

# **The Blue Castle: A Novel Study Guide**

**The Blue Castle: A Novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Blue Castle: A Novel Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 4.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 7.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 8.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 9.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 10.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 11.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 12.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 13.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 14.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 15.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 16.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 17.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 18.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 19.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 20.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 21.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 22.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>



[Chapter 23..... 28](#)

[Chapter 24..... 29](#)

[Chapter 25..... 30](#)

[Chapter 26..... 31](#)

[Chapter 27..... 32](#)

[Chapter 28..... 33](#)

[Chapter 29..... 34](#)

[Chapter 30..... 35](#)

[Chapter 31..... 36](#)

[Chapter 32..... 37](#)

[Chapter 33..... 38](#)

[Chapter 34..... 39](#)

[Chapter 35..... 40](#)

[Chapter 36..... 41](#)

[Chapter 37..... 42](#)

[Chapter 38..... 43](#)

[Chapter 39..... 44](#)

[Chapter 40..... 45](#)

[Chapter 41..... 46](#)

[Chapter 42..... 47](#)

[Chapter 43..... 48](#)

[Chapter 44..... 49](#)

[Chapter 45..... 50](#)

[Characters..... 51](#)

[Objects/Places..... 54](#)

[Themes..... 56](#)



Style..... 57

Quotes..... 59

Topics for Discussion..... 62



## Plot Summary

The Blue Castle is a novel by the author of Lucy M. Montgomery. The story follows the main character, Valancy Stirling, as she tries to put the pieces of her life together after finding out she only has about one year to live because she has a fatal heart condition. When Valancy, who is 29 years old and is an old maid by societal standards, finds out she is about to die, she starts living her life for the first time. She no longer cares what her mother or other family members say or think about her. Valancy vows to start living and experiencing everything she has always dreamed of having in life, including the man of her dreams and a home of her own, which she refers to as the Blue Castle.

One of the first things that Valancy does upon arriving is to land a job as a caretaker of one of her former schoolmates who is dying of consumption. Valancy goes to live with the town drunk to care for his daughter, Cissy. While she is living there, Valancy also becomes close with one of Roaring Abel's friends, Barney Snith.

After Cissy dies, Valancy asks Barney to marry her. She confesses that she's dying and Barney agrees to marry her. He takes her to live with him on his island up in the woods, which Valancy refers to as their Blue Castle. Valancy and Barney live over a year together and Valancy's heart problems seem to be decreasing until the point that the condition disappears.

After Barney saves Valancy from being run over by a train, they both realize that her diagnosis is incorrect. Barney's father comes to town without knowing that Barney is married. He tells Valancy of Barney's true identity. Valancy makes up with her father and Barney and Valancy end up living happily ever after.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The main character of the novel is Valancy Stirling. She wakes on the morning of what is to be her Aunt and Uncle Wellington's thirtieth anniversary picnic to find that it is raining. Since it's raining, the picnic won't take place. Valancy is 29 years old and unmarried, which in her era, makes her an old maid. Ever since she was a child, she dreams of being the maiden of a blue castle. She also dreams of the lovers that she would have over the years.

Valancy enjoys reading books by Foster. Her family allows her to read the books because they think the topics are scientific. Lately, Valancy has been having dizzy spells and a pain around her heart. She wants to visit the doctor, but she wants to do it in secrecy without her family knowing. Valancy vows to visit Dr. Trent, who is an authority on heart disease, but is shunned by her family since he insulted one of her first cousins.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The rain prohibits the picnic from taking place and the author hints that this will change the course of Valancy's life. The pain around Valancy's heart and the dizzy spells indicate that she might have some kind of illness.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

Cousin Stickles knocks on Valancy's door at 7:30 am, which is the time Valancy always gets up. Her aunt runs a strict household, so breakfast is always at 8, lunch is always at 1 and dinner is always at 6. As Valancy gets ready for the day, she sees an insignificant person in the mirror. She also thinks about how she has always been afraid of something all her life and believes she will always live her life afraid of one thing or another. In her dreary mood, Valancy decides that she has to give up her fantasy of a Blue Castle and she goes down to breakfast.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

Valancy is depressed. She feels as if she is contained in a world where she doesn't have any choices. It is as if she is a prisoner in her own home. She has resigned herself to the fact that this is how her life is and how it is always going to be. This, however, foreshadows that something drastic is going to happen to change Valancy's dreary life into a life that she deems worth living.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Valancy eats breakfast with Cousin Stickles and Mrs. Frederick, Valancy's mother. They have the same food and the same conversation as they always do. At breakfast, Valancy asks her mother not to call Valancy by her nickname, Doss, anymore, but to address her as Valancy. After breakfast, Valancy works on a quilt, which Valancy hates to do, but her mother won't allow her to be idle. Valancy goes to her room to retrieve a new thimble and takes 10 minute to read from John Foster's book, but her mother catches her so Valancy returns to her quilt. When Valancy asks her mother to walk to the library, her mother says she just checked out a book a week ago, but Valancy says it was four weeks ago. Mrs. Frederick finally agrees to allow Valancy to go to the store to buy more tea.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

The author foreshadows that Valancy's destiny is about to change, but doesn't yet indicate how. Most likely it will be that Valancy finds a husband because her mother, cousin, aunt and other family members all tease her about being 29 and unmarried. When Valancy goes to the store to buy tea, she is likely to sneak off to the library to check out a new book. This is probably where she meets her future husband. One of the reasons that Valancy thinks so poorly of herself and has such a low self-esteem is that her family thinks this way of Valancy and voices their opinions to her.





## Chapter 4

### Chapter 4 Summary

Valancy's cousin and mother make sure that Valancy has on her rubber boots and warm petticoat because Valancy is prone to colds. As Valancy walks uptown, she notices that the Stirling house is the ugliest house on the block. She covets a new house that Clayton Markley has built and furnished for his bride-to-be, Jennie Lloyd. Valancy doesn't even covet the man as much as she envies Jenny for the house that will be her house.

### Chapter 4 Analysis

Valancy is suffering from "the grass is always greener on the other side" syndrome. She is jealous of what she doesn't have and what she has not experienced, but she sees others enjoy. In a way, Valancy remains childlike because her family treats her as if she is a child, but then condemns her for never marrying.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

It is Valancy's 29th birthday. While she is in her Uncle Benjamin's shop buying tea, he is making jokes about Valancy not being married at her age. For the first time, Valancy stands up to her uncle. Although Valancy has always said she doesn't want a beau to protect her feelings from being hurt, she admits to herself for the first time that she does want a husband and children. The authors keep mentioning Valancy's slanted eyes and dark hair. Valancy passes the rector on the street. He is a man that humiliated her in front of the entire congregation when Valancy was a girl, thinking that she was a boy. Valancy checks out the new John Foster book. When she reads the first passage, it talks about fear. Valancy decides to visit Dr. Trent about her heart.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

The fact that Valancy looks so different from the rest of her family indicates that her father is of Asian descent. This would also explain why Valancy has always been treated as the black sheep of the family because that is what her own mother and relatives think of her. The John Foster passage talking about fear is a sign for Valancy that she must overcome her fears.



## Chapter 6

### Chapter 6 Summary

Valancy visits Dr. Trent, but just as he about to diagnose her, he gets a call that his son Ned was in a terrible accident. Dr. Trent runs out to catch the train. As Valancy walks home, she cuts through Lover's Lane so that she isn't late for dinner. She sees the town criminal and drunk coming out from under his car. At that moment, Valancy's vision of her prince in the Blue Castle changes to look more like Barney Snaith. When Valancy gets home, she eats like every day and then her mother makes her darn socks rather than have time to read. Valancy cries herself to sleep, which is the same way she woke in the morning.

### Chapter 6 Analysis

Even when Valancy tries to overcome her fears and turn her life in a different direction, destiny always seems to steer her right back from where she started. Valancy running into Barney Snaith, however, foreshadows the two falling in love. This is ironic because Valancy is such a good girl and Barney Snaith is such a bad boy.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Valancy decides to cut down her rosebush that was given to her, but has never bloomed. Mrs. Frederick admonishes Valancy for this and gives her the silent treatment. Valancy goes into town to pick up her cousin's medicine and stops at the post office to pick up the mail. She has a letter from Dr. Trent. When she arrives home and reads the letter, the doctor tells her that she has a fatal heart disease and will likely only live for another year. At dinner that night, Valancy hardly eats and speaks out against her mother and cousin.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Valancy's destiny has changed, but not in the way she imagined. She feels as if she is going to die before she has ever had a chance to live. Now that she knows she's going to die, Valancy chooses to speak her mind and do what she wants to do. Valancy's mother admonishing Dr. Trent's abilities foreshadows that he has made a mistake and that Valancy doesn't have a heart disease. Since Valancy thinks she does, however, she'll start living life for the first time.



## Chapter 8

### Chapter 8 Summary

As Valancy tries to sleep that night, she realizes that she isn't afraid to die. When Valancy thinks about how her family will react to her illness, she vows not to tell them. Valancy thinks about how she has never had even one solid hour of happiness in her life. She recalls all of the bad incidents that have occurred to her over the years. Valancy experiences an episode of pain around her heart. When it passes, she vows to stop trying to please others like she has her whole life and to start pleasing herself.

### Chapter 8 Analysis

It's ironic that Valancy is afraid of everything in life but she is not afraid of death. The truth is about to set Valancy free.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Mrs. Frederick and Cousin Stickles stared noticing the change in Valancy since the rosebush incident. The rest of the father starts to notice at the silver anniversary dinner for Aunt Alberta and Uncle Herbert. Mrs. Frederick continues to give Valancy the silent treatment until Valancy announces that she will no longer be attending the Anglican church, but will be going to the Presbyterian church instead. As Cousin Stickles, Mrs. Frederick and Valancy are walking to the dinner party, Roaring Abel, the other town drunk and Barney Snaith's father drives by them. Behind their backs, Valancy waves at Roaring Abel.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Valancy sees a connection between her life and Roaring Abel's life. Valancy believes she escapes the monotony of her life by dreaming about her life in the Blue Castle. She also believes that Roaring Abel escapes the monotony of his life by getting drunk and wreaking havoc on the town.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

While sitting at the table with her relatives, Valancy sees them as if for the first time because her new point of view.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

With the new outlook on life that Valancy has, she might just end up having the life that she has always wanted. Since Valancy no longer fears the relatives that have been holding her back all her life, she possesses a new freedom to do what makes her happy without any thought to how her relatives will feel or what they will do to her.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

As the conversation goes around the dinner table, one of the uncles asks everyone to describe what the "utmost of happiness" is. When they get to Valancy, she says, "to sneeze when you want to." When Uncle Benjamin tells one of his riddles making fun of Valancy not being married, Valancy tells him that he should get some new riddles. Valancy proceeds to answer questions and make comments as she wishes, so her relatives think she has gone crazy. When the conversation turns to attacking Barney Snaith, Valancy sticks up for him and challenges each of her relatives that make a negative statement about him. An attack starts to creep up on Valancy and so she dismisses herself from the table and heads home. After she leaves, the relatives try to come up with a reason for her behavior and conclude that she must be forced to go to the doctor.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

The fond way of which Valancy thinks about Barney Snaith foreshadows Valancy falling in love with home, so that she has one true love before she dies. As a bonus, it will rub her family the wrong way if Valancy falls for Barney Snaith, which would delight Valancy even more. Her relatives forcing Valancy to go to a different doctor foreshadows Valancy finding out that she isn't dying after all.





# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

As Valancy heads home, the spell is upon her and she is in pain. She feels alone and wishes that someone, such as Barney Snaith, was with her to sympathize with her. It's difficult, but Valancy manages to give herself a dose of the medicine prescribed by Dr. Trent. Valncy makes a wish on the moon to have something of her own before she dies.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

The chapter foreshadows that Valancy will find true love before she dies. Since one of her only options is with Barney Snaith, it foreshadows that Valancy thinking of him will make her pursue a relationship with him and she will ultimately fall in love.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Uncle Benjamin tries to convince Valancy to go see the family doctor. Valancy refuses. Olive's mother sends Olive to speak with Valancy about seeing the doctor, but it doesn't work either. When Olive tells her mother, Aunt Wellington, of Valancy's responses to her pleas to see a doctor, Aunt Wellington implies Valancy is crazy and that they can't begrudge Valancy for what she says. Aunt Wellington demands Valancy apologize to Olive, but when Valancy refuses, a family meeting is called. Uncle James consults with Dr. Marsh, who says that nothing Valancy has done or said can be construed as crazy.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Valancy's family believes that normal behavior is docile behavior, where Valancy does what they and what they expect of her. Any behavior that falls outside of their guidelines, Valancy's family deems as abnormal or even downright crazy.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Roaring Abel is summoned to Valancy's home to fix the front porch. When he shows up, he is drunk, but in the beginning stages of it. After dinner, Valancy goes out to the front porch to talk with Roaring Abel. Roaring Abel is Cecilia Gay's father. Barney Snaith is rumored to be the father of Cecilia Gay's child. Valancy and Cecilia were schoolmates. When Cissy gives birth to her baby, she refuses to declare who the father is. The baby lives for a year and then dies. Cissy is dying of consumption. Ironically, in the Christian community in which they live, it is only Barney Snaith that drops in to visit and care for Cissy. Valancy insists that Cissy must have someone to take care of her and asks if Valancy will do as a housekeeper.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Valancy forming a relationship with Roaring Abel will lead to Valancy having a closer relationship with Barney Snaith. Valancy is allowing herself to feel everything she can, such as letting the cold air wash over her while she sits on the porch and converses with Roaring Abel. This foreshadows Valancy going to work for Roaring Abel to care for Cissy Gay. In turn, this will put Valancy in direct contact with Barney Snaith on a regular basis, laying the foundation of their ensuing romantic relationship.

# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Mrs. Frederick tells Uncle James and Uncle Benjamin about how Valancy packed up her bags and left to live at Roaring Abel's house. The two uncles insist Mrs. Frederick should have stopped Valancy from leaving. Uncle James vows to go see the family lawyer and Uncle Benjamin vows to see Dr. Marsh again.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

The uncles themselves predict that Barney Snaith hanging around Roaring Abel's house will mean something when it comes to Valancy. The prediction is inferred that Valancy might end up with an illegitimate child just like that is Cissy Gay's child.



## Chapter 16

### Chapter 16 Summary

Valancy sees living at Roaring Abel's house as living in her Blue Castle. She changes her mind somewhat when she lays eyes on what Roaring Abel's looks like. When Valancy walks in the house, Roaring Abel compliments Valancy's ankles. This is the first compliment Valancy has received in her life. Valancy finds a very ill, broken and changed Cissy. Cissy says she is grateful to have someone because she is lonely.

### Chapter 16 Analysis

Ironically, Roaring Abel is a carpenter by trade, but his own home is in disrepair. Cissy and Valancy are living parallel lives. Both of the women are alone. Additionally, both of the women are dying.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Valancy finds living at the Gay's home to be peaceful. For the first time in her life, Valancy is able to make her own choices and do what she wants. She cleans the house and cooks the meals for the Gays. Valancy is also a caretaker and companion for Cissy. Cissy notices that there is something wrong with Valancy too and she asks Valancy if she is sick. Cissy also confesses that she wants to die so that she finds peace and rest. Valancy tells Cissy about her Blue Castle, which is the first time Valancy tells anyone about it. Cissy says she had her own Blue Castle once too.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

The way Cissy admits she has her own Blue Castle implies to Valancy that someone ruined Cissy's life, but that it wasn't Barney Snaith. The similarities in their lives help to join Valancy and Cissy together when the two women need each other the most.



## Chapter 18

### Chapter 18 Summary

The first time Barney Snaith visits after Valancy moves in, Valancy feels a new symptom. Barney Snaith tells Valancy that he's going to the port and asks if they need anything. She asks him to bring them codfish. After this, Barney Snaith comes around often. Valancy gets to know him better, but realizes that Cissy doesn't know Barney any better than Valancy, and Cissy has known Barney for five years. Valancy also realizes that Cissy and Barney are fond of each other but not in a romantic way.

### Chapter 18 Analysis

The new symptom Valancy feels when she sees Barney Snaith is love. Valancy sees Barney Snaith as a symbol of a knight riding up to her Blue Castle. The Gays, Valancy and Barney Snaith are forming a surrogate family, where they are not related to each other, but care for each other and talk with each other as if they are family.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

The Stirlings send the family lawyer to try to convince Valancy to go home because she is killing her mother with her behavior. When this doesn't work, Uncle James goes to talk to Valancy himself. Roaring Abel overhears what Uncle James is saying and Abel throws Uncle James out of his house, literally. Dr. Stalling, who is the preacher, then goes to talk to Valancy. Dr. Stalling says that if Valancy goes home, Uncle James will pay for a nurse to take care of Cissy. Valancy realizes that she has reached a turning point in her life, where she has finally become important to her family. Cousin Georgiana comes to try to talk to Valancy, but this doesn't work either. Mrs. Frederick thinks that it would so much easier if Valancy died because then she could mourn properly over Valancy's loss.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

Valancy continues to stand her ground and not relent and return home. she has chosen compassion for Cissy, who needs a companion more than she needs a nurse to care for her. Ironically, Mrs. Frederick wishes for Valancy's death. This might be just what she gets if Valancy's diagnosis is correct.





# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

Valancy receives her first month's pay from Roaring Abel. She goes into town and spends it all on a dress, hat and a few other items. Roaring Abel tells Valancy to come to an "up back" dance where he is playing music. Valancy wears her new dress and dances with a few boys at the dance. Later in the evening, the drunks show up and the crowd starts to get rough. Barney Snaith comes through the door and helps Valancy to get away from a group of boys demanding she dance with them and kiss them. Barney says he came to get her when Cissy told him where she was. On the drive home, they run out of gas.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Barney Snaith is starting to have feelings for Valancy. Valancy went to the dance hoping that she would see Barney there. Barney was only there, however, to save Valancy. Valancy is naïve, so she didn't realize that she was not equipped to deal with the crowd that the dance would draw to it.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Barney says they will wait in the car until someone comes by to give them gas. He tells Valancy they'll talk if they have something worthwhile to say. Valancy says that John Foster says that if two people can sit in silence for 30 minutes without talking then they can be friends, and only if they can be friends can they be something more. Barney Snaith agrees that John Foster says good things sometimes. Suddenly, Valancy realizes that she is in love with Barney Snaith, but that she must keep it to herself because he hasn't done anything that suggests he feels the same way about her. Valancy also realizes that it is just enough for her to enjoy the feeling of love without actually having to act on it. Barney shares a dream with Valancy about his desire for ballooning. Valancy in turn shares her dream of the Blue Castle and tells Barney about her life before moving in with Abel and Cissy. As the spring air becomes chilly, Barney gives Valancy his jacket. A car pulls up and it's Uncle Wellington and Olive. Barney requests some gas from Uncle Wellington, who decides to give it them so that nobody else sees Valancy with this man on the side of the road.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

It's ironic that the car that comes to their rescue isn't someone from the up back dance at all, but instead is Valancy's relatives. For the first time, Olive notices the transition in Valancy's disposition. Olive thinks Valancy looks provocative and interesting. This is a struggle for Olive because her family is telling her that Valancy is crazy and bad.



## Chapter 22

### Chapter 22 Summary

The next time the Stirlings hear about Valancy and Barney Snaith it's because the two see a movie and eat a Chinese dinner in town. Valancy drives by with Barney in his car and Mrs. Frederick and Cousin Stickles are sitting on the front verandah. Mrs. Frederick stops attending church because she can't handle the pity and gossip. Cousin Stickles keeps attending because she says the family has been given a cross to bear.

### Chapter 22 Analysis

Valancy is having so much fun living her new life that she can't believe it has been such a short time since she left home. She is no longer living a sheltered life, but instead is experiencing living for the first time. she is finding delight in small things, such as attending a movie or eating out at a restaurant.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Cissy tells Valancy about the boy she met when she went away to work at a restaurant for the summer. This is the boy that fathered her baby. Cissy also tells Valancy what it was like for her sweet baby to die and for her to have to live on without him. A few days later, Cissy dies. When Roaring Abel roars into the driveway, Valancy goes down to tell him of Cissy's passing.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Cissy was able to confess to Valancy before she died. This places Valancy in a symbolic position of a priest or other religious figure and Cissy as a sinner. Additionally, Valancy has now come full circle in her life, back to where she started, without anybody needing her. It foreshadows Valancy having to make a decision on how she will live out the rest of her life, now that her role in caring for Cissy is gone.



# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Valancy prepares Cissy for burial. The preacher from the free Methodist church oversees the burial. Uncle Wellington is one of the "reputable citizens of Deerwood" that carries Cissy to her burial plot. Valancy's whole family attends the funeral in an effort to show support for Valancy, in the eyes of the townspeople, so they can convince Valancy to come home now. A widower, Edward Beck, is but one of the many people at the funeral seeing Valancy in a new light. Beck even thinks of making Valancy his second wife. When Valancy's mother asks if she is coming home now, Valancy says she isn't going to stay at Roaring Abel's now.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

Ironically, the townspeople are all acting as if Cissy never did anything wrong—treating her in death as they didn't do in life after she had a baby out of wedlock. While Mrs. Frederick thinks Valancy is coming home, Valancy saying she isn't staying there foreshadows Valancy moving to Barney Snaith's island with him, or moving away from the area altogether.



## Chapter 25

### Chapter 25 Summary

Roaring Abel says goodbye to Valancy because she plans on leaving his home to following day. Valancy goes down to the gate and awaits Barney's arrival. When Barney arrives, Valancy proposes marriage to Barney. Valancy hands the letter from Dr. Trent to Barney. They each state their terms and conditions for the marriage and agree to marry each other. Barney tells Valancy that he doesn't love her but that he's always thought she was a dear.

### Chapter 25 Analysis

Valancy is marrying Barney because she thinks she loves him. In reality, she just wants to experience love and marriage before she dies. Barney is marrying Valancy to help her fulfill her dream and because he pities her for her health situation.



## Chapter 26

### Chapter 26 Summary

The following day, Barney picks Valancy up for the wedding after driving to the Port to get their marriage license. Mr. Towers from the free Methodist church performs the ceremony. On the drive back, Valancy asks Barney to describe the island and the house where he lives. Barney describes the house, the scenery, his two cats and an owl that lives on the property. When Valancy sees it for the first time, she exclaims that it's her Blue Castle. Barney rows the canoe over to the island and kisses Valancy for the first time.

### Chapter 26 Analysis

Valancy's dreams are coming true. She now has a husband, a home and an island where her Blue Castle sits. She's always wanted cats and now she has two. She also experiences his first kiss, which is another rite in passage of life she has a chance to experience before she dies. The narrator also indicates that Barney Snaith is a fugitive from the law.



# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

Valancy decides that she needs to go to Deerwood and tell her family she is married. She runs into Cousin Georgiana first, who tells her that Edward Beck wants to marry Valancy. Valancy shocks her cousin by telling her that she's already married. When Valancy arrives at her mother's home, she notices that her rosebush is blooming. Valancy runs into Olive first, flaunts her ring and tells her she is Valancy Snaith now. When Valancy steps into her mother's home, she finds most of her relatives assembled there.

Mrs. Frederick thinks Valancy has come home. Valancy announces to her family that she married Barney Snaith. They all react negatively. Uncle Benjamin even suggests that Valancy might be a changeling.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

Part of the reason Valancy married Barney Snaith is for the shock value it presents to her family members. The rosebush is symbolic of Valancy. Valancy is now blooming and blossoming as a woman and so is her rosebush that never once bloomed before when she was living there.

Ironically, it is the rest of Valancy's family that doesn't understand the true meaning of love. Even though they have each other, have been married or are still married, none of them seems to understand it. It's Valancy, who feels love for the first time with Barney that seems to understand how to love someone.





# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

After her visit, most of her family treats Valancy as if she is dead to them. A couple of times they go shopping in Uncle Benjamin's store. He ignores them, but one time he does confront Barney about marrying Valancy. Valancy sees her home as her castle. She also cuts her hair into a bob before it is in style for a woman to wear her hair this, which sends her mother into another crying spell. Her attacks are fewer and controlled with Dr. Trent's medication and the only night she has a bad attack is when she is out of medicine.

## Chapter 28 Analysis

Valancy's condition is probably more mental than physical. The stress of her life with her family is what is causing the attacks. When she is out of medicine, she has a bad attack. When she takes the medicine, she feels as if she has her condition under control.



## Chapter 29

### Chapter 29 Summary

Valancy finds comfort and joy in having dinner every night with Barney. She loves everything about her island and her new world. Barney calls Valancy Moonlight. Barney shuts himself in his own area, which he refers to as Bluebeard's Chamber. Smells come out of the room when Barney is in there, so Valancy assume he is conducting chemical experiments or counterfeiting money. Valancy sees freedom as being to do whatever they want to do. Barney thinks of freedom differently, saying that something always bonds them, including the love Valancy has for Barney.

### Chapter 29 Analysis

Barney seems to be producing moonshine, which is illegal. Valancy is very content in her world. Even when Barney asks if she would like a mansion like one of the millionaire homes on one of the islands on the lake, Valancy says she loves their Blue Castle.



# Chapter 30

## Chapter 30 Summary

Barney and Valancy spend a lot of time wandering in the nature. Valancy learns about everything from Barney, and even when they canoe in the rain, Valancy doesn't catch a cold. Each Sunday, they go to the Free Methodist church together. Valancy takes some of her money out of the bank to buy new clothes. She even buys a bathing suit and Barney teaches her how to swim.

## Chapter 30 Analysis

Valancy feels as if she has been born again. For the first time, she feels as if she can die because she finally knows what it's like to live.

# Chapter 31

## Chapter 31 Summary

Autumn comes. Valancy and Barney continue to enjoy exploring the great outdoors together. Autumn turns to winter. Barney even teaches Valancy how to snowshoe. They also ice skate on the lake. For Christmas, Barney buys Valancy a string of pearls.

## Chapter 31 Analysis

It's as if Valancy and Barney exist in their own world. They might not be rich with possessions, but they are rich with joy and fulfillment for what they do have in life.



# Chapter 32

## Chapter 32 Summary

The New Year comes and Valancy and Barney continue to live and enjoy their life in their Blue Castle. Sometimes, Roaring Abel comes to spend hours and even nights with the couple. Valancy's family, at this point, considers her dead. The only one that still thinks of her safety and happiness is Cousin Georgiana.

Valancy finds a newspaper clipping about a man by the name of Bernard Craig that was a bank teller that ran off with some of the bank's money in Montreal. Valancy assumes this bank teller is Barney and that Snaith is an alias. Valancy only has one bad winter night. It happens when Barney goes away for a night and there is a bad winter storm brewing. Valancy doesn't stop worrying until she sees Barney the next afternoon, dark against the white snow the storm has left behind.

## Chapter 32 Analysis

Valancy's winter nights are in dark contrast now as to what they were when she was living in the Stirling residence. Valancy would wake up in the middle of the night and dread the long winter nights when she was living with her family. Now, she sleeps soundly, but ironically, Valancy wishes that she would still wake in the middle of the night so she could relish in her happiness now. The contrast of Barney being dark against the white snow symbolizes good versus evil. The dark figure, Barney, represents evil, while the virgin white snow represents good.



## Chapter 33

### Chapter 33 Summary

Spring comes to the island in Mistawis. Valancy recites from one of John Foster's book, which slightly annoys Barney. Spring also means that Barney puts his car back on the road and they can travel into town to shop. Valancy's relatives see her, but either groan and stay away from her or hardly recognize her with her new look. One night, when they drive back through Deerwood from the Port, Valancy sneaks a peek in the window of her old house and finds her mother and Cousin Stickles doing the same things they've always done.

### Chapter 33 Analysis

Valancy is changing and growing. Her family, however, remains exactly the same. The members of her family, such as Uncle Benjamin, still think do not think of Valancy as what she truly is, a young woman.



# Chapter 34

## Chapter 34 Summary

One spring day, Valancy is returning home from the woods and runs into a famous painter from New York that has a cottage on the lake, Allan Tierny. When Allan sees Valancy his eyes light up. Another afternoon when Valancy returns home Barney tells her that Allan came to ask Barney's permission to paint Valancy. Valancy says she doesn't want to be painted and Barney had told Allan that he didn't want his wife to be painted.

Another evening that spring, Valancy realizes that Barney likes her. The night Valancy realizes that Barney truly likes her she also realizes that she hasn't had a heart attack in at least two months.

## Chapter 34 Analysis

Allan's eyes lighting up when he sees Valancy foreshadows that he will paint a portrait of Valancy. For Valancy, this will be the utmost compliment. It seems as if Valancy might beat nature by not dying in the one year time allotment that Dr. Trent predicted Valancy would live.



## Chapter 35

### Chapter 35 Summary

Valancy and Barney are in Port Lawrence doing some shopping. Valancy thinks of the Port and the forest as being two separate worlds. As Valancy and Barney are crossing over the railroad tracks, Valancy's foot gets stuck and a train is heading for her. Eventually, Barney is able to free Valancy's foot from the shoe and save Valancy's life. This is when Valancy realizes that she has lived beyond the year Dr. Trent predicted she would live. This is the first time that Valancy realizes that Dr. Trent might have made a mistake in diagnosing her.

### Chapter 35 Analysis

Valancy predicts that Barney realizes that if Valancy's heart didn't give out from almost being run over by a train that Valancy might not die of heart disease. This foreshadows the downfall of the carefree relationship Valancy and Barney have had thus far and maybe even the demise of their marriage.





## Chapter 36

### Chapter 36 Summary

Valancy reads the letter from Dr. Trent before she goes to sleep. When Barney enters the room, Valancy pretends to be asleep. Barney too pretends to sleep beside Valancy. Valancy has bad dreams about Barney confronting her about not being ill and tricking him into marrying her. When Valancy wakes the next morning, Barney and the canoe are gone. Valancy goes to see Dr. Trent.

### Chapter 36 Analysis

Valancy visiting Dr. Trent foreshadows her finally finding out the truth about her condition. Valancy is also presuming what Barney is thinking, but Barney might be thinking something totally different that Valancy is. Since Valancy is now looking at her life, once again, from a different vantage point, she has lost some of her self-esteem, which is causing her to think the worst.



# Chapter 37

## Chapter 37 Summary

Dr. Trent doesn't recognize Valancy at first. Valancy confronts him, but the doctor denies sending her that letter. Valancy shows Dr. Trent the letter and he tells Valancy that he mixed her diagnosis with another patient from the same day, Jane Sterling. The doctor examines her and deems her fit as a fiddle.

## Chapter 37 Analysis

Facing death is what gave Valancy the courage to finally start living her life the way she wanted to live it. Without the death sentence from Dr. Trent, Valancy never would have experienced what she has for the past year. Ironically, Valancy's family has been right along about Dr. Trent being incompetent. While his diagnosis was correct for each woman, he switched the letters.



# Chapter 38

## Chapter 38 Summary

When Valancy reaches the banks of the lank across from her island, she finds a bright purple car parked next to Barney's car. A man emerges and asks if that is the Redfern house. The man, Dr. Redfern, tells Valancy that Barney Snaith is Bernard Snaith Redfern. Dr. Redfern also reveals that Barney's family is worth millions, which shocks Valancy.

Valancy takes her father-in-law to the house. He reveals that he hasn't seen Bernie, as he calls him, in 11 years. Valancy says Barney has only been living there six years, and the doctor says he was traveling the world before that. The doctor says Barney was raised with everything he wanted and has a college degree. Barney fell in love with a beautiful girl in Montreal, but something happened and the engagement broke up. This is when Barney ran off. When Barney bought the pearl necklace from the jeweler, he wrote them a check for \$15,000, which is how Dr. Redfern tracked Barney down. Dr. Redfern says that he'll return the following day and asks Valancy to talk some sense into Barney in the meantime.

## Chapter 38 Analysis

Barney does have a secret life—that of a doctor. Redfern is the brand name of pills and ointments. It seems as if Barney is making these concoctions when he is locked up in his room. These are the chemicals that Valancy smells coming from the room when Barney is in there. Dr. Redfern is shocked when Valancy says that she is Barney's wife. Valancy plans to request a divorce from Barney, now that she knows that he can afford to pay for one.



# Chapter 39

## Chapter 39 Summary

Looking for a pen, Valancy enters Bluebeard's Chambers. When Valancy goes to the desk, she finds stacks of papers written by John Foster. She finds a pen and piece of paper to write Barney a goodbye letter. Valancy puts the letter and her string of pearls on Barney's desk and leaves the house. She glances at her Blue Castle once last time before leaving.

## Chapter 39 Analysis

Barney Snaith is John Foster. John Foster is Barney's pen name. Again, since Valancy is looking at life from a different vantage point once again, she now sees her Blue Castle as the pitiful shanty that it is instead of her Blue Castle.



# Chapter 40

## Chapter 40 Summary

Valancy walks into her mother's house to find her Uncle Benjamin, Cousin Stickles and mother staring at her. They realize something is wrong. Valancy tells her mother she is home because she isn't going to die. Valancy tells her family the whole story. Valancy is so naïve that she doesn't see what her Uncle is doing. Valancy goes to her room. Uncle Benjamin tells the women that he'll take care of everything.

## Chapter 40 Analysis

In her own mind, Valancy compares herself to the Prodigal Son returning home. When Uncle Benjamin finds out that Barney is a Redfern, his whole attitude changes. He seems to be nice to Valancy so that he can help her to some of Barney's fortune. Uncle Benjamin changes his attitude and the way he tells stories about Barney to Mrs. Frederick after he finds out that Barney is a Redfern.



# Chapter 41

## Chapter 41 Summary

Nothing in Valancy's room has changed. Only Valancy herself has changed and evolved. She thinks how Barney will go and marry his old love. Valancy wishes she could die.

## Chapter 41 Analysis

Valancy feels as if she has lived her life and now it is over. While she thinks Barney doesn't love her, he does. It foreshadows Barney proposing marriage to Valancy.



## Chapter 42

### Chapter 42 Summary

Barney comes to tell Valancy the whole story. He tells her how the kids at school and college tormented him because of his father's inventions. When he found out Ethel was in love with him for his money, he took off. With the royalties from his first book as John Foster, he bought the island. He professes his love for Valancy. She realizes he really does love her. Uncle Benjamin decides to change his will and leave everything to Valancy.

### Chapter 42 Analysis

Valancy has finally gotten everything she has always dreamed of having. She has a man that loves her. She has a man that she loves. She has her Blue Castle on the island.



# Chapter 43

## Chapter 43 Summary

Barney says they'll build a home in Montreal near his dad. They'll spend time there and in the Blue Castle. The rest of the time they'll spend traveling. Valancy asks Barney to promise never to tell she asked him to marry her.

## Chapter 43 Analysis

Valancy has made it full circle in her life. She went from an old maid without experiencing life and knowing what love is to having it all. She now has a husband, numerous houses and wealth. She has more than she has ever dreamed of having, or ever really wanted.





# Chapter 44

## Chapter 44 Summary

Olive writes her fiancé Cecil about how the family has taken Valancy back with open arms. Olive says Valancy is laughing behind all of their backs.

## Chapter 44 Analysis

The tables have turned. Olive is now jealous of Valancy's life and the attention Valancy receives. In the past, it was always Valancy that was jealous of Olive, her beauty and all of her



# Chapter 45

## Chapter 45 Summary

Valancy and Barney return to the Blue Castle before going overseas. Valancy is excited but knows there is no place like home.

## Chapter 45 Analysis

Valancy finally has her happy ever after. She has the prince she only dreamed of before she thought she was dying. She has more than one Blue Castle. Now, she has an entire world ahead of her because they plan to travel extensively. It's as if Valancy really is royalty and Barney is her Prince Charming.



# Characters

## Valancy Stirling

Valancy Stirling is a 29-year-old single woman and only child. At the time in which Valancy lives, she is considered to be an old maid. Valancy's family doesn't treat her very kindly. They think of Valancy as a plain child.

Due to their feelings towards Valancy, she has never had nice things or even things of her own that she isn't required to share. Some of Valancy's family members expect her to care for them. For example, Cousin Stickles believes it is Valancy's job to rub liniment on her back.

Because Valancy really doesn't have a life of her own, she dreams about the life she would have if she had her own house - the Blue Castle. Valancy dreams of the prince, her husband, boyfriend, or lover, that will court her in the Blue Castle.

When Valancy finds out that she has a heart condition that will kill her, she makes up her mind to live and experience everything she can. She obtains a job out of her mother's home. She lives with her employer. She even proposes to a man, Barney Snaith, so she can be married before she dies.

## Barney Snaith

Barney Snaith owns his own island up in the woods. The townspeople in Deerwood, including Valancy's family, believe Barney is some kind of a criminal. Part of the reason they think this is because Barney hangs out with the town drunk, Roaring Abel.

After Barney and Valancy marry, Valancy learns Barney's true identity. Barney turns out to be the heir of the Redfern fortune because his father invented various ointment, pills and liniments that are to cure different ailments.

Barney is also the author of Valancy's favorite books, John Foster. Barney has been shunning his father's money for 11 years and living off of the royalties he makes from authoring his books. Barney keeps all of this a secret, however, even from Valancy. It's only when Barney's father shows up that Valancy discovers Barney Snaith is actually Bernard Snaith Redfern.

## Mrs. Amelia Frederick

Mrs. Amelia Frederick is Valancy's mother. Mrs. Frederick is a very regimented woman. She has rules as to when the fires can first be lit in the home for cold months. She requires breakfast, lunch and dinner to be served at the same time every day.



Mrs. Frederick always seems to be disappointed in Valancy and doesn't allow Valancy any downtime. She requires that Valancy is always working on something. When Valancy marries Barney Snaith, Mrs. Frederick pretends that Valancy is dead. It's only when Mrs. Frederick finds out that Barney Snaith is Bernard Redfern that she accepts Valancy and Barney's marriage.

## Cousin Christine Stickles

Cousin Christine Stickles lives with Valancy and Mr. Fredrick. Cousin Stickles is the one that wakes Valancy up every morning at 7 am. She has something wrong with her back, so Cousin Stickles is always asking Valancy to rub Redfern liniment on her back.

## Uncle Benjamin

Uncle Benjamin is Valancy's uncle. He owns a store in town. He is always telling jokes about old maids and women that are not married in an effort to make fun of Valancy. After Valancy and Barney marry, Uncle Benjamin is downright rude to Barney when the couple shops in his store one day. Uncle Benjamin insists on getting Valancy and Barney back together when he finds out that Barney is an heir to the Redfern fortune. Uncle Benjamin also goes to his lawyer and makes Valancy the sole heir of Uncle Benjamin's money.

## Cecilia Gay

Cecilia Gay's nickname is Cissy. She is the daughter of the town drunk, Roaring Abel. Cissy goes away to work at a restaurant one summer and comes back pregnant. She never divulges the name of the father. Her baby lives for a year and dies. Cissy ends up drinking so much alcohol that she contracts an illness in her lungs that eventually kills Cissy.

Valancy goes to work and live with Cissy to be her caretaker. More than anything, Valancy and Cissy become companions and friends.

## Roaring Abel

Roaring Abel is Cissy's father. He is the town drunk. He is also the carpenter in town. When he works on Mrs. Frederick's front porch, Valancy gets to know Roaring Abel better. Roaring Abel agrees to hire Valancy to take care of Cissy and cook for him.

When Valancy first arrives to move in with them, Roaring Abel is the first person in her life to pay Valancy a compliment. Roaring Abel also defends Valancy when her family comes and tries to belittle Valancy enough to make her return home.



## **Dr. Redfern**

Dr. Redfern is Barney's biological father. Barney has been estranged from his father for the past 11 years. When the jeweler contacts Dr. Redfern to tell of Barney's purchase of Valancy's pearls, Dr. Redfern tracks Barney down to the island.

Dr. Redfern is the inventor of numerous pills, ointments and liniments for various ailments. One of Valancy's family members swears by the pills. Cousin Stickles is obsessed with the Redfern liniment for her back pain.

## **Olive**

Olive is Valancy's cousin. To Valancy, Olive has everything. Olive is beautiful and is always the one that gets everything. Valancy is a little jealous of Olive. By the end of the novel, Olive is the one wishing you she had what Valancy has.

## **Aunt and Uncle Wellington**

Aunt and Uncle Wellington are Valancy's aunt and uncle. They are also Olive's parents. It is the rain on the day that is supposed to be their anniversary picnic that alters Valancy's activities and sends her to the doctor for a checkup. Without the lack of their anniversary picnic, Valancy might never have experienced everything she did in her life.



# Objects/Places

## Deerwood

Deerwood is the town in Canada where the novel takes place and where Valancy lives with her family. Deerwood is also the area of town where most of the residents from the surrounding areas go to shop, see the doctor, and do things of a similar nature.

## Mistawis

Mistawis is the area where Barney Snaith lives. Mistawis is where there is a group of islands are inhabited by some residents. Barney purchases one of these islands and lives in the house. It is the area that Barney and Valancy explore together after they are married and living in Barney's house together.

## Rosebush

Valancy receives a rosebush as a gift. The bush has not bloomed since the time Valancy planted it. In a fit of anger one day, Valancy chops the rosebush up. After she visits her family after her marriage, she notices the bush is in full bloom.

## Port Lawrence

Port Lawrence is a city and area beyond Deerwood. Barney goes to the Port a lot for shopping and exploring. He and Valancy frequent the port after they are married. It is also the place where Barney goes to apply for the marriage license when he and Valancy decide to marry.

## Blue Castle

The Blue Castle is where Valancy dreams of living. In her castle, she can be whoever she wants to be and do whatever she wants to do. When she marries Barney, Valancy refers to their home on the island as their Blue Castle.

## Dr. Trent's Letter

Dr. Trent's letter tells Valancy that she has a fatal heart disease. The letter is a turning point in Valancy's life because she makes a conscious decision to change her life. The letter motivates Valancy to start experiencing things and doing things for the first time in her life.



## Valancy's Medicine

Valancy's medicine is prescribed by Dr. Trent. The medication helps Valancy to control her heart attacks. It's the medication that ultimately helps Valancy to get through the systems of her heart disease until the illness subsides.

## Barney's Car

Barney's car is notable because it is loud when he drives it around. Barney is also one of the other residents in the area to own an automobile. The car is transportation for Barney and Valancy after they married—taking them to and places that Valancy has never been before.

## Books

The John Foster books offer an escape from reality for Valancy. In addition to occupying her mind, Valancy applies the information she takes from John Foster's books to her real life situations. In reality, Valancy's love for John Foster is what ultimately, but unknowingly, attracts Valancy to Barney, who is the real John Foster.

## Bluebeard's Chamber

Bluebeard's Chamber is Barney's secret shanty. It's a shed that he prohibits Valancy from entering from before the time they marry. She respects his wishes until the day she goes in the shed to retrieve an ink pen. This is when Valancy discovers that the shed is where Barney writes the books that he publishes under the pen name of John Foster.



# Themes

## Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, Olive has a relationship with her family that they pretty much allow her to do what she wishes as long as it behooves Olive and the appearance of the rest of the family. Valancy, however, must do what her family says.

Friendship is another type of relationship the novel tackles. Before Valancy comes to care for Cissy, they are simply acquaintances. After Valancy starts caring for Cissy, the two women become true friends and companions.

Romantic relationships are also tackled in the novel. Valancy forms a romantic relationship with Barney after they marry and they get to know each other better. Olive has several romantic relationships. She can maintain the ones her family approves of, but must end the ones they do not approve.

## Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as a family that is always demeaning you and health issues. Valancy struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes having a fatal heart disease. In fact, it's her illness that compels her to really start living her life the way she wants to live it.

Valancy also faces the rite of passage of having her first boyfriend and husband. Along with having her first boyfriend and husband, she experiences her first romantic and sexual relationship. Valancy especially struggles with her feelings about herself as a person and how she feels about the people with which she surrounds herself.

## Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—the Stirlings. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Valancy's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written from the third-person point of view, from the perspective of author and narrator. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time leading up to and after Valancy finds out about her heart disease. The past represents Valancy's childhood and life before adulthood.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Valancy Stirling. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Valancy's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to Valancy. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

## Setting

The novel is set primarily in Deerwood, Canada and its surrounding areas. The time period of the novel seems to be prior to automobiles becoming a primary form of transportation in Canada. The main characters are involved in Valancy's life before and after she is diagnosed with her fatal heart disease.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the main character is going to die. However, as events unfold, the fatal heart disease is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters, and even the outcome of the novel.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The author, however, interjects some foreign words, which seem to be British English, to fit into the setting of the novel. The language is from the century in which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

## Structure

The novel is divided into 45 chapters. Each chapter ranges from two to 20 pages in length. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships - both friendship and romantic relationships. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters - primarily, Valancy Stirling. Another subplot involves family relationships.



## Quotes

"We're all horribly long-lived" (Chapter 1, p. 4).

"Your face is so small that you must add height to it by a pompadour effect" (Chapter 2, p. 9).

"Mother, would you mind calling me Valancy after this" (Chapter 3, p. 11).

"I don't envy Jennie the man, but I do envy her the house" (Chapter 4, p. 15).

"Twenty-nine. Dear me, Doss, you're dangerously near the second corner and not even thinking of getting married yet" (Chapter 5, p. 16).

"The doctor forgot all about me" (Chapter 6, p. 20).

"Doss, what on earth are you doing? Have you gone crazy" (Chapter 7, p. 23).

"It's not ladylike to have feelings" (Chapter 8, p. 28).

"A house like that is blasphemy" (Chapter 9, p. 36).

"She has no social presence whatever" (Chapter 10, p. 37).

"The greatest happiness is to sneeze when you want to" (Chapter 11, p. 42).

"I wish that I may have one little dust-pile before I die" (Chapter 12, p. 52).

"There's nothing the matter with my mind" (Chapter 13, p. 52).

"But Cissy must have someone to look after her" (Chapter 14, p. 57).

"I am going to keep house for Roaring Abel and nurse Cissy" (Chapter 15, p. 59).



"They couldn't stop me" (Chapter 16, p. 62).

"Everyone has a Blue Castle, I think" (Chap. 17, p. 66).

"I like a man whose eyes say more than his lips" (Chapter 18, p. 70).

"Miss Stirling can go if she pleases, or stay if she pleases" (Chapter 19, p. 73).

"We'll hear something worse than that about her soon" (Chapter 20, p. 77).

"Evidently John Foster says a sensible thing every once in a while" (Chapter 21, p. 82).

"Who -who will protect that unfortunate girl when I'm gone" Chapter 22, p. 88).

"Who could endure life if it were not for the hope of death" (Chapter 23, p. 91).

"Oh, no, I'm not going to stay here" (Chapter 24, p. 94).

"Will you marry me as I stand" (Chapter 25, p. 97).

"What a nice way to get married" (Chapter 25, p. 99).

"Valancy Snaith, by the grace of God" (Chapter 26, p. 106).

"Marriage is such a serious thing" (Chapter 28).

"What a view old Tom picked out when he built this shack" (Chapter 29, p. 115).

"Moonlight and blue twilight - that is what you look like in that dress" ((Chapter 30, p. 119).

"I'd be bored by conventions and obligations" (Chapter 31, p. 121).

"But now - the laugh comes" (Chapter 32, p. 126).



"That sounds John Fosterish" (Chapter 33, p. 128).

"But we are outlaws" (Chap. 34, p. 131).

"Go - go - quick - you'll be killed, Barney" (Chapter 35, p. 133).

"This is the letter I meant for old Miss Jane Sterling" (Chapter 37, p. 137).

"No - that house belongs to Mr. Snaith" (Chapter 38, p. 141).

"So this explains it" (Chapter 39, p. 148).

"I wonder if the Prodigal Son ever felt really at home again" (Chapter 40, p. 149).

"She can never have those hours in the Blue Castle. Those are mine" (Chapter 41, p. 155).

"I really think, Cecil, you should exercise more" (Chapter 44, p. 44).

"Will you promise me one thing" (Chapter 43, p. 163).

"I really think, Cecil, you should exercise more" (Chapter 44, p. 44).

"And now we're off for a real honeymoon" (Chapter 45, p. 165).

## Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Valancy Stirling? Do you think her new outlook on life is because of her diagnosis or that she has always felt the same way? When Valancy gets her diagnosis, why doesn't she tell anyone? When Naomi confesses that she's dying to Barney, does she do it out of a feeling of desperation because she wants to experience marriage before she dies or for another reason? What does Valancy ultimately realize about her relationship with Barney?

Discuss the relationship between Valancy and Cissy. Are they friends, foes, or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Valancy feel about Cissy? How does Cissy feel about Valancy? How do Valancy's feelings change after Cissy confesses to her? What happens to Cissy?

Discuss the relationship between Valancy and Olive. Are they friends, foes or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Valancy feel about Olive? How does Olive feel about Valancy? How do Olive's feelings change after she finds out who Barney Snaith really is? What does she do about it?

Discuss the relationship between Valancy and Barney. Are they friends, foes, lovers or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Valancy feel about Barney? How does Barney feel about Barney? How do Valancy's feelings change after the she finds out that she's not dying? What does she do about it?

Discuss the relationship between Valancy and Mrs. Frederick. Why does Mrs. Frederick stop talking to her Valancy? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Valancy feel about her mother? How does her mother feel about Valancy? How do Mrs. Frederick's feelings change after she finds out the real identity of Barney Snaith? What does she do about it? What happens to their relationship?

Who is Barney Snaith? Is he a tortured soul or simply a normal man going through a difficult time? Why do you think Barney doesn't want Valancy to know who he really is? What role does Valancy play in Barney's decision to reveal his true identity?

Discuss Naomi's diagnosis. What impact does the diagnosis have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate Valancy and how does it derail her life?