

# **Carol Study Guide**

**Carol by Patricia Highsmith**

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# Plot Summary

NOTE: This guide refers to the Kindle edition of *Carol*, by Patricia Highsmith.

At the beginning of the novel *Carol*, by Patricia Highsmith, 19 year old Therese is in the cafeteria of the high-end department store she is working at during the Christmas season. She finds the place depressing. Her outlook on life changes one day when a beautiful blond woman, Carol, comes to her department to buy a doll for her daughter. Therese is physically attracted to the woman and sends her a Christmas card. Carol responds, and the two women meet for coffee. After the initial meeting, the two women continue to meet each other with Carol often taking Therese to her house. Therese is in love with Carol, but she cannot tell how Carol feels about her.

While the meetings between the two women continue, Therese's career as a set designer advances due to the networking efforts of her boyfriend, Richard. However neither this nor his family's acceptance of her is enough to change her feelings for him. He says that he loves her, but she does not love him. To make matters worse, her thoughts now are only on Carol, who is in the midst of a divorce and custody battle with her estranged husband, Harge.

Needing a break, Carol decides to go on a road trip and invites Therese to come with her. Therese agrees. Before she leaves, Richard (who knows about her feelings for Carol but thinks that it is a phase) sends her a telegram reminding her that he loves her. Richard's mother sends her a white dress that looks like a wedding dress.

The two women proceed on their trip. As the journey progresses, the two women proclaim their love for each other and kiss and cuddle in private. Things change, however, when Carol receives word from her friend Abby, whom she had an affair with in the past. Abby tells Carol that her estranged husband has hired a private detective to follow her. Carol realizes that their room might have been bugged. Therese thinks that it is possible that she saw the private detective. They discuss whether to go back to New York or not. They decide to stay. Carol tries to lose the detective, but she fails. She finally confronts him and buys the tapes that he has with him. He warns her that he has already sent other tapes to New York. On top of that, Harge has possession of a love letter that Therese wrote but never gave to Carol. Therese left it in a book that she left at Carol's house. Florence, the maid, found it and sold it to Harge.

Carol finally decides to go back to New York, but she tells Therese that she can stay and keep the car. She will join her later. Therese matures during her time in the West. She also talks to Carol a bit and finds out that Harge is making her promise that she will not see Therese again in exchange for seeing Rindy.

During this period of time, Dannie, a friend from New York, stops by to see her on his way to California. Therese tells him about Carol and says that she will probably not see other women. Nevertheless, she does not join him either. Instead, she returns to New York and contacts Carol so that she can pick up the car. During their conversation, Carol



reveals that she did not give in to Harge's demands in the end because he would have turned Rindy against her anyway. They have agreed to sell the house. She now lives in an apartment in the city. Carol asks her if she would like to live with her, but Therese declines the offer. After meeting a woman who reminds her of Carol at a party, Therese realizes that Carol is the only woman she loves, and she goes to her. Carol is happy that she is there.



# Chapters 1-5

## Summary

As Chapter 1 opens, it is the Christmas season. Therese, a new hire working at a fancy department store in New York City, is eating alone at the store's cafeteria. While she eats, she reads the manual for new hires and thinks about how much she dislikes being there. An older woman joins her. At first, she only looks at the woman's hands and assumes that the woman must be ugly. The two women start a conversation. The lady is Ruby Robicheck. After lunch, the two go back to work. One evening Therese sees Ruby in a shop across the street. Ruby invites her over for dinner. While she is there, she tells Therese that she used to own a dress shop. Therese tries on one of her dresses. Ruby is willing to give it to Therese. Even though she likes the dress, Therese tells her that she does not want it. Ruby begins to look as if she is not well. She tells Therese that she needs to rest and offers to let her spend the night there. Therese pretends to be asleep until Ruby falls asleep. Then she leaves.

Richard, Teresa's boyfriend, tells her that a friend of his, Phil, knows some people who are producing a small play. They might be able to give her a job as a set designer. Richard and Therese meet Phil and his brother Dannie. Phil likes her set models and says that he will recommend her for the job. Therese does not really believe it will happen. During the evening, Richard asks whether March would be a good time for them to go to Europe. She agrees and surprises Richard by taking his hand. The next afternoon, Therese calls the number Phil gave her and finds out that she has the job.

In Chapter 3, Therese is at work. She sells a doll to a woman to whom she is instantly attracted. She decides to send her a Christmas card. The woman calls the next day to thank her and asks her whether she wants to meet for coffee. Therese says yes.

In Chapter 4, the two women meet again. Therese finds out that the woman's name is Carol. Carol invites Therese to come to her house on Sunday, and Therese accepts.

In Chapter 5, Therese goes out with Richard. He tells her that he has made reservations for the trip to Europe. She wants to know if he can cancel if she cannot go. He holds her hand, but Therese can only think of Carol. He asks if she can have dinner with his family on Sunday, and he tells her that his mother wants to make a dress for her. She declines. When the conversation turns to their relationship, Therese tells him that it is okay if they break up. Richard tells her that he loves her.

## Analysis

The first section introduces many of the novel's main characters as well as the themes of sexual identity, self identity, social class, and conformity. The uncontrollable nature of love is also explored.



As soon as readers meet Therese, they realize that she is not happy with her current situation in life in spite of her boyfriend telling her that she is not stuck there. "But it's so different with you, Terry," Richard had said to her. You've got an absolute convention that you'd be out of it in a few weeks" (3).

Therese compares the store to a prison. The contrast between the store and the place where she believes she belongs is so great that she almost faints when she comes face-to-face with it. This occurs when she tries on the red velvet dress at Ruby's apartment. "This was she, not the girl in the dull plaid skirt and the beige sweater, not the girl who worked in the doll department at Frankenberg's" (15).

At the young age of 19, Therese knows that she does not fit in where society places girls who have to work. She does not really know where she should be. The fact that she creates imaginary places and scenes by building set designs symbolizes this.

Therese takes a step the finding her own identity, though, when she sends Carol the Christmas card. Therese knows that this breaks the norms, so she does not sign her name. Carol responds because Therese's card breaks the social order.

Therese breaks social norms in another way as well. She is romantically attracted to another woman. This attraction leads to confusion about her sexual identity as Therese has only dated men in the past. She currently has a boyfriend. In addition, a nun is her mentor. Finally, neither she nor Carol fits the image that society has of lesbians.

Therese's actions help characterize her as ambitious and her willingness to do what is necessary to get what she wants when she sees it in front of her. At the same time, she is young. Books shape her notion of romance. Maybe, it is her youth and naïveté that allow her go after her dreams.

When it comes to love, Therese's life is chaotic. Richard says he loves her. However, she does not love him, and he knows it. Society's norms make it seem that they have to stay together. Her attraction to Carol comes out of nowhere. It seems as if Therese cannot control herself.

## Discussion Question 1

If Therese had been in a happy relationship with a man and had a satisfying job, do you think she would have fallen for Carol? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

How would you describe Therese's character? Why does she stay with Richard even though she does not love him?



## Discussion Question 3

Would you call Therese's attraction to Carol love at first sight? Explain your answer.

## Vocabulary

barricades, benefits, conviction, apprentice, intensified, augmented, splotched, reminiscent, denominations, bewildered, indifferently, importunate, combat, consciousness, conspiracy, insane, inarticulate, battered, skidded, laboriously



# Chapters 6 - 10

## Summary

It is Sunday in Chapter 6. Carol picks up and Therese to take her to her house. When they arrive, they walk through the house and Therese notices a picture of Carol with a young girl. The young girl is Carol's daughter. Carol gets a Coke for Therese and they talk about to her job at the store. They eat lunch and afterwards Carol asks Therese to play the piano. She does, but is so overwhelmed that she is touching the same keys that Carol has touches that she almost faints. Carol takes her upstairs to take a nap and makes some hot milk for her (at Therese's request).

They talk about Therese's family. Her father is dead but her mother is still alive. She has remarried and basically has deserted Therese. She also talks about Richard. Richard only knows about a portion of her history. There is no one else in Therese's life other than Richard. She had been fired from a job previously and was so ashamed about it that she moved without telling anyone where she was going except for Richard. Their conversation is interrupted by a phone call from Harge. He is coming to pick up some things. Therese says that she can leave but Carol tells her to stay. Therese meets Harge and Carol and Harge have a conversation about their daughter, Rindy. After he leaves, Carol takes Therese to the train station instead of taking her home. Therese asks Carol whether she will get to see her again and when Carol smiles she knows the answer is yes. Therese now looks forward to going to the store because she thinks that Carol may come in. But as Christmas is in a few days, she doubts it. She decides that she will call her on Christmas Eve to wish her a Merry Christmas if she does not see her before.

Therese pawns a necklace that Richard gave her to help pay for a Christmas present for Carol. She is already planning to call Carol if she does not come into the store when she gets a note from Carol to meet her downstairs at 5:00. It means leaving early, but her boss allows her to do so. Therese meets Carol who seems strange, but chooses not to discuss why. They decide to take a drive but first Carol goes to pick up the present. On the way, Carol points out where her friend Abby lives. Therese tries to get Carol to talk about her divorce, but Carol does not want to. Instead they talk about Richard. Carol tells Therese she thinks that she knows Richard better that she knew Harge she married him. They talk more about Harge and his relationship with Rindy whom he named. They decide to go to Carol's house, but first they stop to get a Christmas tree. When they get back to the house they decorated it and Carol suggests that Therese should stay over because it is late. Therese has to see Richard the next day, but she tries to blow off the date. Carol says that she can take her back the next day. The next morning Abby comes by and Therese meets her. Abby takes Therese home and when they arrive, she gives Carol's present to Abby, asking her to give it to Carol for her.

In Chapter 8, Therese is at Richard's family's house. She makes a wish, but does not tell Richard what it is. She is enjoying herself with the family and is comparing





happiness to flying a kite when Richard shows her a kite that he has made. They go to fly it. Richard cuts the kite string and lets it fly away. This upsets Therese but Richard says that he can make another one.

Carol visits Therese at her apartment in Chapter 9. She comes with a present. It is a suitcase. Carol discovers that Therese is a set designer and offers to lend her money so that she can join a Broadway union when the time comes, but Therese turns down the offer. Richard comes by just as Carol is leaving. He asks Therese out, but she says that she's going out with Carol. Richard does not understand the relationship. Therese does not want Richard around her and gets him to leave the apartment. Later she goes out with Carol.

Therese is working at the theater in Chapter 10. Abby invites her to lunch. During the conversation, she says that she will recommend her as a set designer to a friend. During the conversation, she says that she thinks Therese is good for Carol, but she does not want her to hurt her. She also tells Therese that Carol wants to go on a trip with Therese. This is the first time Therese has heard about this and wonders why Abby has found out about this first. Finally, Abby tells Therese that she has won. Therese thinks that the entire conversation is strange. On the way back to the theater, she runs into Dannie. She goes back to his apartment and they talk about friends and love. Afterwards, she goes back to work.

## Analysis

Section 2 exposes more of Carol and her life. It also shows the life that Therese can have with Richard if she decides to stay with him. It makes it clear, though, that this is not going to be the route she takes. In addition, readers realize that Therese loves Carol, but sees that Carol treats her in a different way, causing readers to wonder whether Therese will get what she wants.

Therese's trip to Carol's house shows that Carol is a member of high society. At the moment she lives alone at it is easy to make a comparison between her situation and Ruby's. Both women live alone and both women are Therese's elders. Ruby, however, lives in a small apartment and working in the store wears her out. Carol, on the other hand, lives in a huge bright house and has a maid. While she does live alone now and is going through a divorce, she does have to have a child meaning that she might not live alone in the future.

Ruby repulses Therese and, in her, she sees what she does not want to be. The entire atmosphere at Ruby's causes her to become weak. She becomes weak and Carol's house as well, but is because she admires Carol. This is the life she aspires to. There is it this is too much for her to take in. "It was suddenly too much, her hands on the keyboard that she knew Carol played..." pp. 63



Is important to note that in both cases the women treat Therese like a child. She needs to rest and they send her to bed. Carol even brings her some milk strengthening the image of Therese as a child, or a doll, just like the ones she works with in the store.

At this point, readers may wonder which direction Carol's will take. Once the divorce becomes final will she retain her status or will will she become another Ruby. Can Therese save her from this fate and will she allow her to do so?

Readers already know that Carol does not always follow social norms. She is spending time with Therese even though she must sense what Therese wants. She is getting a divorce doing the time and divorced women become outcast in society. In addition her daughter is not with her. All of this may indicate that Therese may succeed in her pursuit.

Whether she does or not, Therese is ready to make a break with Richard in favor of Carol. The selling of the necklace that Richard had given her symbolizes this. He symbolizes that at some point he will cut his with Therese when he cuts the kite's string. He can always find someone else.

Different family situations appear in the section. Richard has a close family. Thus, he can play with his career choice and has the confidence that he can always get another girl. He has done this before, already seeing several girls before dating Therese. Carol has a family of her own even though now she is moving away from it. At least she has left felt the connection. She also has a friend, Abby, to support her. Therese's situation is worse than that of an orphan. How mother has rejected her and Therese knows this to be true. She looks for the safety net that Richard has, but not with an extended family. She could have that with Richard's family. She wants such a relationship with the person themselves. She feels as if she can get this with Carol.

The final interesting point in the novel is Therese's meeting with Abby. The two rivals are fighting for Carol's affections. Abby makes this clear when she tells Therese that she has won. After getting this affirmation, Therese meets with Dannie. Right when she falls for Carol, Therese meets a man she can consider being with. His presence will help put define her sexual identity as now she can choose a man that is right for her or Carol. Both sides are equal with the exception of their sex.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you think Therese would continue to pursue Carol if she were happily married?

## Discussion Question 2

What kind of mother do you think Carol is?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Therese buy an expensive present for Carol?

## Vocabulary

flung, upholstery, swampy, oblivious, preoccupied, predominating, pretentious, abandon, tendons, limbo, hysterical, annoyance, disdain, reproachfully, pawned, appraising, bluntness, sluggishly, verbally



# Chapters 11 - 15

## Summary

In Chapter 11, Therese tells Carol about her lunch with Abby. She is upset because she thinks Abby does not like her. Carol tries to reassure her by telling her that it is not that Abby dislikes her. During the discussion, Carol asks Therese to go on a road trip with her. Therese says that she cannot afford it and she must work.

The conversation turns to Carol's divorce. She and her husband are fighting over custody of Rindy. Also, Harge's family has never liked her. She says that Harge does not love her. He only wants to control her. Before the conversation is over, Therese changes her mind and decides to go on the trip with Carol. Therese spends the night and is listening to music in Harge's room when Abby calls. She wants to talk to Therese and when she does, she apologizes for being rude. When it is time to go to bed, Therese asks Carol if she can kiss her good night. Carol says no and gives her a check to pay for the trip. Therese says that she cannot accept it, but she takes the check anyway. Carol tells her that if she does not want it, she can tear it up. Instead of tearing it up, she puts it under the runner on the night table in the bedroom and goes to sleep.

In Chapter 12, Therese gets a lead on another set design job. She goes to see Richard after work and finds him with Phil. When Phil leaves, he and Therese fight because Therese went to Phil's apartment alone on New Year's Day. He thinks that it does not look right. Phil has also told him that Therese does not love him. They continue to fight and decide to visit a married couple who are Richard's friends. Therese does not like them. On the way she tells Richard about the trip she is going on with Carol. He thinks she will change her mind and not go, but he still wants to meet Carol. They all meet at a restaurant and end up running into Harge. When it is time to go, Therese tells Richard that she does not want to go to a concert with him because she wants to continue to spend time with Carol. Carol overhears the conversation and tells Therese to go with Richard. Then, she leaves. Afterwards, Therese tells Richards that she still does not want to spend the evening with him. He storms off, but Therese does not care.

In Chapter 13, Richard and Therese fight about her relationship with Carol. He accuses her of being in a trance. He almost knocks over a statue, but Therese smashes it. He thinks that Therese is crazy and leaves. Later Therese tells Carol about what happened and gets mad when Carol seems to be taking Richard's side. Therese says that he will get the hint if she does not talk to him again.

The next morning, she tells Florence that she is going to make breakfast for Carol. Later, she finds out that Carol does not really like her set designs. Harge comes by with flowers. Therese thinks that it is Carol's birthday, but it is her wedding anniversary. The divorce is going to take six weeks longer than expected. At the end of the chapter, Therese tells Carol that the check is still in the bedroom.



In Chapter 14, it is time for Therese and Carol to leave. Before they go, Richard sends a telegram to Therese saying that he loves her. She also gets a package from Richard's mother containing the dress that she promised to make for Therese. She tries it on for Carol who thinks that she should wear it to dinner. Carol gets mad when Therese does not answer a question she asks and sends Therese upstairs to take the dress off. Therese decides to keep it on because Carol likes it. The next morning, they find a toy monkey that Abby has left. She and Carol used to take it on their road Trips. Therese listens to Carol when she tells her that she should call Richard's mother to thank her for the dress. Once the two women are on the road, Therese realizes that she left her book at Carol's house. It had the letter that she wrote (but never gave) to Carol. The check is also there. During this part of the trip, Carol tells her about her family. She tells Therese that the trip will broaden her horizons. The suggestion that she needs more real life experience upsets Therese. The two women stop at a sausage shop, and Therese sends some to Ruby..

In Chapter 15, Therese sees Carol nude for the first time. She also discovers that Carol has a gun. They declare their love for each other. Carol kisses Therese. The two women sleep in the same bed. They spend the night kissing and snuggling. The next day Therese finds out that they are in a town called Waterloo.

## Analysis

This section marks a turning point in the lives of the characters and shows which relationships will survive Therese's interest in Carol.

Abby's and Carol's close friendship survives even though Therese behaves like a child and says that she thinks that Abby does not like her. Carol takes the role of the mother who smooth things over to stop children from fighting. She even has Abby apologize to Therese for being rude.

The relationship between Therese and Richard finally ends. Even though Therese tells Richard over and over again that she does not love him, he has been persistent until now. As Therese gains more confidence by landing set design jobs and pursuing Carol, she begins to publicly display the fact that she has no interest in Richard. In doing so, she goes against social norms. She goes to Phil's apartment alone. Then, there is the fact that she is pursuing another woman and makes the fact obvious to Richard.

As long as Therese's lack of interest in Richard is just between the two of them, Richard seems to be able to deal with it. Everything changes though once it is made public. Now he really tries to control Therese and keep her in line. With the help of his mother, he tries one last effort to get Therese to comply with what society expects of them. He writes a letter telling her that he still loves her and his mother makes what looks like a wedding dress for Therese. Even Carol tries to move Therese in this direction. When the three of them meet, she tells Therese that she should go with Richard. It seems to Therese that Carol takes Richard's side when she tells Carol about him. Carol's actions reflect those of a person who wants to protect someone by keeping them from making



the same mistakes they did. He thinks that Therese is naive. Therese is a child. She creates make-believe worlds. She does not know what is best for her So Carol is trying to lead her in the right direction before it is too late for her as it is now too late for Carol.

It is interesting that Carol says that Harge did not love her, but only wanted to control her. Yet, he brings her flowers on their anniversary. As readers do not know Harge's side of the story, it is hard to know the truth of the situation.

One relationship that survives and blossoms is the one between Therese and Carol. Once they are on the road, away from the stuffy society that encompasses them, Carol begins to loosen up. This is not surprising due to the symbolism of the West. It is a place where people go in search for adventure and possibilities. Carol explores the relationship outside the confines of New York's society scene. In their new space, Carol is free to kiss Therese. The two women can explore their feelings for each other.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How would you describe the relationship between Carol, Therese, and Abby?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Do you think that Therese is worth Richard's efforts? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Do you think that Carol is worth Therese's efforts? Why or why not?

## **Vocabulary**

vibration, taunted, phonograph, impression, machinations, cordial, superficial, compulsion, acquisitiveness, unobtrusive, sullenness, demitasse, emphatically, reputation, capricious, shabbiness, dilettante, conviction, substance, tremendous, diminutive, obliquely, conceded, lopsided, succession



# Chapters 16 - 19

## Summary

In Chapter 16, Carol is distant and rebuffs Therese as she tries to hold her hand in public. Therese asks Carol whether she has had a sexual relationship with Abby. Carol reveals that she has. The two women have known each other since childhood. Back then, Carol sensed that Abby had a crush on her. Nothing had happened until they reunited years later and had to spend the night together in the same bedroom. The affair had lasted for two months. Carol told Harge about it when the divorce started. Therese is no longer jealous of Abby. The two women continue their trip.

In Chapter 17, Carol receives a telegram from Abby warning her that Harge has hired a private detective to follow Carol. Carol and Therese go back and forth as to whether they should continue on their journey. Therese offers to go back to New York, but Carol says she wants her to stay. Therese realizes that she might have seen the private detective following them. Carol tells her to keep an eye out for him.

In Chapter 18, the two women continue their romantic relationship with each other in private. Carol sells her engagement ring to get some more money. They stop at a hotel, and Carol looks for signs that the room has been bugged. They spend some time there and Therese continues to look for the man she thinks is the detective. She sees him at dinner one night. The two women pretend that everything is normal. As soon as they get back to their room, Carol looks for signs that the room is bugged. She finally finds a connection to a dictating machine and cuts it. They wonder what the man has heard. Carol decides that they should leave the next day.

In Chapter 19, the two women leave the next day. They stop at a tourist camp, but they leave quickly after seeing the detective again. They identify his car and realize that he still following them despite Carol's attempts to lose him. She decides to confront him and stops the car to do so. He tells her what she already knows. He has been hired to follow her and he is not leaving. Carol resumes driving, then she stops again. This time she takes a gun, but she ends up leaving it in the car. She agrees to pay \$500 for the tapes. She and Therese burn the tapes. They reach the next destination and call Abby to find out what is going on. She does not know anything. Later, Abby calls and says that something is in the works. Therese decides to tell Carol about leaving the letter and the check in the bedroom. Carol has Abby look for them. She also decides to go back to New York and tells Therese that she can stay and keep the car. She will join her later. Therese decides to stay. At the end of the chapter, the two women take a shower together.



## Analysis

These chapters focus on Carol's struggle to determine her sexual identity and her identity in general. Now that she is away from the social pressures and expectations in New York she is more able to explore this aspect of her life. Carol provides a closer look at Abby and their relationship from childhood until the present time.

In private, Carol has begun a lesbian relationship with Therese. Therese thinks that this means that they are a couple. She wants to display her affection in public as a heterosexual couple would. Carol, though, is not yet comfortable with their forbidden relationship. This is why she gets mad with Therese when she tries to expose their relationship in public by holding her hand, even though they are away from home.

Therese finally asks Carol about her public behavior. Carol acknowledges her feelings about the pressure from society. Though she does not want others to know that she is in a relationship with another woman, this is not her first lesbian relationship. She had a similar relationship with Abby. Her acknowledgement explains the tension between Abby and Therese. It also shows that Abby is a true friend to Carol. Instead of retaliating like Harge has done, she helps Carol even though she knows that Carol is with Therese.

It is interesting in this section that Carol does something similar to Therese's actions early in the novel. She sells her engagement ring to get money for her trip with Therese just as Therese sold the necklace Richard given her to buy a gift for Carol. The selling of the ring signifies that her relationship with Harge is over.

While Carol is fighting with her sexual identity, she makes moves to define her own identity by facing the private detective. She is even ready to get violent to keep control of her identity.

By the end of the section, Carol must make a choice. At the moment, the forces in New York are stronger than her feelings for Therese. Her return to New York signifies that she is not yet ready to give herself completely to Therese.

### Discussion Question 1

Do you think that Carol is ready to have a relationship with Therese?

### Discussion Question 2

What was your opinion of Harge before Carol's trip? What is your opinion of him now? If it has changed, explain why.

### Discussion Question 3

Who do you think is a better friend for Carol, Abby or Therese? Explain your answer.





## Vocabulary

suspended, reproached, reprimands, rasp, arrogance, extravagantly, melancholic, barrage, refrained, brink, indulge, conglomeration, fervid, inaudibly, consciousness, telegram, loathed, registered, phenomenon, precaution, chameleon, majestic, sobriety, resignation



## Chapter 20 - 23

### Summary

In Chapter 20, Therese checks into a hotel in Sioux Falls. Even though she has letters from Dannie and Phil, she does not write them back. She calls Carol and finds out that Abby found the check, but the letter is missing. Therese decides to rent a room instead of staying in the hotel. While she waits for Carol, she spends her days at the library and the diner. She also works on set models to show to people when she returns to New York. Carol does not call often, and her voice is not pleasant. Therese is beginning to think that Carol will not join her as planned. Then, she gets a letter from Carol explaining the situation. Florence had found the letter and sold it to Harge. Harge plans on using it against Carol during the divorce process. She also says that she misses Therese and that she derives strength from Therese's courage.

In Chapter 21, Therese receives a letter from Richard. In the letter, he tells Therese that it is over between the two of them. He goes on to say that she disgusts him and that he is not going to keep quiet about her choice. Therese is happy that he is gone. She also gets a letter from Ruby thanking her for the sausage. The final letter she gets is from Carol telling her to come back to New York with the car. Carol does not give an explanation as to why. Therese calls Carol, but Carol says that she cannot talk because she thinks someone may be listening to her conversation. During the conversation, she mentions a letter that Therese has not yet seen. She finds it after she hangs up with Carol. In the letter, Carol explains what is going on. She is in a custody battle with Harge. He is threatening to take Rindy away from her unless she promises never to never see Therese again. The news upsets Therese. She goes to the library where she finds a painting that reminds her of Carol. When the painting seems to come alive, she runs out of the library.

In Chapter 22, Therese stops in Chicago and looks for a job. She finds one in an office. She is living an unhappy existence when Abby calls her one night to find out when she is coming back to New York. Therese wants to speak to Carol, but Carol is resting in Vermont. Therese promises to come back with the car in ten days. A few days later, Dannie comes to see her. He is on his way to California for a job. He found out where Therese was from her old landlady. He tells her that she looks grown up and they discuss her situation with Carol. Therese says that she will not see Carol again and that she does not think she will see any woman again. The two promise to write each other and go their separate ways.

In Chapter 23, Therese goes back to New York and makes arrangements for Carol to pick up the car. They decide to meet in the city. When Carol sees Therese, she tells her that she is all grown up now. She also gives her an update on the outcome of the divorce proceedings. She lost the custody battle. She decided not to make the promise Harge was forcing her to make because she felt that he was going to turn Rindy against her anyway and she would not end up seeing her in the end. They have also decided to



sell the house. She now has a new place and a job selling furniture. She then asks Therese if she wants to move in with her. Therese refuses the offer because she is afraid that Carol will let her down again. The two part, and Therese goes to a cast party. She meets the star of the play that she is creating sets for and the two flirt. Genevieve, the actress, asks her to come to a private party in her room later. The offer tempts Therese, but she declines once she realizes that it is Carol whom she really loves. She leaves the party and finds Carol at a restaurant. Carol smiles when she sees her, and Therese walks towards her.

## Analysis

Left alone in the West, Therese blooms and grows up. At first, it looks as if she will remain the same while she waits for Carol because she is creating set models which are a symbol of an imaginary world. Like a butterfly coming out of its cocoon, she emerges though and is able to warm herself after Carol tells her that she cannot see her again.

She is now strong enough that she does not need to latch on to someone else for safety. Dannie's visit exemplifies this point. Dannie is the perfect man for her. He never treats her like a child, and he points out how she has grown up. He makes a point of coming to see her, even though he knows about her relationship with Carol. She says that she will not see Carol again and she will probably not see other women. She is strong and confident enough to stand on her own. Thus, she chooses to let Dannie go.

Her new sense of identity continues to exhibit itself when she returns to New York and designs sets there. She no longer chases after Carol. In fact, she turns Carol down when Carol asks her to live with her. While it is true that she is afraid that Carol may let her down again, she realizes that she deserves more than to be treated like a doll who is tossed away when its owner tires of it. This demonstrates how much she has matured. In the past, Carol has not always treated her well. She has often been cold to her. She has criticized her. Back then, Therese tolerated it. When she finally returns to Carol, it is on her own terms.

A major point in this section is the fact that Carol and Therese have traded places. Therese is now the one going to parties. She is part of a social circle. Carol is chasing her. Therese has the inner strength to turn Carol down if their relationship is based only on Carol's terms.

For her part, Carol is now alone. She is living in an apartment and working in a store. In this sense, she is like Ruby. Is it possible that Carol will become another Ruby - a lonely old woman working in a store remembering the days when she had her own store? Carol needs Therese to save her from this fate.

While society as a whole may scorn their relationship, there are pockets that seem to accept it. Therese is in such a pocket of society as Genevieve's advances show. It is



possible that Carol may be working in such a pocket as well. Thus, the two women may have found their place in a society that conforms with their identity.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How has Therese changed since the beginning of the novel?

## **Discussion Question 2**

If you were Therese, would you have gone back to Carol?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Do you think that the relationship between Carol and Therese will last?

## **Vocabulary**

rupture, brusqueness, intermittent, erratic, transfixing, proportion, flourished, reassurance, interference, derisive, torrent, demented, degeneration, delineated, gloating, translator, basin, symmetrical, staccato, expectant, affirmation, subtle, cordial, extravagance, entangled



# Characters

## Therese Belivet

Therese dates Richard at the beginning of the novel and falls in love with Carol. She knows that she wants more out of life than she has when the novel opens. She does not, however, have any real direction.

Therese grew up in an orphanage, but it is only her father who is dead. Her mother abandoned her. Until Therese meets Carol, the only important woman in her life was a nun in the orphanage. At one point it seems as if Mrs. Ruby Robichek may take on that role. Therese, however, rejects her because she is ugly and she knows that Ruby's life is not the life she wants. Carol offers a better prospect. She is pretty and decisive.

Carol also has money, but this does not play a role in her attraction to Carol, even though Therese needs money. Even though Therese does not cash the check Carol gives her, she does not tear it up either. She buys Carol an expensive gift, and she pays for the bill when she and Carol eat out and Carol leaves the table. She wants to be like Carol, with no worries about money. At the same time, she does not want Carol's money.

During the road trip, Therese matures. All of the people who knew her before comment on her looks, saying that she looks different. She thinks of Mrs. Robichek and sends her a present. She is able to warm herself up when Carol goes back to New York. She also stands up to Carol, telling her that she does not want to live with her. She is willing to move on until she realizes that she really does love Carol. However, this time she approaches Carol instead of Carol approaching her.

## Carol Aird

Carol is Harge's estranged wife, Rindy's mother, and Abby's best friend. She is also the woman with whom Therese falls in love. Carol accuses Harge of wanting to control her, but she treats Therese like a doll and controls her in the first part of the novel. She is the one who sets their meetings and keeps Therese waiting because she is always late. She discards Therese when she tires of her. Carol drives her to her house and then makes her either take the train or let Abby take her home. She realizes that Therese is attracted to her, but she never lets her know whether she feels the same way. In addition, Carol plans for Therese to go on the trip with her before she even asks her. Therese learns about the trip from Abby.

It is questionable as to whether Carol has any feelings for people at the beginning of the novel. She says that she wants custody of her daughter, Rindy. However, other than the photo of the two together, there is no evidence of a quality relationship between them. Also, Rindy does not seem to mind spending time with her father. The lack of emotion in her life could be the reason she contacts Therese after she sends her the Christmas



card. Therese's act is unconventional and is outside the boundaries of society. Therese even knows this, which is why she does not sign her name.

Things change for Carol in the second half of the novel. She and Therese experience a role switch. The switch begins after she talks to the private detective. She asks Therese to drive. Symbolically Therese is now literally in the drivers seat. When Carol leaves, Therese keeps Carol waiting and wondering when she will return. When Carol makes advances toward her and asks Therese to live with her, Therese turns her down. In addition, while Therese's career is moving forward and she decides to connect with people, Carol is alone. She is now the one working in a store and living alone.

## **Richard**

Richard is Therese's boyfriend during most of the novel. He says he loves her, but he knows that she does not love him. He stays with her, though, because he has invested time in their relationship and society expects a couple to get married when they have been seeing each other for a certain period of time. Added to the pressure is the fact that Richard's family loves her and she gets along with them. The dress that Richard's mother makes for Therese looks like a wedding dress. His mother gives it to Therese right before she leaves to remind Therese of her duty to Richard.

Richard is a bit like Harge in that he likes to control his relationship with Therese. He cannot stand the fact that she has jilted him. So, he gets revenge by telling people why they break up. It is not his fault. She just prefers women.

## **Abby**

Abby is Carol's best friend. They have known each other since they were children. As adults, they ran a business together and have had an affair.

Abby is at first jealous of Therese, as she realizes that Therese's attractions to Carol is more than just friendship. Still, when she realizes that Carol has feelings for Therese as well, she helps her, showing that she is a good friend. She looks for the letter and the check. She warns Abby that Harge has hired a private detective to follow her. Abby gives her blessing for a trip that Carol and Therese go on by giving Carol the toy monkey that they used to take on their road trips. She also looks out for Therese in the beginning of the novel by trying to warn her that Carol may not be ready for a relationship with her. She does not want either of them to get hurt.

## **Harge Aird**

Harge is Carol's estranged husband. He loves their daughter Rindy and is, in fact, the person who named her. His love for her and wish to punish Carol for cheating on him causes him to do whatever is necessary to get custody of Rindy. To keep Carol away from Rindy, he makes the case that Carol is not a good mother because of her



relationships with women. He gives Carol a choice to either renounce her relationship with Therese or lose her daughter.

## **Dannie**

Dannie is Phil's brother. He meets Therese when he comes with his brother to talk to her about the set design job. He is a foil to Richard as he is intelligent, romantic, and logical. Unlike other people in the novel, he does not treat Therese like a little girl. Instead they have intellectual conversations. He keeps in touch with Therese while she is on her trip with Carol and visits her on his way to his new job in California. The fact that Therese does not choose to be with him shows that she is really in love with Carol, as he would make a good match for her.

## **Phil**

Phi is Dannie's brother. He helps Therese get a job as a set designer. At one point Richard becomes jealous of him because Therese has spent time with him alone in his apartment. Also, Phil tells Richard that Therese is not in love with him. Phil writes Therese while she is away, but there is never any type of romantic relationship between the two of them.

## **Mrs. Ruby Robichek**

Mrs. Ruby Robichek works at the department store and is nice to Therese. When they run into each other after work, she invites Therese to her house and reveals that she used to have a dress shop. She offers to give a dress to Therese, but Therese turns it down and is not very nice to Mrs. Robichek. She thinks that Ruby is ugly. The prospect of being like her (old and lonely working at the department store) when she gets old disgusts her. Her treatment of Mrs. Robichek shows her immaturity. Later however, she thinks of her and buys her some sausage when she is on the road with Carol. Her actions show that she has matured.

## **Rindy**

Rindy is the child of Carol and Harge. During the divorce proceedings, the two parents fight for custody. Rindy seems to care for her mother, but her father loves her as well. Rindy likes spending time with him, too. When asked to make a choice between Therese and Rindy, Carol first chooses Rindy. Then, she gives her up thinking that Harge will turn Rindy against her no matter what.



## Genevieve Crannel

Therese is designing sets for a play in which Genevieve, a British actress, has the lead. After turning down Carol's offer to move in, Therese meets Genevieve at a cocktail party. Genevieve reminds Therese of Carol in terms of her looks. The two flirt, and it is obvious that they share a mutual attraction. Genevieve sees Therese as young, so young that she thinks that she might be a minor. Therese realizes that she is not attracted to Genevieve. It is Carol whom she wants.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Frankenberg Department Store

Frankenberg Department Store represents the constraints of society and a dead-end life. It puts working women in a place where Therese does not want to be.

## Sets

The sets symbolize Therese's attempt to create a world for herself. At the beginning of the novel she is not able to do that. Her attempts are amateurish, just like her sets according to Carol. She dates a man who does not interest her, and she works at a dead-end job. Once she starts spending time with Carol, she stops working on sets. At this point, she is learning about who she is, gaining experience, and living a more authentic life. When Carol leaves, however, Therese becomes lost for a period of time. She tries to create a world for herself by once again building sets.

## The Red Dress

The red dress represents Therese's dissatisfaction with her current life. When she tries it on she sees the girl that she really is in contrast to the drab person who wears the drab clothes and works at the department store.

## Letters

The letters represent a way to stay connected with people and to express feelings. Therese's relationship with Carol begins with a Christmas card. A letter that Therese never gives to Carol seals their relationship. Throughout the novel, characters use letters to stay connected with Therese and Carol while they are on the road. It is through letters that people show the feelings that they cannot express to people face-to-face.

## The Cutting of the Kite's String

Richard and Therese go out to fly the kite together, but they have trouble getting it to soar. During their time together, Therese is thinking of Carol. When it finally soars, it is her heart soaring for Carol, not Richard. Richard cuts the string, and this symbolizes the cutting of his relationship with Therese. Therese's heart can continue to soar with thoughts of Carol. In the meantime, Richard can make another kite, meaning that he can find someone to replace Therese's place in his life.



## Dolls

Dolls represent youth and girlishness. When Carol first meets Therese, she is looking for a doll and finds one in Therese. She thinks that she is pretty and treats her like a doll by telling her what to do, putting her to bed, and giving her milk. Later though, she realizes that Therese has grown up and no longer treats her in this manner.

## Temperatures

The characters constantly refer to how hot or cold they are throughout the novel. When Therese is cold, she wants people to get away from her. At one point when Richard touches her, she says that his hand feels icy cold. Carol's voice is cold when she is unsure about having Therese in her life. When there is love and lust in the air, the temperature is warm, as it is in the hotel room. When Carol leaves Therese, Therese is cold at first, but then she goes to the library and is able to warm herself up. This fact symbolizes the fact that Therese has matured. She realizes that she can be in control of her own life instead of following the tune of others.

## The Train in Frankenberg's Department Store

Trains usually represent journeys that lead to one finding themselves. Therese notices the toy train at Frankenberg. She says that it has a fury. This train, however, does not move forward. It goes around in circles. This represents Therese's life. There is a fury in her to jump the current track of her life. However, until she meets Carol, she has just been going in circles, getting nowhere.

## The Gloves the Nun Gave Therese

The gloves the nun gave Therese represent wasted or missed opportunities. They are perfectly good gloves, but Therese just keeps them in a drawer until they are too small to wear. It is the thought of these gloves that inspires her to contact Carol instead of letting the opportunity pass her by.

## The Road Trip

The road trip represents self-discovery and acceptance. It is on this trip that Therese and Carol feel free to express their love for each other. When Carol returns to New York alone, Therese matures and realizes that she does not need others to feel alive and give her confidence.



# Settings

## The Department Store

Therese works in the department store during the Christmas holidays. The department store is where she meets Carol for the first time. However, Therese feels as if the store is a prison. She cannot wait to get out of it.

## Therese's House

Therese's house is where Therese lives an unhappy life. Richard spends time there with her. Carol comes by once, and she meets Richard there. It is the point of intersection for Therese's old life and her new life.

## Richard's Family's House

Therese spends Christmas at Richard's family's house. She enjoys it here because here she has the family she never had. Yet, it is also here that Richard cuts the kite's string representing the end of their relationship.

## Carol's House

Carol's house is the place she shared with Harge and Rindy. Therese spends time at Carol's house, but nothing happens between the two women when they are there. This is also where Therese leaves the letter she wrote (but never gave) to Carol. It is not the place where the two women can be together because it represents society's constraints. In the end, Harge and Carol decide to sell the house, and Carol gets her own place.

## The West

The Western states are where Carol and Therese are able to express their love for each other. Therese finds herself and matures. This is fitting as people associate going West with opening new horizons.

## The 1950s

The novel is set in the 1950s. During that time period, society expected certain behavior in matters of love and marriage. Heterosexual relationships were the norm. Homosexuality was taboo. The characters' feelings about their personal relationships are reflective of the time period.



# Themes and Motifs

## Sexual Identity and the Role of Love

Is one's sexual identity something one cannot escape, even if they try to ignore it? Or, is sexual identity a choice? Can someone be attracted to both men and women? This novel explores these questions.

Carol has a relationship with Abby while she is still married to Harge. She does not leave him at the time, though. It is almost as if she has the affair because it is convenient and risky. The reason is similar to why Carol goes to see Therese after receiving her card. Sending the card was not part of the social norm. Someone who would do such a thing intrigues Carol.

Carol complains that she thinks that Harge does not love her and only wants to control her. However, she never expresses negative feelings about having sex with him. While she might see herself as a lesbian, it is possible that she has chosen this way of life as a way of rebelling against society. She is attempting to escape being alone. Carol decides to drop the fight for custody because she feels that Harge will turn Rindy against her anyway. She does not do it because she realizes that she truly loves Therese.

Therese's actions give cause to wonder about whether she has chosen this lifestyle just because there is something about Carol's looks that evokes feelings of love. She does not show interest in other women. When she sees other lesbians, she turns away from them as if to distance herself from them and not want to be noticed. When she talks to Dannie and he asks her whether she will be with more women, she says that she does not think so. Therese flirts with Genevieve, but she quickly realizes that she is only attracted to her because she reminds her of Carol. It is easy to understand how she can be confused and think that she is attracted to women. The men she has been with have not been sexually pleasing. This includes Richard, whom she does not love anyway. Her lack of sexual fulfillment with these men could be due to her lack of emotional connection with them.

Heterosexual relationships are also explored in the novel. People have sex before marriage and in a way that seems to be expected. Once the relationship becomes long term, couples are to remain loyal to each other and eventually get married. Richard gets mad because of the implication that Therese may be having a relationship with Phil because she goes to his apartment alone. Her actions are socially embarrassing for Richard. However, even if Therese does not love Richard, their marriage after a long term relationship would be socially acceptable.



## Searching for Identity

Both Therese and Carol learn much about themselves during their individual searches for an authentic self-identity. In the end, they emerge as two women who find happiness living on their own terms.

It is obvious to readers that Therese is not happy at the beginning of the novel. Society has placed her in a box that clashes with her self-identity. The department store is the place where women work until they get married. It is the place where they are stuck if they never get married or get divorced. She is also in a relationship with a man she does not love.

Even though she knows that she should be doing something more, she does not seem to know how to get where she wants to be. Things change when she sees Carol. She takes control of her destiny by sending Carol a Christmas card, something that breaks society's mold. She takes another step in this direction by deciding to pursue a relationship with Carol, instead of staying with Richard. At the end of the novel, she could have gone with Dannie. Again, she chooses to pursue Carol. She is making a lot of decisions that control her destiny instead of letting others control her. Instead of her chasing Carol, for example, Carol is chasing her. Carol finds out that she cannot take her for granted as she did before.

By the end of the novel, Carol also takes control of her identity. In the beginning of the novel, she is married to a man whom she claims is not in love with her. According to her, he just wants to control her. His family does not even like her. At one point, she is tempted to continue with her false identity of self so that she can see Rindy after the divorce. However, Carol realizes that in the end, she will not get to see Rindy anyway. It is interesting to note that she instantly breaks from the identity of being the lonely, older woman who works in a store by asking Therese to move in with her. By the end of the novel, both women have managed to create an identity in the world.

## The Importance of Family Bonds

Families can support people and make it easier for them to find their way in life. The contrast of Richard's, Phil's, Danni's, and Abby's lives to Therese's and Carol's proves this to be true.

Richard belongs to a close family. Even though he plays around with pursuing a career that he will probably never have, he has the luxury of having something to fall back on whether it is his father's business or the support of his family in general. At one part of the novel Therese thinks "It was easy for Richard, living at home with a family to keep him cheerful" (21). It is also easy for him to attract women as he has had several relationships before Therese. The sense of searching for security that his family gives him makes him confident about being able to quickly replace something once he lets it go, as is the case with the kite. He spends a lot of time working on the kite. Yet, he is willing to cut the string, saying that he can always make a new one. The kite is symbolic



of Therese's and Richard's relationship. It is not flying right. When he finally cuts the kite's strings, he is literally cutting the ties in the relationship. Readers get a sense that he will find someone to replace her.

Dannie and Phil have each other and and ties with others in their field. Phil is close enough to people in his line of work that he has the ability to help Therese get a job. Dannie is working on his graduate degree and gets work immediately afterwards. Their bond allows them to reach out to others, which includes Therese while she is traveling.

Readers do not learn much about Abby's family connection, but they do know that it is her mother who puts Abby and Carol in the bedroom together. It is possible in doing this that in some way, Abby's mother was supporting her as she sensed that Abby had a crush on Carol. Like the others with family support, Abby is a strong woman.

Both Therese and Carol lack a strong family bond. When Therese starts her relationship with Carol, she cannot cut the string and move on to the next one thinking that she can recreate what she had. This could be one of the reasons she obsesses over Carol. Pursuing her is the first relationship she has ever pursued. Later, she tries to cut the string between them, but she cannot even though she is stronger by this point. In the end, she returns to her.

Carol does not have a strong relationship with her family. This includes the family she was born into and the one she tries to create with Harge and Rindy, as well as the family into which she marries. She does have a best friend in Abby, but the hopes for a romantic relationship between the two are over. Thus, she reaches out to Therese in an attempt to create a family. Therese is the only family she has now that she is divorced and has given up Rindy.

## **Love Cannot Be Controlled**

Many of the relationships in the novel that readers classify as romantic or family-like are complicated, and they show one cannot control the person they love.

Richard and Therese have a relationship that even his mother accepts. She loves Therese to the point that she had makes a dress for her that looks like a wedding dress. Still, even though Richard tells Therese over and over that he loves her and his mother dotes on her, Therese does not share the feeling. She likes them, but she does not love Richard. Though society approves of their relationship, Richard cannot keep Therese.

Carol's relationship with Harge parallels this situation. According to Carol, he tries to control her. She rebels by having an affair with Abby while she is married. Even though Therese pursues Carol, she does not want Carol to control her. She pays for their food when Carol leaves the table. She gets up when Carol tells her to stay where she is. She does not answer questions that she does not want to answer.

The same is true for familial relationships in the novel. Richard is close to his family, but he does not blindly follow his father into the business. He attempts to do his own thing.



The relationship between Therese and Carol is the ultimate example of how chaotic love can be. One cannot control where their heart lands in love.

The story is set in the 1950's when society as a whole did not accept lesbian relationships. Richard's reaction and the reaction Carol gets from Harge's lawyers prove this fact. While Therese is a bit naïve as she explores her feelings for Carol, Carol knows this to be true. This is why she does not hold Therese's hand in public. Therese's idea of love is what she has read in books. Reality is different.

## **Society, Class, and Conformity in the 1950s**

Fitting into society in the 1950s meant conforming to what society accepted. During that era, there was a place for women and there was a code of conduct when it came to sexual behavior. Having sex before marriage was not acceptable. If couples dated for any length of time, society expected a forthcoming marriage based on the idea that a woman's role in society was to be married and have a family. Even if the marriage was devoid of love, it was seen as the better alternative to living a single life while working at a dead-end job. Thus, a marriage between Richard and Therese is expected by his family and society as a whole after their long term relationship. It is embarrassing that Therese will not marry him.

Single women were for the most part pitied despite the fact that many lived vibrant lives. In this story, the 1950s mindset plays out. Though Therese does not love Richard, society at that time would favor a marriage between them over a lesbian relationship between Therese and Carol. Likewise, Harge is intent on holding Carol in a loveless marriage by making her choose between having a relationship with their daughter and what she perceives to be her sexual identity. Therese finds her voice when Carol leaves her out West. Therese finds her niche in designing sets. As she continues, she gains confidence in herself. She is strong enough to live life on her own terms when she returns to New York.

In the story there is also a distinction between classes. Carol is a member of the upper-class and has money. Therese is poor. Normally, these two women would never interact with each other outside the encounter they have in the store. This fact does not stop Therese, however. She goes against the rules of society by sending a Christmas card to Carol. This violates the rules. Then, she violates the sexual conduct rules by chasing Carol. She continues by refusing Richard. In the 1950s, this would cause her to be ostracized by society. It is interesting that in that time period there existed a sub-society in which the two could find acceptance. Therese sees this in the theater world when she meets Genevieve.



# Styles

## Point of View

The author uses a third person perspective that is "in the head" of Therese, the story's main character. This is appropriate as the novel is about Therese's movement from her teen years to adulthood, the shaping of her identity, and the courage to move forward. Her actions cause reactions as others move forward from their own static positions. As she is the instigator, though others may not even realize the role she plays in their lives, telling the story from her perspective makes the story stronger.

At the same time, it is important to note that Therese starts out being young and naive. Throughout the narrative, she tends to do things without thinking of others. Readers learn about characters from her perspective, unless they speak themselves. It is left to the reader to decide whether or not her perspective is reliable. Is Harge really evil? How kind is Carol? Is Ruby really so sad? Readers only have Therese's words to go on when it comes to the personalities of these characters.

## Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is accessible to all readers. It is important to remember that the story takes place in the 1950s. As such, there may be some words that are not in high usage today, even though readers may know their meanings. The language also has an intellectual feel to it. Perhaps, this is due to Carol's social status. Even though Therese and her friends are not from the same social class, they all seem to be educated. Therese herself reads a lot of books. Therese's conversations with Dannie heighten this feeling.

Readers will come across words with the British English spelling as opposed to the American English spelling. This includes words like "centre," "theatre," and "travelling."

At times, because of Therese's work in the theater, there are words associated with the industry. However, professional jargon is kept to a minimum.

## Structure

The novel is divided into two parts containing an almost equal number of chapters. The first part focuses on Therese's dissatisfaction with her life. It sets in motion the changes that will allow her to mature and to create her own identity. The second part literally takes Therese on her journey of growth. The chapters move quickly and are a mixture of Therese's thought and dialogue.



The opening of both parts reflect their content. In the first part, Therese is in the department store, a place she compares to a prison. In the second part, she is engaged in her dream job - working on a set.



## Quotes

She tried to imagine what it would be like to have worked fifteen years in Frankenberg's department store and found that she was unable to.

-- Narrator (In the head of Therese) (chapter 1 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Readers see Therese's dissatisfaction with her current station in life as soon as they meet her. Working in the department store is a dead-end job that can turn into a dead-in life for some if they never marry and have to support themselves. Such women work at such stores until they got married. They work there forever if they never do. Therese wants something more for herself.

This was she, not the girl in the dull plaid skirt and the beige sweater, not the girl who worked in the doll department at Frankenberg's.

-- Narrator (in the head of Therese) (chapter 1 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This quote points to how Therese sees herself and shows how disappointed she is working at the department store. She feels that her identity is not to be someone who blends in (beige) but someone who pops out and should be living a life of passion, as represented by the color red and the velvet fabric.

The feeling bore no resemblance to what she had read about love. Love was supposed to be a kind of blissful insanity.

-- Narrator (In the head of Therese) (chapter 2 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote shows how young and inexperienced Therese is at this point in the novel. Her only notion of love is what she has read that it is supposed to be. Due to her family background, she has not experienced love in a family. She did not see her parents express their love for each other and her mother never expressed love for her. She is looking to be swept off her feet. Readers may wonder, though, whether this is a realistic view of love. Theresa's concept of love does, though, match the drama she looks for in life.

Therese glanced in vain for a picture of him.

-- The Narrator (in Therese's head) (chapter 6 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** This quote does two things. The first is that it foreshadows the fact that a divorce is in progress. There are signs of a man, but no picture. This shows that his departure must have been rather recent. It also gives readers insight into Therese's character. She is determined to get whatever she wants, even if it means interfering with the life of a family.

She felt if she wept enough, it would all go out of her, the tiredness and the loneliness and the disappointment, as though it were in the tears themselves.

-- Narrator in the head of Theresa (chapter 6 paragraph 89)



**Importance:** This quote shows how sad and isolated Therese feels as well as her disappointment in life thus far.

A world was born around her, like a bright forest with a million shimmering leaves.  
-- Narrator in the head of Therese (chapter 6 paragraph 153)

**Importance:** This quote shows the shift in Therese's thoughts and perception of the world now that she has met Carol.

I think friendships are the result of certain needs that can be completely hidden from both people, sometimes hidden forever.  
-- Dannie (chapter 10 paragraph 106)

**Importance:** This quote works on two levels. On the first level, it helps to characterize Dannie. It shows his level of intelligence. It also shows readers how Therese feels about herself, She wants to know what is weak about Dannie which indicates that she does not know what she can give him. It also may help Therese realize that none of the relationships that she has found to be disappointing were worthless. This understandings may be one of the things that helps her mature and could be why she later seeks people she ran away from after being fired from her job.

How was it possible to be afraid and in love, Therese thought.  
-- Narrator (in the head of Therese) (chapter 18 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** This quote shows that Therese feels safe with Carol. She does not worry about being deserted as she was by her mother. It also may show why she never allowed herself to love Richard. He had affairs with several women before her. It could be that she was always afraid that he would leave her, even though he continued to declare his love for her.

She remembered the first night she had let him stay , and she writhed again inwardly.  
-- Narrator (in the head of Therese) (chapter 5 paragraph 66)

**Importance:** At first glance, this quote seems to show how much Therese is not into Richard. However, it could be a sign that Therese prefers women to men.

Yet, she understood why Carol had sent the letter. Because Carol loved her child more than her.  
-- Narrator (in the head of Therese) (chapter 21 paragraph 42)

**Importance:** This quote shows that Therese is now jealous of Abby's daughter and sees her as her rival.

She meant to move away from Mrs. Osborne's as soon as possible. She wanted to look up some of the people she had run away from last fall.  
-- Narrator (in the head of Therese) (chapter 22 paragraph 125)



**Importance:** This quote shows that Therese has gained confidence and matured. She no longer plans to hide in a lonely apartment or from people she has known. She is ready to move forward.

it would be Carol, in a thousand cities, a thousand houses, in foreign lands where they would go together, in heaven and in hell.

-- The Narrator (in the head of Therese) (chapter 23 paragraph 153)

**Importance:** This quote signifies Therese's realization that her love for Carol is deeper than just wanting to be with another woman. It is Carol that she wants to be with because Carol is Carol.