

The Bookseller Study Guide

The Bookseller by Cynthia Swanson

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Plot Summary

NOTE: All citations in this Study Guide refer to the Kindle version of *The Bookseller*, published March 3, 2015.

Sometimes the brain deals with changes in one's life, particularly traumatic changes, by creating an alternate life. Katharyn "Kitty" Miller learns in the novel *The Bookseller* by Cynthia Swanson. Kitty begins to dream about a life where she is married with three children, a reality different from her life as a single woman who co-owns a bookstore. As Kitty's dreams become more and more realistic, she begins to question if they are really dreams at all.

Kitty's life rotates on a single event when she put a personal ad in the newspaper seeking a boyfriend. Lars Andersson was the only one who answered her ad who seemed suitable. They spoke on the phone before meeting in person. Because she was going through a phase where she wanted to seem more mature, Kitty introduced herself to Lars as Katharyn. Kitty remembers arranging to meet Lars in a coffee shop before they ended their phone call. She waited for him at the shop but he never showed up. Believing she had been stood up, Kitty left the shop and embraced her life as a single woman and co-owner of a bookstore with her best friend, Frieda. Kitty later learns Lars died of a heart attack just after they talked on the phone.

Kitty is surprised years after the personal ad incident when she suddenly begins waking up in a world where she is known as Katharyn. In that life she is married to Lars. They have three children, triplets. They live in a house that Lars' designed just for them and even have a maid to help with cleaning. Katharyn does not work but instead stays home with the children. In this version of her life, Lars did not die of a heart attack because Katharyn had sensed what was happening when they were talking and had gotten paramedics to Lars in time to save his life.

As Kitty finds herself immersed more and more often in what she believes is her dream world she begins to learn troubling things about herself and her life as Katharyn. One of her sons is autistic. After researching the causes of autism she learns that specialists believe the disorder is caused because a child was deprived of its mother's love during early years of development. She also learns that she and Frieda had a fight when Katharyn decided to stay home with her children instead of helping Frieda keep the bookstore open. Most upsetting to Katharyn is that her parents were killed in a plane crash when they flew back to Denver from their visit to Hawaii.

Themes in this novel, which has a twist at the end, include the different ways people react to changes in their lives. Also of importance in the novel are the themes of treating people fairly despite their race, understanding autism, and the joy that can be found in teaching a child to read.



Chapters 1 and 2

Summary

In Chapter 1, Kitty wakes in a bedroom she does not recognize. She remembers her friend Frieda helping her paint the bedroom in her duplex bright yellow. She does not remember finishing the painting job or Frieda leaving when they finished. Her dreams generally put her outside traditional times and places, not as straightforward as waking up in a strange bedroom. She thinks this is because she reads so much. Most recent she has been reading the novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. At the bookstore where she works, she tells people the book will haunt their dreams.

Meanwhile in the strange bedroom, Kitty is woken by a man with bright blue eyes. He calls her Katharyn. He tells her Missy's forehead feels warm and she wonders who Missy is and why that is her concern. She sits up, asking who the man is and where she is.

Kitty tells the reader that her name is Katharyn but she has chosen to go by the nickname Kitty. In her dream the man tells her that he is Lars, her husband. He begs her to come help him with their daughter, Missy. In the bathroom Kitty checks herself in the mirror. She is relieved to see she looks the same as she always has. On the way out she is fascinated by a color photograph of a mountain scene. While she is looking at it she is tackled by a small boy who calls her mama. The boy takes her to Missy's room. She guesses the children are five or six and might be twins. As she talks to Missy she is surprised how easily she picks up on mothering.

Kitty interrupts her story to tell her reader that although she is not married and has no children she always thought she would marry Kevin, the boy with whom she went steady in college. They continued to date even when he was sent to war, as well as when he came back and resumed his studies toward becoming a doctor. When Kevin made it obvious he did not intend to propose to her she finally told him she thought they should break up. He married a nurse less than a year later. In her dream world, Kitty gives Missy some aspirin for her fever. Suddenly Kitty is brought out her dream world by the sound of her alarm ringing. She is back in her duplex in the yellow bedroom.

In Chapter 2, Kitty's cat, Aslan, is curled up beside her when she wakes in the real world. As she gets ready for work Kitty thinks it is eerie when the same song, a Rosemary Clooney song, she had in her head during her foray into her dream world comes on the radio. She also thinks it is strange that the man had called her Katharyn since she had always gone by Kitty except for a short time when she thought her given name made her sound more grown up.

As Kitty drinks her coffee and sorts through her mail the thought comes to her mind that she has heard the name Lars before. In the mail she has gotten a postcard from her mother, who is vacationing in Honolulu. Her thoughts move to the shop she owns with



Frieda on Pearl Street. Since the streetcar line that once passed their shop has been shut down, they do not get as much business. She and Frieda have been discussing their options.

Before being a part owner in the bookstore, Kitty had taught fifth grade. She tried to convince herself she loved her job, but she felt the students made fun of her because she got so nervous and talked fast. The parents were hateful and demanding. At the time, Frieda was also unhappy with her job, so with the help of Frieda's father they took out a business loan and started the bookstore they call Sisters'.

Back in the present, Kitty remembers where she has heard the name Lars. He was one of the men who had responded to a personal ad she ran in the newspaper. He had been the only man that she had thought had real potential. Later that day after she got back home, Kitty found the copy of the personal ad as well as the letter Lars had written to introduce himself. After calling Frieda to see if her friend remembered anything about Lars, Kitty recalls that she and Lars had talked on the telephone to set up a date to meet. She also remembered that the same song she had heard in her head during her dream encounter with Lars — the Rosemary Clooney song Hey There — had been playing on the radio when they talked on the phone. She remembered he told her he had not served in the war because he had a heart condition. They had decided to see each other two days later. In the present, Kitty feels anger because he never showed up for their scheduled date.

Analysis

This novel is written in present tense from the first person point of view of a woman referred to both as Kitty and Katharyn. The author uses the present tense to allow for the element of surprise. Kitty is just as surprised to be waking up in a strange bedroom as the reader is to be faced with this declaration the first sentence in the novel. "This is not my bedroom" (1). She is just as confused by her situation as the reader. Meanwhile, the use of the first person point of view puts the reader in very close relationship with Kitty. Had the story been written in a third person point of view there would have been a distance perceived between the reader and the main character. This use of the first person allows the reader to feel like he has a one-on-one relationship with Kitty.

An important thing the reader should be aware of is the two different names used to refer to the main character through the course of the novel. Although her parents named her Katharyn, the woman who serves as the narrator for the novel thinks of herself as Kitty. In her life as the co-owner of a bookstore and a single lady she still refers to herself as Kitty. The nickname makes the main character appear to be a fun, lighthearted person. It is not nearly as serious or heavy as the name Katharyn. In the scenes in which Lars is involved he will refer to her as Katharyn. The uses of the different names are one way that the author differentiates between the person Kitty believes she is and her alternate identity in her dreams.



Author Swanson begins right away the process of helping her readers distinguish between dreams and reality. Notice that she includes a description of the types of dreams that Kitty has after she begins reading the novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. This dream has typical dream characteristics. First, Kitty is unable to make her legs move correctly. Second, she is unable to keep up with the boys she is pursuing, and third, is unable to persuade them to be wary of the carnival. Compare this dream to Kitty's abilities when she woke up in Katharyn's bedroom. Not only was she able to easily move around, she also had information and experience, particularly when it came to caring for children, of which she had no prior knowledge. In comparison to what Kitty believes is her real life, however, she realizes that there is a space of missing information. She has no knowledge of finishing her painting project with Frieda or going to bed.

Lars' bad heart is a significant object in this novel because it is upon his heart health that the action of the novel turns. In her life as Katharyn, the main character is married to Lars and they have two children. In her dream, Lars appears to be healthy and no mentions have been made of a bad heart. Remember that when she talked to Lars on the phone for the first time, he told her that he had a heart condition that kept him from serving in the military. Notice also that Kitty noticed he was breathing heavily when they hung up the phone with each other. The ending of the conversation also seems odd, as if Lars had something he wanted to tell Kitty but decided against it.

Another important symbol in this section of the novel is the song *Hey There*, sung by Rosemary Clooney. This song connects three different aspects of Kitty's life. She hears it in her head when she wakes in the bedroom that Katharyn shares with Lars. The following morning after Kitty wakes in her duplex she hears the same song on the radio. Later, she remembers that this same song was playing on the radio the first time that she talked to Lars on the phone.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the typical qualities of dreams. How is the dream in which Katharyn and Lars look after Missy unusual?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Kitty's loss of memories from her own life. What do you think would account for her not remembering she and Frieda finishing the job of painting?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast the uses of the names Kitty and Katharyn. What different personality traits does each name indicate? Why does Kitty decide to go back to the use of her nickname?



Vocabulary

forays, protagonists, remorseful, bestowed, delectable, fabricated, clerestory, deduce, buxom, foraging, forlorn, nonchalant, perfunctory, callous, cronies, perturbed, compatible, indulgence, anomaly, flippantly, prefabricated



Chapters 3, 4 and 5

Summary

In Chapter 3, Kitty remembers being hurt but not terribly surprised when Lars did not show up for their date. She left the coffee shop where they were supposed to meet with her head held high. In the present, Kitty goes to sleep and wakes in the bedroom she shares with Lars. It is Saturday morning. They have sex quickly before the children wake. There is a knock on the door and Mitch joins them in bed. Lars goes to fix breakfast and leaves Katharyn reading to Mitch. Soon Missy comes to tell them breakfast is ready. Katharyn sends both Missy and Mitch to the kitchen.

Before she leaves Katharyn explores the bedroom and studies the portraits displayed in the hallway. One is of Katharyn and her parents when she was only a baby. She also explores her husband's office. He works as an architect and is president of his own company. She is mystified by a photograph holder that has slots for three photos but has no pictures in it. She is interrupted when Mitch comes looking for her.

In Chapter 4, when Kitty wakes Aslan is asleep next to her. She wonders where he is in her dreams. At the store, Kitty calls the phone numbers she found for Lars in his office but the number is disconnected. She also looks for people named Lars Andersson in the phone book. She is unable to find any information on Lars. In the back of her mind she remembers the postcard that she received from her mother that morning. In it her mother suggests that Kitty can be "anything you want to be" (47-48). Her mother notes she hopes Kitty knows what she is talking about but Kitty is mystified at her meaning. During her lunch break Kitty goes to the library to do some more research on Lars. She is surprised when she sees a death notice in the Oct. 21, 1954 edition of the Denver Post for Lars Andersson.

In Chapter 5, Kitty realizes that Lars did not meet her for coffee because he was dead, not because he stood her up. When she goes to sleep that night, Kitty is surprised to find herself as Katharyn again, eating in a restaurant with Lars. They meet a couple named Bill and Judy. Bill is a client of Lars'. He wants to build an office building with shops downtown. Katharyn is interested and wonders if she and Frieda should consider a shop downtown.

Later during the evening Judy asks how Lars and Katharyn met. She is told that they met through the personal ad that Katharyn had put in the paper. While they were talking on the phone Katharyn had realized that Lars was having a heart attack. She called for medical help and he had survived. As Katharyn sits in her alternate life and considers the situation, she thinks that if she were watching a television show she would have gotten up and turned it off because the circumstances seem so absurd.

As the dream progresses, Katharyn tells Judy how she had gone to the hospital where Lars was being treated and approached Lars' brother-in-law. When she introduced her



as the one who had gotten Lars' help, the man told her Lars wanted to meet her. They had gotten married less than a year later. Katharyn tenses when Lars wonders aloud what might have happened if they had ended their call a few minutes sooner than they did. When Lars mentions that they had decided together to quit smoking to improve his health, Katharyn remembers her own decision to stop smoking about that time in her real life. She could not explain to Frieda exactly why she had decided to quit, she just felt like it was something she had to do.

In her dream Katharyn notes the route they drive to get home. It turns out they live at 3258 Springfield Street. She is surprised when they go inside and she learns that they have a Mexican maid named Alma. When she goes to the bedroom to prepare for bed she finds that the cabinet is stocked with the same products, like the Fountain of Youth face cream, that she uses in her real life.

Analysis

Significant, obviously, are the differences between the way Kitty remembers how she met Lars and the story that she as Katharyn and Lars tell their dinner companions. It is this one particular incident, the ending of the phone call when they first talk to one another, that is the fork in the path for Kitty. If it is true that Lars died of a heart attack then Kitty's life as the single co-owner of a bookstore is what would have followed for her. On the other hand, if she did notice his odd symptoms and call for medical help it is possible that she could have married him and now be living her life as Katharyn. Notice in one of her forays into Katharyn's world, there is reference to Lars' heart problems. This reference indicates that the man to whom is married as Katharyn appears to be the same man with whom she talked on the phone after he answered her personal ad.

When Kitty, as Katharyn, explores the bedroom that Katharyn shares with Lars she seems to be getting a sense of *déjà vu*, as if she has been there before but cannot quite put all the pieces together. Her interactions with the children seem to be second nature, as if she has been dealing with them all of her life. Katharyn asks herself several times during her interactions with the children how she knew certain details about them. One example of this comes when she asks Missy about her new princess nightgown without any prompting.

Many differences between Kitty and Katharyn are pointed out in this section of the novel. The intention is to help the reader understand how different Katharyn's life with Lars is from Kitty's life as a single woman, the co-owner of a bookstore. First, Katharyn is able to sew and apparently even appliquéd. Kitty is barely able to sew on a button. Katharyn's wardrobe is much more classy than Kitty's and her clothes are organized and neatly stored. Kitty likes to wear eclectic clothes and often leaves piles of outfits scattered around her bedroom when she leaves for work in the morning.

One aspect of her personality that is constant in her personalities as both Katharyn and Kitty is her appreciation of her parents. As Kitty, she treasures the postcards that her mother sends her from Hawaii. As Katharyn, she stops in the hallway in front of the



picture of she and her parents to thank them and tell them she does not know what she would do without them.

There is foreshadowing of a coming twist in the novel in this section. This foreshadowing comes as Katharyn stands in front of her family's photograph in the hallway. "I think suddenly about what it means to grow old. It means that all those that you loved as a youth become nothing but photographs on a wall, words in a story, memories in a heart" (43). This quote reminds the reader of the reality of death, that no one, not even those we love, live forever. Since Katharyn has this idea when she is looking at her parents' picture it makes the reader wonder if she will lose her parents in the course of the story.

Also significant is Kitty's act of quitting smoking in the fall of 1954. In her life as Kitty she had no firm reason why she stopped smoking. She could only tell Frieda she felt like not smoking any longer was something she needed to do. She realizes as she hears Lars tell the story of how he and Katharyn decided to quit smoking at the same time to help improve his health that it was also in the fall of 1954 that they stopped smoking.

Katharyn's surprise to learn that she has a Mexican maid gives the reader an idea of Kitty's stand on racism. "I would have preferred my persona in this dream world to be a bit more enlightened" (62) Katharyn says of herself and the way she apparently treats her maid. She is especially discouraged that she makes Alma wear a uniform. She thinks of herself that she should "at least have the decency to let her wear street clothes, especially when she's babysitting after hours" (62). Even though Katharyn is not sure how she usually interacts with Alma, she invites Alma to stay inside while she waits for her husband to pick her up. Katharyn does this as an offer of kindness between the two. Notice that Alma is Mexican and is characterized as such. She speaks Spanish. When she does speak English it is broken.

A few other things to notice in this section include the photograph of the mountains that is displayed in the hallway where it can be seen from the bed in Lars and Katharyn's master bedroom. Katharyn is also bemused by the photo frame she finds in Lars' office that has room for three photos, she wonders what they plan to use it for. A final thing to notice in this section is the Patsy Cline song "Leavin' on Your Mind" that plays at the restaurant where Lars and Katharyn are eating. Remember that this song is a new release.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the coincidences between Kitty's life and Katharyn's. What do you think these coincidences mean?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Kitty's reaction when she discovers that in her life as Katharyn she has a maid. What seems to disturb her most about having a maid?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Kitty decides to research Lars and does not just blow the dreams off? Why is it significant that the stories of the way Kitty and Lars met — up to the end of the phone call where Kitty hung up understanding that she and Lars were to meet in a coffee house, but the woman who became Katharyn recognized Lars was not well and got him medical attention — are so similar?

Vocabulary

contritely, furtively, obliging, girth, eclectic, subdued, rumpus, beguiling, furtively, ruefully, cadence, piques, premonitions, facade



Chapters 6, 7 and 8

Summary

In Chapter 6, even though she knows it is silly, Katharyn feels sad when she wakes at home. That evening as she and Frieda are locking up the shop, they see Bradley, their landlord. Katharyn feels panicky because they are not sure from where they will get their money for the next month's rent. Instead of going home, Kitty rides the bus as far as it goes to into the area of town that includes Southern Hills neighborhood, the place where she lives with Lars as Katharyn. She walks the rest of the way to Springfield Street. Where the house in her dreams should have been there is only a hilly lot. She asks a man walking his dog if he knows of a family named Andersson. He does not.

Back in her own neighborhood Katharyn spots her neighbors' son, Greg Hansen, bouncing a ball against the duplex. She asks him about school, which he says is hard. Reading is the hardest subject for him. She offers to help him learn to read better and invites him over after dinner. She has just finished looking through her children's books for something that might interest him when he knocks on the door.

In Chapter 7 Katharyn wakes in a bathtub. She is with Lars on their honeymoon in Paris. She does not want to wake up from her dream. When she does wake again, she is still Katharyn but the time setting has gone forward to 1962. Lars comes into the bathroom and Katharyn jokes with him. He tells her that he is glad she is feeling better, that they have all been worried about her. She asks why they have been worried but Lars will not give her a specific answer. When Katharyn does wake up from her dream, she realizes she has fallen in love with Lars, whom she believes is a ghost.

In Chapter 8 the books Katharyn has are either too easy for Greg or too difficult. She tells him she will find something interesting for him to read that is not too difficult. Her mother's postcard that she receives that day is melancholy. Her mother mentions a women's necklace she found washed up on the shore.

Kitty scours the store she owns with Frieda but does not find any books she thinks will work for Greg. On a whim, Kitty asks what he would like to read about. He tells her he would like to read about baseball. Because she is unable to find any books about baseball on Greg's reading level Kitty decides to write one for him. In order to get the information she needs, she asks him about baseball. She learns his favorite player is Willie Mays.

A couple of nights later she gives Greg a book of papers stapled together. She has drawn pictures to go with the story and even included a stack of cards with words that feature corresponding pictures. Greg flips through the book and discovers that the story is about Willie Mays and about him. He thanks Kitty for the story.



For a week Kitty has no dreams. She has more energy which she uses to put together a fall display at the store. Greg thanks her for the book and tells her that his mother was proud when she read it to him. Kitty decides to write him more stories.

Analysis

Hints that something stressful has happened in Katharyn's life begin to be dropped in this section. In the dream about her life with Lars he tells her that he is glad she is feeling better. Even though she questions Lars, Katharyn cannot get any hints about what might have happened to make her feel bad. The author drops this hint to let the reader know that not everything is good in Katharyn's life with Lars. She begins to build suspense and questions in the reader's mind when she mentions Katharyn has been feeling bad.

The author also includes a hint of what is going to happen to Kitty's parents in the postcard that Kitty receives from her mother. In her note on this card Kitty's mother mentions a women's necklace that she found washed up on the shore in Hawaii. Hints are given that the woman who lost the necklace is no longer alive to come back for it. "I doubt anyone will return for it" (83) Kitty's mother says of the necklace. "Such incidents make one wonder what other mysteries lie deep under the sea" (83) as if she is speaking of wreckage from boat or plane crashes. Notice that Kitty's mother even mentions how storms at sea are so much more scary than those in landlocked areas.

Even as she falls in love with the Lars she knows as Katharyn, Kitty is also falling in love with an activity she begins in her life as Kitty. She is thrilled with the success she has when she writes a story for the boy who lives next door to her. The boy, Greg, has been having trouble reading and is inspired when Kitty gives him the book that she has written just for him.

In the structure of this novel, the author includes a section that Kitty refers to a dream within a dream. She is in her life as Katharyn when she dreams about her honeymoon with Lars. Because this is a dream Kitty is not disturbed by her ability to remember. She thinks it is her mind making up a memory.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of the postcard that Kitty's mother sent her. What does the necklace symbolize?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Kitty's interest in teaching Greg to read. How is she able to come up with the idea of writing a book for him?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Kitty's ability to have dreams even while she is in her life as Katharyn. Why might this be significant? Have you ever had a dream within a dream?

Vocabulary

melancholy, lucrative, avert, allure, plethora, annoyance, curmudgeon, peignoir, devoid, davenport, salable



Chapters 9, 10 and 11

Summary

In Chapter 9, in her next dream Katharyn finds herself and Lars at a cocktail party. Her outfit reminds her of one worn by the first lady, Jackie Kennedy. Katharyn is also surprised because she is drinking a martini. A redheaded woman, whom Katharyn has learned is named Jean, compliments Katharyn on her dress. The host, George, brings Jean another drink. Katharyn recognizes him as the man she saw during her walk to Springfield Street in her real life. She realizes she has to go to the bathroom and goes in search of one. Instead of finding a bathroom she winds up in the kitchen. Alma shows her to the bathroom but seems concerned that Katharyn might be having a problem and not enjoying the party.

Walking back down the hallway to the party Katharyn runs into George, the host and man she saw in her real life. George touches her hip and compliments her in a suggestive manner. His wife walks up behind him and shoos him off before he can go any further. She apologizes to Katharyn for her husband's behavior and asks Katharyn how she has been coping with what she had been through. She also thanks Katharyn for lending her Alma.

After the party, Katharyn and Lars walk home. She bids farewell to the babysitter while Lars waits outside to walk the girl, named Trish, home. Katharyn goes to the bedroom she shares with Lars and is astonished to see Aslan there. She hears Lars come in and the sounds of him checking the children. When he is in the bedroom she apologizes for drinking so much. He tells her it is understandable. She asks him where she got her dress and who does her hair. He tells her the name of the store where she bought the dress and also reminds her that his sister, Linnea, is the one who does her hair. He assumes she has forgotten because she is drunk.

In Chapter 10, back in her life as Kitty, she gets an appointment with Linnea to get her hair done. She also checks at May-D&F, the store that Lars told her she got her dress from, but cannot find one similar.

During her hair appointment, Kitty is surprised how similar Linnea is to the Lars in her dreams. Kitty gets Linnea to talk about her family, their immigration and how her family members died. Kitty cannot imagine not having her parents alive with her. Just that morning her mother's postcard had made Kitty want to call her. On Linnea's request, Kitty tells her about herself. Kitty tells Linnea about the bookstore she owns with Frieda. Linnea mentions she would like to come and browse someday.

When Kitty arrives back at the bookstore Frieda, compliments her on her new hairstyle. She also mentions that Greg Hansen stopped by the bookstore. He wanted to thank Kitty for the book she had written for him.



In Chapter 11 Katharyn wakes to hear Missy calling her name. She slowly realizes they are in the shoe department of a Mays-D&F but that it is a different store from the one at which she has always shopped. Missy likes a pair of Mary Janes. Mitch seems concerned about the lace up shoes the salesman brings so Katharyn suggests some loafers that do not tie. When Mitch is relieved, Katharyn gets the feeling she might be good at parenting.

Katharyn realizes she has promised the children if they were good in the store, they could go browse at the toy store. They head that direction. As they leave Mays-D&F Missy points out a similar dress to the one Katharyn wore to the cocktail party on a clearance rack. Katharyn questions Missy about when she bought the dress, and is able to put together from the clues Missy gives her that life with Lars is set in the future from her life as Kitty. Katharyn tries to determine what year it is by asking her children who the president is but realizes even though they say it is Kennedy, the year is still undeterminable because she suspects Kennedy will serve a second term.

As she walks with her children through the shopping center, Katharyn wonders if a place like this is the right place for she and Frieda to relocate Sisters'. As she is watching her children, the hostess from the party greets Katharyn from behind. The woman asks if they are shopping or browsing and Katharyn suddenly decides to let the children each get a toy as a treat. The woman tells Katharyn that under the circumstances it is probably okay to spoil the children a little. She also compliments Lars on being such a good husband and comments she saw him playing with the children for several hours a few days before. She mentions that her husband would not take care of their son like that.

After Missy and Mitch have bought their toys, they walk into the parking lot. Katharyn challenges them to help her find their car. They lead her to a green station wagon. She starts driving out of the lot but gets frustrated when she stalls the car. She surprises even herself, asking where Michael is. She wonders who Michael is. Missy tells her Michael is safe at home with Daddy.

Analysis

Mysteries about Katharyn's life with Lars continue to surface in this section of chapters. Chapter 11, for instance, ends with a bombshell. It appears there is another member of the family, Michael, that Katharyn has not yet met but she knows he exists because she asks about him. Katharyn's comment about Micheal is significant because it is one of the first things that she remembers about her life as Katharyn of which she had absolutely no prior knowledge. Missy and Mitch also know Michael and are able to tell their mother that Michael is with his father.

Other hints are given that something is amiss in Katharyn's life. For instance, Alma asks Katharyn twice if she is all right as she helps Katharyn find the bathroom. Lars tells his wife it is "understandable" (97) that she would drink too much considering her situation. The hostess meanwhile asks Katharyn how she is "coping" (94) after what she has



been through. When Katharyn later runs into this same woman at the toy store she mentions how good a husband Lars is, as if Katharyn is doubting Lars' dedication of a husband. From this hint the reader must wonder if Lars is somehow responsible for Katharyn's stress. Note also Katharyn's fear that she will lose her parents. "I cannot in my wildest imagination envision losing my parents" (103) Kitty thinks to herself as Linnea does her hair. Since Kitty's dedication to her parents is such a recurring theme in the novel one must wonder if something is going to happen to them.

Kitty's growing interest in her life with Lars is significant. She tries to determine the differences in times of year between her life as Kitty and her life as Katharyn by questioning Missy and Mitch. Even from the answers that they give her she is able to tell Katharyn's life is set a few months ahead of her life as Kitty, but is still not able to tell in what year they are living.

One aspect of both Kitty and Katharyn's lives that turns out to be parallel is their use of Linnea, Lars' sister, as a hairdresser. Significant also is that even though Linnea's brother died in the life that is lived by Kitty, Linnea remained in Denver and continued her job as a hairdresser. Her brother's death did not affect her life as much as it appears that it did Kitty. It is also interesting that the "real" Linnea in Kitty's life is able to fix her hair just like the one in her life as Katharyn does.

Katharyn's relationship with Missy is significant because Katharyn recognizes how much she and Missy have in common. "She reminds me so much of myself as a child," (116) Katharyn thinks to herself. A short time later she calls Missy "child of my heart" (116). What is important to remember is that Katharyn thinks to herself that she would be willing to give up anything for Missy to really be hers. Later in the novel she will be reminded of this thought. She will realize that by having children, her life as Katharyn will be changed and she will have to give up an important life because of her children.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think there is a time difference between the life of Kitty and her life as Katharyn?

Discussion Question 2

How is Katharyn's statement that she would be willing to give up anything for Missy to be hers dangerous? What might she be asked to give up?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that Linnea appears in both Kitty's life and her life as Katharyn? Why is it unusual that Linnea's life appears to have changed so little because of Lars' death?

Vocabulary

fanciful, venues, formative, hapless, inebriated, concede, unequivocally, pensively, fathom, disenchanting, trepidation, iconic, intuition, protocol, minuscule, ominous



Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15

Summary

In Chapter 12, back in the real world, Kitty reads the Denver Post to learn how the World Series is progressing. Frieda looks through the help wanted section hoping to find inspiration for their store. Kitty suggests relocating to the University Hills Shopping Center. They decide to close early and take the bus to that shopping center where they look for empty stores. She claims they are just looking, but Kitty sees a sparkle in her eyes.

In Chapter 13, Katharyn wakes up alone in the bedroom of the Springfield Street house. She finds Lars in the kitchen, cooking breakfast. As he cooks she goes to the picture window in the living room. Lars brings her coffee. As she is drinking and thinking she is attacked by a small boy wearing thick glasses. He calls her mama but seems to be off, looking at nothing but smiling. She yells at him in surprise. When the boy begins screaming Lars comes from the kitchen. He holds the boy by the shoulders and gets him to sing a song along with him. Mitch and Missy, who have heard the noise, come downstairs. Once Lars gets the boy, whom he calls Michael, calm, he asks Mitch and Missy to take him back upstairs. Katharyn notices all three children are the same size. She also notices Lars is angry when he looks at her and asks what is wrong with her.

In Chapter 14, Kitty wakes in her bed in her duplex. The memory of Michael and his scream is still real. She wonders what is wrong with him. At the store the following day Kitty calls her mother in Honolulu. As Kitty talks to her mother, a lady with a young girl walks into the store. Kitty ends her conversation with her mother quickly when she hears a crash and the girl screaming. She realizes the sound of the girl's scream is like that of Michael's. The woman tries to calm the girl and finally manages to get her to be quiet. She apologizes to Kitty and tells her they had been having a good day but she should not have challenged the girl by coming into the store. She had been looking for the book *Ship of Fools*, but would not even wait for Kitty to get a copy for her. When Kitty tries to ask, the woman tells her that her daughter is autistic. She seems offended by Kitty's questions and behavior.

Kitty finds a book in the store that has a section about autism. She reads a description that reminds her of both Michael and the girl who was just in the store. She is chilled when she reads that it is believed autism is caused by an emotionally distant mother.

In Chapter 15, when Kitty wakes next as Katharyn, she is in Washington Park with Michael. It is a park she had played at when she was a child. She questions Michael and learns that Mitch and Missy are at school. He seems happy as she pushes him on a swing. She wonders if the children are triplets and tries to imagine being pregnant with three babies. Katharyn decides to push Michael further and asks him how old he is. He gets angry when she repeats her question but then, after he asks what time it is, he tells her his age down to the minute. He also tells her the ages of Missy and Mitch. They are



all six years old. Michael is the oldest with Mitch born second and Missy born last. He also tells her the date is Feb. 27, 1963 and reminds her it is Wednesday, the day they go shopping for food.

On the way to the grocery store she asks Michael if they should go by her parents house. When they arrive the shades are drawn. The sidewalk is shoveled but the steps and the walkway leading up to the house are not. As she and Michael sit outside the house Katharyn wonders if her parents deal well with Michael. She has a memory of her, Lars and the children going to her parents' house and having them come outside and greet them enthusiastically. They promise to take good care of the children while Lars and Katharyn go to play tennis. Back in the car with Michael, Katharyn decides to visit her parents another day.

Michael gives her directions to the grocery store. They are about halfway through the shopping when a woman greets her. She speaks to Michael but then talks to Katharyn about how she is never sure how to interact with Michael. Michael screams at the woman that he can hear her. People turn to stare. Katharyn tries to calm him like Lars did but he only gets more upset. He runs out of the store. Katharyn leaves her cart full of groceries to go after Michael. She manages to get him in the car. He screams the entire way home. In the driveway Alma comes outside to see if everything is all right. Katharyn begs Alma to tell her how to make him stop. Alma is no help. She asks to go back inside because the iron is on. Alma asks if she should call Lars but Katharyn tells her not to do so yet. Katharyn tries to open the door on his side of the car but he hits her. She has to go to the driver's side in order to unbuckle his seatbelt. She tells him he can stay outside and scream or stop and come inside. She leaves the door open.

Inside she pours herself a glass of whiskey. She stands and watches Michael through the picture window. She can still hear Michael screaming. She asks Alma how long she thinks Michael can keep up the screaming. She admits she tried to touch the boy but he hit her. Alma nods. Katharyn asks her to call Lars.

Analysis

When Kitty, as Katharyn, meets Michael she realizes that all is not perfect as one would expect of a dream world. Her first impression of him is that he is not right. It is an odd coincidence when the girl with autism and her mother visit Kitty's book shop the day after Kitty meets Michael in her dreams. It is from this girl's behavior that Kitty is able to determine that Michael, like the girl in the book store, is autistic. Kitty asks the woman questions, trying to learn more about the disorder, but the mother seems to think she is being rude and nosey. In a return trip to her "dream" world, Michael has a similar episode to the girl's when he and Katharyn are shopping. Katharyn is unable to calm him down. It appears that Lars is the only one with the ability to pacify the boy once he gets upset.

Any ideas Kitty, as Katharyn, was developing that she could be a good mother disappear when she meets Michael. First, she learns that the professionals believe that



autism is caused by a mother who is emotionally distant in the early years of development. Kitty realizes it could be Katharyn's fault that Michael is the way he is. Second, Kitty realizes that as Katharyn she had forgotten completely about Michael. Up to that point her dreams had included only Missy and Mitch. However the reader should remember Katharyn's panic because Michael was not with them when they returned home from shopping. She did remember Michael, who he was and how he was had not set in yet. "What kind of mother would I be — if I actually was a mother, and that world was real — if I had somehow forgotten that Michael even existed?" (131) Kitty thinks to herself as she considers her reaction to Michael the first time she met him. She believes her ability to forget she had three children indicated that her life with Lars was just something her brain was concocting.

There are several odd things that happen in this section concerning Katharyn's parents. First, notice that she has begun taking Michael to Washington Park, the one her parents took her to when she was a child. She knows of no particular reason for visiting this park, only that Michael tells her they have been coming to this different park recently. Also strange is Katharyn's decision to go to see her parents, as well as her decision to leave without visiting. When she pulls up to the house, notice that it appears like no one is living there. The shades are drawn and the sidewalk and steps remain covered in snow.

One of the earmarks of autism is that even though a child may be emotionally and developmentally different, he often has some area in which he excels. For Michael this area of excellence appears to be math. He is able to tell his mother down to the minute how old he, his brother and his sister are. One aspect of Michael's character that seems strange is his speech. He is portrayed as speaking quite well for a young child, especially one who is autistic. This ability to speak this well is interesting because many children with autism do not speak at all or speak very little. In Katharyn's case, it is important that Michael be able to speak to her because he is able to give her details of her life with her family that help orient her to time and place. Michael's sudden flashes of anger and uncontrollable temper, however, do fit the course for autism.

As Kitty and Frieda try to decide what they should do to bring more business to their store, they seem to be coming to a crossroads as they both seek different responses to the changes in their lives. Since foot traffic and business has declined so much at their store on Pearl Street, Frieda wants to try opening a store in a new shopping mall. Although Kitty likes their small, personal shop in the older part of town she knows Frieda dreams of a new shop in a busy mall area. It is the "sparkle" (125) that Kitty sees in her friend's eyes that gives away that she is doing more than just looking for empty shops.

Discussion Question 1

The author makes a point of telling the reader that Katharyn has begun bringing Michael to the same park her parents took her to visit when she was a child. There is also the strange incident when Katharyn drives to her parents' house but decides not to visit. What do you think the author is trying to tell the reader by mentioning these things?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way Michael is portrayed in this section. Do you think the author has done a good job of presenting the personality of an autistic child? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Kitty is not interested in moving to a larger store that would get the more business, the way that Frieda is?

Vocabulary

sluice, gulches, excursion, reconcile, transfixed, figment, impulsively, precarious, fervor, incongruously, pervades, incoherently

Chapters 16 and 17

Summary

In Chapter 16, Kitty wakes in her own private, quiet world. Later that day as she works in the book store she thinks about the novel *Ship of Fools* and how it relates to her life. Just like the characters in the confined spaces described in the novel are having to get to know one another whether they want to or not, she is having to get to know the family that she has as Katharyn. Katharyn also thinks about how Katherine Porter, the author of the novel, almost died in 1918 of the Spanish flu. If she had died, she never would have written the novel *Ship of Fools*. If that had been the case the woman with the autistic child would not have come into her shop and Katharyn would never have realized what was wrong with Michael, her child in the other world.

Before leaving the store for the evening, Kitty and Frieda decide to eat together at C.J.'s Tavern. During dinner they talk about the possibility of moving into a store at University Hills Shopping Center. Kitty feels like the desire to make their little store into a big, modern one is more Frieda's dream than her own. Frieda interrupts their conversation by telling Kitty that she sees Kevin alone at the bar. Frieda reports that he looks old and tired. He spots Frieda and Kitty and joins them at their table. As they talk Kitty realizes she feels a good deal of animosity toward Kevin. She looks at him and knows that she would not want to be married to him. She would rather be married to Lars, the man in her dreams. Kevin admits to them he is no longer married. He shows pictures of his daughters but says his ex-wife keeps them under tight ropes when it comes to visiting him. When Kevin admits their stepfather is better for his children than he is, Kitty can not help but laugh. The laugh angers Kevin. He gets up and walks away.

In Chapter 17, Kitty settles to go to sleep believing the dreams will not return again. She thinks that she has learned her lesson, that there is no perfect life. Regardless, Kitty wakes as Katharyn and finds herself eating lunch with Lars and the children. She tries to hide how disgusted she is by Michael. When she is clearing the table Michael knocks over his glass of milk. Katharyn first starts to scold him but then catches herself. Lars comforts the boy. Later in the kitchen Lars tells Katharyn that he will take the children for the afternoon so that she can do something she enjoys.

Katharyn takes the afternoon and decides to visit the old book store. As she drives toward the shop she hums along to the latest song by Patsy Cline, her favorite singer. On Pearl Street, the building that housed Sisters' has a "for lease" sign in the window. Hoping to find out what happened, Katharyn climbs the stairs to Bradley's apartment. She tells Bradley she cannot remember why Frieda is no longer in her life and begs him to explain the circumstances. He tells her Frieda has opened a new store in a shopping center on University Boulevard.

Katharyn also drives by the duplex in which she lives by herself in real life. She wonders if Greg Hansen exists in both worlds. She thinks of the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* that



she and Kevin saw together. She enjoyed the movie, which allowed its main character to see how much better the world was because of the impact he made. While Kitty had thought then it would be great to know how many people she had actually made an impression on during her life. Kevin thought the movie was too sentimental. She does know that one of the good things she has done as Kitty is helping Greg learn to enjoy reading.

At the shopping center Katharyn easily finds Frieda's shop. It has been renamed and is now called Green's Books and News. She browses inside the store, picking up a copy of the novel *The King's Persons*, a new release by Joanne Greenberg. She's never heard of the book or the author. Katharyn also notices a large copy of a Henry Matisse cutout that she realizes she remembers from her honeymoon. She and Lars had seen the real piece displayed in Paris.

Katharyn learns from the salesclerk that Frieda owns a chain of six, soon to be seven, stores. Frieda also no longer works in the book stores themselves, she works at the company office. The girl also tells her that Frieda and the woman with whom she used to work had a terrible fight. That woman, Mrs. Andersson, had walked out and left Frieda with a good deal of debt. According to the sales clerk, Frieda never forgave Mrs. Andersson. Katharyn wonders after she leaves the store what she did to cause her friendship with Frieda to end so badly.

Analysis

Kitty notices there begin to be coincidences in what she believes is her dream life that help her to understand her life as Katharyn and feel better about her life as Kitty. She realizes one of these coincidences when she thinks about Katherine Porter's novel *Ship of Fools*. That author had the flu and almost died before *Ship of Fools* was written. Kitty considers that if she had died, she would never have met the autistic girl and her mother, the ones who helped Kitty to recognize what Michael's diagnosis is, would possibly have never come to her shop. Another coincidence is Kitty, as Katharyn, recognizing where she had seen the Henry Matisse cutout before. She remembers, unprompted, that she and Lars saw the cutout during their honeymoon.

Notice that Bradley is the only character in the parts of the novel where Kitty appears as Katharyn who addresses her as Kitty. As has been noted before, all of the people in the world where Kitty appears as Katharyn call her Katharyn. Not even Lars refers to her by her nickname. It is unusual for Bradley to refer to her as Kitty when everyone else knows her as Katharyn. Remember that in her early days working in the book store, which she and Frieda rented from Bradley, Bradley knew Katharyn as Kitty. His act of continuing to call her by the name of Kitty indicates that he is not aware she has decided to be called by her given name.

Another strange occurrence is Kitty and Frieda's chance meeting with Kevin. Kevin is everything a gypped girlfriend or boyfriend might see in a man they had once considered for marriage but had been passed up by. He is drunk, lonely and



unattractive. Even more strange is that he admits to Kitty that his children are better off with their stepfather than they are with him. This behavior does not seem congruent with the man whom Kitty dated for so many years who seemed to think himself on a higher plane than others because he was studying to be a doctor. Kitty notes at one point that she believes he would not marry her because he did not think she would make the proper doctor's wife. Another change in Kevin that is beneficial to Kitty is Kevin's willingness to buy drinks for her and Frieda. She remembers him as a cheapskate who was always skimping on their dates.

Even though she believes her life as Katharyn is a dream, Kitty becomes obsessed with finding out what went wrong between her and Frieda. The reader must wonder if she thinks that this dream holds some key to her future with Frieda as they try to decide what to do with the shop on Pearl Street. In her life as Kitty, Frieda is one of the few people to whom she is close. They are both old maids and are best friends. To lose Frieda would cause Kitty to lose a good deal of her support system. In comparison, in Kitty's life as Katharyn, Katharyn has a much larger support system and more responsibilities in the form of her family. Any number of things could have happened to make the two part ways. When Katharyn hears the rumors told to her by the girl who works in one of Frieda's stores it appears that it was Katharyn who abandoned Frieda and the shop. The situation seems to be even worse when Katharyn is told that she left Frieda and the shop in a good deal of debt.

Significant objects in this section are the book by Joanne Greene as well as the newly released song by Patsy Cline. The reader should remember that the world in which Katharyn lives is several months ahead of the world in which Kitty lives. There will be a time span of several months before new releases in Katharyn's world arrive in the one inhabited by Kitty. This is important to remember because both the book and the song will appear in a later section of the novel as proof of inconsistency in time.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Kitty's search to find out what happened between her and Frieda in her life as Katharyn. Why do you think Kitty is so obsessed about the relationship even though the breakup is in what she thinks is a dream? Are you able to direct the actions of your dreams as well as Kitty is?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the coincidences occurring in Kitty's life and her life as Katharyn. What do you think the author is trying to tell the reader through these coincidences?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast the Kevin that Kitty dated with the Kevin that she and Frieda meet at C.J.'s Tavern.



Vocabulary

copious, disjointed, conspiratorially, palatial, expedition, feign, proverbial, animosity, perimeter, nonagenarian, inconspicuous, meticulous, lithograph



Chapters 18, 19 and 20

Summary

In Chapter 18, Katharyn wakes before 3 a.m. She calls Frieda and tells her friend she had a bad dream. Frieda asks if Katharyn is dreaming about the troubles brewing with Cuba. Katharyn admits she is not worried about that at all. She has a feeling it will blow over. Katharyn considers telling Frieda about her dreams but decides not to.

In Chapter 19, When Katharyn wakes again she is still sitting in Lars' car after having visited Frieda's bookstore. She drives back home where Mitch and Missy greet her happily. Lars is upstairs bathing Michael, using the warm water to calm him. Katharyn tells Lars she went to visit her old store. She admits she does not remember a good deal of details about what happened. When she begs him to tell her what she did, he says only that she did what she had to for their family and for Michael.

Kathryn lies down in her bedroom hoping to wake up in the world where she believes she belongs but instead she remembers the doctor's appointment where she learned she was pregnant with twins. She believed her children were a boy and a girl so she made Lars a cake with one blue layer and one pink layer to share with him the news.

Katharyn also remembered Frieda had been concerned she would leave her to stay at home when the babies were born. She promised she would get a babysitter. Before she had even reached eight months, Katharyn went into labor with her babies. They had to be born through a cesarean section. When she woke from the operation, Lars told Katharyn she was not quite right about her babies. There were three. Two boys and one girl. One of the babies had been hiding behind the others. They had already come up with names for Mitch and Missy but had to think of a third one for the unexpected baby. They chose the name Michael. Looking back on that memory, Katharyn considers how Michael was never really expected at all. He certainly was not expected to have a disability.

In Chapter 20, Kitty wakes in her duplex wondering what is real and what is false. She is beginning to wonder how the memories that she is recovering about her life with Lars could be false or a product of her active imagination. She spends that day watching the news with Frieda. The nuclear weapons have been removed from Cuba. Frieda is relieved but Kitty was never really worried about the situation. She is more concerned that she cannot remember all of the events that have happened over the last few days. Katharyn looks in her trash and sees only a copy of that day's paper. There is also a wrapper from a candy bar she does not remember eating.

The next day is Katharyn's day off. She goes to her parents' house to air it out and clean. She thinks about her relationship with her parents and remembers Frieda's relationship with her parents. Even though her father did not believe the bookstore was a good idea he still agreed to fund a loan for the girls. Later, they managed to keep the



store above water because Katharyn got \$1,000 inheritance from her uncle. Katharyn finishes cleaning her parents' house. Even though she told herself she would not do so any more, and she walks through the Springfield Street neighborhood before going home.

Analysis

Just as Kitty is noticing, the reader should also begin noticing as well just how real her life as Katharyn seems. Katharyn is beginning to remember things about her past with Lars, like her pregnancy with the triplets as well as the early years of their marriage. These memories come to Katharyn in her dream world not as dreams but as memory flashes that come to her as she is going about her life in that world. What is strange about these memory flashes are that they are beginning to fill in the blank spots in her life with Lars. Meanwhile, in her life as Kitty, Kitty is noticing more and more spots of missing time. There are hours and days for which she cannot account. Because her life as Kitty has gone on as it always had even before the incident with the personal ad, it is easy for Kitty to assume what she did during those missing blocks of time. The fact that she cannot pin down her specific actions, however, bothers her.

Kitty is also not concerned about the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis, a sign that she already knows how that situation will end. There are several mentions of the situation in Cuba made, a technique to help the reader understand how serious the situation really was. For instance, when Kitty called Frieda in the middle of the night complaining about nightmares, Frieda's first thought was that Kitty was worried about the situation with Cuba. Kitty's mother is so concerned about the situation that she asks Kitty to consider coming to Hawaii to stay with them until it is resolved. Even in the midst of the nation-wide fear, Kitty is not concerned. "I feel an inherent calm about it. I don't know why, but I'm certain it's going to blow over — and soon, too" (183). This could be because Kitty already knows from her alternate life as Katharyn that there will be no violence and that the situation will be resolved. Remember that Katharyn's life is several months ahead of Kitty's.

Notice that when Kitty goes to her parents house to clean in preparation for their return, things are described in terms of gloom and death. The house is described as being "closed and heavy, casketlike" (199). Even when Kitty tries to clean the windows to brighten things but the house remains gloomy. Even the weather is described in the depressing terms of being "cool and dank" (199).

Kitty continues to struggle to remember what happened between her and Frieda. Even though she asks Lars what happens he believes she really remembers and does not give her any specifics. The only hint he gives her is that she did what she had to for "your family, for your child" (188) as he refers to Michael.



Discussion Question 1

What do you think it is that keeps drawing Kitty back to the Springfield Street neighborhood?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it strange that while not being able to remember days of her time as Kitty, Kitty is remembering more and more about her life as Katharyn?

Discussion Question 3

What is the tone of the story thus far? How does the author go about developing this tone?

Vocabulary

inherent, flaxen, fervor, tactic, beneficial, decode, protruding, gestation, moot, angst, morose, slovenly, proverbial, query



Chapters 21, 22, 23 and 24

Summary

In Chapter 21, suddenly Kitty, as Katharyn, is standing in front of the Springfield Street house. Mitch and Missy are trying to learn to ride their two wheeled bikes. Katharyn tries to force Michael to ride his bike but only succeeds in upsetting him. Lars glares at her.

In Chapter 22, on Wednesday, Kitty has another hair appointment with Linnea. She does not remember anything about Tuesday. She wonders if her forgetfulness is normal or if there is something wrong. It is Halloween. Linnea has a paper black cat taped to her mirror. She talks to Kitty about how she and Lars always worked with their hands. Kitty suddenly remembers that Lars designed and helped to build the house on Springfield Street.

She remembers they had first lived together in an apartment on Lincoln Street. Lars promised her a custom built house. When the triplets came, they were suddenly too cramped in their apartment. They decided to go ahead and build the house. She remembered they had searched to find just the right lot and finally settled on the one on Springfield Street. Lars worked on designing the house. Meanwhile, Frieda was getting frustrated because Katharyn had not yet returned to work. So far she and Lars had not found a nanny who could handle all three babies. Frieda told Katharyn she needed to figure out what she wanted but warned her that she could not have it all.

Linnea speaks to Kitty and brings her back from her dream world. Kitty apologizes to Linnea for the sudden death of her brother. She tells her hairdresser that she believes she and Lars would have liked each other.

In Chapter 23, Kitty, as Katharyn, wakes sitting in Lars' office. She is putting school photos for Mitch and Missy in the photo frame on his desk. Even though Michael does not go to school she has taken a similar photo of him to go in the third slot of the frame. Lars calls for her, telling her that "they" (221) are here. On her way down the hall Katharyn realizes the mountain photo is of Rabbit Ears Pass where Lars proposed to her. In the living area of the house Katharyn greets Linnea and her family. Katharyn is surprised to learn she has cooked an entire meal for the family.

In the kitchen Linnea asks Katharyn how she is holding up. Katharyn is not sure what Linnea is referring to but recounts that their week was uneventful. Linnea also makes a point of asking if she and Lars are okay. Katharyn wonders what she is referring to since she has never seen Lars angry with her except when they have an unpleasant encounter with Michael. Later in the day Katharyn wonders where her parents are.

In Chapter 24, Kitty is happy to wake up on Thursday in her real life. It is the day her parents will arrive back in Denver from Honolulu. As she waits for her parents' connecting flight, which has been delayed, she reads the final post card her mother sent



her from Honolulu. Her mother expresses concern about flying as well as excitement about seeing Katharyn again. After they have reunited Katharyn's mother tells her she almost did not get on the plane because a plane that flew from Hawaii on Tuesday had crashed because of bad weather. Even though Katharyn kids them about preparing a home cooked meal, they go to The Buckhorn Exchange, the place she knew her father would want to eat. The wine she has at dinner makes her sleepy and she goes to sleep sitting in the taxi between her parents, a place where she feels safe.

Analysis

The nature of Kitty's dreams continues to evolve as the author moves toward a twist in the novel. When Kitty first began having these "dreams" that she was Katharyn, they occurred only when she went to sleep in Kitty's world. She would wake in bed in her room with Lars. As the dreams continued Kitty began "waking" to find herself in the midst of action already in progress in her life as Katharyn. In this section of the novel Kitty visits her world as Katharyn without even having gone to sleep. She just remembers waking in Lars' office. She also notes she is losing track of more and more time in what she continues to call her "real" life. Notice that even though the events of her day-to-day routine are blurry, she specifically remembers picking up her parents from the airport. She is able to describe their reunion in detail.

Notice also in this section that while Kitty is with Linnea, she has a memory of her life with Lars. In the past sections of the novel these memories came only when Kitty was immersed in her dream life as Katharyn. This recollection that Lars personally helped build their custom house after the babies were born comes as Linnea is talking about the way she and Lars had always worked with their hands. It is apparent that it is Linnea's words that brought the memory to Kitty's mind, but unusual that she should have a memory about a person she is in a dream while she is awake.

Even though her parents have made it back from Hawaii safely, the author continues to use negative images and words when referring to them. First, her parents' flight is delayed and Kitty has to wait two hours at the airport to pick them up. Notice Kitty's thought about the post card she has gotten from her mother. "This card is the last one I will receive. My mother says as much" (228). There is a finality about this idea of the last card that the reader will probably pass over as being the last card that Kitty will receive from her mother from Hawaii. The sentence is actually carefully phrased and worded. It is the last card Kitty will get from her mother though she does not know it yet. Kitty's mother foreshadows what will happen when she tells Kitty that the flight from Honolulu on Tuesday crashed because of a storm.

Notice also in this section that the author describes Kitty's reaction to her parents being home like that of a child. She jumps up and down at the window in the airport, waving at them. On their way to the baggage claim Kitty walks between her parents, holding their hands, the image like that of a child. Later, after they eat she falls asleep between them in the taxi. "How safe I feel, snuggled between my parents, and how easy it is to nod off in the secure little haven that they create for me" (232) Kitty thinks as she goes to sleep.



Meanwhile, Frieda reacted badly when Katharyn did not come back to work as soon as she could after the babies were born. This new information combines with Lars' statement to Katharyn in Chapter 19 that she did what she had to for her family can lead the reader to infer that Katharyn and Frieda's split had something to do with Frieda's desire for Katharyn to come back to work sooner than Katharyn was ready. "Frieda was getting fed up with my wishy-washy stance on what I wanted to do with the rest of my life" (218). Katharyn remembers. Frieda not only seems frustrated with Katharyn's inability to decide what she wanted to do with her life she seems angry at Katharyn for getting married and having children. There is almost a feeling of anger in the words when she tells Katharyn "here's a news flash — you can't have it all, sister" (218).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss your opinion of the relationship between Katharyn and Frieda at this point in the novel. What do you think, at this point, is the cause of their split? Give reasons to support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think memories of her life as Katharyn have suddenly begun to come to Kitty during the times she believes she is "awake"?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of Linnea asking Katharyn how she is doing? Why do you think she asks if she and Lars are okay?

Vocabulary

pantomime, temporary, pensive, reverie, ensconce, familial, gallantly, affably, ambience



Chapters 25, 26 and 27

Summary

In Chapter 25 Kitty, as Katharyn, next remembers singing her children to sleep. She is in the boys' room. Mitch's side is decorated, with his bed piled with stuffed animals. Michael's side has no decorations. After she finishes the nighttime routine she meets Lars downstairs for a nightcap. He mentions how tired she looks and tells her that her exhaustion is understandable. He explains that he felt the same way even though his were not together. Katharyn does not understand what he means. She encourages him to talk and he begins telling her the story of his mother's death. After she died, his father decided he could not live without her. He shot himself. Linnea found him. As Lars tells the story Katharyn encourages him, filling in the details of how he and Linnea became successful despite the loss of their parents. They remind each other how lucky they have been. She is in shock after he drives home to her that her parents are dead when he says that he understands there does not seem like there will be any good happen again after the death of her parents.

The news upsets Katharyn and she tells Lars she needs to get back to her real home. He tries to comfort him but she tells him that he is just part of a dream. Mitch hears Katharyn crying and goes downstairs to hug her. Katharyn comments she did not expect to loose her parents so soon. When Lars goes to put Mitch back to bed Katharyn looks at the picture of her and her parents displayed in the hallway. Lars calls to her, using the name Katharyn and she lashes out at him, telling him that her name is Kitty.

Lars finally calms Katharyn down enough to tell her what happened to her parents. He reminds her that their plane crashed on the way home from Hawaii. She argues with him, remembering that in her life as Kitty her parents survived their plane trip home. Lars reminds her that her parents came back on Tuesday because they did not want to miss Halloween with the children. She declares that cannot be true because nothing about Lars and that life is true. Even though she knows she is hurting him, she tells him that she always thought he was a "rat who stood me up" (243). Lars is the one who is confused when she tells him she did not know he had died alone in his apartment. She gives him what she believes is a final hug and kiss, and tells him she is going to go to sleep. She plans to wake up back in her real life.

In Chapter 26, Kitty wakes in her room at her parents' house. As she walks down the hallway to the kitchen she tries to reconcile what Lars told her the night before with what she believes to be true. She knows a plane did crash on Tuesday but also knows her parents were not on that plane. She tells herself that she has to find a way to keep from going back to that world where her parents are gone. After her parents wake they eat breakfast together. Kitty's parents take her back to her apartment and then walk with her to her shop. They visit with Frieda for a moment and then go home to unpack.



Kitty decides to tell Frieda about her dreams. Frieda does not seem surprised by what Kitty tells her. Kitty tries to impress upon her that what happens in the dreams could have really happened to her if Lars had not died. Frieda comforts Kitty telling her the dream world is just an escape, she reminds Kitty how real the things feel in the world in which they live. When Kitty tells Frieda she can feel those things in the other world, too, Frieda tells her that she just has an active imagination. She puts Kitty's hand on a book and tells her that is what is real.

In Chapter 27, Kitty puts off going to sleep as long as she can. She fixes dinner for her parents. After they eat and have gone home, Katharyn plans out new books for Greg. She settles in to read but soon finds herself going to sleep.

Kitty, as Katharyn, wakes in the Springfield Street house. It is late morning and the house is quiet. Alma is sitting at the kitchen table when Katharyn walks in. She asks how Katharyn is. Katharyn takes the opportunity to question Alma about her employment with them. Alma says Katharyn was still working at the bookstore in 1958 when she first came to work for them. Alma cleaned the house while Jenny, a nanny, took care of the children. They had hired Jenny because she was a professional. She indicates Jenny treated the children like they were rats in a laboratory. Jenny had been abusive with Michael, grabbing and pulling him by the arm to try to make him play with the other children and then slapping him for not cooperating.

Because Alma was new at the time she did not report to Katharyn and Lars right away that Jenny was abusing Michael. Because he behaved so strangely anyway, Katharyn and Lars never suspected he was being abused. About a year went by before Alma told Katharyn what was happening. Jenny was fired. Katharyn took Michael to doctors who told her that he had autism and that his condition was her fault because she had not been around when he was small.

After Alma begins cleaning, Katharyn wonders if it is her fault that Michael is autistic why Missy and Mitch turned out normal. She assumes she must have left her job at the bookstore when she learned about Jenny, determined to make matters right with Michael. In her bedroom Katharyn begins seeing bits of her life with Michael. She had tried everything to make Michael love her. She introduced the children to gardening but Michael hated the dirt. He would not play pretend with Missy and Mitch. Trips were difficult because Katharyn never knew what was going to set Michael off on a screaming fit. She felt like the mother of the autistic girl in her bookstore. Things were bad when Missy and Mitch began going to nursery school. They were even worse when they began kindergarten. Katharyn tried to teach Michael at home but had little success.

Katharyn dresses and watches as Lars and Michael pull up in the car. Michael is upset. Lars admits to Katharyn that he does not know how she deals with him all day. She asks Lars to tell her the details of what happened to her parents after the plane crash. He tells the story. They had dressed the children in their Halloween costumes and taken them to meet the plane. They did not learn about the crash until they got to the airport. Lars tells Katharyn that her parents had been like another set of parents to him as well. As she thinks about grief and her role in grief in this world she realizes she has to hold



herself together not just for herself but also for her family. She asks for details about the funeral, specifically if Frieda was there. Lars tells her that she was not. After he leaves to go to work Katharyn lies down in their bedroom anticipating she will wake in her duplex.

Analysis

The novel reaches a climax in this section as Kitty learns that in her life as Katharyn, her parents are dead. Even though she still does not accept that her life as Katharyn is real, she seems to be becoming more and more convinced that it is because she asks for information about the plane crash. When she wakes in her parents' house, she tries to reconcile what Lars has told her about her parents with what she believes to be true. Even though she has hesitated to tell Frieda about her dreams in the past, Kitty does so in this section of the novel. Frieda comforts Kitty and tells her that the world in which they exist is the real world.

The difficulties of raising a child with autism, and how different they can be from other children is stressed in this section of the novel. One way the author illustrates the differences between a child with autism and a child without autism is by describing Mitch and Michael's room. While Mitch's side of the room is decorated with pictures and his bed filled with stuffed animals, Michael has no decorations on his side of the room. There are no animals in the bed. It appears this is a preference on the part of Michael, not a lack of decorations because his parents did not want to put decorations on his side of the room. Michael also behaves strangely. His behavior is described as being so unusual that Lars and Katharyn do not even notice any signs that he is being abused by Jenny. When Katharyn does finally take Michael to the doctor, she is told that the autism is her fault. This doctor's advice echoes what Katharyn read in the book about autism in Chapter 14, that it was believed to have been caused by an "emotionally distant" (136) mother.

Despite suggestions that Michael's condition is her fault, Katharyn believes otherwise. One of the strongest points in her favor that she was not the cause of the autism is that Michael's triplet brother and sister do not have autism. Since they grew up in the same environment it appears that Katharyn's behavior toward them would have either affected all of them or none of them. When Katharyn asks Alma if she thinks it was bad mothering that caused Michael's autism, Alma will not commit. She instead tells Katharyn she has already said too much and needs to return to work.

Notice that the actions of the people in Kitty's life become more and more strange, almost as if they were being directed by Kitty herself. Frieda's responses, for instance, seem strange when Kitty finally tells her about her dreams. She comforts Kitty and tells her that it is their world in the bookstore that is the real world, the very thing that Kitty wants to hear. Even Kitty's parents are unusually understanding of the fact she had too much to drink during dinner and had to stay with them overnight.



Frieda describes dreams as a type of escape when she talks to Kitty about her strange dreams. “But this dream life of yours . . . it’s just an escape, Kitty. It’s not real” (252) Frieda tells her friend. Most odd about Frieda’s statement to Kitty is her decision to refer to the dream life as being an escape. What sort of escape is a life where one of your children is autistic and you have just learned your parents are dead? It is easier to take what Frieda says to Kitty in reverse. Her life as Kitty, where her parents are still alive and her life is relatively uncomplicated, seems like more of an escape from her world as Katharyn.

Alma’s position as an uneducated maid but regardless a valuable member of the family is put in the spot light in this section. Alma was the one who witnessed Jenny abusing Michael. Although she was afraid to do so at first, Alma finally told Katharyn what was happening. Some of the reasons Alma gives for not telling sooner include her lack of seniority. Because Jenny had been there longer than she, Alma probably believed Katharyn and Lars would take Jenny’s word over hers. She also reasons that Katharyn and Lars would not believe that a woman who had a college education in child psychiatry would abuse a child, even one like Michael. Alma’s caring heart eventually won out over her fear for her job and she told Katharyn what was happening.

Even while most of the other characters in the novel are characterized by a similar speech pattern, Alma’s very different, perhaps to accentuate her standing as an immigrant. Alma does not credit herself with being very smart. Her broken English and frequent use of Spanish phrases shows that she is not yet fluent in the English language. She has probably picked up what English she does have by listening to others talk. Despite her lack of an education note that Katharyn credits her as being “about as credible a witness as you could find” (260). She knows she has a jewel in the woman who keeps house for her.

Remember the book upon which Frieda placed Kitty’s hand during their discussion about what was real. This book will be important later on in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

How do things seem to be turning over on themselves in this section of the novel? How does the author slowly bring the reader around to the knowledge that it is actually the life as Kitty that is the dream life?

Discussion Question 2

What role has Alma played in the Andersson family? What type person is she? How is she characterized in a different way from other characters in the novel?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Jenny's abuse of Michael. Might it have made his autism worse? Why would Katharyn and Lars not have noticed Michael was being abused based on the way autistics naturally react to human emotion and interaction?

Vocabulary

disheveled, pristine, horrendously, cynically, depersonalized, austere, haggard, pristine, credible, penance, amends, abhorred, albeit, respite, compliant, ruefully

Chapters 28 and 29

Summary

In Chapter 28, Kitty does wake in her duplex. Her mother is there. Frieda had called and asked her to check on Kitty because she had not shown up for work. As she talks to her mother, Kitty realizes that in her dream world, she and Michael must be held up by her parents, their champions. She has a memory of herself, the children and her mother in a library for story hour. When a woman complained that Michael was being distracting and should be made to leave, Kitty's mother had spoken up, telling the woman that Michael had as much right to hear the story as any of the other children there.

After work that day, Kitty and Frieda go to a tavern. They are both surprised when the bartender announces their drinks are on the house. As they enjoy their drinks, Frieda presses Kitty to make a decision about the store. Kitty shares her concern that she would not love the new store like she does their smaller one. Besides, she tells Frieda she has been considering trying to teach reading in a one-on-one setting or even writing children's books for struggling students.

Frieda has an announcement of her own. She tells Kitty that she has met a man, an investor who not only is willing to put money into her business but also is interested in her. Kitty begs Frieda not to go anywhere, even if things work out with her new man friend. Frieda promises her that her heart is big enough to share.

In Chapter 29, Kitty wakes as Katharyn in the Springfield Street house. She goes into the living room where Lars is reading to the children and asks him what day it is. Michael comments that their mother does not believe that they are real. Katharyn is surprised because he is the last person she thought would understand her. Later, as she tucks Missy into bed, Katharyn remembers her thought at one point that she would do anything to make Missy her own. Now she wonders to herself if she really meant that.

Later Katharyn reads in the Denver Post that three singers, including Patsy Cline, have been killed in a plane crash. She wonders if it is her mind's way of dealing with the plane crash that killed her parents. Again, Lars tries to talk to her and she tells him that this is not her real life. When she asks about the way she treats him and the children, he tells her that she does not always insist that her life is not real. Most of the time she acts normally. He tells her she did not begin to act strangely until a few weeks after New Years, the same time Katharyn remembered her dreams starting as Kitty.

Lars asks what Katharyn's other life is like. She tells him about her duplex, the store and the books she writes for Greg. When she talks about the memories of her parents' homecoming and the times they have spent together since, she realizes those times seemed like they had been a gift. Before they go to sleep Katharyn tells Lars she feels



like she should say goodbye to him because she does not know where she will wake up. He tells her that is true with everyone, each person alive could be gone in a second.

Analysis

Katharyn seems to be coming to terms with the changes in her life, particularly those brought about by the death of her parents. She has still not accepted that her life with Lars is her real life but is being more and more convinced that is where she belongs. She has learned several lessons about the time she and her parents spent together in her life as Kitty. First, she realizes that her parents not only were her source of support but also supported Lars and the children. She also comes to the realization that if her life as Kitty is false, the memory of the few days more she believed she was spending with her parents was like a gift. Notice also that Lars noticed Katharyn began to act strangely just after New Years, about the same time that Kitty began having the dreams that she was Katharyn.

Kitty believes that while she is immersed in Katharyn's life that she fabricates a plane crash in order to help herself come to terms with her parents' deaths. A favorite singer of both Kitty and Katharyn was Patsy Cline. Understandably, Katharyn is upset when she reads in the paper that Patsy Cline and two other singers were killed in a plane crash. She believes this plane crash is a fabrication of her brain in some way to help her deal with her parents' death. While Katharyn's brain is fabricating, it is not the death of Patsy Cline and the others that is the fabrication. Instead, it is the uneventful life as Kitty that is the one that is fabricated to help her deal with her sense of loss and grief.

Kitty is haunted in this section by her memory of telling herself she would do anything for Missy to be her own child. This memory is haunting because she knows that in order to stay in her life with Missy, where she is Katharyn, she will have to give up her parents. Kitty takes a moment to wonder if she was really serious about giving up anything for Missy.

Kitty and Frieda's lives continue to become too good to be true in this section of the novel. Not only does Frieda find an investor for the upscale book store she wants to open, she also finds a male companion. This leaves Kitty free to pursue her dream of writing children's books and perhaps offering a tutoring service. The two part ways in a manner that pleases them both. Kitty is not left feeling as if she abandoned Frieda, as she does in her life as Katharyn. To make the situation even more unbelievable, when Kitty and Frieda are talking about their plans for the future the bartender insists that all of their drinks are on the house.

Notice the interactions between Kitty and her parents continue to be described in this section like those of a small child and its parents. When Kitty wakes in her parents house she considers going and getting in bed with her mom but decides not to do so. After Frieda calls from the store to tell Kitty's parents that Kitty did not show up for work, Kitty's mother goes to check on her and sits by the couch knitting until Kitty wakes up. Her mother's actions continue to be strange, as if they were directed by Kitty. The act of



Kitty's mother calmly knitting in Kitty's apartment when she wakes is unusual because Kitty's parents were probably in a panic when they got the call from Frieda saying that Kitty was not at work. What panicked parent would pick up some needlework if they were on the way to make sure their child was okay? Kitty makes a point: "It is exactly like my mother to have the foresight to grab her knitting bag when she has been called to her adult daughter's home to check whether she's dead or alive" (276). It is likely this statement is highly sarcastic but possibly a characteristic that Kitty thinks might describe her mother, a woman always prepared for anything.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Lars' comment to Katharyn that each person could be gone in an instant. Why is this especially poignant in his situation?

Discussion Question 2

How has Kitty's life evolved through the course of the novel? Does it seem too good to be true? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of Katharyn learning that Patsy Cline, one of her favorite singers, was killed in a plane crash.

Vocabulary

verbalize, mesmerizing, animated, proximity, advocate, triumvirate, disbanded, proprietors, illiterate, envision, bequeathed, amicable



Chapters 30 and 31

Summary

In Chapter 30 Katharyn stands in front of the bookstore. It is foggy. She looks through the window and thinks how much she loves Frieda. Suddenly she is irrationally angry with her friend. She wonders what will happen to her, Frieda and their shop in this world. She also wonders what will happen to her children in the other world. She wishes she could see the woman with the autistic daughter again. She feels she would know better how to act around them. She would give that mother a free copy of the book for which she was looking.

Inside the store, a Patsy Cline song that Katharyn knows has not yet been released is playing. When she tells Frieda that Patsy Cline will die in a plane crash Frieda does not seem surprised but instead as if she already knew. Katharyn also notices the Joanne Greenberg book that is not even in print yet is sitting on their shelves. She considers how neatly things had been falling into place in that world. Frieda is looking at her knowingly.

In Chapter 31, Katharyn wakes in Lars' arms. She asks for clarification if the world she is in with him is the real world. He says that it is. She apologizes to Lars for the way she has been treating him and the children. Lars tells her that he and the children all want and need her there with them. As she gets up she notices a copy of Bradbury's book *Something Wicked This Way Comes* on her nightstand. Lars tells her that she had been reading and that she had commented it was haunting her dreams.

Both Mitch and Missy are unhappy because they have to go to school. Mitch had planned to design a new track for his toy trains. He complains his day is ruined. To Katharyn's surprise it is Michael who calms Mitch, and offers an alternate plan to build the track on Saturday. With Mitch and Missy gone Katharyn decides to start Michael's lessons again. She gets a picture dictionary and has Michael point out words he knows that start with the letter "A". She hugs him too tightly and starts a fit when he recognizes the word anchor in the dictionary. He runs for his room but Katharyn is happy because he has learned something.

Later she goes upstairs and gets Michael from his room, promising to let him count real change. After he finishes counting the money Katharyn goes in search of Alma to fix Michael's lunch. She passes the photograph of Rabbit Ears Pass in the hallway and remembers it was in that spot that Lars proposed to her. When she finally finds Alms cleaning the master bathroom, Katharyn is suddenly struck by all that Alma does for them even though she has a family and home of her own. She is the one who told them what was happening to Michael. Katharyn asks Alma about her family and then tells her they will be doubling her pay.



That afternoon while Alma is watching Michael, Katharyn drives to the corporate office for Green's Books and News. She waits to see Frieda. Inside Frieda's office Katharyn tells her old friend she cannot believe what has come of her new life. Frieda expresses sympathy for the death of Katharyn's parents, but Katharyn lashes out because Frieda did not come to the funeral. Frieda tells Katharyn she did not think she would want her at the funeral and reminds Katharyn that she was the one who left. Frieda's phone rings. While Katharyn waits for Frieda to finish she tries to remember what happened between the two of them.

Analysis

Proof that her life as Kitty is not her real life is given to Kitty in this section of the novel. In fact the reader should notice that even the scene in which Kitty says goodbye to the Frieda in her dreams is described in the way one might expect a dream to be. "The morning is misty, almost foggy" (298). Kitty's inability to see her surroundings well because of the fog gives the impression of things not being quite real. The street is still, almost as if time is standing still. Even though it is cold, Kitty is not dressed for the weather. While the setting seems frozen in time and surreal, it is when Kitty goes inside the store that she knows for sure that it is this life that she has fabricated, not the one as Katharyn. First, Kitty hears a Patsy Cline song "Leavin' on Your Mind" that has not even yet been released playing in the background. She also sees copies of the book by new author Joanne Greenberg, a book she knows is not even in print yet. As she looks at these books that prove her world as Kitty as a dream she wonders if it was the new Salinger anthology that Frieda had put her hand on when she tried to convince her that world was real.

Kitty's sudden, irrational anger at Frieda when she sees her in the book shop foreshadows that something bad must have happened between the two of them. "Something she's done makes me furious" (298). This contradicts what Frieda tells Katharyn in her office. Frieda tells Katharyn that it was Katharyn who abandoned Frieda. If so, how are Katharyn's feelings that she has been "betrayed" (298) by Frieda justified?

Now that the reader has reached the point in the novel where it is certain that it is the life that Kitty lives as Katharyn that is the real one, the reader can more clearly see how and why Katharyn might have confused what is real and what is not. The storyline is more plot driven, and in particular driven by specific incidents, than it is character driven. The incidents that drive the novel include Lars' heart attack and the death of Katharyn's parents. When Katharyn's parents die in the plane crash she is so certain that she cannot handle her life on her own that she concocts a life for herself in which she never got married. Her mind's reasoning is that if Lars died the night they talked on the phone, they would not have gotten married, would not have had children, and her parents would have had no reason to fly back from Hawaii a day early to see the children in their Halloween costumes. When Katharyn wonders about her belief that she would be willing to give up anything for Missy to be her own, she realizes that she is, in a way, giving up her parents in exchange for her children. It is only because she had



children that her parents were killed in a crash instead of flying home safely on the flight they had first booked.

While living in her two separate lives Katharyn does learn some valuable lessons. First, she learns to appreciate Alma more fully. As Katharyn she had grown used to the idea of having a Mexican maid and treating her as a somewhat more lowly person. When Kitty sees with fresh eyes how Katharyn treats her maid Kitty is appalled. It is this fresh look that helps Katharyn realize that she needs to treat Alma more respectfully. Vice versa it is the pleasure that Kitty gets from helping Greg learn to read that sparks fresh ideas for helping Michael how to read. She realizes that instead of forcing him to do things he does not like to do, she should connect with him by discovering what he does like and turning those into learning experiences.

Discussion Question 1

How has Kitty's opinion of autistic children changed because of her life as Katharyn?

Discussion Question 2

How has Katharyn's opinion of Alma changed because of her experiences as Kitty?

Discussion Question 3

Katharyn begins to make progress with Michael in this section (Chapters 30 & 31) of the novel. What do you think prompts the changes in the way she approaches him to make their relationship more compatible? Give reasons for your answer.

Vocabulary

meticulously, anthology, lilt, beseech, veer, haphazard, preposterous, outmoded, pensively



Chapters 32, 33, 34 and 35

Summary

In Chapter 32, Kitty hears Frieda calling to her in a dream, telling her that they need to talk. In the real world, they, as the women they are now, need to talk out their problems. When the dream Frieda asks, Katharyn tells her she understands what she is saying to her.

In Chapter 33, Back in Frieda's office, Katharyn remembers what happened. Because the store was in so much debt, Frieda asked Katharyn to try to borrow money from Lars. Katharyn agreed and got agreement from Lars to lend them the money. It was the following morning that Alma chose to tell Katharyn about Jenny. To make matters worse, it had been Frieda who had helped them find Jenny. When Katharyn told Frieda what was happening with Jenny and Michael, she remembered telling Frieda that the store was a waste of her time. She had also blamed Frieda for Michael's issues. Frieda, meanwhile, was angry because Katharyn left her with a pile of debt and no money.

Katharyn suddenly realizes that although she did what she had to for her family, she hurt Frieda very badly by taking her companion away from her. Katharyn apologizes to Frieda for leaving her alone and suggests perhaps they can see each other again. Frieda gives a vague answer. Katharyn senses Frieda needs her to leave.

In Chapter 34, when Katharyn leaves Frieda's building she imagines that her mother and father are standing in front of her. They tell her that they love her and that they are there to say goodbye. Her mother tells her to take their memory out of her mind and put it in her heart. They also tell her not to doubt herself, Lars, or Michael.

In Chapter 35, Katharyn waits to pick up Mitch and Missy. In her mind she goes through what they will do that evening. She realizes that she is where she belongs, the other world has already begun to fade as she waits to give her children hugs when they get out of school.

Analysis

Kitty receives one more message from her dream world encouraging her to go ahead with her confrontation with Frieda even though the conversation will be hard for both of them. It is proposed as if the Frieda from Katharyn's dreams is reaching out to Katharyn asking her to help repair the damage between Katharyn and Frieda. Just before they do talk, Katharyn realizes what happened between the two of them and the situation in which she found herself when she told Frieda she would no longer work at the store. She was angry with herself and with Jenny, and took it out on Frieda by taking away her friendship.



A final goodbye to her parents tells the reader that Katharyn has accepted the loss of her parents. The timing of this final goodbye indicates that Katharyn needed to know the truth about what had happened between her and Frieda before she could completely let her parents go. It is as if this hope of a renewed relationship with Frieda gives Katharyn the strength she needs to go on without her parents and realize that her life with Lars and her children is really where she belongs.

Discussion Question 1

After Katharyn leaves Frieda's office, how do you think the relationship between them stands? Do you think they will be able to rekindle their friendship? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think the author brings the novel to a close in a satisfactory way? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author use objects to first prove Kitty's dream world is real, and then to prove that it is not real?

Vocabulary

credible, emulate, affable, smitten, conjured, compromise



Characters

Katharyn “Kitty” Miller

Katharyn “Kitty” Miller is the main character and narrator of the novel. She is a single woman who is working at a book store with her best friend when she puts a personal ad in the newspaper. She talks on the phone to Lars Andersson, one of the men who answered the ad. Before they hang up Katharyn, as she is calling herself at this point in her life, realizes that Lars is having a heart attack. She gets him medical attention and he survives. The two are married and have triplets.

Lars is an architect. He personally builds a good deal of the custom house in which they live. Lars is characterized as an ideal husband and father. He is particularly good with Michael, their autistic son.

In Kitty’s alternate life, in which she remains single and continues to work with Frieda in the book store, Katharyn did not recognize during their conversation on the phone that Lars was having a heart attack. Shortly after they hung up from their call, he died of a heart attack.

Frieda Green

Frieda Green is Kitty’s best friend. They have been friends since high school. Up until the time that Kitty met Lars through her personal ad the friends owned a book store together. After Kitty, who was using the name of Katharyn at that point, had triplets, the two began to be at odds because Katharyn was spending so little time at the store. Their relationship fell apart because Katharyn learned that Jenny, the girl whom Frieda had helped them find to work as a nanny, was abusing Michael. Katharyn decided not only not to put any money into the store, she also stopped working at the store entirely.

After Katharyn abandoned Frieda, Frieda opened her own chain of stores, one of which was in the University Center shopping center. Even without Katharyn’s help, Frieda makes a success of herself. Despite her success, Frieda remains deeply hurt and upset by the way Katharyn abandoned her. The two reach some sort of understanding when Katharyn visits Frieda after the death of Katharyn’s parents.

Tom and Claire Miller

Tom and Claire Miller are Kitty’s parents. Kitty is the only of her parents’ four children who was not miscarried. Kitty and her parents are very close. Tom and Claire die in a plane crash coming home from Hawaii. They had decided to fly home a day earlier so they could see their grandchildren in their Halloween costumes.



In her dream world, Kitty's parents successfully fly home from Hawaii and the three have a happy reunion. Kitty's mother mentions to her daughter that she almost did not get on the plane because the plane from Hawaii the day before had crashed, killing all on board.

In her real world, the plane in which Katharyn's parents are riding crashes because of a storm. It is the death of Katharyn's parents that causes her to create an alternate reality in which she believes she is single, that Lars died before they ever met in person. Because Lars died, they never had children and her parents had no reason to come home a day early, on the plane that crashed.

Lars Andersson

In the real world, Lars Andersson is Katharyn's husband. He is Missy, Mitch and Michael's father. He is president of an architectural firm.

In Kitty's dream world Lars wrote her a letter in response to a personal ad she put in the paper. She called him and talked to him on the phone. They arranged a meeting in a coffee shop but Lars did not show up. She assumed that he had stood her up. It was not until years later that she found Lars' obituary and realized that he had died of a heart attack before they were to meet.

In the real world, Katharyn and Lars did meet when Lars responded to a personal ad that Katharyn had placed. When they talked on the phone, however, they stayed on the phone and Katharyn recognized that Lars was having a heart attack. She got help to him and saved his life.

Linnea Andersson Hershall

Linnea Andersson Hershall is Lars' sister. She is a hairdresser at Beauty on Broadway in both Katharyn's real life and Kitty's dream life.

In her dream life Kitty goes to visit Linnea after she learns that is where she has her hair done as Katharyn. She not only likes the way Katharyn's hair looks, Kitty also wants to get to know Linnea.

In her real life, Katharyn began going to Linnea to fix her hair since Katharyn helped to save Lars' life.

Michael

Michael is one of Lars and Katharyn's sons. He is the oldest of the triplets. Michael is autistic. He cannot make eye contact and has trouble with emotionally charged situations. He does not attend traditional classes because his parents believe he would be a distraction to the other children. Katharyn tries to teach him at home. She feels



guilty about his condition because people have said the autism was caused because Katharyn was not at home with the boy when he was an infant.

Kevin

Kevin is the man whom Kitty dated in college. He studied to become a doctor. Kitty finally broke up with Kevin because he would not commit to her. He married a nurse less than a year later. In her dream world, Kitty and Frieda see Kevin in a bar. He is divorced and unhappy, just the way that Kitty would want him to be because he accepted her suggestion they break up so easily. Kitty admits to Frieda that seeing Kevin that way does not make her feel any better about herself.

George

George is the name of the man whom Kitty happens to see when she goes looking for the house in which she, as Katharyn, and Lars live together. George does not know a family with the last name of Andersson. In her real life, as Katharyn, she and Lars attend a party hosted by George and his wife. She recognizes him and is surprised that he exists in both of her worlds.

Alma

Alma is the Mexican woman who works for Katharyn and Lars. She has been working for them for several years when Katharyn's parents die and Katharyn has her split with reality. It is Alma who is responsible for telling Katharyn and Lars that Jenny, the nanny, was abusing Michael. Toward the end of the novel, Katharyn has more fully realized the way she has been treating Alma and decides to make a change for the better, starting by doubling her pay.

Greg Hanson

In Kitty's dream world, Greg Hanson is the boy who lives next door to her. Kitty decides to help Greg learn to enjoy reading. In order to do so, Kitty writes Greg books about baseball, a sport that Greg loves. Kitty's success with Greg helps her to realize that she wants to help tutor children who have trouble reading in her real life as Katharyn.

Missy

Missy is the daughter of Lars and Katharyn in the real world. Katharyn describes Missy as being a child after her own heart. At one point she says that she would do anything to make Missy real and keep her forever. Missy is the youngest of the three triplets.



Bradley

Bradley is the older man who rented Kitty and Frieda the space on Pearl Street for their bookstore. Bradley has always known Katharyn as Kitty. He refers to her by her nickname even after she has changed her name to Katharyn.

Jenny

Jenny is the child professional that Frieda helps Lars and Katharyn find to work as a nanny for their children. It is Alma who tells Katharyn that Jenny is abusing Michael.

Mitch

Mitch is one of Lars and Katharyn's sons. He is the middle child of the triplets.

Aslan

Aslan is Katharyn's yellow tabby cat. He is in both her real and dream worlds.



Symbols and Symbolism

Lars' Bad Heart

Lars' bad heart is the object that causes the split in Katharyn's life after the death of her parents. She makes up a life for herself in which Lars died of a heart attack the night after they first spoke on the phone with each other. In this life her parents did not die. Lars first mentions his bad heart to Katharyn during their phone conversation in Chapter 2.

Lars' Obituary

Lars' obituary, which Kitty finds so easily in the library archives, is a symbol of his death. It is all the proof Kitty needs to prove to herself at first that her life with Lars is a figment of her imagination. This obituary appears in Chapter 5.

Rosemary Clooney Song Hey There

The Rosemary Clooney song Hey There is a symbol of Lars and Katharyn's relationship. The song was playing on the radio when Katharyn first talked to Lars. She also had it stuck in her head when she woke up for what she believed was the first time in the bedroom of the Springfield Street house. When Kitty hears this song on the radio she puts together why the song was so familiar when she heard it in her head during her dream the prior night. This song is first introduced in Chapter 1. It appears again in Chapter 2.

Photograph of a Mountain Scene

This mountain scene is a symbol of the beginning of Lars and Katharyn's lives together. Katharyn does not recognize the scene at first but is fascinated by it each time she sees it. She first recognizes the scene as a photo of Rabbit Ears Pass but it is almost the end of the novel before she remembers it is where Lars proposed to her. Katharyn is first fascinated by this photo in Chapter 1. She realizes it is of Rabbit Ears Pass in Chapter 23 and remembers Lars proposed to her there in Chapter 31.

Photograph Holder with Three Slots

This photo holder with three slots is symbolic of Katharyn and Lars' three children. When Katharyn first saw this photo holder she was confused because it had three slots and she only knew of two children. After she met Michael she realized for whose picture the third slot was allocated. The photo holder appears in Chapters 3 and 23.



Woman's Necklace on the Beach

This woman's necklace that Katharyn's mother finds washed up on the beach is a symbol of the coming death of Claire and Tom, Katharyn's parents. Claire suggests in a note to Katharyn that the necklace might washed up from a ship wreck or plane crash. She wonders what other mysteries the ocean holds not knowing that soon she and her husband will be among those mysteries. This necklace is mentioned in Chapter 8.

Novel Ship of Fools

The novel Ship of Fools is a symbol of the way that Kitty learns her son Michael is suffering with autism. It is also used as a symbol of the way people need to be more understanding of one another regardless of their differences. In the book the people on the ship refuse to try to get to know one another even though they are living in such close quarters it is almost impossible not to do so. When a mother with an autistic daughter comes into Kitty's book store looking for this book Kitty recognizes Michael in the girl's behavior. Because Kitty is not familiar with the disorder yet, her questions and actions make the mother feel as if Kitty is being rude. The novel is mentioned in Chapters 16 and 30.

Novel Something Wicked This Way Comes

The novel Something Wicked this Way Comes is a symbol of connection between Katharyn's dream life and her real life. In her dream life Kitty had read this novel and suggested it to her customers telling them that it would haunt their dreams. When Katharyn finally accepts that her life with Lars and the children is her real life, she notices the same book on her nightstand. Lars tells Katharyn that she had reported the novel was haunting her dreams. The novel appears in Chapters 1 and 31.

Patsy Cline Song Leavin' on Your Mind

The Patsy Cline song Leavin' on Your Mind is one of the things that proves to Kitty that her life in the book store with Frieda is not her real life. During her last visit to Frieda, this song is playing in the background. Kitty knows that it is impossible the song is playing because it was newly released in her life as Katharyn, a life that is three months ahead of her life as Kitty. This song is mentioned in Chapters 5, 17 and 30.

Novel The King's Persons

The novel The King's Persons is another symbol of proof to Katharyn that her life as Kitty is not real. Kitty first saw this novel as a new release in her life as Katharyn, three months ahead of her life as Kitty. When Kitty sees the book on display in Sisters'

Bookstore, she knows that is not possible because the book is not even in print at that time. The book appears in Chapters 17 and 30.



Settings

Platt Park Neighborhood

It is in the Platt Park Neighborhood that the single Kitty lives in a duplex with her cat, Aslan.

Denver

Denver, Colorado is the place where both Kitty's dream life and Katharyn's real life is centered.

Pearl Street

Pearl Street is the place where Frieda and Kitty opened their bookstore. It was the ideal location when they first opened the store because there was a streetcar line that ran on that street. Since the streetcar has stopped running, there is significantly less traffic at the store.

Sisters' Bookshop

Sisters' Bookshop is the book shop that Kitty and Frieda own together. In her reality as Kitty, Kitty tells Frieda she would rather tutor children with reading difficulties or write books for these children instead of working in the bookstore if it were moved to a big shopping center. In Katharyn's world, Frieda closes the store on Pearl Street after Katharyn leaves to concentrate on her family.

Southern Hills Neighborhood

The Southern Hills Neighborhood is the place where Lars, Katharyn and their children live. When Kitty visits this neighborhood, to compare it to what she has seen in her life as Katharyn, the house in which she and Lars live is not there.

May-D&F

May-D&F is the department store in which Kitty wakes as Katharyn and realizes she is in the process of buying shoes for Missy and Mitch.



University Hills Shopping Center

University Hills Shopping Center is the place where Kitty and Frieda consider relocating their bookstore. It is this same shopping center in Kitty's life as Katharyn where Frieda has one of her six stores in the chain Green's Books and News.

Beauty on Broadway

Beauty on Broadway is a setting in both Kitty's world and her world as Katharyn. It is in this beauty shop in which Lars' sister, Linnea, works.

C.J.'s Tavern

C.J.'s Tavern is the place where Kitty and Frieda go to talk about the future of their store. It is here that they happen to run into Kevin, Kitty's old boyfriend.

Green's Books and News

Green's Books and News is the name of the bookstore that Frieda opens in the new shopping center. It is when Kitty visits this store as Katharyn that she learns Frieda has a chain of six stores. Katharyn visits the store in an attempt to remember what happened between her and Frieda.

The Buckhorn Exchange

The Buckhorn Exchange is the restaurant where Kitty and her parents eat dinner the night her parents arrive home from Honolulu.

Rabbit Ears Pass

Even before she realizes its significance, Kitty - as Katharyn - is fascinated with a photograph of mountains displayed across the hall from the bedroom she shares with Lars. She finally recognizes it as a photograph of Rabbit Ears Pass, the place where Lars proposed to her.



Themes and Motifs

Dreams As An Escape

Frieda sums up the purpose of Kitty's recent dreams when she tells her they are "just an escape" (252). While Kitty is using the dreams as an escape, Frieda is wrong about what Kitty is trying to escape from. The novel illustrates not only how Katharyn's brain uses dreams to help ease her back into her own reality but how Katharyn goes about realizing that her life as Kitty is not her real life.

Even though Katharyn's parents die in a plane crash in the fall, Katharyn does not begin dreaming she is Kitty until after the beginning of the year. It is suggested before that time she was so busy with the holidays that she did not have to focus on her loss. When she does start the dreams, she imagines that she is a single woman, she and Lars never met or got married because he had a heart attack and died the night they originally talked on the phone. Her brain seems to go back to the point of Lars' heart attack because that was a point at which her life turned drastically. Had she not met Lars she would have had no children. If she had no children there would have been no reason for her parents to change their flight a day earlier so they could see their grandchildren in their Halloween costumes. They would have come on Wednesday's plane, the plane that arrived safely, instead of Tuesday's, the one that crashed.

Even from the beginning, Kitty notices that the dreams that place her in Lars' world are strange because they do not have the normal characteristics of her dreams. Instead of being wild and fantastical, like the ones she had after reading the novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, things are very systematic and grounded. Still Kitty goes along with the idea that this world where she is knows as Katharyn is a dream because it seems so perfect at first. She has a wonderful husband, perfect house and charming children. For this reason it does seem like an escape from Kitty's world where she and Frieda are considering relocating their book store because they are unable to turn a profit in their current location.

The dreams begin to get confused with reality when problems with Kitty's perfect life as Katharyn appear. Katharyn has a son who is autistic with whom she has trouble connecting. She also blames herself for his disorder because she worked while he was an infant and failed to notice the nanny was abusing him. Her dream life also loses its dreaminess when Kitty realizes that as Katharyn, she and Frieda, her best friend, have had some sort of falling out and are no longer friends. Kitty decides she no longer wants any part of her dream life when she realizes in that world, her parents were killed when their plane crashed.

Meanwhile in Kitty's life things begin to get better and better. She and Frieda run into Kitty's old boyfriend and discover he is divorced and miserable. Kitty also begins tutoring the boy who lives next door to her and discovers that she enjoys teaching on a one-on-one basis. She and Frieda find an ideal way to save their store when Frieda



meets a man who not only likes her but is also willing to invest in the business. Frieda encourages Kitty to go out on her own and do what makes her happy instead of insisting that they stay together at the store.

There are several hints given throughout the course of the novel that should help the reader begin to understand that Kitty's life as Katharyn is her real life and not a dream one. The first of these hints is that she begins to remember specific memories of her life as Katharyn while she begins to notice there are more and more holes and unaccounted time in her life as Kitty. These memories of her life as Katharyn are proof that this is the real life because there is no way she could have known the things she remembers had she not lived through them. On the other hand, in her life as Kitty, things have been the same since she and Frieda opened the book store together. There would be no need to fabricate and nothing to remember about her past life as Kitty because it would all be about the same. It is only when Kitty begins pressing herself to remember certain days that she realizes there are chunks of time in her life that are missing.

The final hints that her life as Katharyn is her real life are given in physical objects. Katharyn's real life is set three months ahead of her dream life as Kitty. Because her real life is ahead of her dream life, things are happening in her real life that have not happened yet in her dream life. When Kitty confronts Frieda with the news that Patsy Cline has died Frieda does not seem surprised even though the plane crash is still three months in the future. Also alerting Kitty to the fact that reality is not real is the fact that a Patsy Cline song that has not yet been released is playing on the radio in the book store, while their shelves hold copies of a book that is not even in print yet.

Dealing With Changes

The novel, *The Bookseller*, explores how all people face the challenges of changes, yet everyone handles them differently; how people handle changes affects not only their relationships with others, but can effect the entire course of their life.

"How odd — events turn so easily on a dime, don't they?" (154). These are Kitty's thoughts to herself when she considers how just a slight change in one's life can have such drastic outcomes. The novel details how Katharyn, who invents a life in her dreams where she is Kitty, deals with major changes in her life. These changes include the death of her parents as well as changes in the productivity of a book store she and a friend own.

Events are described as having almost a waterfall effect in this novel. One example that Kitty uses is the changes that came about in her life because the author Katherine Porter did not die when she contracted Spanish flu. Because the woman lived to write the novel *Ship of Fools*, a woman with an autistic daughter came into her book store looking for that novel. If it had not been for that visit Kitty would not have realized her son Michael was autistic. In this same way, Kitty's life changed "on a dime" because



Lars survived his heart attack her life followed a path where she had children and family instead of her remaining a single woman.

When her parents die in a plane crash Katharyn's mind takes her back to the point in her life where she met Lars and changed the outcome of their relationship. She creates a dream world where instead of surviving his heart attack, Lars dies and Kitty remains single. This is the brain's way of protecting Katharyn from a loss that she is not yet able to handle. When the time becomes right, Kitty slowly recovers her memories as Katharyn and learns to accept the death of her parents.

Another character in the novel who does not appear to cope well with changes is Frieda. It appears that Frieda had intended for the two of them to remain old maids and run a book store together forever. When Katharyn has her children, three at one time, Frieda is very impatient with her friend. She shows her lack of understanding by telling Kitty she needed to make up her mind what she wanted out of life. Frieda was also responsible for helping Katharyn and Lars by finding Jenny, the nanny who abused Michael. Even though Katharyn knew her family was her priority, Frieda showed no understanding for her friend's situation.

Importance of Books/Reading

Through the course of her novel, Swanson stresses the importance of books and reading in one's life. Not only does she stress the importance of learning to read, she also introduces the idea that different people can be taught to read different ways. The fact that the book is filled with references to books is itself a nod to the importance of the written word.

Kitty both faces a challenge and discovers a love when she decides to help Greg Hanson, the boy who lives next door to her, learn to enjoy reading. After looking through volumes of children's books she finally decides that if she is going to get his attention she needs books that he will find interesting. Since there are no books about baseball, Greg's favorite pastime, for readers his age, Kitty decides to compile one for him. She not only writes the text but also illustrates it and includes picture cards that correspond to difficult words. It is when Greg reads this book that he enjoys reading for the first time.

In a similar experience with her autistic son, Kitty, as Katharyn, decides to let Michael look through his siblings' picture dictionary for words that begin with the letter "A" that he recognizes. Even though Michael admits to his mother that "reading tires me out" (307) Katharyn is ecstatic because Michael began showing some promise at recognizing words.

Swanson also uses books in other ways to show their importance. She fills her novel with references to a variety of works of fiction. These include the novels *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, *Ship of Fools*, *The King's Persons*, and the *Canterbury Tales*. Katharyn finds ways to relate these novels to her everyday life, proving that one can



learn lessons about life from books. For instance she compares her act of getting to know herself as Katharyn and her family as the way the characters in the novel *Ship of Fools* tried to avoid getting to know one another even though they were in very close proximity.

Books are also used as a way to prove that things are “real” even though books, particularly works of fiction, are written about things that are not real. When Kitty finally gets the nerve to tell Frieda about her dreams, Frieda puts Kitty’s hand on a book and tells her that book is what is real. In the tactile sense, the book is real. Ironically, even though Kitty does not remember the exact novel Frieda pressed her hand to, it is likely that it was a work of fiction. In this way, Frieda tries to use a novel, a book about made up lives, as an example of what is real.

Understanding Autism

By giving one of Katharyn’s children autism, Swanson takes the opportunity to educate her reader about this disorder. Swanson does this by describing Michael’s behavior and his fits as well as the episode the autistic girl has while in Kitty’s book shop. Swanson also indicates to her reader that she does not believe that the mother is responsible for a child developing autism.

Swanson describes typical autistic behavior when she describes Michael’s behavior. He does not make eye contact, as is described in Kitty’s first encounter with him. He does not play pretend or made up games, and prefers to play by himself. He does not like to be shown affection. Michael additionally has loud, prolonged screaming fits when things do not go his way. The autistic girl who visited Kitty’s book store with her mother had a similar tantrum in the store. While Michael is difficult to deal with he does have an advanced ability in math. The only thing that seems off about Swanson’s characterization of Michael as autistic is his advanced ability to communicate. Most autistic children do not speak at all or speak only very little.

At the same time that Kitty learns how difficult it is to parent a child with autism the reader also learns how difficult it can be to parent an autistic child. Because Michael is so strange and distant, Kitty has trouble connecting to him even though she connects easily with her other children. She illustrates the day-to-day struggles parents with autistic children face as she describes Michael throwing a fit in the grocery store, their reasonings for not sending Michael to school, and the difficulties in traveling with an autistic child.

Even though Swanson introduces the idea that it was once believed that the mother was responsible for her child becoming autistic, she also provides information that indicates this idea is not true. When Kitty first learns that her son suffers with autism she reads that it is believed autism is the fault of an emotionally distant mother. When they talk about Michael, Alma tells Katharyn that doctors told Katharyn the same thing when they first had Michael diagnosed. Before Katharyn can fully blame herself for Michael’s



condition, she remembers that Michael is one of triplets. If her parenting were the cause of the autism, she reasons that her other two children would have the disorder as well.

Combatting Racism

One benefit that Katharyn takes away from her experience as Kitty is her ability to see Alma, her maid, with a new sense of respect. Katharyn not only realizes that the idea that Alma is a subordinate to them is not acceptable but that they should treat her with more dignity simply because of her loyalty to the family. Instead of treating Alma like a servant, Katharyn begins to treat her as a member of the family.

When Kitty first realizes that as Katharyn she has a maid she is not so much surprised that she needs help keeping the house, but that the person who is the maid and the way the family treats her is so stereotypical. Kitty indicates that she would prefer for the version of herself in the dream to be “a bit more enlightened” (62). One of the things she points out is that the maid is “brown-skinned” (62). She credits herself as being “uneducated about the world of domestic help” (62) but assumes white-skinned women rarely take jobs as maids. Katharyn is embarrassed because the woman is even wearing a maid’s outfit, even though she is working after hours. “If I’m going to have a maid, I think, I could at least have the decency to let her wear street clothes, especially when she’s babysitting after hours” (62).

Even though Alma is an immigrant and relatively uneducated she soon proves her loyalty to the family. Because she cannot remember much about her past, Kitty, as Katharyn, has Alma tell her about the time Alma has worked for them. Alma tells her the story of Jenny and how Jenny was abusing Michael. Although she is ashamed for not telling anyone sooner, Alma finally spoke up and got Jenny removed. Notice the contrast that Alma makes between herself and Jenny. Jenny was educated, a credential that Alma believed made her more trustworthy than a woman of Mexican descent who could speak only broken English scattered with Spanish.

Even before Kitty learns how Alma told them about the abuse Michael was suffering, she had already begun to question the way Alma was treated. “This place in which brown-skinned people wait on white-skinned people — this is not how I live in my real life” (91) Kitty thinks to herself when she sees Alma among a group of maids at a neighborhood party. She thinks how her parents taught her to treat everyone alike regardless of the color of their skin. “It’s just a matter of good taste and of being a decent human being, my mother would say” (91).

Despite the Kitty’s conflicting feelings about Alma, she does not really make a change in her behavior until she sees Alma cleaning their bathroom. She considers the way that even though Katharyn had the same upbringing as Kitty, the idea of having a maid did not shock Katharyn as much as it did Kitty because Katharyn was able to adjust to the idea over time. It was introduced to Kitty rapidly and was shocking to see herself in the role of a white-skinned person being catered to by a darker-skinned person. Even

though she feels foolish Kitty thanks Alma for her work and asks her about her family. Feeling she needs to do something to reward Alma, she doubles her pay.



Styles

Point of View

This novel is told from the first person point of view by Katharyn, a woman also known as Kitty. The novel is told in the present tense so Katharyn is learning the details of her real life and her dream life at the same time the reader is. Katharyn tells her reader what she sees, hears and experiences as she explores the unfamiliar world where she discovers she is a wife and mother.

Significant is the writer's decision to refer to this main character by two different names. Kitty is used to refer to this woman during the times she believes she is a single woman who never married Lars because he had a heart attack. The woman's other personality is that of Katharyn. Katharyn is who Kitty turned out to be because Lars survived his heart attack and the two got married. During the scenes in which Kitty believes she is dreaming the interactions with Lars and the children, she is referred to as Katharyn.

Language and Meaning

The language used in this novel is of a slightly quaint but well-educated, bookish woman. "Oughtn't I to remember what happened next?" (1) Kitty asks herself as she realizes she cannot remember finishing her painting job with Frieda. The language is slightly stilted and proper. As the reader might expect from a woman who reads books and owns a book store, the narrative is full of references to novels and books.

The characters generally all speak the same without any attempts to mimic dialects in speech patterns. There is one case where the similar speech pattern seems strange and another where the author does deviate from this pattern. In Michael, the boy with autism, his advanced ability to speak is unusual. This is especially so since those with autism usually have difficulty developing speech. Also interesting in the speech patterns presented in the novel is the author's decision to give Alma, the maid, her unique way of speaking. She speaks in a mixture of broken English and Spanish phrases. The author may intend to present Alma as the stereotypical Mexican maid by having her speak this way.

Structure

Although the novel is easy to follow the structure is actually quite complex. Katharyn's real life and her dream life as Kitty occur three months apart yet both parts of her life are narrated in the present tense. This is not problematic for the reader because they believe at first that Kitty is going forward in time only through her dreams which technically would make those events taking place in the present tense. For this reason, the novel feels like it is flowing in a linear progression even though in reality the author is jumping back and forth through time each time Kitty "dreams" she is Katharyn. There



are some flashbacks given, especially in the parts of the novel dedicated to Katharyn's life. These flashbacks fill the reader in on information needed to understand relationships or help the reader understand how Katharyn's real life is different from her dream life as Kitty.

The reader experiences the story developing as Katharyn experiences it. Exposition and rising action occur in the first several chapters up until Chapter 25 when Lars tells Katharyn that her parents are dead. The story stays at this climax point through the time that Katharyn remembers what happened between she and Frieda during Chapter 33. The action falls through the remaining chapters as she and Frieda discuss their differences and Katharyn gets a final chance to say goodbye to her parents. The denouement occurs in Chapter 35 when Katharyn realizes that her life with Lars and her children is the life in which she belongs.



Quotes

I cannot recall spending the evening painting, then standing back to admire our work before we cleaned up.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: When Kitty wakes in her own bedroom after a strange dream in which she was married to a man named Lars, she realizes that she does not remember cleaning up after finishing painting, or even going to bed the night before.

It was playing on the radio that night. The night when we talked on the telephone.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 2)

Importance: Kitty realizes that the song that she heard playing in her mind during her time in the dream with Lars is the same one that was playing when she and Lars talked on the phone after he replied to her personal ad.

On the other hand, there is nothing like the library to awaken a reader to the endless possibilities of the written word.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 4)

Importance: Kitty makes a trip to the library hoping to find a book there that will appeal to Greg but not be too babyish. She has been hoping to open Greg’s mind to the joys of reading even though he is challenged by reading.

Lars Andersson could not have stood me up, because he was not alive to do so.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

Importance: After Kitty finds Lars’ obituary on the microfilm at the library she realizes that Lars did not stand her up. He had instead died between the time they talked and the time they were to meet.

It is then that I remember something: I did give up smoking in the fall of ’54. I could never explain to Frieda why I did it. At the time, it simply felt like something I had to do.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

Importance: An odd coincidence Kitty remembers when she hears the story of her relationship with Lars is that she stopped smoking in 1954, but had no real reason for doing so at the time. When she, as Katharyn, hears the story about her courtship with Lars she realizes that they, as a couple, stopped smoking at that same time in order to help Lars’ heart health.

But there is nothing between them except for an empty, treeless, rather hilly lot.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 6)

Importance: When Kitty visits the neighbor where she, as Katharyn, and Lars live with



their family, there is only an empty lot where Lars built the house for his family. Because she never married Lars, there was never any family to build a home there.

Suddenly I realize who he is. It's the man with the dog, the one I saw on the street when I walked alone past where our house would be. When I walked there in the real world."
-- Narrator (Chapter 9)

Importance: When Katharyn meets George at a cocktail party she attends with Lars, she realizes that he is the same man she met when she, as Kitty, went to see the spot where she, as Katharyn, lived with Lars.

The causes of autism are unclear. However, autism is commonly thought to be caused by emotionally distant parenting, generally on the part of the mother."
-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

Importance: After the woman and her autistic daughter visit Kitty's bookstore, Kitty realizes that the son she has as Katharyn has the same disorder as the girl. Kitty researches autism and is chilled to learn that it is believed the mother is responsible for causing autism in their children.

How odd — events turn so easily on a dime, don't they?"
-- Kitty (Chapter 16)

Importance: Kitty considers that if she had stayed on the phone with Lars long enough to hear him having his heart attack she would have become the woman she knows as Katharyn. In that case, her real life would have followed the course of her dreams instead of the course of her life as a single bookseller, the one she believes is real. She is awed that such a quick point in time could alter one's life so drastically.

All these years later, I still remember how her grip felt on my arm, how possessive it was — and yet gratifying as well. Despite all that she had, all that she was, Frieda Green — somehow, inconceivably — wanted to be my friend."
-- Narrator (Chapter 16)

Importance: Even from the early years of her friendship with Frieda, Kitty felt honored to have Frieda as a friend. They are so close in her life as Kitty that she and Frieda refer to each other as sisters. For this reason, Kitty is very disturbed that in her life as Katharyn she has not seen nor heard mention of Frieda.

I get it,' I say aloud in the darkness. It seems silly, saying it out loud, but I want to make sure my subconscious understands. I want to be sure it knows that I understand. / There is no such thing as a perfect life. It's not perfect here, and it's not perfect there."
-- Kitty (Chapter 17)

Importance: One night before she goes to sleep Kitty talks out loud to herself stating her knowledge that her life with Lars is not perfect. She seems to believe that if she



acknowledges she would be facing difficulties even in what seems to be such a nice life, she will not have to go back there.

And hating myself for feeling this way about my own — albeit imaginary — child.”
-- Narrator (Chapter 17)

Importance: Even though Kitty believes Michael does not really exist, she cannot believe that she, in any circumstances, would hate any child of hers.

And I? What do I think? Am I having the effect on others that I want? I'm helping Greg, in the real world. Moreover, I'm thoroughly enjoying it.”
-- Narrator (Chapter 17)

Importance: This quote foreshadows Kitty's decision to let Frieda go ahead on her own with her plan to move the store. Kitty has decided from her experience with Greg that what she really wants to do is take an active role in teaching students with learning disabilities how to read.

I think about Michael, and how he was always 'that other fellow.' The unintended one. Not expected at all, really. And, once he was here, certainly not expected to be as he turned out.”
-- Narrator (Chapter 19)

Importance: Katharyn thinks about how Michael was unexpected in a variety of ways. Not only was he unexpected to ever exist, because Katharyn and Lars thought they were just having twins, he was also never expected to have an emotional disability.

A small part of me has started to wonder what is true and what is made up. It's beginning to seem impossible that something as real as the world I share with Lars and the children could actually be imaginary.”
-- Narrator (Chapter 20)

Importance: It is when Kitty wakes up in her yellow bedroom after remembering her pregnancy with the triplets that she first begins to wonder which of her lives is real and which is the dream.

But how is it possible that I can remember events from a life that never even happened?”
-- Narrator (Chapter 22)

Importance: It is when Kitty, as Katharyn, remembers details about her fight with Frieda that she wonders how she could so clearly remember things from that life if it never really happened. This is more evidence that weighs in favor of her life as Katharyn being more than just a dream.

I felt the same way, you know,' he says. 'When it happened to me.' His voice lowers. 'Mine weren't together, of course, but . . . you know that mine were only days apart.'”



-- Lars (Chapter 25)

Importance: It is in this quote from Lars that the reader gets the biggest hint thus far as to what has happened to Katharyn that has caused those around her to be so concerned for her. The reader learns later that Lars is referring to the death of Katharyn's parents.

I'm terrified that one of these nights I'm going to fall asleep and end up there permanently. And I will not be able to get back here again."

-- Kitty (Chapter 26)

Importance: When Kitty finally tells Frieda about the strange dreams she has been having, Kitty admits to her friend she is frightened that she may get stuck in that world. Frieda, or the version of Frieda that Kitty concocts in her dreams, assures Kitty that their world, the one in which Kitty is single and co-owns the books store, is the real one.

Here, that is not the case. My life, and my love, are bigger than that. Even in grief, I have to hold other people close."

-- Narrator (Chapter 27)

Importance: Even before Kitty completely comes to the realization that her life as Katharyn is her reality, Kitty begins to recognize the differences between her two lives. As a single person Kitty has the ability to be selfish in her grieving. As a mother and wife, Katharyn must balance her grief with her responsibilities to her family.

The last person in this house I ever would have expected to understand me — he's hit the nail on the head."

-- Narrator (Chapter 29)

Importance: When Michael tells his siblings that their mother does not think they are real, Katharyn realizes how intuitive the boy is despite his autism. Although she has trouble reaching him and understanding him, he has picked up on her feelings about her life as Katharyn.

Anything, Kitty? You would truly give up anything for her?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 29)

Importance: This quote echoes a thought that Katharyn had earlier in the novel about Missy, her daughter. The girl is so much like her that she believes she would be willing to give anything for the child to be hers. In order to have Missy, however, Katharyn will have to give up her parents. It was because they wanted to see their grandchildren in their Halloween costumes that her parents came back from Hawaii a day early. They were on the flight that crashed instead of the next day's flight, as they had been in Kitty's single life where they arrived home safely.

These books are not yet in print. They cannot be found in any stores. Yet here they are, in our little bookstore."



-- Narrator (Chapter 30)

Importance: Kitty drops hints for herself in her next dream about the bookstore to prove to herself that her world as Kitty is the dream world. These hints include the appearance of a book not yet in print in Sisters' Bookstore and also the playing of a Patsy Cline song in the story that had not yet been released at that time.

So is the view of this world through Kitty's eyes — a new awareness that, even as Katharyn, I need not treat someone working for my family as somehow less than me — another gift? Is it like the gift of imagining myself quietly conversing with my mother? I believe it is.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 31)

Importance: Katharyn realizes that her time believing that she was single has allowed her to enjoy a couple of gifts. One of these gifts was that of more time with her parents. Another was the gift of seeing her own life through the eyes of another. She now recognizes she needs to treat Alma with the respect she deserves, in light of how much she has done for the family.