

Charlie St. Cloud: A Novel Study Guide

Charlie St. Cloud: A Novel by Ben Sherwood

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Plot Summary

The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud is a novel by writer Ben Sherwood. Thirteen years ago, fifteen-year-old Charlie St. Cloud took his brother to a baseball game, using a car borrowed without permission. On the way home, a drunk truck driver crossed into Charlie's lane. Both Charlie and his brother were killed by the impact, but a dedicated paramedic was able to bring Charlie back, but not before Charlie made a promise that he would never leave his brother. Now Charlie's life is restricted to the boundaries of the Waterside Cemetery where he sees his brother every night at sundown. When Charlie meets Tess Carroll, the restrictions of his life become almost paralyzing until he realizes that sometimes you have to let go of what matters most. The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud is a beautiful portrait of grief and second chances that will haunt the reader long after the last page.

Charlie St. Cloud surprises his brother with tickets to see their beloved Red Sox play. Their neighbor is out of town and so they borrow her car without informing anyone of their plans. Both brothers have a wonderful time at the game, eating hotdogs and cheering their favorite team. On the way home, as they begin to cross a dangerous bridge that has been the scene of many accidents in the past, Sam distracts Charlie by telling him that the moon looks amazingly close to the earth on that particular night. Instead of watching the road, Charlie studies the moon, so that he does not notice the semi-truck wandering into their lane.

When paramedic Florio Ferrente arrives on the scene, he immediately goes to work cutting Charlie and Sam from their borrowed car. Both boys are seriously injured, neither with detectible heartbeat. In the ambulance, Florio works on Charlie first. As Florio works diligently, Charlie and Sam find themselves on a hill overlooking the harbor. Sam is scared, so Charlie promises him that they will always be together, that Charlie will never leave him. However, Florio shocks Charlie's heart as the boys begin to cross over, pulling him back to the world of the living. Shortly after Sam's funeral several days later, Charlie realizes that he has been given a gift, the ability to see his dead brother.

Thirteen years later, Charlie, who went to college and became a certified paramedic, works at Waterside Cemetery so that he might be able to see his brother each night at sundown. Charlie's life is very rigid, he can only travel far enough away that he can easily return by sundown. The few times Charlie has been late, his gift began to fade and he could not see Sam properly. For this reason, Charlie refuses to do anything that might keep him from seeing his brother every night.

Tess Carroll is a local girl who owns a sail manufacturing company. Tess is a sailor and plans to sail around the world in less than a week. Tess takes her boat out to test a new sail she and her workers have made specifically for the race. Tess purposely sails into a storm to test both her own skills and her boat. However, the storm proves to be more intense than Tess anticipated and she finds herself in real danger. The boat capsizes. All that Tess remembers is that she ends up at Waterside Cemetery visiting her father's grave.



Charlie meets Tess in the cemetery and invites her to dinner. Dinner is romantic and exciting, creating a new kind of bond unlike any they have ever had. However, the next morning Charlie learns that Tess's boat is lost at sea. Charlie realizes that Tess is only a spirit, one of many he has been capable of seeing since his accident. Charlie spends time with Tess, but is saddened when she disappears, leaving behind a note asking him to come find her. Charlie believes the only way he can find Tess is if he commits suicide. However, Charlie soon realizes that Tess's spirit was different from the others and that she might still be alive. Charlie heads up a search for Tess, missing his meeting with his brother for the first time.

Charlie and his companions are about to give up on the search for Tess when Sam, who has now crossed over, guides them with gusts of wind. Tess is found, injured and hypothermic, but alive. Tess remains in a coma for several months, but soon wakes with vague memories of Charlie. Tess makes a full recovery over time and she marries Charlie.



Introduction and Part 1, Racing the Moon: Chapters 1-4

Introduction and Part 1, Racing the Moon: Chapters 1-4 Summary

This book was originally published by the title *The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud*. However, when a movie was made of the novel, the novel was reissued by the name of the movie, *Charlie St. Cloud*.

Florio Ferrente is a fireman who is a certified paramedic. Florio has been called to the site of many accidents on the General Edwards drawbridge, including one that led to the miracle recovery of a man thought dead after drowning. That is one of three miracle rescues Florio feels he has been a part of. Another was the rescue of a little girl who was caught in a fire and declared dead by the medical examiner before Florio was able to bring her back. The last was *Charlie St. Cloud*, a young man in a car accident that Florio again brought back from death.

Charlie and his brother, Sam, live with their mother in Marblehead, Massachusetts. The boys have two different fathers, two different men who ran off when told of their impending births. For this reason, the boys are extremely close to one another. Both boys are big fans of the Boston Red Sox. One Friday in September, 1991, Charlie surprises his brother with tickets to a Red Sox game. They borrow a neighbor's car, without permission because the neighbor is out of town. Charlie drives carefully into the city because he is only fifteen and does not have a license. At the game, the boys cheer wildly for their team and eat their fill of hotdogs and peanuts. They even taste a little beer, offered by someone sitting near them, but not enough to impair Charlie's ability to drive home. The boys leave the ballpark long after everyone else, hanging out just to relive the excitement of the game and to reveal in one another. On the drive home, they debate many things, including music and baseball. Sam notices the moon and thinks it looks closer than usual. This makes Charlie study the moon, taking his eyes off the road as they cross General Edwards drawbridge and a semi-truck wanders into their lane.

Florio Ferrente arrives at the scene of the accident and immediately uses heavy equipment to cut Charlie and Sam out of the crushed car. Florio and his partner load Charlie and Sam into the back of the ambulance. Both are in traumatic arrest, Sam with obvious head trauma and Charlie with a badly broken leg.

Charlie, Sam, and their dog, Oscar, find themselves on a hill overlooking Marblehead and the harbor. Sam is worried that their mother will be angry with them or that they might go to jail. Charlie promises to fix things. Then Charlie and Sam see a light coming toward them. At the same time, in the ambulance, Florio turns his attention to Charlie. Florio intubates Charlie and begins to shock his heart with a defibrillator. Florio shocks



Charlie multiple times, never giving up because he knows that sometimes the dead comes back when it is least expected.

Sam makes Charlie promise that he will never leave. Charlie promises. A few econds later, Florio is successful in forcing Charlie's heart to beat again. Charlie is confused and immediately demands to know where Sam is. Florio turns his attention to Sam and begins to work on him, but he is unable to bring him back. At the same time, Charlie remembers his promise to Sam and begins to dream of a future together.

Introduction and Part 1, Racing the Moon: Chapters 1-4 Analysis

The novel is written as thought told by the paramedic, Florio Ferrente, who saved Charlie St. Cloud the day of his car accident. Florio is a kind, gentle man who believes in miracles. Florio has witnessed several miracles in his years as a fireman and paramedic, including saving Charlie from death. This makes Florio feel connected to Charlie in a unique sort of way, which is why he is telling his story.

Charlie and his brother Sam have grown up without their respective fathers and their mother works long hours to support them alone, therefore they have come to rely on one another and are closer than brothers. For this reason, it is clear to the reader that Sam's death will have an overwhelming impact on Charlie, especially since it appears that he could have avoided the accident if he had not been distracted. In this way, the introduction of Charlie and his brother, the trip to the ball field, and the circumstances of their accident sets up the conflict in the plot that will propel must of the story as the novel progresses.



Part 2, Diving for Dreams: Chapters 5-10

Part 2, Diving for Dreams: Chapters 5-10 Summary

Tess Carroll is a local girl who is preparing to sail around the world. Tess wants to be one of only ten women who have successfully sailed around the world alone. Tess is set to leave the following Friday. Today, with the help of employee and friend, Tink Wetherbee, Tess places a new sail that her company, Carroll Sails, has made special for the race. When the sail is in place, Tess says goodbye to both Tink and her mother, Grace Carroll, heads off on a test run. Tink has outlined a course for Tess that avoids an incoming storm, but Tess decides the best way to test the new sail and the boat, as well as her solo skills, is to navigate directly into the storm.

Charlie is finishing up his work for the day at Waterside Cemetery. Charlie went to college and is a certified paramedic, but he has always come back to Waterside and is now the head groundskeeper. As Charlie is finishing his work, he sees his old high school teacher, Mrs. Phipps, sitting by a grave. Charlie stays back until it is clear that she is distraught. Charlie then offers some consolation until Mrs. Phipps feels confident enough to leave. Charlie then rides in a specially modified golf cart around the cemetery, making sure everyone has left before he locks the gates for the day. Charlie finds Mr. Guidry, a local man who suffers with Alzheimer's, beside his wife's grave. Charlie gently explains that it is time to go, a conversation he has with Mr. Guidry most days even though Mr. Guidry does not always remember it. Finally, Charlie locks the gates and heads toward the woods.

Charlie walks into the woods where he comes to a clearing that has a pitcher's mound in the center. Then, miraculously, Sam walks out of the trees. At the same time, Tess has sailed into a force 10 storm and is having trouble controlling the controls of her boat. Tess decides to go down into the cabin and ride out the storm there. Tess calls Tink to check in, but decides not to tell him about the storm because she knows he will not approve of her decision. After the call, Tess is thrown around the cabin when the boat capsizes.

Charlie has designed himself this place in the woods to resemble the yard of his former home in Marblehead. This is where Charlie meets his brother, Sam, every day at sundown. Charlie and Sam play catch for a while and then often go to a pond Charlie dug himself to swim. Charlie has been able to see spirits since the day of the accident, but only in the cemetery. Sam was the first. However, if Charlie misses one sundown meeting with Sam he is afraid that his gift will stop because he has been late once or twice and on those occasions Sam seemed to be fading. As they play ball on this day, Charlie tells Sam about his day, of seeing Mrs. Phipps who has recently died, and Sam talks about how he spends his day. At the same time, Tess knows she should set off the EPIRB emergency bracket, but she does not want to do it too soon and be made to look like a fool. Instead, Tess decides to wait for the boat to right itself. As she waits, Tess prays, not to God, but to her father who passed away two years previously.



Charlie spends the following morning preparing for a new funeral and cleaning up debris from the storm that hit the night before. The funeral party arrives and Charlie watches from a distance for his cue to lower the coffin into the grave. As he waits, Charlie is joined by the spirit of the dead man, a fireman named Florio Ferrente. When Charlie speaks to the man, he realizes this is the same fireman who saved his life thirteen years ago. Florio asks Charlie if he knows what the purpose of his second chance. Florio assures Charlie that there is a reason he was saved.

Tess wakes in Waterside Cemetery, covered in bruises and sea salt. Tess cannot remember coming back to port or how she got to the cemetery. However, Tess is happy to be alive and safe and feels that she owes her father gratitude for that fact. Tess can hear a strange noise and goes to investigate. At the same time, Charlie continues to wrestle with Florio's question as he and co-worker, Joe, use remote-controlled toy motorboats to scare away the Canadian geese. Tess comes to see what the noise is. Charlie walks over to her and apologizes. They talk for a few minutes and Charlie finds himself asking Tess to come to his cottage for dinner.

Part 2, Diving for Dreams: Chapters 5-10 Analysis

The reader learns in these chapters that Charlie can see ghosts. It began with Charlie's brother, Sam. Charlie and Sam were extremely close before Sam's death, therefore it is not a surprise that their connection would remain after death. However, Charlie feels even more connected to Sam because of the promise he made on the night of the accident that he would never leave Sam. For this reason, the brothers meet in the cemetery every night at sundown. When Charlie has been late in the past, the ability to see Sam appears to have faded somewhat, so Charlie is convinced that if he should miss one meeting with his brother that he will never see him again, breaking his promise. This causes Charlie to be locked to the cemetery, which is why he works there and why he has not pursued other dreams, such as being a paramedic or dating a woman who wants to do something other than hang at the cemetery every night.

Charlie can also see other spirits as long as he is in the cemetery. Charlie is not sure why, but his gift does not work elsewhere. For this reason, Charlie often has conversations with people he is burying, such as Florio Ferrente, the paramedic who saved his life thirteen years ago. Charlie helps these people deal with their deaths and to cross over. For this reason, Charlie knows a great deal about what happens to the human spirit after death. Charlie also can usually tell when a spirit is of a dead person because they shine on the edges.

Tess Carroll was sailing in a terrible storm when her boat capsized. Suddenly, Tess finds herself in the cemetery, sitting at her father's grave. Tess was close to her father and when she finds herself in trouble, it is her father she calls out to. Therefore, it is not surprising that Tess would visit her father's grave upon returning safely to shore. This brings Tess and Charlie together. A lively conversation about poetry and cemetery maintenance leads to a dinner date between Tess and Charlie. This suggests a future

romance for both, making the reader wonder what will happen if Charlie falls in love and decides to miss his daily meetings with his brother.



Part 2, Diving for Dreams: Chapters 11-18

Part 2, Diving for Dreams: Chapters 11-18 Summary

Charlie has only twenty minutes to buy groceries for his dinner with Tess because it is nearly sundown. Charlie tried to date once before, but it did not work out because the girl did not understand his unwillingness to leave the cemetery. Charlie learned a long time ago not to tell people of his ability to see spirits, so he never told his girlfriend why he could not leave the cemetery. Charlie worries a little about what this date with Tess might lead to, but he is too excited to call it off. Instead, Charlie rushes into town to buy fish. Charlie runs into an old high school teammate and an ex-girlfriend. Charlie asks the girlfriend what she knows about Tess Carroll.

Tess visits her grandmother in the nursing home, but is not surprised when her grandmother does not appear to see her. Tess's grandmother is very old and often does not recognize or even acknowledge her. However, a strange thing happens at the end of the visit. Tess's grandmother says that she can hear her and she will see her very soon.

Charlie rushes his meeting with Sam so that he might clean up his little cottage before Tess arrives. Sam is somewhat annoyed until he realizes that Charlie has a date. Charlie makes Sam promise to stay away because he sometimes likes to use his spirit powers to manipulate or play with people.

Tink goes to Tess's house and takes her dog, Bobo, for a walk. Tink has a crush on Tess and once hoped she would return the feelings, but has come to understand that friendship is the best he can hope for. On the way to take Bobo back to Tess's, Tink makes plans with another local woman.

Tess enjoys Charlie's cooking immensely and enjoys his company even more. Tess has never felt so instantly comfortable with a man before. They talk about everything, including her boat, her dream of sailing around the world, their taste in music, and sports. It turns out Tess is not a baseball fan, but a football fan. Somehow they manage to get past that. Charlie talks about his mother, telling Tess how she moved to Oregon after Sam's death and married, settling into a new family. Then Charlie takes Tess into the cemetery.

Tess and Charlie walk through the cemetery. Charlie takes Tess to see Sam's mausoleum, a marble masterpiece built by the guilt ridden trucking company paid for after it was proven their driver was drunk. Charlie tells Tess how he came to have the job in the cemetery and tells her about the accident that took Sam's life. As he talks about Sam, Charlie becomes aware that Sam is near them, trying to get his brother's attention. Charlie tries to make him leave with veiled comments, but is unsuccessful. Tess talks about her father and Charlie tries to reassure her without telling her that he



never saw her father's spirit, therefore he crossed over almost immediately. Then Tess suddenly decides it is time to go, leaving Charlie with a single, chaste kiss. From the cemetery, Tess goes home and speaks with her dog, a little saddened that the old, nearly deaf dog does not respond to her. Then Tess spends the night in the widow's walk of her house, thinking about Charlie.

Charlie thinks of Tess as he waits for Joe to come pick him up for breakfast. Sam comes by and Charlie chastises him for trying to horn in on his date. Mrs. Phipps soon joins them to say goodbye. Mrs. Phipps has decided to cross over so she can be with her departed husband. Finally, Joe arrives and they make their way to the local diner. When they arrive, Charlie is surprised to learn that Tess's boat, *Querencia*, is missing at sea.

Tess takes Bobo for a walk Sunday morning and is slightly annoyed when a local man does not seem to hear when she calls for him to help wrangled the runaway dog. Tess finally catches up with the dog at her father's grave in Waterside. A young boy comes walking over and seems surprised when Tess can see him. They talk for a few minutes and Tess tells him she would like to find Charlie. The boy tells her where to meet Charlie later in the day, at sunset. As he leaves, Tess asks the boy his name and learns that he is Sam St. Cloud, Charlie's dead brother.

Part 2, Diving for Dreams: Chapters 11-18 Analysis

Charlie and Tess have their date. It is instant chemistry between them and they are both blown away with how easily they get along. For the first time in a very long time, Charlie finds himself talking to someone about Sam. It is a surprising turn in events for Charlie, suggesting to the reader that he might finally be coming to grips with his grief over Sam's death. At the same time, the reader learns that Charlie blames himself for Sam's death, suggesting a reason why Charlie has become so committed to the promise that keeps him trapped in the cemetery.

Tess is a romantic who has always wanted to find that one perfect love. Tess never believed she could find that in Marblehead, so part of her motivations for sailing around the world was to find her great love. Therefore, Tess finds it ironic that she finds that one guy with whom she clicks so completely in Marblehead just a few days before she is set to sail around the world. This leaves no doubt in the reader's mind how Tess feels about Charlie. At the same time, it leaves the reader feeling a little sad for the two lovers who have so many obstacles between them.

At the same time Charlie learns that Tess is believed missing at sea, Tess discovers that she can see Sam St. Cloud, both suggesting that she is dead. To add to all the obstacles between them, now they both must deal with the fact that Tess is dead and their romance cannot continue. The reader must wonder how this will impact both characters as the reality of this situation becomes unavoidable.



Part 3, In Between: Chapters 19-28

Part 3, In Between: Chapters 19-28 Summary

Charlie goes out on a lobster boat with Tink to help in the search for Tess. They have found some debris from the boat, including a burnt life raft, that does not bode well for Tess's survival. Charlie finds himself wondering if Tess is still hanging around the cemetery or if her spirit has already moved on. As it gets closer and closer to sundown, Charlie becomes tense, anxious to return to the cemetery. Charlie tries to reassure Tink about Tess, at the same time rushing him to return to port. When they finally arrive, Charlie must run to make it to the cemetery on time.

When Charlie arrives at the clearing, he is afraid he is too late. However, Sam arrives just as always. Sam tells Charlie about Tess. Charlie worries that Tess has already passed on, but Sam assures him that she is planning on coming to the clearing.

After leaving Sam, Tess walked through town and came to realize that no one could see her. Then, when looking at herself in the water, she realized that she cast no reflection. Frightened, Tess tried to remember what happened to her the night of the storm but cannot. Tess goes to the only place where she knows she will get answers, the clearing. Charlie is pleased to see her. Charlie tells her about the search for her boat. Tess tries to tell him what happened, but still cannot remember.

Tess begins to focus on everything she will never do now that she is dead. Then she begins to wonder why she is still in Marblehead. Charlie and Sam begin to explain. Then Sam suggests a tour of sorts.

Tess and Sam fly around Marblehead before settling in her mother's house. Tess wants to touch her mother, but Sam warns her not to. However, Tess cannot stop herself from adding cream to her mother's clam chowder. When Tink arrives and tells everyone that there has been no sighting of her boat, just more debris collected, Tess's mother becomes overwrought. Tess wants to comfort her, but when she touches her mother it is as though a cold chill has overcome her mother. Tess is saddened by what her disappearance is doing to her mother.

Charlie looks at his maps, trying to figure out where Tess's body might be located. Then he hears a sound outside and opens the door to find Tess there. Tess has begun to fade and was unable to knock. Inside, they talk on the couch for a while. Tess remembers some of what happened the night of the storm. Tess remembers the boat righting itself and going back out to check for damage. The boat had gone off of autopilot for some reason and before Tess could call for help, a lightning strike ignited the deck.

Tess asks Charlie if he would ever leave the cemetery and Charlie tells her he could not live without Sam. Charlie then takes Tess upstairs to his bedroom. Tess is afraid to let



Charlie sees that she is continuing to fade away, so she undresses in the shadows. Tess and Charlie make love all night.

Charlie wakes the next morning to find Tess gone. Tess left a note explaining how she began to fade away and left before she disappeared. The note ends with a request for Charlie to 'come find me' (p. 161). Tink is waiting for Charlie at the dock, but Charlie refuses to go because he knows it is too late.

Charlie is preparing for another funeral when his grief for Tess becomes overwhelming. Charlie lets everyone go home early. Charlie then goes to his cottage and drinks a bottle of whiskey before becoming angry and tearing the many maps and charts that show him how far he can go and still return to the cemetery by sundown off the walls. Charlie thinks he should commit suicide so he can be with Tess and Sam forever. Then Charlie passes out.

When Charlie wakes, he finds a single map that is still whole on the floor in front of him. Suddenly Charlie realizes that this map is Tess's way of telling him where she is. Charlie jumps up to call the harbor master, but hangs up when he realizes no one would believe him. Charlie decides to go after Tess himself.

Part 3, In Between: Chapters 19-28 Analysis

Charlie joins the search for Tess even though he knows it is futile. Tess is dead, Charlie knows this because he has seen her spirit. Instead, Charlie is anxious to get back to the cemetery, not only to keep his promise to Sam, but to learn if Tess has already crossed over. It is then that Charlie learns that Tess has learned of her death and has been struggling with the idea all day. Charlie does his best to help her, and Sam does the rest.

Tess's boat and body continue to be missing throughout this part of the novel. While Charlie can see Tess and knows she is dead, it does not stop him from loving her. For this reason, Charlie spends the night with Tess in an attempt to live a lifetime in one night. At the same time, Tess' family and friends grieve for her even as they hold out hope that she is still alive somewhere. When Tess disappears, Charlie thinks from previous experience that she has crossed over. However, Tess's spirit appeared differently to Charlie from the spirits of the dead, leaving him with a small amount of hope when he remembers her request that he come find her when he is ready. Suddenly Charlie is filled with hope, leaving the reader wondering if maybe Tess is only badly injured somewhere.



Part 4, True Wind: Chapters 29-37 and Afterward

Part 4, True Wind: Chapters 29-37 and Afterward Summary

Charlie convinced Joe to let him use his boat to search for Tess. For this reason, Charlie finds himself on the boat with both a drunk Joe and Tink. However, it is late when they start up and Charlie is forced to miss his meeting with Sam. Charlie is saddened about this.

Charlie and Tink have no luck spotting any signs of Tess despite searching in the area where Charlie believes she has told him to look. Joe finally decides at dawn that it is time to give up despite Charlie's protests.

Sam crossed over when Charlie failed to show up and has now gained an amazing knowledge and freedom that he had missed before. Sam wants to help Charlie, however, and he flies over Joe's boat, trying to give Charlie clues to Tess's whereabouts, but Charlie fails to notice. Charlie has grown depressed and disheartened. When Joe goes to the restroom, Charlie takes over the wheel and suddenly notices an odd thing about the wind. Charlie begins to follow the odd movement of the waves and soon sees a spot of orange on a tiny lip of rock. Charlie holds an unresponsive Tess in his arms until the Coast Guard whisks her away.

Charlie waits in the hospital with Tink for news on Tess. Grace Carroll comes and introduces herself to Charlie. When a nurse comes for Grace, she invites both Charlie and Tink to join her. The doctors tell them that Tess has suffered a severe head injury and is in a coma. They offer little hope that she will recover.

Charlie quits his job at the cemetery, but finishes his day as he always has. Charlie visits his brother's mausoleum and leaves behind the old ball and glove he and Sam have always played catch with.

At sunset, Charlie goes to the hidden playground one last time. Charlie wishes he could say goodbye to his brother and is surprised when he is joined by Sam. Sam looks different now, more like the man he might have been. Sam assures Charlie that he is okay and that he did the right thing letting him go. They promise one last time to never leave one another before Sam disappears for the last time.

Charlie runs into Mr. Guidry one last time. This time Charlie agrees to have dinner with Mr. Guidry, causing the old man to realize something is different in this conversation despite his Alzheimer's. Then Charlie locks the gates to Waterside for the last time.



Charlie has become a full time paramedic for the city of Marblehead. Charlie frequently visits Tess, who continues to be in a coma. On this particular day, Charlie talks to Tess about an upcoming football game. As he is preparing to leave, Tess wakes.

Tess is confused when she first wakes and does not recognize Charlie. However, her confusing slowly passes and she comes to believe she knows Charlie even though she cannot place him. All of Tess's friends and family come to revel in her consciousness. Charlie waits in a waiting room during their visits. By the end of the night, Tess is asking for him.

Florio tells the reader that he believes it is important for the dead to pass on so that the living can get on with their lives. Florio also tells the reader that Tess fully recovers and she and Charlie marry. They have two sons and live a quiet, unassuming life.

Part 4, True Wind: Chapters 29-37 and Afterward Analysis

Charlie is convinced that Tess is still alive and she wants him to come find her. The reader is not certain this is the case, but goes along on the ride as Charlie searches for her, giving up the one thing he has lived for for thirteen years, Sam. In the end, it is Sam who shows Charlie where to find Tess. Charlie finds Tess just in time. Tess is in bad shape, in a deep coma, but she eventually comes out of it. At the same time, Charlie suddenly finds himself with a new freedom he did not have before.

Charlie has finally learned to let go of the past, to let go of his brother. By letting go, Charlie has allowed both himself and Sam the freedom to move on to something better. Charlie is able to fulfill his dream to be a paramedic and Sam is able to move up to the next level, to gain great knowledge and to leave behind the petty worries and concerns of the living world. In this way, both Charlie and Sam have learned that they were holding each other back, hurting each other.

Tess wakes from her coma, but has little to no memory of her time as a spirit. This does not deter Charlie, however, and Florio assures the reader that Charlie and Tess find happiness together. It is a happy ending that could not have happened if Charlie had not let go of Sam.



Characters

Charlie St. Cloud

Charlie St. Cloud is only fifteen when he borrows a car without permission in an innocent attempt to show his brother some fun and ends up in an accident that takes his brother's life. Charlie makes a promise to his brother as they both are suspended somewhere between this world and the next that he will never leave him. When Charlie sees his brother shortly after the funeral, he becomes obsessed with the idea that if he does not meet his brother each day at sundown that his gift to be able to see him will disappear and he will be breaking his promise.

Charlie spends his days waiting to see his brother again. Charlie has charted on maps how far he can travel in a single day in order to make it back to the cemetery to see his brother. Charlie has given up his dreams of being a paramedic and his chance to find love all so he can tether himself to a promise made thirteen years before. However, all this changes when Charlie meets Tess Carroll.

Charlie meets Tess in the cemetery and has no idea that the person he sees and interacts with is actually only the spirit of Tess. Tess has been in a boating accident and is dying on a lonely outcropping of rock in the middle of the Atlantic. The Tess Charlie loves is nothing more than Tess's spirit trying to make sense of what is happening to her. Charlie eventually finds Tess's body from clues her spirit has left him, but has no idea if she will remember him when she wakes. However, by searching for Tess, Charlie has had to release himself and his brother from his promise, allowing him to become untethered from the cemetery and move on with his life.

Sam St. Cloud

Sam St. Cloud is a twelve-year-old boy when the novel begins. Sam and his brother, Charlie, are both fatherless therefore they become very close even for brothers. Sam is killed, however, in a car accident that Charlie feels is his fault for allowing himself to become distracted. Sam makes Charlie promise to never leave him and to fulfill this promise, Charlie tethers himself to the cemetery where Sam is buried and where he can see him each day at sundown. Sam remains as he was when he died, a twelve year old boy, even as Charlie continues to age and mature. In the end, however, when Charlie releases himself and Sam from his promise, Sam crosses over and becomes everything he should have been and much more.

Tess Carroll

Tess Carroll is a local Marblehead girl. Tess is a romantic who dreams of one day finding a perfect love. In pursuit of this love, Tess decides to sail around the world and find the right man for her. Tess is an avid sailor, raised by a lobster fisherman, and she



hopes to one day be one of only ten women to sail around the world solo. However, Tess is also reckless. Tess sails into an approaching storm despite warnings to the contrary in order to test herself and her boat. This proves to be a fatal mistake when Tess's boat is damaged and then is struck by a bolt of lightning. This causes Tess to become injured and abandoned on an outcropping of rock in the middle of the Atlantic ocean.

As Tess's body becomes weaker and weaker, her spirit separates from her body and returns to Marblehead. It is there that Tess meets Charlie and immediately falls in love. However, their romance is doomed from the beginning, first because of Charlie's promise to Sam and then because of Tess's status as a spirit. This does not stop them from indulging in romance before Charlie finally figures out where Tess's body is and he saves her.

Tink Wetherbee

Tink Wetherbee is a former weatherman. Tink works for Tess at her sail making shop. Tink is in love with Tess, but has long since come to the conclusion that Tess will never be interested in him. Instead, they have a brother-sister type relationship. When Tess's boat goes missing in the storm, Tink is one of the first who goes out in search of her.

Joe the Atheist

Joe the Atheist is a friend and co-worker of Charlie's. Joe works in the cemetery digging graves and he often stops to listen to the religious ceremonies at the open graves. However, Joe does not believe in God and often speaks to Charlie about the lack of guidance and compassion from an all-knowing being. Charlie and Joe are fairly good friends and it is to Joe that Charlie turns when he needs a fast boat to help him find Tess. After Charlie finds Tess, Joe begins to think that maybe there really is a God.

George Carroll

George Carroll was a lobster fisherman. George died two years before the novel begins, leaving behind his beloved daughter and wife. As a father, George taught Tess her love of the sea and sailing. When Tess finds herself tossed in a raging sea, it is to her father that she prays, to her father that she begs for help. When Tess wakes the following morning, she finds herself sitting at her father's grave. The grave is in the same cemetery where Charlie works, bringing Tess to Charlie in a time when she desperately needs him.

Grace Carroll

Grace Carroll is Tess's mother. Grace is a kind, gentle woman who loves her daughter dearly. Grace lost her husband two years ago to a sudden heart attack and she still



struggles with the loss. Therefore, when Tess goes missing, Grace desperately clings to the hope that she will be found alive and well. In the end, when Charlie finds Tess, Grace embraces Charlie and welcomes him into the family, never questioning his relationship to Tess even though Charlie and Tess never really spoke to one another before Tess's accident.

Florio Ferrente

Florio Ferrente is the paramedic and fireman who responded to the car accident that killed Charlie's brother. Florio worked on Charlie first and was able to bring him back from the brink of death. However, Florio was not able to save Sam. Thirteen years later, Florio is killed trying to rescue some pets from a house fire. At his funeral, Florio asks Charlie if he has discovered the purpose for his life, the reason God allowed him to return to the living world. This idea bothers Charlie until he finally decides it is because he was meant to save Tess.

Hoddy Snow

Hoddy Snow is the harbormaster in Marblehead. When Tess's boat goes missing and a fisherman finds remnants of her boat, it is to the harbormaster the information is taken. Hoddy heads up the search for Tess and the Querencia. When Charlie realizes where Tess must be, he calls Hoddy, but decides that his story will sound crazy and he decides to go in search of her on his own instead.

Oscar

Oscar is Sam and Charlie's dog. When Sam and Charlie decide to sneak off to see a Red Sox game, they decide to take Oscar with them to keep him from tearing up the house while they are gone. Oscar goes to the game inside a backpack. Later, Oscar is killed in the car accident that also takes Sam's life. For this reason, Oscar spends much of the afterlife at Sam's side, often visiting Charlie at the cemetery.



Objects/Places

Survival Suit

Tess puts on an orange survival suit during the storm that tears apart her sailboat, Querencia. The suit protects Tess from the elements long enough for Charlie to find her and because of its bright color that Charlie is able to see her from a distance.

Maps and Star Charts

Charlie uses maps and star charts to figure out exactly what time sundown will come each day and how far he can travel and still return to the cemetery in time to see Sam each day.

Tess's Note

Tess leaves Charlie a note when she begins to fade that asks him to come find her. At first Charlie thinks this is an invitation to commit suicide, but later realizes it is a plea for Charlie to rescue her from the sea.

Historical Society

Marblehead is a very old town that has a great amount of history. The Historical Society strives to preserve this history by restricting modifications residents can make to their homes. Charlie is often harassed by the president of this society for allowing bushes to grow wild outside the gates of the cemetery.

Modified Cart

Charlie has a golf cart that he has modified so that he can clear the cemetery in record time each evening in time to see Sam at dusk.

Horny Toad

Horny Toad is the name of Joe the Atheist's boat. It is on this boat that Charlie is finally able to find Tess.

Querencia

Querencia is the name of Tess Carroll's sail boat. Querencia is a Spanish word for safe place.



Charlie's Cottage

Charlie lives in a small caretaker's cottage that sits on cemetery property. It is because of the location of this cottage that Charlie is able to have dinner with Tess and to spend the night with her while she is a spirit. Charlie cannot see spirits outside of the cemetery.

Waterside Cemetery

Waterside Cemetery is the cemetery in Marblehead where Sam is buried and Charlie works. It is here that Charlie can see the dead. Charlie meets Tess in this cemetery.

Secret Playground

Charlie has created a secret playground in the woods on Waterside Cemetery property that resembles places from his shared childhood with Sam. This is where Charlie meets Sam each day at sunset.

Marblehead, Massachusetts

Marblehead, Massachusetts is the small sea side community where the novel takes place.



Themes

Grief and Letting Go

The novel begins with a story of two brothers who love each other so much that they do something incredibly stupid in order to share a few stolen moments together. Charlie wants to make his little brother happy, so he takes him to a baseball game. However, Charlie is too young to drive. Charlie is not a bad driver, but he allows himself to become distracted. This moment of distraction ends in tragedy when Charlie and Sam's car is hit by a truck driver who is drunk and has wandered into the wrong lane.

In death, Charlie promises Sam that he will never leave him. When Charlie is brought back to the land of the living, he still feels that he cannot break this promise. Therefore, when Charlie realizes he can see Sam, he makes a date with him each day at sundown. This promise keeps Charlie tethered to the local cemetery, a situation that takes from Charlie his opportunity to find a fulfilling career or love. Charlie has stopped living because he loves his brother so much.

Charlie's promise to Sam becomes a metaphor for the grief that often becomes all-encompassing for some people. Some people simply cannot let go of their dead loved one and move on with their lives. Charlie physically cannot move on with his life because of his promise to Sam. However, when Charlie breaks this promise, he frees both himself and Sam for bigger and better things. Again, this is a metaphor for letting go, for freeing oneself from grief and getting on with a good, happy life.

True Love

Tess believes that true love exists. However, she has not been able to find true love in her own life. In fact, Tess often dates men who are difficult, losers who often leave her broken hearted. For this reason, Tess has decided to look in other parts of the world for a good man. Tess is an avid sailor and she has decided to sail solo around the world. While she is in different parts of the world, Tess hopes to find the man of her dreams.

Before Tess can leave for her trip around the world, she decides to take her boat out for a final trial. However, Tess runs into trouble and the boat is destroyed. Tess finds herself in a cemetery with a man who she quickly realizes is the man of her dreams. Tess and Charlie get along like they have known each other their whole lives. Tess feels comfortable with Charlie in a way she has never felt before. Tess believes Charlie is the one.

Tess does not realize that Charlie is chained to the cemetery because he can see dead spirits. Tess also does not realize that she herself is a spirit because her body is slowly dying on a rock outcrop in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Despite the obstacles between them, Charlie and Tess manage to find one another again, both literally and

figuratively. In the end, Charlie and Tess look forward to a good life together, making true love a theme of the novel.

Second Chances

Charlie blames himself for the death of his brother, Sam. It was Charlie's idea to go to the ball game and it was Charlie who was distracted and did not see the drunk truck driver swerve into their lane. For this reason, Charlie feels responsible for the death of his brother. Charlie makes a promise to his brother that he will never leave him, that he will always be with him. When Charlie returns to the living world without Sam, he manages to keep the promise because of a surprising gift that allows him to see spirits on the cemetery grounds.

Charlie spends thirteen years tethered to the cemetery because of his promise to his brother and Sam spends those thirteen years as a perpetual teenager, never able to grow up or become something more than what he was on the day he died. In this way, both Charlie and Sam are tethered by their promise, a promise that prevents both boys from moving forward with their lives.

Charlie thinks that he cannot live his life without his brother, therefore he refuses to break his promise to Sam. When Charlie meets Tess, he knows from the very first moments that she is the woman he is meant to be with. Unfortunately, Charlie cannot be with Tess and keep his promise to Sam. When Charlie realizes that Tess might still be alive, he knows he must choose between Sam and Tess. Charlie chooses Tess, allowing Sam the freedom to move on to the next world and to experience a metaphysical change that frees him of all the difficulties of the living world. In this way, Charlie has given both himself and Sam a second chance at happiness, making second chances a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is a combination of the third-person omniscient and the first-person point of view. The introduction and the afterward are both written in the first-person point of view as though told to the reader directly by the fireman Florio Ferrentes. The bulk of the novel, however, is recounted through the third-person point of view of several characters, including Charlie, Tess, Sam, and Tink. This third-person point of view allows the reader insight into all of their feelings so that the reader might know every important aspect of the plot that allows the plot to progress.

The point of view of this novel works well with the story. The beginning point of view, the first person point of view of Florio Ferrentes, gives the novel a sense of both wonder and anticipation, especially when the reader learns that Florio has died and is telling this story from the afterlife. The third person point of view allows the reader to understand each of the major characters, their motivations, and how they happen to find themselves in the conflict that propels the plot. The point of view of this novel works well with the characters, with the plot, and allows the reader to experience a well-rounded story.

Setting

The novel is set in Marblehead, Massachusetts. Marblehead is a sea side village where many of the residents are fishermen, lobstermen, or are related to a fisherman or lobsterman. For this reason, the sea and its dangers have a great deal to do with the plot of the novel. Marblehead is also a very small community, giving the novel a sense of family and camaraderie that is important to certain parts of the plot, especially the search for Tess Carroll.

The setting of the novel lends a realistic feel to the dangers that Tess Carroll faces as she sails into a storm and finds herself adrift in the Atlantic Ocean. The setting also gives a sense of community to the character, especially Charlie as he finds himself both isolated and a part of a larger community. Only in such a small, tightknit community would someone such as Charlie find it both dangerous and safe to live with the ability to see his dead brother. Hence, the setting of the novel works well with the overall plot of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is an educated, but simple English. The novel contains several words or phrases in a foreign language, such as Querenica, the name of Tess Carroll's boat. However, the majority of the novel is in a simple language that is appropriate to a large audience. The main characters are all educated people, therefore the language reflects the true character of those who populate the novel.



The language of the novel is simple enough to allow a large audience to read and enjoy the book, but also reflects the education and lifestyle of those who populate the novel. The author does not try to add any kind of slang to his novel, but there are instances of foreign words and phrases. Each of these foreign words or phrases are explained in the text, avoiding certain complications for the reader. Hence the language of the novel is appropriate to the plot and characters.

Structure

The novel is divided into four parts, an introduction, afterward, and thirty-seven chapters. The parts are each given a simple phrase that reflects what takes place in the plot at that point in the novel. The chapters are of varying length, some quite long while others are surprisingly short. The novel is told both in a first person point of view in which the narrator speaks directly to the reader with something of an authorial voice and a third person point of view that allows the reader to understand the motivations of multiple characters in the plot.

The novel contains two main plots and several subplots. One main plot focuses on Charlie and his relationship with Sam, despite Sam's death thirteen years previously. Another main plot focuses on Tess, a young woman who hopes to sail around the world alone, but runs into trouble when she sails her boat directly into a storm. A subplot involves Charlie's relationship with his co-workers and some of the people who regularly visit the cemetery, both alive and dead. Another subplot involves Tess's relationship with friend and employee, Tink Wetherbee. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"I believe in miracles" (Introduction, p. 7).

"Now turn the page, come along on the ride, and let me tell you about the death and life of Charlie St. Cloud" (Introduction, p. 10).

"To be precise, Charlie ruined everything on Friday, September 20, 1991" (Chapter 1, p. 13).

"Of all his reckless decisions that night, surely this was the worst. Charlie raced the moon, and in the final second before the end, he saw the perfect image of happiness. Sam's innocent face looking up at him. The curl dangling over his forehead. The Rawlings glove on his hand. And then there was only fracturing glass, metal, and blackness" (Chapter 1, p. 17).

"They were dead and gone" (Chapter 3, p. 22).

"He felt his brother's hand, all limp and cold. And Charlie held on as hard as he could" (Chapter 4, p. 27).

"Charlie was different. He was like some rare and exotic animal—a gentler, more sophisticated breed than the critters she had grown up around" (Chapter 15, p. 95).

"The ocean had never looked so massive" (Chapter 19, p. 123).

"Tess was a natural at flying" (Chapter 23, p. 142).

"Nothing had changed. Everything had changed" (Chapter 26, p. 162).

"'I quit.' They were two words that Charlie never imagined uttering, but he was stunned by how easily they came out" (Chapter 33, p. 189).

"Sam was there, Charlie knew right away. His brother was all around him in the air, the sky, the sunset, and the leaves" (Chapter 33, p. 191).

Topics for Discussion

Who is Charlie St. Cloud? How old was he when he borrowed a car without asking and took his brother to a baseball game? Why did Charlie do this? What did Charlie expect the outcome of this trip would be? What was Charlie looking at when the accident occurred? For what reason? Was the accident Charlie's fault? What might Charlie have done differently to avoid the accident?

Does Tess know who Charlie is when she wakes up? Does Tess remember what happened to her? Explain. How does Florio know that Charlie and Tess will live a long life together? How does Florio know so much about Charlie? Who is Florio? How is he telling his story? Why does Florio tell the story? What is Florio's goal in telling the story?

Who is Tess Carroll? What type of business does she run? For what reason? What does Tess hope to do in the near future? For what reason? Why does Tess take her boat out early? What is the purpose of this trip? Why does Tess make the conscious decision to sail into a storm? What is she trying to prove? To whom is she trying to prove it? Why does Tess often not take sailor superstitions seriously?

Why does Charlie try to keep Sam from Tess? What happened the last time Charlie had a girlfriend? How does this past experience influence Charlie's actions with Tess? Why does Charlie become upset when he sees Sam hanging around he and Tess? Why does Charlie show Tess Sam's mausoleum? Why does Charlie talk to Tess about the accident that left Sam dead? What does Charlie say about this accident? How does this discussion explain some of the reasons why Charlie continues to try to keep his promise to Sam?

What is Charlie's reaction when he learns that Tess' boat is missing in the ocean? What does he think this means about the Tess he saw the night before? Why does Charlie help in the search for Tess? What does Charlie tell Tink about Tess and her situation? Why does Charlie later refuse to help Tink search for Tess? What happened to change Charlie's opinions about the situation?

Why does Tess begin to disappear? Why does she try to hide this from Charlie? What does the note Tess leaves for Charlie say? How does Charlie take it? Why does Charlie get drunk and begin to think about suicide? Is Charlie depressed? Is he serious about trying to kill himself? What purpose would there be in Charlie killing himself? Why does he change his mind?

Why does Charlie think Tess left him clues to her whereabouts? How did she do this? Where does Charlie think Tess is? Where is she? How does Charlie finally find Tess? What does Charlie give up in order to find Tess? How does this make Charlie feel? How does it impact Sam? How does it impact Tess?