of fixing things? What do you think he is really doing, stealing the items or buying them cheaply to resell at a higher price?

Vocabulary

anticlimax, queue, negotiations, indulgence, pungent, hospitable, spontaneous, tentative



Chapters 9-11

Summary

In Chapter 9 Britt-Marie watches as the children play soccer. Vega reminds Britt-Marie of Ingrid because her younger brother, Omar, is always in her shadow, the way Britt-Marie was always in Ingrid's shadow. It was Ingrid's dream for them to one day live in Paris. At this point in her life, Britt-Marie has still not been to Paris. Britt-Marie loved Ingrid. Even though Ingrid excelled at everything, she noticed Britt-Marie and complimented her.

Britt-Marie is distracted from her thoughts by a banging on the door. It is Vega. She wants to know if they can watch the soccer game at the recreation center. When Britt-Marie tells her that she had heard there was no longer a team, Vega becomes defensive of her friends. She argues the group is a team because they played together and because they were there.

Britt-Marie calls the girl from the unemployment office for advice. The girl thinks letting the children in the recreation center is a good idea. Britt-Marie opens the door for them but has the clean soccer jerseys for them to wear instead of their muddy clothes. She suddenly notices there is a policeman standing with the children. She asks Omar what he has done, assuming that he has caused some sort of trouble. The policeman stares at Britt-Marie for a moment before handing her the jar of jam he brought as a welcome gift. After the policeman, Sven, has left, Omar asks Britt-Marie if she is married. She tells him that she is divorced. Omar shares that Sven is single.

In Chapter 10 Britt-Marie has put towels on the couch and is making the children use coasters for their soft drinks. When she tries to put the remote controls that have fallen on the floor onto the table the children all revolt. Britt-Marie learns from the ginger haired boy that they are very superstitious. They believe their team will not win if things are not exactly the way they were the last time the team won. He tells her he is the one who hit her with the soccer ball. He apologizes and then he compliments Britt-Marie on her hair.

Britt-Marie learns from Vega that the boy's name is Pirate. Vega also points out Toad and Dino sitting on the couch. Vega is the only girl, a fact Britt-Marie questions but Vega insists the group in Borg is her team. She does not want to play on a girls' team. During a break in play Omar begins changing the light bulbs. Also during the break, Vega realizes they have left the ball outside. Britt-Marie follows Pirate, the boy chosen to go after the ball, trying to stop him from getting his clothes muddy again. When they are outside together, Pirate asks her if she will help him fix his hair for a date. She tells him she has to check her list first. Meanwhile, the team the children are rooting for has scored another goal. Because they are so superstitious they lock Pirate and Britt-Marie outside in the rain.



In Chapter 11 at half time, Britt-Marie and Pirate are allowed back inside. Britt-Marie spends the second half of the game in the bathroom because the team scored a goal when she originally went to the bathroom and she was not allowed to come out. She thinks about the way it was the silence that bothered her the most after Ingrid died. Her father began staying away from home longer and longer. Her mother stayed in bed later and later in the day and then one day did not get up at all. It was at the time of her mother's death that Britt-Marie was reacquainted with Kent who was newly divorced.

After the game, Pirate knocks on the bathroom door and tells her that Sven has come back. He shows her a flyer and tells her that he thought the room for rent advertised on it might be a good place for her to live. Britt-Marie refuses to ride in the police car because she might be recognized and taken as a criminal. After the children leave, she cleans up after them. There is another knock on the door. It is Sven. He has brought a bamboo screen that she can use to hide her face as they drive through town. Britt-Marie agrees with the arrangement.

Analysis

Britt-Marie finds herself watching the kids play soccer because she thinks her sister might have liked it. She is particularly interested in the differences between the way Vega and her younger brother, Omar, play. Vega is described as being "calm and calculating, gently moving the ball with the insides of her feet, as you might twiddle your toes against someone you love while sleeping. Her brother, on the other hand, is angry and frustrated, hunting the ball down as if it owes him money" (72). Britt-Marie recognizes that Vega is better at the game than Omar. For this reason she compares Vega and Omar's relationship to that of the relationship between Ingrid and Britt-Marie. Ingrid was always the sibling who was good at doing things while Britt-Marie was always in her shadow.

The importance of Britt-Marie's relationship with Ingrid is developed further in this section of the novel. Britt-Marie lost her best friend when Ingrid died. Ingrid was one of the few people who saw Britt-Marie and appreciated her. Making Britt-Marie's pain even worse is the fact that Britt-Marie felt she could not talk to Kent about Ingrid's death. She often finds plants others have thrown out to put in her balcony boxes. For Britt-Marie this is a symbolic way of paying homage to her sister, who loved plants. She believed it was by saving these plants that she got "the strength to remember a sister whose life she was not even able to save once" (77-78).

Vega describes a team as a group that plays together. She becomes almost violent with Britt-Marie when Britt-Marie suggests the children really do not have a team. In Vega's thinking the five kids who play together make up a team because they want to be a team, regardless of what the adults say. To make matters even worse for Vega and her friends, they do not have a coach. It appears the children have plans to fix that issue. It is when Britt-Marie first cleans the jerseys belonging to the team that: "this is how Britt-Marie turns into their team coach. It's just that no one has told her about it yet" (92).



The children also seem to have other plans for Britt-Marie when they question her about her marital status. When they learn that she is single they tell her that Sven, the village policeman, is single as well. Sven is interested in Britt-Marie. The children have already described her to him but he is intrigued when he sees that she is: “Fussy, yes, and bossy, clearly, but something else as well. Determined, immaculately neat, and somehow . . . unique” (79).

Notice the way the author clues off the reader that the real action of the book will begin in Chapter 9. “Everything begins in earnest this evening” (71) the narrator states as Britt-Marie cleans the recreation center the second day she is there. About midway through the chapter when Britt-Marie allows the children to watch the soccer match in the center the narrator gives another nudge “That’s how it all happens before everything begins in earnest” (77) to indicate things are really happening. At the conclusion of the chapter the narrator ends: “That’s how it all begins” (80) indicating the complete story has been told.

Notice the way that the author continues to illustrate his novel with literary techniques. Simile is used in several places. For instance, Sven’s hair is described as looking “like a lawn the day after an impromptu barbecue” (79). Meanwhile, when the children begin watching the soccer match in the recreation center she walks around “like a confounded spirit whose grave someone has opened in order to start a discotheque” (81). Again, Britt-Marie’s idea of cleanliness is used as a point of humor. When she sees Omar after he has been playing soccer in the mud she is surprised how dirty he is. “He has mud in his nostrils. Inside his nostrils. Britt-Marie cannot get her head around how something like that could happen. Surely there’s such a thing as gravity” (75). Britt-Marie thinks to herself as she wonders how the boy’s condition is even possible.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Britt-Marie continues to call the girl from the unemployment office for advice? Why is her dependence on this girl significant?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Britt-Marie’s hesitation to ride in the police car with Sven.

Discussion Question 3

How does the author use Britt-Marie’s obsessions as a way to add humor to the novel?

Vocabulary

marginal, predestined, diplomacy, depletes, impromptu, ambivalent, immaculately, confounded, articulation, explanatory, coiffure, condolences, affronted



Chapters 12-14

Summary

In Chapter 12, Britt-Marie is impressed that the policeman does not talk about himself on the way to the house but instead tries to learn about Britt-Marie. He tells her it is nice that she is helping the children because they need someone to “see” (98) them. She changes the subject by commenting about the number of “For Sale” signs at houses in Borg. He tells her those who have signs up still have hope of selling their houses, those who do not have taken their houses off the market. Britt-Marie tries to change the subject again to soccer. Sven explains to her that his love of soccer seemed to be instinctive.

When they arrive at the house Britt-Marie learns she will be renting from the blind woman she met at the pizzeria. Britt-Marie notices the careless state of the house as well as the numerous pictures of a girl in a yellow soccer jersey hung in various places. The woman shows Britt-Marie the room and Britt-Marie tries to apologize for the way she acted earlier. Bank seems frustrated with Britt-Marie when she explains to her that she is not blind but only visually impaired. It is easier to tell people she is blind because they ask fewer questions. Later that evening, after she has cleaned the mattress, Britt-Marie notices a door in her room. She has to force it open but is pleased to find it leads to a balcony.

In Chapter 13, it is 6 a.m. when Britt-Marie knocks on the door of the pizzeria asking for a drill. Somebody, who is hungover, insists on doing the drilling for Britt-Marie who wants to hang a map of Borg that she has found in the recreation center. Britt-Marie loves maps because they state clearly where one is. After Somebody has hung the picture, Britt-Marie notices how low it is. When she remembers Somebody’s wheelchair, she decides the place where the map is hung is perfect. She follows Somebody back to the pizzeria and has to fight the urge to clean up. At one point when she begins cleaning Somebody stops her and tells her she will not be able to find anything if Britt-Marie rearranges. It is when Britt-Marie starts rearranging the cigarettes that Somebody hollers at her to stop. The cigarettes cannot be mixed up for tax reasons. Britt-Marie realizes some are stolen. Somebody corrects her, telling her they fell off the back of a truck.

When the men with beards and caps who always drink coffee at the pizzeria arrive that morning they are surprised to find it is clean. Britt-Marie makes coffee for the men because Somebody has fallen asleep with her head in the cutlery drawer. She asks the men if she can have the crosswords from their newspapers but they tell her to buy her own newspaper. Vega arrives she is surprised by the cleanliness as well. Karl comes into the pizzeria looking for a package, followed by Sven.

Sven is asking Britt-Marie how the room worked out when Vega groans because a BMW has pulled up in the parking lot. When Fredrik, the man driving the car, comes



inside Vega sarcastically asks him if he there to fire someone. When Fredrik is done making his purchases Sven warns him he needs to leave. Before he and his son, Max, get out the door Fredrik asks Britt-Marie who she is. She explains and then compliments him on his jacket, telling him that her husband had one just like it, except his fit properly. Fredrik leaves angrily when those in the pizzeria begin laughing at him. After she tells Pirate she has time to fix his hair Britt-Marie leaves as well upset because of the laughter.

In Chapter 14, in the recreation center Britt-Marie thinks about how much she wants to go home. She tells Pirate she does not like to be laughed at and he assures her they were not laughing at her. Instead, they were laughing at Fredrik because no one likes him. As Britt-Marie cuts Pirate's hair she shares with him that her husband told her she had no sense of humor. Pirate recognizes what a terrible thing it was for Kent to say about Britt-Marie and tells her so. She says she still loves her husband but that sometimes love is not enough.

After she finishes cutting Pirate's hair Britt-Marie notices two boys in the parking lot, leaning against a black car. Pirates says the boys are named Sami and Psycho. Sami, who is Vega and Omar's older brother, is okay but Psycho is dangerous. They watch as Vega brings out two pizzas and hands them to Sami. Britt-Marie learns that Psycho is not allowed to eat in the pizzeria when Sven is there because Sven is afraid of him.

Pirate changes the subject by asking if Vega has asked her if she would be their coach. They want to play in a competition but can only do so if they have a coach. Before she can answer, there is a knock on the door and Britt-Marie opens the door to find a long haired boy standing there. The boy asks if Ben, Pirate's real name, is there, and then explains to Britt-Marie that he has a date with him. She asks him to wait there. Back in the bathroom, Ben asks Britt-Marie if he thinks that his date will like his hair. Britt-Marie tells Ben that if his date does not compliment him on his hair then the boy does not deserve him. Several minutes after the two boys leave Britt-Marie gets a text message from Ben announcing he did get a compliment.

As Britt-Marie waits for the rat to come for its Snickers bar she calls the girl at the unemployment office and apologizes for criticizing her hair style. After the rat finally shows up for dinner, more than an hour late, Britt-Marie cleans up. She watches as Sven leaves the pizzeria, and she is disappointed when he does not come and knock on the door. After Britt-Marie has turned off all of the lights except the one in the bathroom she notices the light illuminates the spot where Somebody hung the map. It appears the map really is hung in the perfect spot.

Analysis

Even though Borg is a small town, it has its unsavory characters just like any other town. One of these unsavory characters is Psycho. The first clue that Psycho is not a character those in town want to deal with is that when Ben tells Britt-Marie the names of the teens lounging on the black car he sounds scared. "Psycho is called Psycho



because he's a psycho" (119) Ben tells Britt-Marie. He is not allowed inside the pizzeria when Sven is there because Sven, the town's police officer, is afraid of him. The second unsavory character is not unsavory because he is a criminal but because he is responsible for the state of the town. Even though Fredrik is responsible for many of the people in Borg being out of work he insists on shopping at the pizzeria. It is almost as if he is flaunting the fact he can still drive a BMW while many of them are struggling to survive. Vega is openly hateful to him. The old men with hats and beards look at him "as if hoping that by doing so they'll eventually set him on fire" (114). Sven finally has to ask him to leave in order to keep the peace.

Hope can be buoyed by even the smallest things. For instance when Britt-Marie discovers there is a balcony attached to the room she is renting she is overjoyed. It reminds her of home and the balcony she left behind. There is another side to hope. Some people in Borg have lost hope. When Sven drives Britt-Marie through the town to her room he points out that the "For Sale" signs are in the yards of people who still have hope they can sell their homes. Those who have taken their signs down have lost hope.

According to the people of Borg, there is something universal and instinctual about the love of soccer. When Sven tries to explain to Britt-Marie why he loves the game so much he has trouble telling her exactly why. "I just mean that . . . I mean everyone loves soccer, don't they? So to speak?" (99) he stammers as Britt-Marie listens with a lack of understanding.

The map of Borg that Britt-Marie has Somebody hang in the recreation center is an important symbol in this section. It is not only a physical illustration to Britt-Marie where she is in relation to the rest of the country but it also demonstrates the need to be considerate of others. Britt-Marie could have criticized the way that Somebody hung the picture but instead she takes into consideration that Somebody is in a wheelchair and could not physically have hung the picture any higher. By overlooking this imperfection Britt-Marie is able to enjoy the effect of the light from the bathroom as it spotlights the red dot that represents Borg, a coincidence that would not have been if she had insisted the picture be hung higher.

Similarly open-mindedness is encouraged when Britt-Marie learns that Pirate's date is with another boy, not a girl. Because she has helped Pirate prepare for his date and recognizes how anxious he is she knows his feelings are real for this other boy. Her contact with homosexuality prompts her to call the girl at the unemployment office and apologize for her comments about the girl's hairstyle. It is obvious that Britt-Marie assumes just because the girl's hair is short that she is homosexual. Another note about Pirate. In this section Britt-Marie learns that the boy's given name is Ben. From this point forward Pirate will be referred to as Ben.

The author continues to add interest to his writing with the inclusion of simile. For instance when Britt-Marie insists on apologizing to Bank about her behavior in the pizzeria Bank obviously does not want to talk about her visual handicap because she "looks like someone weighing up the possibility of causing damage to the wall with the front of her head" (102). The shock the men with the beards and caps display when they



walk into the clean pizzeria is described “as if they have stepped into a parallel dimension where there’s a pizzeria just the same as the one where they usually drink their coffee, except this one is clean” (110). The way the author describes Vega’s reaction to the clean restaurant is also priceless, she reacts in shock “as if the pizzeria has been burgled in the night by a group of pedants who have cleaned it up as a way of making a political statement” (111). When Britt-Marie asks Karl if she can help him it is clear the men with beards and caps still believe she is the enemy, even though she cleaned the pizzeria. They give Karl looks “as if to clarify that, as far as they are concerned, he should not be negotiating with terrorists” (112).

Discussion Question 1

Although it is a minor theme, the author makes statements about people with disabilities in this section of chapters. What is he saying about the disabled? For that matter, what statement does he make about the way we should treat anyone who is different from us?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that the author have Fredrik pay a visit to the pizzeria? What is his demeanor toward the people in the town?

Discussion Question 3

What does the author say about hope in this section of the novel? Why is it significant that Britt-Marie’s room at Bank’s house has a balcony?

Vocabulary

solariums, preconceived, diplomatically, semantics, balmy, defiance, irascible, crockery, tentatively, contraband, harangue, pedantic, pedants, vexatious, consternation



Chapters 15-17

Summary

In Chapter 15, as Britt-Marie walks home a truck passes her too fast. In her fright she jumps for the side of the road. When she gets up, she is disoriented. A car, a BMW, is bearing down on her. It is Fredrik. He calls her names and belittles her until he is stopped by Sami's voice asking if there is a problem. Psycho is standing behind him. His smile shows his teeth. Fredrik leaves but curses them all one more time before he drives away. Britt-Marie walks away quickly and hears Sami tell her that he will see her later. He calls her coach. When Britt-Marie gathers the courage to look behind her she sees that Sami, Psycho and some other older boys are playing soccer.

Britt-Marie wakes late the following morning to the sound of someone knocking on the door. It is Vega and Omar. Vega invites her to come eat with them that evening. She kicks Omar when he rushes ahead and tells her they want to know if she will be their coach. They want to play in an upcoming competition but cannot do so if they do not have a coach. Britt-Marie tries to decline, first saying she does not know anything about soccer then that she cannot attend practice at 6 p.m. because that is dinner time. Vega orders her to come eat with them at 6 p.m., and then they will practice afterward. When the children leave Britt-Marie calls the girl at the unemployment office and asks what she needs to do to be a soccer coach. The girl suggests Britt-Marie have the children's parents sign permission slips allowing them to play on the team, and also take roll first thing during games.

In Chapter 16, when Britt-Marie arrives at the apartment where Sami, Omar and Vega live, Omar tells Britt-Marie to take off her shoes because Sami has just mopped the floor and will get angry. She takes off her shoes and goes to the kitchen where Sami directs her to a chair and tells her the food is ready. As the narration continues, Britt-Marie learns that the children's mother drives a truck abroad and that their father is gone. They are in charge of taking care of themselves. In an attempt to teach his brother good manners, Sami tells Omar to take his elbows off the table. The boy questions the need to remove his elbows and Britt-Marie backs up Sami's request. He gives her an appreciative look. After the children and Sami leave the room Britt-Marie finishes eating and cleans up. She notices Sami's cutlery drawer is properly arranged. When she is done cleaning, she joins Sami on the balcony to tell him the food was good and to compliment him on his cutlery drawer.

Sami drives the children to the recreation center parking lot for practice in his car. Vega argues with him about Psycho all the way there. Britt-Marie tries to change the subject by asking Sami why he and the older boys play soccer if they do not have a team. Sami does not understand the question and asks Britt-Marie what she means. When they reach the parking lot the children put out soda cans to represent goal posts. Britt-Marie calls roll, with some argument from Vega why roll needs to be called, and then tries to hand out permission slips but Vega and Omar have gotten into a fight. She hands their



slips to Sami instead. He suggests she make them run an exercise called Idiot. When Britt-Marie asks Sami why he does not coach the team he replies he has a criminal history and would not be allowed to work with the children. When Britt-Marie thinks about Idiot she decides it is a good name both for the exercise and the person who came up with it. There is a happiness inside her when she realizes she has intentionally made a joke.

In Chapter 17, Omar watches as Bank leaves the pizzeria with her cane and dog. He wonders if she has super powers and could sense if a soccer ball was about to hit her. Omar dares Toad to shoot the ball at Bank. They are all surprised when he hits her. Britt-Marie first tells Bank it was an accident but when she learns that Toad did actually intend to hit Bank, Britt-Marie declares Toad's action is a sign of progress because the kids do not usually hit what they aim at.

After Bank leaves Somebody rolls out of the pizzeria reminding Britt-Marie that Bank has a lemon up her ass. Meanwhile Max walks out of the pizzeria with a pizza box. He seems interested in the soccer team but looks away. Since all of the goal posts have been drunk they decide practice is finished. Britt-Marie washes and dries the soccer jerseys. On her way back to Bank's house she sees Ben standing at the bus stop. He tells her that he has to go and get his father's signature on the permission slip. He asks if she will go with him. When they pull up in front of a prison Britt-Marie grips her handbag tightly and thinks how decent people should not be visiting these places.

Analysis

Britt-Marie and Sami begin to forge a relationship in this section of chapters. Britt-Marie is at first afraid of Sami because he keeps company with Psycho. Even though Sami makes Fredrik stop harassing Brit-Marie, she is relieved to get away from Sami and the others. Notice how Psycho, with his toothy smile, is compared to an animal. "Human beings are the only animals that smile as a gesture of peace, whereas other animals show their teeth as a threat" (128-129) remembers from a documentary. She sees Psycho's grin not as a human action of showing peace and friendship but instead an animal-like move displaying aggression.

When Britt-Marie joins Sami and his family for dinner she realizes Sami is a good deal like her. He works hard to keep his family's house clean and food on the table. Despite his hard work, he is under appreciated. It is when Brit-Marie looks in Sami's cutlery drawer and sees that it is properly arranged that she decides he cannot be all bad even though he has admitted to her that he has a criminal background.

Although it is not described as such the truck that bears down on Britt-Marie causes her to flash back to the wreck that killed her sister. It is why she jumped across the road in an instinct to protect herself. She had wondered when their car was actually hit if she had been able to call out Ingrid's name if it would have made any difference in the outcome of the wreck. This flash back illustrates how Britt-Marie is still hurting and filled with fear concerning the wreck that caused her sister's death. Notice the imagery and



personification used to describe the way Britt-Marie's heart felt as the truck passed. "The truck thunders by, so close that her heart can't tell whether it's been run over or not" (127). Certainly Britt-Marie's heart was run over, figuratively, by the truck that killed her sister.

Another example of this writer's imagery developed by the perfect choice of words is seen in his description of the way darkness comes in Borg. Backman writes that "People sometimes refer to darkness as something that falls, but in places like Borg it doesn't just fall, it collapses" (126). While the idea of darkness falling emotes the idea that this onset of darkness is natural and gentle, like snow falling. The idea of darkness collapsing indicates a sudden, violent process.

The idea that soccer is universal is continued in this section of the novel when Britt-Marie notices the older boys are playing soccer. "They're playing soccer. / Playing" (130) These words will appear again later in the novel. The idea is that even bad boys enjoy soccer. Britt-Marie still cannot quite embrace the idea of playing soccer for fun. She asks why Sami and his friends play soccer if they do not have a team. Britt-Marie cannot grasp the idea of doing something just because it is fun.

Notice the way the author plays with the situation the children face because they have no formal soccer field. Instead of goals with nets they set up soda cans to represent the goalposts. From this point the soda cans and soda are referred to as goalposts. For instance as Sami watches he is "sitting on the hood of the black car, drinking one of the goalposts" (141). Later when Toad tries to answer a question posed by Omar he "answers with a sound made by children whose mouths are full of goalpost" (144). In the same way the children decide practice is over when all of the goalposts have been drunk.

Notice the interest that Max shows in Borg's soccer team when he leaves the pizzeria. This will be significant later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Britt-Marie's reaction to the truck that passes her on the road as she is walking to Bank's house. What does her reaction indicate about her emotional state in respect to the wreck that killed her sister?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the standoff at which Britt-Marie and Sami find themselves in Chapter 16 when Britt-Marie questions Sami why he and the boys play soccer even though they do not have a team.



Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Sami and Psycho as they are presented in this section of the novel. How does your opinion of these two characters change in this section (Chapter 15-17) of the novel?

Vocabulary

encapsulated, unfathomable, amicability, obliterate, incandescent, cleaving, innovation



Chapters 18-20

Summary

In Chapter 18, Britt-Marie thinks about how Kent used to always refer to people in jail as well as anyone who did anything he did not like gangsters. As she continues to think about his prejudices, she realizes that she never really figured out what exactly it was that he wanted. He just always seemed to want more and more. She had never questioned him and never complained when he did things she did not like. Because she never complained and because she left him without telling him why, she feels like the breakup was somehow her fault.

In the prison waiting area Ben tells Britt-Marie she cannot tell his mother, who is working at the hospital, where they are. Britt-Marie takes the opportunity to ask why the other children call him Pirate. Ben explains it is because his father “hid the treasure” (152). As they are waiting, Sven walks into the visiting area. The guards had called Ben’s mother from the prison because he is there at a time when his father is not allowed visitors. Sven manages to get the guards to take the permission slip so Ben’s father can sign it. His father also writes on the slip that he loves Ben. Ben tries to give the paper to Britt-Marie but Sven tells him to keep it.

After they drop Ben off at his house, Sven tells Britt-Marie that Ben’s mother is working three jobs to try to keep the family together. His father is in jail for tax evasion. As the family had gotten more desperate for money, he had done a desperate thing. When they drive past Sami and Psycho playing soccer, Sven says that Ben’s father is not like those boys. Britt-Marie explains to him that she believes Sami is not a criminal either. Sven agrees but argues that Sami does keep bad company. He explains that Sami could have been a great soccer player as a child but that he was too busy staying alive. The narration continues as Sven describes how Sami’s father had fits of anger. When he got angry Sami would take his little brother and sister and run away. Psycho would meet him outside the door and help Sami get the kids to safety.

Sven mentions something happening to their mother but Britt-Marie does not question what happened. He goes on to say that Psycho truly became a lunatic as he got older but that Sami could not find it in himself to turn his back on his friend. As they watch Psycho, Sami and the others play soccer, Sven tells Britt-Marie that he senses there is a fire in the boys that will eventually burn them up. He takes Britt-Marie to a lake, a place he says is his favorite spot in Borg and gives her a portrait that he has drawn of her. Sven attempts to invite Britt-Marie to eat dinner with him on a date but Britt-Marie goes into the house and closes the door.

In Chapter 19, the following morning Britt-Marie sits on the balcony and looks at the picture that Sven drew of her. It is proof that he really sees her. Downstairs, Britt-Marie asks Bank if she could give her some advice about being a soccer coach. She mentions she has seen all of the soccer photographs hanging around the house. Bank asks



where they are and Britt-Marie points them out. Before she leaves, Bank tells Britt-Marie nothing will help that team.

At the pizzeria that day Britt-Marie assembles her IKEA furniture. She eats a pizza before soccer practice and Sven joins her for coffee. Britt-Marie makes sure she leaves the restaurant before he has a chance to talk to her. Outside, Ben's mother is waiting for her. She expects to be criticized but the woman thanks Britt-Marie for "seeing" (162) Ben. She gives her a bottle of Faxin as a gift.

During practice that day Britt-Marie learns from Sami that people who root for Liverpool are believed to be those who think they can turn anything around. Britt-Marie did not understand so Sami described to her the game where that team came from behind to win in overtime on penalties. Britt-Marie also learns that Toad's father is Karl. She is impressed to see the usually grouchy man standing there watching the practice, almost smiling. After practice is finished, Britt-Marie allows Sven to drive her balcony furniture home but she insists on walking. She also tells him she eats at 6 p.m., her way of accepting his dinner invitation. After Sven leaves with her furniture, Vega kicks the ball to Britt-Marie. Britt-Marie kicks the ball back.

In Chapter 20, although she was supposed to have a date with Sven, Britt-Marie's day turned out to be the worst ever. She broke two fingers and gave herself a bump on her head after she fell asleep in a tanning booth trying to make the white mark on her finger where her wedding ring was go away.

That morning, before she had gone to the tanning salon, she had gone to the pizzeria to send a postcard to Kent. While Britt-Marie is there, Somebody tells her that she and Bank had once been best friends. Once Bank's vision had gone she hated soccer because she could no longer play. Bank and her father also grew apart, because without soccer they had nothing to talk about.

Britt-Marie wonders what had happened to Somebody to put her in the wheelchair but does not ask. Somebody offers that she fell off a boat when she was small. Britt-Marie denies she had wondered at all. Somebody compliments Britt-Marie and tells her that she likes the way she sees Somebody as a human, not just as a wheelchair. Before she goes home Britt-Marie asks if there is somewhere she can buy flowers for Bank. Somebody suggests she get her a beer instead. In the recreation center, Britt-Marie left out a Snickers bar and a note for the rat saying she had a date that evening.

It was after leaving the recreation center that Britt-Marie went to the tanning salon. From there she winds up in the hospital. Ben's mother cares for Britt-Marie and begs her not to get discouraged. The children from the soccer team and Sven wait in the waiting room. He has brought baguettes in a basket he wove himself. She asks him just to take her home. At Bank's house she cleans the house from top to bottom then sits on her bed and cries into a towel.



Analysis

Loyalty is a major factor that helps to maintain the relationship between Sami and Psycho. Sven describes to Britt-Marie how Psycho had once helped Sami get Vega and Omar out of the house when Sami's father would get one of his regular fits of anger. Even though Psycho has deteriorated to the point that he is truly dangerous and Sami is a good kid, Sven lumps the two together when he refers to them as criminals. He believes that Sami should be judged by the company he keeps, and says that Psycho is bad company. Sven foreshadows that "there's a fire burning in those boys, and sooner or later it will consume everyone around them, or themselves" (155).

The author suggests in this section that her decision not to give Somebody a proper name was because of the way people treated her because she is in a wheelchair. "You get that I am human, huh. Happen to have the wheelchair. I am not a wheelchair that happens to have human in it, huh" (170) somebody says to Britt-Marie when Britt-Marie denies that she wondered why Somebody was in a wheelchair. Somebody tells Britt-Marie that she like her because she is also human, she has her own failings.

The stereotype of criminals is also blown apart in this section of chapters. Ben asks Britt-Marie to go with him to get a signature from his father for his soccer permission slip. It is not until they arrive at their destination does Britt-Marie realize they are visiting Ben's father in jail. Although Kent had once referred to all criminals as "bloody gangsters," (150) Britt-Marie learns from Sven that Ben's father is not a typical criminal. He had been jailed for tax evasion, an attempt to help his family survive in tough financial times. Britt-Marie knew even Kent had cut corners on his tax returns. Even though she had not liked it he had always told her "Get over it, darling! It's not cheating if you don't get caught!" (117). Notice Britt-Marie's determination to never call Ben by his nickname of Pirate again once she learns his friends call him that because his father "hid the treasure" (152). Britt-Marie realizes the nickname must be a painful reminder of his father's mistake.

Even though Sven has asked Britt-Marie out on a date, the details of Chapter 20 represent a very low point in Britt-Marie's life. In her attempt to remove the white mark around her finger left when she removed her wedding ring, she managed to break two fingers and knock herself in the head when she went to sleep in the tanning booth. This white mark is a reminder of her relationship with Kent and the fact that it has fallen apart. Her attempt to cover the mark with a tan represents her desire to get rid of this constant reminder of this ruined relationship. Britt-Marie, however, winds up humiliating herself even further.

This low point in Britt-Marie's time in Borg is preceded by a high point, illustrated by her finally feeling the urge to kick a soccer ball. This urge comes just after Britt-Marie has successfully put together the furniture she bought from IKEA and she had stumblingly agreed to go out on a date with Sven. She is feeling very proud of herself. This time when Vega kicks the soccer ball to Britt-Marie, Britt-Marie kicks it back. The narrator



indicates that Britt-Marie, like the rest of the population of Borg “no longer knows how not to” (165).

Discussion Question 1

How does the author address the stereotype of criminals in this section (Chapter 18-20) of the novel? Think about this question in terms of Ben’s father, Sami and Psycho as well as Kent’s opinion of criminals.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of Britt-Marie’s act of kicking the soccer ball back to Vega.

Discussion Question 3

The author gives his characters lively personalities. Write a character sketch of one of your favorite characters so far. Discuss the traits and personality of the character you chose with the group.

Vocabulary

extortionate, livid, affirmatively, retort, decimated



Chapters 21-23

Summary

In Chapter 21, Bank comes home drunk and breaks all of the photographs of herself playing soccer. Britt-Marie sits on her balcony until the noise stops. Britt-Marie hears footsteps on the stairs. It is the dog coming to join Britt-Marie on the balcony. In the morning Britt-Marie sweeps up all the glass and collects the pictures. Before she leaves for work she puts the beer beside Bank, who is slumped against the wall, and tells her that it is a gift. Among her comments Britt-Marie tells Bank she assumes that her father was not a supporter of Liverpool. Britt-Marie is walking away when Bank replies that her father supported Tottenham.

At the pizzeria Somebody also smells like alcohol. She hands Britt-Marie a letter about the soccer team. Britt-Marie glances at it but does not pay much attention. She serves coffee to the men and is surprised when Karl thanks her. Sami and Psycho come into the pizzeria after lunch. Psycho looks around the place before he leaves as if he has lost something.

That evening Britt-Marie eats dinner with Somebody. Somebody has shown the courtesy of not asking Britt-Marie about her date. Britt-Marie and the children are headed out to begin practice when Max shows up. He asks if he can play with them. Because he is Fredrik's son and because Vega hates him so badly for that reason, she does not want him to play. She tells him the team is no good and that they do not want him. Omar, however, gives Max a challenge, telling him that if he can get the ball from Vega he can be on the team. After they challenge one another with the ball Vega states Max is "okay" (181) as a player.

In Chapter 22, a man and woman from the district soccer association in town drive a red car into the parking lot of the recreation center. The woman tells Britt-Marie she has to have a license to coach the team. In order to get a license, Britt-Marie has to take a course. Because it appears the children will not be able to play in that year's tournament, Bank speaks up and tells the woman to put her name in as the coach because she has a license. As Bank waves her stick at the man and woman, who obviously know Bank and treat her with animosity, she hits them several times.

After the man and woman leave Bank tells the team that she will try to help them get as good as possible but that they should not get their hopes up. The children think at first that Bank is an even worse coach than Britt-Marie because she is blind but Bank demonstrates a move with the dog that shows them that she does not need vision to know how soccer should be played. She teaches the children to talk to each other while they play so that they know where the other players are. Banks tells them if they can be heard it means they exist. Britt-Marie whispers to herself that she is here. She wishes that Sven could hear her.



At home Bank begins drinking her beer out of the bottle. Britt-Marie insists that she use a glass. She also asks what it means that Bank's father was a Tottenham supporter. Bank tells Britt-Marie it means "you always give more love than you get back" (188). Upstairs, Britt-Marie feels for the first time that her move to Borg might not have been such a bad idea. She hears a knock on the door, one she believes she has been expecting. At the door, however, is not Sven but Kent.

In Chapter 23, Britt-Marie remembers her mother's hateful comments about how she was the punishment for her mother's sins and that they had to hope they could find a man to support her. Alf and Kent were the two boys who lived on the same floor of her apartment building. Britt-Marie dated Alf. When he returned from military service Britt-Marie discovered he had another girlfriend in the town in which they lived. Britt-Marie's mother only criticized her for crying too loudly. Britt-Marie got a job as a waitress. One day she saw Kent standing on the landing in the apartment after he had gotten divorced. Britt-Marie had made his life her own.

Kent stands in Bank's doorway offering Britt-Marie flowers. He tells her that his affair with the woman is over. They drive around in his BMW. Britt-Marie is shocked to see that he is walking with a cane. He tells her the doctors have given him medication for depression. Britt-Marie gets the feeling he believes that explanation should make everything okay. He makes fun of Borg. When they pull up at Bank's house Britt-Marie notices how heavily Kent is breathing and knows he is in pain. He tells her that he needs her at home. Britt-Marie goes upstairs and packs her bags. She sits up the rest of the night.

Analysis

There is a turning point in this section of the novel. This turning point takes place when Kent knocks on Britt-Marie's door instead of Sven. Up until the point that Kent reappears, making Britt-Marie feel sympathy for him because he is so sick, Britt-Marie has developed the self-confidence to imagine herself begin able to have a relationship with someone other than Kent. She has made friends with both Somebody and with Bank and is beginning to feel somewhat at peace with herself. Even though nothing has gone the way she thought it would she has begun to realize just because things have not gone her way does not mean they are going badly. At the point that Kent reappears, she seems to begin to lose her identity and desire for self-confidence.

It appears that Britt-Marie's marriage might not have been one so much for love as for convenience. Britt-Marie was at a low point in her life and Kent seemed to see her as a person. Her mother ignored her and belittled her. Britt-Marie was made to feel as if she had no hope if she were not able to marry a rich man who would take care of her. The narrator states of Britt-Marie's situation: "It's impossible to be good enough for a parent after losing a sister who, in all important respects, was a better version of yourself. Britt-Marie did try, nonetheless" (190). She dated Kent's brother Alf until she learned that Alf was dating another girl in the same town. When Britt-Marie cried her mother scolded her



for making too much noise. For that reason Britt-Marie cries into a towel. She does not want to bother anyone else with her pain.

In this section the author teaches the reader he might wind up standing in dog pee if they underestimate certain people. This is what happens to Omar when he complains loudly when Bank takes over as coach of the team. He believes that because she has limited vision, she knows nothing about soccer. Instead, she demonstrates a move with the dog that fascinates Vega and leaves Omar standing in a puddle of dog urine because she has so correctly forecasted his movements.

Notice the frustration in Bank's act of breaking all of the pictures of herself playing soccer that are displayed in her house. Britt-Marie is not sure how to deal with Bank's anger but probably handles it best by leaving her alone. The noise and vibes of anger are so strong as Bank is crashing about that even the dog comes upstairs to seek refuge with Britt-Marie. It is the day after Bank's fit of anger that she and Britt-Marie seem to connect for the first time. It appears Bank has gotten all of her anger out by destroying the physical reminders of how proud her father was of her as a soccer player, not an individual.

Bank adds a new aspect to the definition of one's existence in this section of the novel. She teaches the children to talk to one another as they play, telling the others where they are and what they are doing. "If you can be heard then you exist," mutters hungover Bank, massaging her temples" (187). This statement particularly sticks with Britt-Marie who is desperately looking for proof that she exists. Before that proof was always given to her through Kent. Now she is not sure where her identity lies. Notice that when she whispers that she is there it is Sven that she wishes could hear her, not Kent. This shows that she does like Sven even though she is scared of a new relationship.

Even though Vega hates Max their definitions of what constitutes a team is surprisingly similar. When Max proposes playing for the team Vega tries every excuse imaginable to keep him away. Finally he tells her: "I couldn't give a shit if you're good. I just want to play. That's how a team is made" (180). This statement is strikingly similar to Vega's words to Britt-Marie when Britt-Marie suggested there was no soccer team in Borg. "We're here, aren't we? We're here! So we are a team! Even if they take our bloody pitch and our bloody club and our trainer has a bloody heart attack and goes and bloody dies on us we're a team!" (77) Vega told Britt-Marie forcefully. Both children have a deep set love of soccer and desire to play.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author brings Kent back into Britt-Marie's life? What is your reaction when she opens the door to find him standing there? Why do you feel as you do?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way that the author uses Bank as a way to teach the reader not to underestimate anyone. Why do you think Bank agrees to be the coach for the children? What does it mean that she has been teaching her dog soccer moves?

Discussion Question 3

Given the information that you have so far about Kent and Britt-Marie's relationship do you think they got married because they loved one another or was it a marriage of convenience? What does this novel have to say about allowing anyone, even one's spouse, to be the focal point of one's life?

Vocabulary

taciturn, catapults, spasmodically, accredited, conspiring, codger, stipulate, corpulence, mediocrity, unscathed



Chapters 24-26

Summary

In Chapter 24, Britt-Marie talks to the rat, telling it she feels as if it is judging her. She argues with it, defending her reasons for wanting to go back to Kent. She watches as Kent plays soccer with the children outside. She sees his bad side so clearly. She argues with the rat that she did not have to stay at home, she could have gotten a job but she also remembers how Kent would make fun of her if she suggested getting a job. Then, if she actually went to a job interview she would feel bad if one of the other applicants was a single mother, someone who actually needed a job.

Britt-Marie reminds herself of Kent's good qualities in her mind. She tells herself that he could change. Additionally, Britt-Marie knows herself well enough to know she is not ready for an unusual life. She wants life to go back to normal and is afraid of having to get to know a new person.

Standing in the door of the recreation center Britt-Marie sees Sven walk out of the pizzeria. Britt-Marie points out Kent and tells Sven that Kent is her husband. Sven is not wearing his uniform so Kent does not take him seriously when he tells Kent that he cannot leave his car where he has parked it. Kent finally realizes Sven is a cop after he has thoroughly humiliated him. Instead of becoming respectful, Kent sarcastically salutes Sven. Britt-Marie asks Kent just to move his car. After Kent drives away and Sven has gone back into the pizzeria, Britt-Marie blames herself for what has just happened. She thinks she should have known she was too old to start a new life.

Britt-Marie and Kent eat dinner together. He pats her bandage but does not ask how she hurt herself. He also begs her not to ruin their lives because he made one mistake. He tells her that she can stay in Borg until the soccer competition has been played. Before they part ways that night Britt-Marie asks Kent what soccer team he supports. Manchester United is his team.

In Chapter 25, Britt-Marie tries to defend her relationship with Kent to Bank. Bank does not seem concerned, but goes on cooking her breakfast and asking Britt-Marie if she wants some. When Britt-Marie goes on talking about Kent, Bank turns up the exhaust fan so high she cannot hear what Britt-Marie is saying. Britt-Marie does finally get Bank to tell her that people who support Manchester United are those who feel they deserve to win.

Kent's humiliation of Sven continues that morning in the pizzeria. Britt-Marie realizes Kent has made himself so comfortable there that she feels like a stranger. He is not even wearing any shoes on his propped up feet. After he finally leaves Britt-Marie deals with her frustration by cleaning.



When Vega comes in later she angrily cleans as well. Omar tells Britt-Marie that Vega is angry because she is afraid that Britt-Marie will leave. When Vega finishes cleaning and prepares to leave, Britt-Marie suggests she should put on a jacket. Vega calls her an “old bat” (216) and suggests she should go back to her old life with her “shitty” (216) husband. Vega leaves and Omar runs after her. Britt-Marie cleans the entire pizzeria. She even accepts the beer that Somebody offers her. Britt-Marie has taken only a few sips of her beer when a man with a black hood and a pistol walks in the door.

In Chapter 26, the robber orders Britt-Marie to open the register. Even though the man is pointing a gun at her, Britt-Marie tells the man he has to buy something first. Somebody crashes her wheelchair into Britt-Marie just as the robber pulls the trigger on his gun. From the floor Britt-Marie hears the door open and the voices of Vega and Omar. The masked man asks the children why they are there and Omar recognizes Psycho’s voice. Meanwhile Britt-Marie has gotten between Psycho and the children. She tells him that he has done enough. Psycho swings the pistol around the pizzeria again before he glares at Britt-Marie and leaves. Britt-Marie gathers the children into her arms and comforts them. Vega apologizes for calling her an old bat.

When they begin to calm down both children tell Britt-Marie they have to find Sami. They are afraid when he finds out what Psycho did, Sami will try to kill him. They are unable to get in touch with him. Britt-Marie brings them more blankets and cocoa. She also cleans up the broken glass and mess from the gunshot. The men with the caps and beards offer her their crossword supplements.

Analysis

Britt-Marie’s behavior when Psycho tries to rob the pizzeria with a pistol finally earns her respect with the people of Borg. This respect is illustrated when the men with beards and caps offer her the crossword supplements from their newspapers. Britt-Marie is finally accepted by these men who once hated her because she was from town.

Also endearing about Britt-Marie is her need to stick to the rules even though the store is being robbed. It is not within her realm of possibility that she can open the cash drawer of the cash register without having first made a sale. Somebody realizes that Britt-Marie’s lack of common sense is about to get her hurt and knocks her over before she can be hurt. Even though it is doubtful that Psycho would hurt Vega or Omar since he tells them he specifically waited to rob the pizzeria until after they left, Britt-Marie protects the children with her own body.

Notice that the author includes a little used literary technique in this section of the novel to make some of the situations in which Britt-Marie finds herself seem even more ludicrous. While most are familiar with the use of hyperbole, which is an exaggeration. Here the author makes use of litotes, or understatements, to make his point. For example when Bank gets out of Kent’s BMW she “accidentally taps her stick against the paintwork and it’s almost certainly not deliberate the first two times” (206). This statement indicates that Bank hit the car more than two times and that her hits were



probably intentional, even the first two times. When Psycho comes into the pizzeria to rob it the narrator indicates that Britt-Marie is “not used to having alcohol levels of this magnitude in her blood.” In an earlier sentence the reader learns that Britt-Marie has only had time for a few sips of beer, certainly not the amount to deliver a magnitude of alcohol to her system or probably even impair her at all. A simile that is included to describe the sounds Vega makes as she cleans is as follows: “It sounds like something is crawling about in the sink while she attempts to beat it to death” (215). The reader can sense Vega’s anger in the way the sounds she makes are described.

When Kent and Sven meet one another Britt-Marie finds herself in the middle of a vicious love triangle. Kent realizes that Sven is interested in Britt-Marie. His goal is to humiliate Sven as much as possible. He seems to believe that by humiliating Sven he will make Britt-Marie care for him. Instead, it has the effect of offending the reader and making him wish that Britt-Marie would stand up for Sven instead of going back to Kent.

Meanwhile, Britt-Marie defends Kent to both the rat and to Bank in what appears to be an effort to convince herself that she loves him and wants to return home with him. The main reason that she gives herself for going back to Kent is that she believes she is too old to get to know someone else. She is comfortable with Kent even if he is abusive. Even though she can so clearly see his bad side, she tries to remind herself of his good qualities and convince herself that he can change. Meanwhile, the man who made himself appear so sick he barely walk the day before is playing a lively game of soccer with the children. He even manages to leap into the air in victory after he scores a goal.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Britt-Marie does not identify the robber as Psycho even though she knows that is his identity?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Kent and Sven.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Britt-Marie’s actions during the robbery. Why do you think she acted as she did? Do you think she was brave? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

foray, melancholic, transitional, justifying, edifying, surlier, balaclava, ambivalence, dubious



Chapters 27-29

Summary

In Chapter 27 Sven and Kent arrive at the pizzeria at the same time. They are each upset that they missed the chance to be Britt-Marie's hero. Instead of being concerned about Britt-Marie, however, the two men begin arguing. Kent makes Sven angry by insisting that they calm down until the police get there. Britt-Marie tries to step between them, but they continue arguing about her even though she waves her arms at both of them. They begin to physically fight with one another and crash through the door of the pizzeria. The two continue their argument outside. Britt-Marie asks them to leave, four times, but they do not hear her. When she finally yells at them to leave they stare at her. Knowing she has their attention she asks them to leave again. Before they go she chides Kent for not asking what happened to her hand. When Sven begins trying to tell Kent how Britt-Marie feels she yells at him not to assume he knows how she feels as she herself does not know. After they finally leave, Britt-Marie begins cleaning.

In Chapter 28 Britt-Marie is irritable with the two policemen who come to question her about the robbery. The only thing she is able to tell them about the man who threatened her was that he had a pistol. After they leave Britt-Marie tries to mop the floor again but Somebody stops her. She gets Britt-Marie to eat and then gives her the keys to her car. When Britt-Marie asks when it was finished Somebody admits it has been ready for days. She did not give Britt-Marie her keys back because she did not want her to leave. Britt-Marie is frustrated when Somebody tells her the new door on her car is blue. She is so frustrated by the way the day is turning out that she tears up her list and starts a new one.

Vega and Omar continue to try to get in touch with Sami. Britt-Marie fixes dinner for them at their apartment. She realizes when both children put up their dishes after eating that something is seriously wrong. They all burst into tears at the same time. When the doorbell finally rings it is Bank with her dog and the rest of the soccer team. Bank asks if they are coming to practice but Britt-Marie responds she assumed practice had been called off because of the attempted robbery. Max asks aloud if someone stole the soccer ball. They play in the yard outside the apartment using three gloves and the dog as goalposts. Sami drives up just as they are finishing. He had no success in finding Psycho.

After Sami has the children asleep, Britt-Marie tells Sami it is not acceptable for him to go around trying to kill people. Sami says he would not have killed Psycho and then goes out on the balcony for a cigarette. Britt-Marie joins him and asks him for a cigarette. He offers her some whiskey as well. With no prompting, Sami shares with Britt-Marie that Psycho had helped Sami chase Sami's father away. Psycho had seen Sami trying to keep his father from hitting his mother and put his knife to the man's throat. When Britt-Marie questions Sami about his mother, he admits that she died in a traffic wreck. Sven helped him cover up that he was a minor raising two minor children.



Britt-Marie is surprised Sven agreed to the arrangement but Sami tells her he thinks Sven believes more in justice than rules.

In Chapter 29 Britt-Marie wakes up with a hangover but tells Bank she has the flu. At the pizzeria Somebody complains about Britt-Marie's whiskey breath. She fixes her a bloody Mary but Britt-Marie spits it out at the dog. Sven comes to the pizzeria to fix the door and apologizes to Britt-Marie. When Britt-Marie goes to get the vacuum Somebody hands her a bouquet of purple tulips from Kent.

The men in beards and caps come to drink their coffee and ask when the first match is scheduled. The women with walkers who live across the street from Bank also come into the pizzeria. They have brought fruit for the children to eat. Because she has the "flu" Britt-Marie asks Sven to drive her car with the entire team inside to the game. The car is so crowded that the dog and Toad have to ride in the trunk.

Analysis

The idea of being seen resurfaces in this section of the novel. This time it is both Sven and Kent that Britt-Marie is trying to get to see her. They are too busy fighting over Britt-Marie as if she were a possession that they cannot even be bothered to be concerned about her.

Notice the differences in the way Kent and Sven approach the situation. They arrive at the same time but Sven is the first to speak. He asks if everyone is okay. He shows concern. Kent immediately begins belittling Sven. When Kent accuses Sven of not being able to do his job, Sven is angry. It is indicated that even Somebody and Vega have not seen him this angry before. There are also differences in the way both men try to make up for their childishness. Sven fixes the door of the pizzeria. He offers Britt-Marie a verbal apology. He seems sincere. Kent sends flowers. They are her favorite flowers and show that he knows her but there is no sincere verbal apology.

Britt-Marie sums up the differences between Kent and Sven with an analogy. She compares her relationship with Kent as being at home while the possibility of a relationship with Sven is like staying in a hotel. Home is safe and familiar. Staying in a hotel is "new and curious and tentatively fumbling for switches on the wall, repeatedly turning on different lights than those she wanted to turn on" (243). Britt-Marie is afraid of starting over with Sven. She does not know his personality and he does not know her. They would have to work at learning each other's likes and dislikes, something Britt-Marie does not believe she is up for. "You wake up one morning and realize that you're too old to check in to a hotel" (244).

The stress from Britt-Marie's day causes her to do things that are uncharacteristic. First, she tears up her list. "Britt-Marie gets so worked up about this that she takes her notebook and tears out her list for the whole day, and starts one completely fresh. She has never done this in her whole life, but desperate times call for desperate measures" (230). Britt-Marie also drinks and smokes, giving herself a hangover. This drinking and



smoking is done later in the evening as she sits talking with Sami after they have gotten Vega and Omar to bed. Britt-Marie takes the time to talk to Sami about his situation and try to give him advice. Because she smokes and drinks with him she shows she is not the overbearing parent type trying to boss him around. She comes to him as another adult trying to give him advice.

For a boy who is still a minor himself, Sami is carrying a heavy load. He is trying to keep his family together even though his father is gone and his mother is dead. He knows Psycho is bad news but feels he owes his friend his loyalty. Britt-Marie learns that Psycho not only helped Sami get his siblings out of harm's way when Sami's father had fits of anger, he also helped Sami run his father away for good.

Despite the heaviness of the situation, the author puts Britt-Marie into a situation that is completely averse to her personality. Even though she clearly has a hangover, Britt-Marie decides she has the flu. Bank tells her she smells of spirits. Somebody comments of her whiskey breath. She has fun at Britt-Marie's expense by asking that she not light a match and breathe on it.

Meanwhile, the soccer competition seems to be pulling the town together toward a common goal. The elderly women on walkers who live across the street from Bank and Britt-Marie bring fruit for the children on the soccer team. The men with beards and caps ask what time the match will begin. "The men check their wristwatches. As if for the first time in ages they have a schedule to keep to" (244).

In this section Vega gives Britt-Marie an important bit of advice. "You don't have to support Liverpool from the day you're born, Coach. You can learn to do it when you're grown up" (247). In chapters past, Britt-Marie has learned that people who support the soccer team Liverpool have a basic belief that it is never too late to turn things around. Of course this goes against Britt-Marie's ideas about herself. In respect to choosing between Kent and Sven she believes it is too late for her to start getting to know another person.

Vega's advice that Britt-Marie can begin at any point to turn her life around directly relates to Britt-Marie's dependence on Kent. Even though she was able to drive she did not know how to put gas in her car. Vega talks her through how to put the fuel in and tells her that it is not too late to learn to be independent.

Finally, notice that even though Britt-Marie has assumed because of the day's stressful events, that soccer practice would be called off for the day, Bank and the children see no reason not to have practice. Max is the one who speaks up and asks if the robber stole the soccer ball. It is the only reason he can think for canceling practice. Just as Sami, Psycho and the older boys had played soccer in the street using the lights from Sami's car, the children organize a game. "So they play. In the yard outside the apartment block, between the refuse room and the bicycle stand, using three gloves and a dog as the goalposts" (233). Even in the unlikeliest of circumstances the children are able to work out their emotions in a game of soccer.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss Britt-Marie's evening with Sami. Why does she drink and smoke with him?

Discussion Question 2

After you learn that Sami is raising his siblings on his own, how does this change your opinion of him? Does it change it at all? What about his relationship with Psycho? Do you understand why he is loyal to Psycho even though Psycho is such a bad influence?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way the author injects comic relief into his novel. What are some of the techniques she uses to create this comedy?

Vocabulary

gesticulating, pension, indecorous, perpetrator, synchronized, feasibility, dubiously, preamble, deluge, paltry, frenetically, empathy



Chapters 30-31

Summary

In Chapter 30, on the way out of town Britt-Marie notices a man taking the “For Sale” sign out of his front yard. Sven says it is because they have hope now because the soccer team is going to participate in the cup. Britt-Marie also notices that a whole line of cars is following them out of town.

When they stop to pick up Max, Vega insists on going inside to use the bathroom. She is surprised to learn there is no furniture in his house. Max tells her they do not have any money, like the rest of the people in Borg. His father only keeps the BMW because he does not want people to know he has given up.

Ben is so nervous by the time they arrive at the sports hall that he has wet his pants. Britt-Marie gets him changed and cleaned up. He tells her that his mother has taken off work to come watch his game. Bank gathers the team and talks to them. Britt-Marie suggests they try to make a good first impression. They are approached by the man and woman from the soccer association just as Vega and Toad get into a scuffle about a can of soda. Pandemonium ensues. Kent saves the day when he keeps a coach from an opposing team and Bank from falling over a railing.

The soccer association woman tells them that a complaint has been made because two team members do not have the exemptions they need. Vega cannot play because she is a girl while Toad cannot play because he is too young. Kent accuses the coach of being afraid to play against a team with a girl and a younger player. She and Toad are given their exemptions. Britt-Marie thanks Kent for the flowers. He says that he got them from Karl, who has a greenhouse in his backyard. Kent takes a seat in the stadium next to Sven.

In the first game Dino gets tackled several times by a boy who is bigger than he is. When the boy tries to tackle Dino a third time Max stops him even though he gets benched. Ben shoots the ball and scores a goal. Ben’s mother runs onto the pitch even though the officials try to stop her. She and Ben dance together.

In Chapter 31 the narrator indicates that at one point in a person’s life he will ask himself how he should live his life. Britt-Marie tries to remember the times in her life that she has been happy. Watching Ben score his goal was one of these times.

After the games are over she is in the hospital bathroom trying to clean the blood from Vega’s jersey. Vega bloodied her nose, cut her forehead and busted her lip because she jumped for a ball as the other team was about to make a goal. Britt-Marie cannot understand why soccer would be so important to Vega she would hurt herself. Vega admits to Britt-Marie that she loves soccer so much that she does not feel pain when she is playing. She asks Britt-Marie what she dreams about and Britt-Marie tells her that



she dreams about Paris. Vega explains that for her, soccer is like Paris for Britt-Marie. Vega asks why Britt-Marie never when to Paris. Britt-Marie indicates she was never the type of person to take chances and now she feels she is too old.

When they leave the bathroom and go into the waiting room Fredrik yells at Britt-Marie because the doctors believe Max has a broken leg. Fredrik is upset because Max may miss his elite hockey training camp. Vega asks if Fredrik ever asked Max if he wanted to go to that camp.

Even though the team had lost the first two games and tied the second, they were ecstatic. It is the first time in a long time the team from Borg has not lost a game. Both Vega and Max had stopped the other team from scoring even though they had gotten hurt.

Later at the hospital, Britt-Marie approaches Fredrik and asks him if he has ever loved anything the way that the children love soccer. As he thinks about that, Ben's mother tells him that Max's leg should be ready for hockey in six months. Fredrik looks up and asks when his son will be able to play soccer.

Analysis

These two chapters represent a climax in the novel. The soccer team from Borg has made their village proud by not losing all three of their games. They lost two games while one ended in a tie. The people from Borg celebrate just as if they had won a national cup.

Even though she is excited by the game, Britt-Marie still does not understand why Vega would put so much stock in not losing a game that she would be willing to get hurt. Vega tries to explain to her how much soccer means to her. She learns that Britt-Marie dreams of going to Paris and compares her love of soccer to Britt-Marie's love of Paris. Later, when Fredrik is angry because Max has broken his leg playing soccer and has put his hockey career in jeopardy Vega asks him if he ever even asked Max if he really wanted to play hockey. Fredrik's question to the nurse, when his son will be ready to play soccer, indicates he has taken both Britt-Marie and Vega's suggestions that he is pushing Max into hockey, into consideration.

Just the act of the soccer team participating in the competition seems to help restore hope in the town. Signs of hope include the line of cars following the team out of town to support them in the competition. Sven tells Britt-Marie the man taking the "For Sale" sign out his front yard is also a sign of hope. Sven believes it indicates the man has decided to stay around and see what will happen.

Max's story is continued and the reader learns again the possibility of assumptions being wrong. The people of the town have assumed that just because Max's father still drives his BMW the family is financially stable. Vega learns differently when she pushes her way into Max's house to use the bathroom. Even though things appear good on the



outside, the family is living in an empty house. They have had to sell their furniture in order to pay the bills.

Meanwhile, the author helps the reader refocus on the decision before Britt-Marie. At the point the reader believes she has two choices. She can stay in Borg or she can go with Kent. Since she tells Vega she was never the one to take chances, the reader can assume that Britt-Marie is leaning toward going home with Kent.

Discussion Question 1

What does it mean for Borg that the soccer team does not lose one of its games? How does this simple act help to restore hope to the town?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Fredrik's anger that his son was injured playing soccer. Why do you think he asks the nurse when Max will be able to play soccer again?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Vega hopes to convey to Britt-Marie when she tells her she can choose to be a supporter of Liverpool as an adult?

Vocabulary

jurisdiction, deranged, implacable, consolation, banal, euphorically, coagulated



Chapters 32-35

Summary

In Chapter 32, Britt-Marie sits outside the emergency room. Sven sits beside her. She tells him how wonderful it is for her to feel happy about something again. When she asks him to drive the children home, he clarifies that Kent will be driving her home. She wants to try to explain to him that she's too old to fall in love again but cannot do so. When Kent and Britt-Marie reach Bank's house, Kent tells her to get her stuff so they can leave. He belittles her desire to wait and give her leave but agrees to let her stay that night and wait to leave the following morning. He fidgets with his cell phone as she tries to talk to him about her needs.

After Kent leaves, Britt-Marie walks by the pizzeria where she hears singing. In the recreation center she sits waiting for the rat, but he does not come. Britt-Marie calls the girl at the unemployment office and tells her that she needs to hand in her resignation. When the girl asks how the match went Britt-Marie finds herself telling the girl all about her experience in Borg. The narrator describes how the girl tells Britt-Marie that hers is one of the few sunny stories that she hears in her job.

Sami stops at the recreation center and tells Britt-Marie he is going into town to help Psycho. He asks her to look after Vega and Omar if anything were to happen to him. He tells her he has chosen her because he knows that she is not one to walk out. Sami drives her to Bank's house on his way out of town. Even though he asks her not to wait for him to come home she does anyway.

In Chapter 33, Britt-Marie has gone to the recreation center where she is telling the rat she is going home. Sami has still not come back and she could no longer stand waiting at Bank's house. When a car does finally pull into the parking lot, Britt-Marie goes out to meet it. The narrator describes that Psycho's enemies found him outside a bar. They pulled a knife on him but Sami stepped between them. Back in the parking lot, Sven gets out of his patrol car. He is crying. Britt-Marie falls to the ground.

In Chapter 34, Sven gets Britt-Marie into his car and they find Vega. She says Omar is headed out of town. They have to catch him. Sven stops the car in which Omar is riding and Omar steps out. When he sees Vega, Omar falls to his knees. The two other young men in the car leave without Omar. In the police car Sven, Britt-Marie, Omar and Vega drive to the lake. Vega throws the pistol that Omar had with him into the water.

Britt-Marie stays with Vega and Omar several days. One night Britt-Marie wakes to slamming sounds in the apartment. Vega is cleaning. Britt-Marie joins her. It is on a Sunday when Sami is buried next to his mother. Everyone in Borg attends the funeral and a gathering afterward at the pizzeria. A continuous thumping draws both Vega and Britt-Marie outside. Even though Max is on crutches he is kicking a soccer ball against



the wall of the recreation center. When he sees Vega he lets the ball roll to her. She bends and touches the ball, and then begins crying.

In Chapter 35, the children begin to play soccer. More and more join in the game. A man, Dino's uncle, thanks Britt-Marie for coaching the team. Sven and Britt-Marie talk for a moment. She asks for assurances that Vega and Omar will be okay. She sees Kent outside playing soccer with the children. Sven tells Britt-Marie that more and more children had been showing up for soccer practice since Sami's death. He tells her that the game "forces life to move on" (296) When he tells her he loves soccer too much to pick any one favorite soccer team Britt-Marie believes his answer is poetic. Before they part Sven tells her that every time he hears a knock on the door he will hope that it will be her.

Britt-Marie goes to clean up the pizzeria but realizes someone else has already cleaned. She meets Kent at his car after the children have gone home. He tells her that she has to let the authorities take care of the children. She asks permission to deal with one more errand before they leave town.

Analysis

The joyous tone in the previous chapters deflates as tragedy strikes. It is like that sense of exhaustion one feels after a very exciting day, doubled with the threat that a loved one is in danger. This feeling of foreboding is strengthened by the approaching need for Britt-Marie to make a decision if she wants to go back home with Kent or if she wants to try for a life of her own.

Even though Britt-Marie has made it appear that she plans to go home with Kent, it appears she is not sure about that decision. She tells Sven she will be going home with Kent. She tells herself she will be going home with Kent but when he pushes her to leave that night she refuses to do so. She sees the parallels between herself and Sami. "Sami went to town to protect someone who doesn't deserve it, and Britt-Marie is getting ready to go home for the same reason. Because if we don't forgive those we love, then what is left? What is love if it's not loving our lovers even when they don't deserve it?" (283).

The author leaves off humor to describe the raw grief as Sven, Britt-Marie, Vega and Omar learn about Sami's death. Each deals with their grief differently. Britt-Marie collapses. Vega searches for her younger brother. She knows she needs to save him. Sven also is destroyed with grief. He had forecasted the boys would come to nothing good but had probably hoped the circumstances would turn. In his grief, Omar gets a pistol and seeks revenge.

The pistol is an important symbol in this section as it represents hate and revenge. If Omar had gone after the boys who killed Sami the vicious cycle of revenge would only have continued. As a symbol that they want to break this cycle, Vega throws the pistol into the lake.



Meanwhile, is it once again soccer that helps heal and bring the town together. It is Max who stands outside the pizzeria during a gathering after Sami's funeral kicking a soccer ball against a wall even though he is still on crutches. Vega is drawn to the sound and to the ball. Notice the imagery at the end of Chapter 34. The narrator indicates that the sound the ball makes as Max kicks it sounds like a heartbeat, a sign of life. As Vega cries over the soccer ball that Max kicks to her Liverpool wins its game. It is a sign that it is not too late for even Vega and Omar, who are facing the worst of circumstances to come back from behind.

Just as Sami and Britt-Marie dealt with the tragedies in their lives, now Vega is dealing with her own tragedy. Remember when Britt-Marie tried to talk to Sami back in Chapter 28 about what he felt with his mother dead. He replied: "I don't have time to feel things, I have to take care of them." Vega's response when Britt-Marie tries to talk to her about her grief from Sami's death is frighteningly similar: "I don't have time to feel things. I have to take care of Omar," the girl interrupts vacantly" (288). Vega also picks up on Britt-Marie's cleaning obsession. Just like Britt-Marie cleaned after her sister died, Vega cleans after her brother's death. Britt-Marie shows compassion for the girl by helping her clean.

Discussion Question 1

How does Kent's continued belittling of Britt-Marie make you feel about the idea of her going back home with him? Do you think Britt-Marie is questioning what she wants to do? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author indicate a change in atmosphere after the soccer competition is finished? Is the change sudden or gradual?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author incorporate the idea that soccer is a universal game in this section (Chapters 32-35) of the novel? How does it help Vega to grieve?

Vocabulary

actualizing, levitates, blithering, futile, nonplussed



Chapters 36-38

Summary

In Chapter 36, Britt-Marie, backed by Kent, approaches the local council to ask that a soccer field be built in Borg. The committee, however, is in meetings and is unable to meet with them. Britt-Marie tells Kent she knows he has meetings but she wants a soccer field for Vega because the girl does not feel any pain while playing soccer. Kent promises they will come back the next day. He adds he has only one meeting, a meeting with the car dealer to sell his car. He says his company is bankrupt because of the financial crisis. He was wrong when he said it was over.

Britt-Marie and Kent visit town hall for the next three days before they are allowed to meet with a member of the committee. They are turned away. Kent promises Britt-Marie they will come back the next day. Britt-Marie does not notice a vengeful look in Kent's eyes. On the fifth day Britt-Marie is so frustrated that Kent has to threaten to write items in ink on her list in order to get her to go to town hall. She is angry to see the woman from the soccer association there believing she is there to fight against them. The woman says that Kent asked her to help them.

In the meeting with the council members Britt-Marie learns that the businesses in Borg have all signed a petition requesting that a soccer field be built in their town. The council has also been contacted twenty-one times by a girl at the unemployment office. Because of all of the pressure they have received the council members tell Britt-Marie she can either keep her job or can request that the soccer field be built. They cannot afford to do both. The narrator indicates that the choice is unreasonable.

In Chapter 37 Britt-Marie visits Sami's grave to explain to him the unreasonable choice that the choice the council members have given her. On a positive note, she tells him the graveyard is tidy and that she will never regret having come to Borg.

Before visiting Sami's grave she had sat in the recreation center by herself crying and saying goodbye to the building. A social services worker knocked on the door and said she hoped she might understand Vega and Omar better if she were able to see the recreation center they loved so much. Britt-Marie wanted to ask if it would make a difference if someone volunteered to take the children but she did not because Toad's parents were there asking for custody of Vega and Omar. Somebody suggested they could come live with her, with all of the village raising them. Britt-Marie snunk out behind them.

That evening Britt-Marie sees grown men, the ones with beards and caps, playing soccer in the parking lot. As she walks down to road toward Bank's house she sneaks up to Sven's house even though he is not home and knocks on the door. At Bank's house the "For Sale" sign has been removed. Bank is watching soccer. She tells Britt-Marie that she supports Aston-Villa because no one else does. Britt-Marie packs her



things and cleans the house. Kent knocks on the door. Britt-Marie hesitates. She is crying and Kent asks what she is doing. She informs him that the game between Liverpool and Aston is tied, she thinks Liverpool will win. He tells her that he will wait only one more day then he will go home alone.

Britt-Marie heads to the recreation center. She is so lost in thought she runs past Omar and Vega. They were coming to watch the rest of the game with Britt-Marie. They all eat at Bank's house that night. Before Vega and Omar leave with the social services worker, Omar asks Britt-Marie what she will be doing the next day. She tells him both Kent and Sven will be waiting for her to knock on their doors. Vega asks Britt-Marie to do her a favor by just getting in her car and driving. The following morning Britt-Marie packs her car. She goes to a door and knocks.

In Chapter 38 Britt-Marie realizes that all of the choices she has made in her life have been about someone else. The door upon which Britt-Marie knocked is opened and she is both surprised and disappointed that the person there expected her. Omar takes her outside and shows her cans of gasoline lined up along the side of the road. Vega explains the members of the team collected money to buy her enough gas to drive to Paris, and then to drive back. Britt-Marie gets in the car and drives. The narrator suggests she might or might not have knocked on another door before she left Borg.

The narrator explains how Liverpool will nearly win the English Premier League that year. Regardless of the near win, the seasons will move on and a new season of games will start. The narration continues that a person has to slow down when they go through Borg to see what is left there. Of these things there is a soccer field and a soccer club, donations that show Britt-Marie was once a member of that village.

Analysis

The time has come for Britt-Marie to make a choice. Notice the twist as the author introduces a third choice for Britt-Marie, one she had never considered. The children help Britt-Marie with this choice by buying her enough gas to drive to Paris. Although it is assumed that Britt-Marie does drive to Paris, the narrator does not tell the reader that specifically. He leaves her final decision unclear.

The author leaves Britt-Marie's fate unclear because he wants the reader to focus on what Britt-Marie has done in Borg. She has left proof that she was there. Back in Chapter 3 when the girl at the unemployment office asked Britt-Marie why she wanted a job Britt-Marie told her it was because she wanted "someone to know I'm here" (21). The soccer field and thriving soccer club are proof of her presence. This proof that she existed is what motivated Britt-Marie through the course of the novel though she wanted to feel she existed for Kent. Just like she did not go about covering up the white line left from her wedding ring the way she had hoped to, she also did not go about proving her existence in the way she had hoped. As she had come to realize about the wedding ring line, the outcome is the same.



Kent does demonstrate how well he knows Britt-Marie in this section of the novel. In order to motivate her to go the town council one more time to speak her piece about the soccer field, he threatens to write things on her list in ink. He is the one who pushes to have the soccer field built and even organizes the people of Borg to support Britt-Marie. Surprisingly, Kent also tells Britt-Marie that he was wrong about his view of the financial crisis. This happens when he tells her that he will have to sell the BMW because they are bankrupt. It appears, however, that all Kent has done and the changes that he appears to have made are not enough for Britt-Marie to be certain he is the direction in which she wants to go.

Discussion Question 1

Did you ever consider Britt-Marie had a choice other than going with Kent or staying in Borg? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that the author leave Britt-Marie's final destination a mystery?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss why it is so important to Britt-Marie that a soccer field be built for Vega.

Vocabulary

umbrage, expertise, agape, intractable, galvanized, surreal, deplore



Characters

Britt-Marie

Britt-Marie is the main character of this novel. She is a 63-year-old woman who finds herself suddenly single when she leaves her husband because he had an affair. She desperately wants to go back to her old life but at the same time experiment with self-sufficiency.

Britt-Marie's first step after leaving her husband is to go to an employment agency and try to get herself a job. Because she has no higher education and has not worked outside her home since she has gotten married the girl who works with Britt-Marie tells her it may be difficult to find her a job. The girl, however, does find Britt-Marie a temporary position as the caretaker of the recreation center in Borg.

If Sigmund Freud were to describe Britt-Marie he would call her anally retentive. She is precise about cleaning and germs. She orders her day with a list on which she cannot write in ink because ink is permanent. She requires familiar structure and organization in order to feel comfortable. Although she is strange, Britt-Marie has developed her obsessions honestly. When she was only a child, her sister, Ingrid, was killed in a car wreck. Even before she lost her sister Britt-Marie was a people pleaser. After her death Britt-Marie dedicated herself to cleaning things up and making things nice even though few people have noticed her efforts.

Britt-Marie feels she has been ignored and under appreciated for the majority of her life. She credits her sister as being one person who really saw her and understood her. It was Ingrid who sparked Britt-Marie's desire to go to Paris. After Ingrid's death Britt-Marie felt her parents never forgave her for surviving the car wreck that killed Ingrid. She has always felt that her parents preferred Ingrid to her anyway. For a short while after they were married, Britt-Marie believed that Kent saw her but at some point had stopped caring.

Without even intending to Britt-Marie has the effect of breathing hope into a community that was close to dying. She knows nothing about soccer and does not even like it but is persuaded by the children of the town to take on the position of soccer coach. Britt-Marie applies herself to this position and soon finds herself caring deeply for the children. She befriends Somebody, the disabled woman who runs the pizzeria, and Bank, the town's former soccer star who is losing her vision. As Britt-Marie works with the children the people of the town become more and more interested and involved in supporting the team.

When Vega's brother, Sami, is killed trying to protect his friend, Britt-Marie feels compassion and empathy for the young girl. She realizes what that pain is like and wants Vega to have an escape from her pain. Because Vega once told Britt-Marie she did not feel pain when she was playing soccer, Britt-Marie decided it would be fitting to



demand that a soccer field be built in Borg. Although Britt-Marie becomes so frustrated she wants to give up, with the help of Kent and the other friends she has made through her job in Borg, she manages to get the field built.

Meanwhile Britt-Marie and Sven, the police officer in Borg share a mutual attraction for one another. Their attempts to date are thwarted when Kent, Britt-Marie's husband, shows up to take her back home with him. At first Britt-Marie agrees to go. She believes she is better off with a person with whom she is already familiar than trying to get to know a new person. The children on the soccer team, however, have learned through Vega that Britt-Marie has always wanted to go to Paris. They manage to collect enough fuel for her to make the trip there and back.

Bank

Bank is a 30-year-old woman who was once Borg's star soccer player. As she has aged, she has lost a good deal of her vision. Even though she is really only visually impaired, she tells people she is blind because they ask fewer questions if they think she is blind.

Bank returned to Borg when her father died. She hopes to leave again once she sells his house. In the meantime, Bank agrees to rent a room to Britt-Marie.

Because Britt-Marie does not have a coaching license Bank agrees to help coach the team. When she gets immersed in soccer once again Bank become more lively and happy. By the end of the novel she has even decided to take her father's house off the market and stay in Borg for a while.

One of Bank's notable habits is that of hitting people and objects with the walking cane she carries with her. She tends to motion with it when she talks and does not pay attention to who might be within hitting range. Britt-Marie suspects that not all of the damage that Bank does with her cane is accidental.

Although Bank is no longer able to play soccer, the people of Borg still refer to her by the nickname she earned as a soccer player. Somebody told Britt-Marie that having Bank on Borg's soccer team was like having money in the bank.

Vega

Vega is the sister of Omar and Sami. She helps Somebody in the pizzeria. Vega is the best player on Borg's soccer team. She is also the only girl on the team. Vega is high-spirited and competitive, reminding Britt-Marie of her sister, Ingrid. She stands up to Fredrik, the man who owns the trucking company and fired all of the people in Borg when the economy got bad, when he comes into the pizzeria.



It is Vega who appears to be the spokesperson for the soccer team. She persuades Britt-Marie to be the coach of the soccer team and then is later the one who stands up to Max and tells him that he cannot join their team.

Sami describes Vega very properly. He says that “Vega’s afraid, even though she mainly seems angry” (238). Vega tells Britt-Marie that when she plays soccer she does not feel any pain. Britt-Marie notices that when Vega handles the soccer ball she holds it as if it were someone she loved. Britt-Marie uses this information about Vega when she decides to insist that a soccer field be built in Borg. She knows it is one way of helping the child deal with her pain. In return, it is Vega who suggests to Britt-Marie that she take the opportunity and go to Paris. She even has the team collect money to buy gas for the trip.

Sami

Sami is Vega and Omar’s older brother. Even though he is a minor himself, Sami is raising his brother and sister because their mother is dead and their father ran away.

Britt-Marie approves of Sami because he has an impeccably organized cutlery drawer. The two develop a close relationship even though they are very different from one another. Sami is a self-professed criminal, which Britt-Marie does not approve but reaches out to him on his level when she agrees to drink whiskey and smoke cigarettes with him as they talk about Psycho the day that Psycho tried to rob the pizzeria.

Before Sami goes to protect his friend he asks Britt-Marie if she will take care of Vega and Omar in the event that something were to happen to him. Britt-Marie sees Sami in herself when she considers that she is thinking of going back to Kent, a man who does not deserve her while Sami is risking his life to protect his friend, Psycho, who does not deserve it. Sami is killed by Psycho’s enemies.

Fredrik

Fredrik is the man who owns the trucking company in Borg. The people of the town do not like Fredrik because he fired everyone at the trucking company during the financial crisis.

Fredrik enjoys giving people the impression that he has a good deal of money. He drives a BMW and wears expensive clothes. One day Vega pushes her way into their house to use the bathroom and discovers that the family has had to sell all their furniture because they are broke.

He is the coach of the hockey team and forces his son to play on that team even though Max would rather be playing soccer. At the hospital where Max is being treated for a broken leg Britt-Marie confronts Fredrik about Max’s love of soccer. Fredrik finally agrees to let Max play soccer with his permission.



Somebody

Somebody is the first person who Britt-Marie meets in Borg. Somebody runs the pizzeria/corner shop/car workshop/post office. The narrator never gives this character a name. She is always referred to simply as Somebody.

Somebody is in a wheelchair. She tells Britt-Marie that she fell off a boat when she was little. She and Bank were once close friends when they played soccer together but since Bank lost her sight they have turned into just drinking buddies.

Somebody tries to help Britt-Marie acclimate to life in Borg by explaining the financial situation there. She also talks to Britt-Marie about the different residents of Borg and their personalities. One of her favorite things to say about a person who is particularly grumpy is that he has “a lemon up his arse” (35).

Ben aka Pirate

Ben, who is also known by the nickname of Pirate, is one of the boys on Borg's soccer team. He is the boy who asks Britt-Marie to fix his hair for his date. He surprises Britt-Marie when his date turns out to be a boy.

Britt-Marie learns that Ben's father is in prison for tax evasion. The other children call him Pirate because his father "hid the treasure." After Britt-Marie learned the origins of Ben's nickname she refused to call him by that name any longer.

At the soccer competition it is Ben who makes the first goal for Borg. The residents of Borg respond as if the team had just won the national title in soccer. His mother runs onto the field and the two dance together in celebration.

Magnus aka Psycho

Magnus, who is most often referred to as Psycho, is a teen whom most people in the town believe is dangerous. Psycho has gotten in with the wrong crowd and owes a good many people money. At one point in the novel, Psycho attempts to rob the pizzeria.

Even though Sami knows that Psycho is no good, Sami is loyal to Psycho because Psycho helped him get his siblings out of the house to safety on the nights when Sami's father would have his fits of anger. One night when Psycho found Sami trying to keep his father from hitting his mother Psycho ran off Sami's abusive father by holding a knife to his throat.



Sven

Sven is the policeman in Borg. He develops a crush on Britt-Marie. Sven enjoys learning things by taking courses. He has taken art classes, pottery classes, sushi classes and art classes.

Sven loves his community, but at the same time he seems more interested in justice than rules. He is the one who helps Sami keep his younger brother and sister after their mother dies. Even though he helped Sami, Sven is worried that Sami's future is not very bright. He is afraid Psycho will cause trouble for Sami. Sven is correct. Even though Sven forecasts what might happen to Sami, he is unable to conceal his grief when he is killed.

The Rat

Britt-Marie sees this rat the first day she arrives in Borg. Because she does not want poison to be put out in the recreation center and she does not want chocolate in a trap on her clean floors she decides to make a deal with the rat. She tells it that she will provide it with dinner at 6 p.m. each day as long as it does not allow her to lay on the floor and stink if she dies.

The rat, which is described as being as big as a flower pot, turns into a sounding board for Britt-Marie. When Britt-Marie tries to convince herself she wants to remain with Kent she talks out loud to the rat. She imagines it is being critical of her decision.

Ben's Mother

Ben's mother works at the hospital. Sven tells Britt-Marie that Ben's mother is working three jobs trying to keep the family above water. She is the one who takes care of Britt-Marie after she breaks her fingers and then cares for Max after he breaks his leg in the soccer tournament.

After Britt-Marie goes with Ben to the prison where his father is incarcerated to get his signature on the soccer permission slip Ben's mother thanks Britt-Marie for paying attention to her son. She also encourages Britt-Marie not to give up after Britt-Marie's accident in the tanning salon.

Max

Max is Fredrik's son. Even though Fredrik wants his son to play hockey Max would rather play soccer. He approaches the kids in Borg to see if he can play with them. He has to play against Vega before he is allowed to join the team. It is said of Max that even though he talks like a person from the city, he plays soccer like someone from Borg.



During the soccer match, Max breaks his leg when he stops the opposing team from scoring a goal. His injury angers his father because it means Max will not be able to participate in the elite hockey training camp that his father wants him to attend.

Kent

Kent is Britt-Marie's husband. He is self-centered and hateful to Britt-Marie even though she takes pains in caring for him. Britt-Marie brags about her husband because she believes he is a successful entrepreneur. It is only while she and Kent are trying to reconnect that Britt-Marie learns that Kent's business is actually bankrupt.

Kent's one supportive action toward his wife in this novel is when he fights so hard to help Britt-Marie get the soccer field built in Borg. In all of his other dealings he is selfish and inconsiderate of her.

Unemployment Office Girl

The unemployment office girl is the one that Britt-Marie deals with when she tries to get a job after she leaves her husband. Although the girl is at first frustrated by Britt-Marie's quirky way of doing things, the girl later compliments Britt-Marie by telling her that she is one of her few "sunny" stories from her job at the unemployment office. She also bombards the Borg council with requests that a soccer field be built in that town, helping Britt-Marie achieve her goal.

Karl

Karl is a man who visits the pizzeria daily to pick up packages he has ordered. Britt-Marie suspects at one point that Karl may be purchasing material to make a bomb. It turns out the Karl actually is growing plants and flowers. At the conclusion of the novel he opens a florist shop in Borg. Karl is the father of the boy nicknamed Toad who plays on Britt-Marie's soccer team.

The Dog

Bank takes this white dog with her everywhere she goes. Because she also has a cane and wears sunglasses, people assume she is blind. Even though he is not technically a seeing eye dog, he does help her to get around. Bank has also taught him how to do tricks. On the night that Bank comes home angry and smashes all of the pictures of herself as a soccer player the dog goes to Britt-Marie for companionship and comfort.



Ingrid

Ingrid was Britt-Marie's sister. She was killed in a car crash when she and Britt-Marie were still children. Although she was much different from Britt-Marie, Britt-Marie loved Ingrid because she was one of the few people who saw Britt-Marie and appreciated her. It was Ingrid who instilled in Britt-Marie the desire to visit Paris.

Omar

Omar is Vega's younger brother. He is known for stealing things. He describes himself to Britt-Marie as a fixer. Even though she is not very world wise, Britt-Marie realizes that the boy steals things that he sells.

Patrik "Toad" Ivers

Patrik "Toad" Ivers is the son of Karl. He is most often referred to as Toad. At the soccer competition the officials almost do not allow Toad to play because he is so young. After Kent embarrasses the coach Toad is given an exemption and allowed to play.

Bank's Old Man

Bank's old man was the soccer coach in Borg until he suddenly died of a heart attack. He was proud of his daughter, who was the star soccer player. After Bank lost her sight and she was unable to play, the two no longer had anything in common.



Symbols and Symbolism

Cutlery

The proper organization of cutlery drawers is symbolic of the way that Britt-Marie believes life should be ordered. Those who have properly organized drawers are civilized, Britt-Marie believes, while those who do not are barbarians.

Baking Soda

Baking soda is a symbol of Britt-Marie's desire to keep things clean and nice. In fact, it is one of her favorite cleaners. Britt-Marie learned about baking soda when her sister died. She found out that it was because the body stopped producing sodium bicarbonate, the chemical name for the active ingredient in baking soda, that it began to smell.

Soccer Ball

The soccer ball is symbolic of the beginning of Britt-Marie's life in Borg. Britt believes her car has exploded when she pulls into the parking lot at the recreation center but it was actually only hit by a soccer ball. While standing in the parking lot Britt-Marie is also hit in the head by a soccer ball.

IKEA Furniture

The piece of IKEA furniture that Britt-Marie buys with the intention of putting together by herself is a symbol of her determination to prove to herself that she is capable of putting the piece together, unlike Kent's belief women could not put things together.

Faxin

Faxin symbolizes Britt-Marie's desire to see and be seen by the world. It is her favorite cleaner because she once saw an advertisement indicating the use of that cleaner would allow her to see the world.

White Line on Britt-Marie's Finger

This white line on Britt-Marie's ring finger where she once wore her wedding ring is a symbol of her separation from Kent.



Red Dot on Borg Map

This red dot on the Borg map symbolizes Britt-Marie's location in the world. By being able to physically see where she is on a map, Britt-Marie feels comforted and grounded.

BMW

The BMW is a symbol of wealth. Both Fredrik and Kent drive BMWs because they believe others are impressed with their show of money. In fact, Fredrik hangs onto his BMW even after he and his family have had to sell their furniture because he does not want people to think that he has given up.

Britt-Marie's Handbag

Britt-Marie's handbag is a symbol of her obsession. She not only always has this handbag with her, she also clings to it more tightly in what she sees as dangerous situations. As Britt-Marie becomes more forceful, she begins using her bag as a weapon, often hitting people who do not please her with it.

Bank's Stick

Bank's walking stick is a symbol of her temper. Even though she intends for people to believe the stick is a cane used by blind people Bank is actually only visually impaired, not entirely blind. She uses the stick often on people who anger her or who are in her way.

A Pistol

This pistol is a symbol of the cruelty and unfairness in the world. It first surfaces when Psycho tries to rob the pizzeria. Later, Sven takes this pistol away from Omar and convinces him not to try to get revenge on the people who killed Sami. Vega throws this gun into the lake. The act is symbolic of Vega's desire to do away with the cruelty and unfairness.

Crossword Supplements

These crossword supplements given to Britt-Marie by the hat-wearing, bearded men in the pizzeria are a peace offering after Britt-Marie keeps Psycho from killing anyone when he tries to rob the pizzeria. Britt-Marie had once asked the men if she could have their crossword supplements but they refused to give them to her when they discovered she was from the city.



Settings

Unemployment Office

The unemployment office is the place where Britt-Marie goes to register for a job. This is the opening setting of the novel.

Borg

Borg is the small, dying village to which Britt-Marie is sent to work for three-weeks as the caretaker of the recreation center. The village is described as having a road that runs through it that leads in both directions away from the town. There are few businesses open in the village. Many of the homes there are for sale.

Recreation Center

The recreation center is the place that Britt-Marie was hired to work for three weeks before it was scheduled to close. It is at this recreation center that the children gather to watch soccer games on television. The parking lot of this center is the place where the children practice soccer since the village's soccer field was sold.

The Corner Shop/Pizzeria/Car Workshop/Post Office

The most significant event that happens in the pizzeria is Psycho's attempt to rob the store. Somebody appears to be the only full-time worker at this multi-purpose business. When Britt-Marie is not working at the recreation center, she is often cleaning and serving coffee at the pizzeria.

The Prison

When Britt-Marie asks all of the children on the soccer team to have their parents sign a permission slip to play soccer, Britt-Marie goes with Ben to the prison where his father is being held in order to get his signature.

The Lake

Sven drives Britt-Marie to this lake during one of their drives together. He wants to show her that there are still some nice places in Borg, he says this is his favorite spot. Later, Vega throws the pistol Omar had planned to use to kill the boys who killed Sami, into the lake.



The Sports Hall

It is at the sport hall that the competition is scheduled. The team from Borg does not win but one of the games does end in a tie, the first time the team from Borg has not lost in a long time. The members of the team make the people of the village proud because they try so hard.

The Hospital

The hospital is the place where Britt-Marie is taken for treatment after she hurts herself when she tries to fill in the tan line where she once wore her wedding ring. It is after the soccer competition that Ben and Vega wind up in this same hospital after they are both injured during the final game.

Themes and Motifs

Soccer as a Common Language

Soccer is central to the novel in that it is presented as a common form of language. Nearly everyone in Borg loves soccer and plays soccer. Soccer is so ingrained in the community that people's personalities are defined by the team for which they root. In the community of Borg, soccer has the ability to draw people together, motivate people and comfort them.

"The only two noticeable things in Borg are soccer and the pizzeria, because these tend to be the last things to abandon humanity" (23). This sentence in Chapter 4 indicates how deeply ingrained soccer is in this community. The pictures of soccer jerseys and soccer balls in the recreation center and pizzeria underscore the importance of the game for this community. The children continue to play the game even though their soccer field has been sold and all of their best players have abandoned them to play on the team in a larger town.

Britt-Marie is perhaps the only person in Borg who does not understand the love of soccer when she first arrives in that small village. Sven tries to explain to her, "I just mean that . . . I mean everyone loves soccer, don't they? So to speak?" (99). Sven shares with Britt-Marie that people in the town love soccer because they do not know how not to love it. He says "if a ball comes rolling down the street, you give it a punt" (99). People in that village do not know how not to love soccer. He takes it for granted that the love of soccer is universal. In the town where they live, the children play soccer continuously. Even the old men are seen playing soccer at the end of the novel.

The people of Borg even use the soccer team for which a person roots as a way to define his personality. Liverpool is perhaps the most popular team. It is the team the children watch the first time they visit the recreation center under Britt-Marie's watch. Supporters of Liverpool are said to believe that things can be turned around, even at the last moment. Bank tells Britt-Marie that her father was a supporter of Tottenham. Those people, Bank explains, give more love than they receive. Britt-Marie's husband, Kent, supports Manchester United. Those who support this team are said to believe that they deserve to win.

The children's trip to the soccer competition has a reviving affect on the entire town. All of the residents pull together to support the children and cheer them to victory. The soccer team seems so important to the community that the people actually catch a spark of hope when their team rallies to the point that it can participate in a competition.

After Sami's death, Dino's uncle points out a time when Sami had tried to include a boy who did not speak their language in their soccer game. Even though the boy could not understand what Sami was saying, the boy did understand what it meant when Sami rolled to ball toward him.



Even though she is a self-professed hater of soccer, even Britt-Marie eventually gets caught up in the game. As she watches the children practice, she realizes first that soccer is a game that Ingrid would have liked. This might be her first step in learning to like it. Sven has told her the love of the game is instinctual, not something that can be taught. Britt-Marie does not have that instinct when she first arrives in Borg. This is demonstrated when she lets the soccer ball that Vega kicked toward her roll past her without kicking it back.

Downfalls of Stereotyping

Boiling a person down to a stereotype can cause a person to miss out on one's real personality. In the same way judging a person by their disability can also cause misunderstandings. Britt-Marie, Somebody, Bank and Max are all people who at one point in the novel are seen only as one aspect of themselves, one that does not describe their complete personality at all. Once the other characters in this novel learn to look beyond the stereotypes or disabilities, they realize even people different from them can have a unique viewpoint to add to their lives.

Britt-Marie simply has a viewpoint of life that many people do not have. The loss of her loved sister followed by a life of emotional abuse and rejection have left Britt-Marie full of compulsions and fear. In Britt-Marie's case it is the children on the soccer team, particularly Vega, who see her promise. Vega encourages Britt-Marie to realize it is never too late for her to get a fresh start. She is the one who not only nudges Britt-Marie to be friends with Sven, but also helps her to achieve her dream of going to Paris.

Because Somebody is in a wheelchair, people often see her only as her disability. At one point in the novel Somebody thanks Britt-Marie for seeing her as a person. "You get that I am human, huh. Happen to have the wheelchair. I not wheelchair that happens to have human in it, huh" (170). One of the instances where Britt-Marie is blessed by Somebody's disability comes when she has Somebody hang the map of Borg for her. Britt-Marie at first thought about criticizing the hanging of the map because Somebody hung it so low. Britt-Marie realizes, however, that from the confines of her wheelchair, that was as high as she could physically hang it. It is later when Britt-Marie has all the lights off in the recreation center with the exception of the bathroom light that she realizes that light focuses on the dot that represents Borg. Had the map been hung higher it would not have done so.

Because Bank is blind, the kids on the soccer team at Borg immediately jump to the conclusion that she will not be a good coach. By demonstrating a movement with her dog, Bank shows the children she does not need her sight to remember how to play soccer or anticipate the moves of another player. She earns the respect of the children when they realize she is more than just her disability.

Max is a final character that the children, particularly Vega, interpret incorrectly. Because Max's father is a rich man who fired all of the men in town from their trucking jobs she assumes that Max is also rich and spoiled. When Max first shows interest in



joining the soccer team Vega does not want him based on the opinion that she has of his father. After Omar suggests a playoff between Vega and Max, Vega has to admit that Max is good at the game. By the time they have played in the competition and both have been injured in an attempt to keep the other team from scoring, Max and Vega are friends.

Hope as a Motivator

Hope, even in the most trivial things, can be a strong motivator. When the soccer team in Borg goes to a competition it sparks an infectious hope, one that uplifts the spirits of the entire village of Borg. As Britt-Marie adjusts to life in Borg she also realizes how strong a motivator hope can be.

The first night in Borg as Britt-Marie cares for her balcony boxes she considers the role of faith and hope in caring for plants. “The winter requires whoever is doing the watering to have a bit of faith, in order to believe that what looks empty has every potential. Britt-Marie no longer knows whether she has faith or just hope” (42). The author refers to the possibility that Britt-Marie might have “just hope” but this hope still buoys her above her circumstances and keeps her caring for boxes of dirt that appear they will never show any signs of life.

On a larger scale, the soccer team brings hope to the people of Borg. They were disillusioned and beaten down because they had lost their jobs and seen many of the businesses in their town close. The children do not even have a proper field on which to practice soccer. To make matters worse, many of the most talented players have gone to towns with better soccer programs. When they see their ragtag soccer team go to compete against the other teams, the people of town believe that if the children have enough hope to go to a competition despite the marks against them, perhaps they could turn things around despite their bleak circumstances.

Things begin to change around town. Almost all of the residents plan to attend the competition. Ben’s mother, who has to work hard just to put food on the table, has taken the day off to see her son play. The women with the walkers who had never even waved at Britt-Marie before bring her fruit for the players to take to the competition. On their way out of town, Britt-Marie sees a man taking the “For Sale” sign out of his front yard. Sven tells her it is because the soccer team has sparked a new hope in the people of the town that good things will happen for Borg again.

Need to be Appreciated

The need to be appreciated or “seen” is a universal need. This need is expressed in Britt-Marie’s words to the girl at the employment office when she asks Britt-Marie why she wants a job. Britt-Marie replies that she wants someone to know that she exists. Children, single people, and the disabled all need to know that they exist for someone.



One of Britt-Marie's requirements for being "seen" is being appreciated. One of her major complaints about her marriage is that Kent never appreciated her. Kent's children never appreciated her. As a child after the death of her sister, her mother never appreciated Britt-Marie's attempts to keep the house clean and make things nice. One of the characteristics that endears Sami to Britt-Marie is his feelings of being under appreciated by his siblings. This is a point of connection for them. Britt-Marie lets Sami know she "sees" him by showing her appreciation for what he does for the children.

As the people of Borg slowly warm to Britt-Marie they appreciate her willingness to "see" the children. Although Britt-Marie is at first an unwilling participant in the children's soccer team she does become close to two of the players. One of the children with whom Britt-Marie bonds is Ben when she helps him fix his hair for a date. Later, he asks her to go with him to get his father's signature on a permission slip. Britt-Marie learns his father is in jail and that the children call him by a nickname connected to his father's crime. Britt-Marie realizes how painful this nickname must be to Ben and refuses to call him by it any longer.

Somebody is additionally a character that Britt-Marie "sees" or appreciates despite her disability. Somebody is never given a proper name. It is as if she does not deserve one. She is just somebody in a wheelchair. At one point Somebody tells Britt-Marie how much she appreciates Britt-Marie's friendship because Britt-Marie looks beyond the wheelchair.

Loyalty

The feeling of loyalty can keep a relationship going even when one person in that relationship no longer deserves the other person's attention. This aspect of loyalty is an adhering factor in the relationship between Sami and Psycho, and Britt-Marie and Kent. It is also loyalty that keeps the people of Borg rooting for and believing in their village.

Even though Sami knows that Psycho is not a good influence he tells Britt-Marie he cannot turn his back on his friend because Psycho once helped him. When Sami, Vega and Omar were children, their father was prone to fits of anger. During these fits, Psycho would help Sami get his younger siblings out of the house to safety. It was also Psycho who ultimately ran off Sami's abusive father. It is because of what Psycho did for Sami in the past that Sami believes he cannot turn his back on his friend. Because of his loyalty to Psycho, Sami is killed by some of Psycho's enemies.

When Britt-Marie considers returning to Kent she knows she would be doing so for the same reasons that Sami stood behind Psycho. She knows she would be returning to Kent based only on her feelings of loyalty, loyalty that Kent does not deserve. Just like Sami feels about Psycho, Britt-Marie feels Kent has given her too much to allow her to turn her back on him.

Loyalty is also seen in the way the people of Borg support their soccer team. Even though the hodgepodge soccer team has no chance of winning the people of Borg still



show their loyalty to the children by attending the game and cheering them on. When the children tie their final game, the first time Borg did not lose all their games in a long time, the people of the town act as if they had won a national title. This loyalty to the children's soccer team also spread to the village of Borg as a whole. Even though there is not much going for it, the people who believe in Borg are highly loyal to it. They are so loyal that they shun outsiders whom they see as threats to their town.



Styles

Point of View

This novel is written from the third person point of view with an emphasis on Britt-Marie. The narrator is omniscient only in regard to Britt-Marie's emotions, thoughts and actions. The other characters are seen through the filter of Britt-Marie. Their actions and words are reported but their emotions and thoughts are not known unless they are told to Britt-Marie.

The third person point of view allows the reader to get an unbiased view of Britt-Marie. If the story were told in first person it is likely that the reader would get too close to Britt-Marie. The third person point of view allows the reader to get to know Britt-Marie while still maintaining some distance.

The third person point of view also allows the reader to see the changes in Britt-Marie through the course of the novel. These changes would not be as spectacular if the story were presented in the first person. The third person point of view also gives the author a chance to incorporate comic relief into the novel. Often this comic relief comes at the expense of Britt-Marie, as the narrator describes some strange activity or idea of hers. This could not be done if the novel was written in the first person point of view.

Language and Meaning

One significant factor to take into consideration when thinking about the language of this novel is that it is a translation from the original Swedish. For this reason some common items are called by unusual names. The soccer field, for instance is referred to as a soccer pitch. Britt-Marie is constantly worried about the cutlery drawer, more commonly known in America as the silverware drawer.

Also significant are the speech characteristics given to some characters. Somebody and the women with the walkers both have very unusual, distinct speech patterns. Somebody speaks as if she is not completely familiar with the language she is trying to speak. "Therefore — she became the best. What's-it-called? Incentive! You understand?" (170). Somebody often searches for the correct word to use and then asks the person to whom she is speaking if the understand what she is saying. The old women with the walkers speak in a way that Britt-Marie cannot even understand. "We ainitt derd hire! Tell doose bastourds dait, hire wha' I see?" (245) is one woman's attempt to get Britt-Marie to tell the people at the soccer competition that Borg is not dead yet.



Structure

The structure of this novel is fairly simple. The story is told mostly in a linear fashion with only a few flashbacks. Chapter 20 is one of these chapters where the author gives the reader an idea about what has happened and what will be described in the novel. He tells the reader that Britt-Marie has broken two fingers and bumped her head but does not immediately tell what happened to cause her injuries. The author then goes back in time to fill in what happened to Britt-Marie.

Chapters 1-23 are mostly exposition and rising action with Chapters 1 and 2 being almost entirely exposition. The action begins to rise beginning in Chapter 3 as soon as Britt-Marie arrives in Borg. A turning point in the novel comes in the end of Chapter 23 when Kent shows up at the house where Britt-Marie is staying. The action rises even more quickly at this point as Sven and Kent battle with each other over Britt-Marie, and the soccer team prepares for competition.

The climax of the novel comes with the soccer competition. It is after the competition that the action falls as the novel draws to a close. The denouement comes when Britt-Marie drives out of town after the children have given her the gas to get to Paris.



Quotes

But surely no civilized person would even think of arranging a cutlery drawer in a different way from how cutlery drawers are supposed to be arranged?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: Britt-Marie is so rigid that she believes everyone should arrange their cutlery drawers in one particular way. She believes those who do not arrange their drawers the same way she does are barbarians.

I don't use perfume, so I asked him to always put his shirt directly in the washing machine when he came home. He never did. Then he used to yell at me because the washing machine was so loud at night."

-- Britt-Marie (Chapter 3)

Importance: Britt-Marie tells the girl at the unemployment office that she realized her husband was having an affair because she could smell the woman's perfume on her husband's shirts. It was why she insisted on washing his shirts each night.

Because you can't change Britt-Marie's way of seeing the world. Because once Britt-Marie has taken a position on the world there's no changing her."

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

Importance: This quote is another indication of Britt-Marie's rigidity. The narrator indicates that Britt-Marie is so resistant to change that once she has made up her mind about something there is no way to persuade her to change her mind.

The winter requires whoever is doing the watering to have a bit of faith, in order to believe that what looks empty has every potential. Britt-Marie no longer knows whether she has faith or just hope. Maybe neither."

-- Narrator (Chapter 6)

Importance: Britt-Marie dislikes winter because nothing grows during that time of the year. Even though there are no signs of the flowers she has planted in her balcony boxes in the winter, Britt-Marie realizes she must show faith and continue watering and caring for the dormant plants in the boxes because they will grow and bloom when spring comes. Britt-Marie believes her life looks similarly empty and dead, like the balcony boxes. She is not sure if she has the faith to keep nurturing her life to see what blooms when the "spring" comes.

She doesn't know when he stopped caring about what people thought of her."

-- Narrator (Chapter 7)

Importance: Even though Britt-Marie continued through all of their married lives caring what people thought of Kent and trying to keep him acting and looking appropriately, she wonders when he stopped caring about her.



Britt-Marie saw it because she always put her belt on, because she wanted her mother to notice. Which she obviously never did, because Britt-Marie never had to be noticed, for the simple reason that she always did everything without having to be told.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 8)

Importance: The day of the wreck that killed her sister, Britt-Marie saw the truck barreling toward them. Her sister and mother did not see it because they were arguing.

The last thing Britt-Marie remembered before she passed out was that she wanted to clean it up. Make it nice. And when she woke up at the hospital that is precisely what she did. Clean. Make things nice.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 8)

Importance: It was after the wreck that Britt-Marie’s compulsion to clean developed. By cleaning she is trying to make things right in her world again.

The parking area is only blessed with light here and there, where it’s cast by the neon sign of the pizzeria, or from the kitchen window where Britt-Marie stands hidden behind the curtain watching them, but, to be quite honest, most of them are so bad at soccer that more light would only have a marginal effect on their ability to hit the ball.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 9)

Importance: The narrator indicates that even if the parking lot in which the children of Borg practiced soccer had better lighting, it still would not improve their playing skills at all.

And for this reason Britt-Marie repeatedly saved homeless plants, to give her the strength to remember a sister whose life she was not even able to save once.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 9)

Importance: Britt-Marie’s desire to care for and nurture plants other people had thrown out came from her knowledge that her sister had loved plants. By taking care of and saving plants Britt-Marie believes she is symbolically taking care of her sister.

They got married because Kent’s accountant said it made sense from a ‘tax-planning perspective.’”

-- Narrator (Chapter 18)

Importance: This quote indicates that Britt-Marie and Kent got married not because they necessarily loved one another but because it made good financial sense.

Psycho grew into a properly dangerous lunatic, Sami knows that, but Sami’s not the sort of person to turn his back on someone who once carried his younger siblings on his back. Maybe in a place like Borg you don’t have the luxury of being able to choose your best friend.”

-- Sven (Chapter 18)



Importance: Sven explains to Britt-Marie in this quote why Sami defends Psycho even though he knows that Psycho is no good. His statement alludes to the loyalty that Sami feels for Psycho because Psycho once helped Sami and his siblings escape their father's anger and violence.

I just wanted to say thank you for, well . . . for seeing Ben. Not many grown-ups do,' says Ben's mother, and holds out what she has in her hands."
-- Ben's Mother (Chapter 19)

Importance: Although Britt-Marie was afraid Ben's mother would criticize her for going with Ben to the prison to get his father's signature, she instead thanks Britt-Marie for "seeing" him. This idea of seeing other people is a theme in this novel as Britt-Marie seeks appreciation and acknowledgement.

I couldn't give a shit if you're good. I just want to play. That's how a team is made."
-- Max (Chapter 21)

Importance: When Vega tries to discourage Max from wanting to play on their team, he comes back at her with his definition of a team, a definition that is eerily similar to the definition that Vega gave Britt-Marie when Britt-Marie tells Vega she has heard there is no soccer team in Borg.

If you can be heard then you exist,' mutters hungover Bank, massaging her temples."
-- Bank (Chapter 22)

Importance: As Bank coaches the soccer team she instructs them to talk to one another on the field. She instructs them that it is when they can be heard that they truly exist. Britt-Marie applies this to her life, hoping that she can be heard as she whispers that she, too, is there. It is this idea of being in a particular place, or proving one's existence, that inspires the title of the novel.

So in a way she did achieve the desired result of her visit to the tanning salon, even if not in the exact way she had thought."
-- Narrator (Chapter 22)

Importance: Britt-Marie went to the tanning salon hoping to tan the skin that was lighter than the rest of her ring finger because she had worn her wedding ring on that finger. In a freak accident she winds up breaking two fingers in the tanning salon. Because her ring finger has to be bandaged, she realizes she managed to cover the finger with the white mark on it even though it had not been the way she had intended.

When he goes to sit in the last empty seat in the away section, she realizes that this is the first time Kent is somewhere for her sake. The first time in their lives that he has to present himself as being in her company, rather than the other way around."
-- Narrator (Chapter 30)

Importance: Through the course of their married lives, Britt-Marie realizes that Kent



had never gone anywhere in an attempt to be supportive of her. This soccer match in which the team from Borg is playing is the only place he has even gone because Britt-Marie would be there.

It was not a reasonable choice to give a human being, but Britt-Marie remembered what it was like losing a sibling, she remembered just how much one could lose oneself. With this in mind, she felt this was the best possible thing she could give someone who was every bit as lost. A soccer pitch.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 37)

Importance: When Kent and Britt-Marie badger the town council about building a soccer pitch in Borg, the members of the council tell Britt-Marie she can either keep her job or have the soccer field built. Britt-Marie chooses to have the soccer pitch built because she believes it is the least she can do to help Vega deal with the pain of losing her brother.