

Come to Me Study Guide

Come to Me by Amy Bloom

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Plot Summary

In the first short story titled, "Love is Not a Pie", a young woman, Ellen, back home to attend the funeral of her mother, Lila, is confused about the life her parents lead with their dearest friend, Mr. DeCuervo. After Ellen and her sister, Lizzie, piece their separate stories together, they realize that their mother is in love with both men who over the years have agreed to share her and periodically, become a threesome. This upsetting reality helps Ellen to realize her true feelings for her fiancé, John Wescott, and she calls off their wedding.

The next story, titled, "Song of Solomon", tells the story about a young, single mother of a newborn baby who is preparing to "accidentally" run into her doctor, Dr. Sheldon, at the Jewish synagogue he attends, even though she is not Jewish. She is hoping to get his attention and make him fall in love with her.

In "Sleepwalking" Julia Sampson is married to Lionel Sampson who has a son, Lionel Jr., nicknamed Lion, from a previous marriage. Lion is 19 years old and had become Julia's stepson 12 years earlier. Lionel and Julia have a son together as well, Gabriel Tyner Sampson, nicknamed Buster, who is still in elementary school. After Lionel's death, the grieving family leaned on one another until the contact became too personal. One night when Lion and Julia were both feeling sad, Lion climbed into bed with her for comfort. He has sex with her, and she is a willing participant. After that, she realizes the mistake she has made, breaks his heart, tries to send him away, but he doesn't leave and becomes disrespectful and hard to handle until he returns to school out of town. Lionel's mother, Ruth, is shocked at her grandson's change in attitude and personality, though she does know the reason why. After Lion leaves, Julia and Buster continue their lives normally.

"Hyacinths" depicts a boy named, David, who does not lead a happy life, and probably, the worst day of his life is his sixth birthday. His father, Walter, is a cold, cruel man, and his mother passed away while he was young. He is lucky to have the support of his father's brother, Francis, and two sisters, Ida and Myrtle, as well as the support of his mother's brother, Hiram, and sister, Ruth. On David's sixth birthday, his father gives him a calf to take care of on his own. When his cousins arrive to have dinner and cake, the oldest boy, Willie, is impressed by the calf, but begins touching Walters's tools and eventually gets into his gun cabinet. David tells him that he shouldn't do that, and when they grab the gun to put it back, they both slip in the mud, and Willie is shot in the chest and killed. David's father beats him, but Ida takes him away to rescue him and put him in bed. Once in bed, Walter goes into David's room with a gun to shoot him, a sort of an eye for an eye kind of thing. Walter's brother, Hiram, won't let him hurt the boy and takes David back to Duluth, MN with him and his wife, Fritzi.

After living there happily for a while, David receives a note from Walter saying that he's coming to pick him up. David asks Hiram if he can become Jewish like him. The story then jumps to David as an adult, married to Galen with daughters Violet and Rose. He is taking them back to his hometown in Rosebank, to show them where he was born.



Stopping at a motel outside of Rosebank on the night they arrive, Galen, Violet, and Rose get in their swimsuits and go to the unlit pool. When David goes outside he hears Rose screaming, jumps in the pool, and saves an almost unresponsive Violet. Galen walks up after the event asking what happened. David is mad at her. He looks up and believes he sees the ghost of his cousin Willie, still as blood as they day he was shot, telling him he was lucky this time.

In the story, "The Sight of You" the reader learns that Galen is married to David, but she has a crush on Henry who is also married. After a lot of quick interactions here and there, Galen agrees to leave her husband for Henry. Unfortunately, Henry wants much more than just an on-going affair. He wants to get married. Galen does not want that kind of commitment, so before breaking it off with her husband, she tells Henry she's changed her mind.

The story, "Silver Water" is a story about a family whose daughter, Rose, has a mental breakdown. She starts off like any other kid, but somewhere along the way, she has a psychotic break. The family's ups and downs, laughter and tears, happiness and... mostly sadness... are all spelled out in various ways as the family interacts with each other, with Rose, and with her varied therapists over the years.

This story is a continuation of the story "The Sight of You", but is titled, "Faultlines". This one focuses on Henry and Marie in their new home. Henry, of course, is still looking around for an affair. He is attracted to a girl in the office, Mary, who is not married, but living with a man, Nathan. He invites them over to have dinner with them, knowing that Marie will not like it at all, because Mary is blonde and beautiful. Although Mary flirts with Henry at the office, by the end of dinner, she likes Marie so much, she can't think of having a fling with Henry. As Mary and Henry are walking back into the house from the garden, Mary's heel is caught, and she stumbles. Henry catches her, and despite what she has just decided, she ends up kissing Henry, anyway.

"Only You" involves Marie and Henry, but this time, Marie is focusing on herself and not on whatever Henry is doing. She decides to make changes to her appearance with the help of a hairstylist named Alvin. She starts working for Alvin as his assistant. When they go to a conference together, she learns that Alvin is a transvestite, but that he likes her, too. The story ends with them going to bed together.

"Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines" features Susie, a lonely, overweight young girl, who is picked on at school and hounded by an unsympathetic mother at home. She makes friends with one of her neighbors who happens to own a fur store. They begin a weekly habit of going to his closed store, Susie undressing, and trying on furs. When Mr. Klein abruptly, and it seems reluctantly, ends their weekly ritual, Susie is extremely upset. She bounces back when her fur filled afternoons are replaced with piano lessons, and she falls in love with her teacher.

"Semper Fidelis" is the story of a young woman of 18 who marries a much older man of 50. They have been together for ten years when the story opens, and now Max, her husband, is dying of cancer. Although he is dying, he is still insisting on watching his



young wife undress, claiming to be having an affair with his nurse, Dawn, and bringing up past affairs he's had since they've been married. Because she needs a break, she goes out shopping every Thursday night...first the mall, then the grocery store. She leaves the house in jeans and tennis shoes, but changes into sexy clothes before shopping, then changes back before going home again. She has her eye on Ray, the deli man at the grocery store. Although she's never done anything to act on her attraction, they exchange flirty smiles when she goes in.

"When the Year Grows Old" is a story about a young girl, Kay, whose mother has a mental breakdown, acts in mysterious, unfamiliar ways, and must be hospitalized for a time while Kay stays home with her distant, harsh father.

"Psychoanalysis Changed My Life" begins with a patient, Dr. Marianne Loewe, who is visiting her psychiatrist, Dr. Zumer. However, as the psychiatrist begins to collapse, she asks the patient to drive her home. Marianne takes her home, places her in her bed, and calls to check on her daily. The older woman asks Marianne to visit her at her home because she's too sick to go to the office. As they talk, they become more than doctor and patient; they become friends. In the end, the lonely Marianne is introduced to the Dr. Zumer's single son, Alex.



“Love is Not a Pie,” p. 1-23

Summary

In this short story, Ellen has come back to her childhood home to attend her mother's funeral. The reader gets the distinct feeling that she has been estranged from her mother. She begins to notice that their longtime neighbor, Mr. DeCuervo is particularly upset at her death.

Ellen's sister, Lizzie, also begins to receive some information that makes both sisters realize that they did not know their mother as well as they thought they did. Their father, still living, tells the girls that their mother, he, and Mr. DeCuervo had an arrangement. This arrangement involved them sharing Lila, the mother, and sometimes becoming a threesome. Their father makes them understand that it was a loving and caring relationship for decades. Ellen, who is engaged to be married takes a long look at her own impending marriage and realizes that though her parent's relationship was not 'normal' they managed to have the type of close bond that she knows she doesn't have with her fiance. She calls him and tells him that she can't marry him.

Analysis

This story is told from the first person point of view of Ellen and begins at Lila, her mother's, funeral. During the service, Ellen lets her mind wander to think about why she should not marry John Wescott in August. Like an itchy sweater in July that agitates the skin and is not appropriate for that time of year, Ellen is agitated and distracted by the fact that too many things are making her question her marriage to John. With this consideration looming in her thoughts, Ellen and her sister, Lizzie, help their dad welcome people into their home to pay respects after the funeral.

Although they are grief stricken at their mother's passing, they begin to share with each other their curiosity over the relationship between Mr. DeCuervo and their parents. During this time, through the use of Ellen's flashbacks to their childhood, both girls tell and/or think about stories from the past with their parents and with Mr. DeCuervo and his daughter, Gisela. They reminiscing mostly centers on their confusion over Lila's relationship with Danny DeCuervo, and both parents' relationship with Mr. DeCuervo.

Although Lizzie, during their summer vacations together, was too young to be told, Ellen had two disturbing memories of her parents and Mr. DeCuervo. Once while everyone in their summer vacation home was asleep, Ellen got up for a glass of water and discovered her mother and Mr. DeCuervo, or Goucho, as her parents called him, hugging intimately, as her parents had on occasion. Her mother's hand was under Goucho's shirt. On another occasion, Ellen was freaked out when she wasn't feeling well, and had gone into her parents' room to be comforted. She finds her parents asleep



on the bed with Goucho; Lila lying between the two men. Although Ellen was extremely disturbed and curious, she did not bring these occurrences to her parents' attention.

Lizzie, who has been with her mother through the illness, tells Ellen about the daily phone calls from Goucho to Lila. She explains that those calls seemed to be the highlight of her mom's days. Being intrigued, Lizzie had asked her mom about her relationship with Goucho. She learned that her mother didn't believe that love was compartmentalized and labeled person by person. She was a free-thinker in this area and explained that she, Goucho, and Danny loved each other in different ways. She believed that it was okay to express the way one loved someone to that person without judgment or conventional rules. Lila explained that she loved both of her daughters, but in different ways. It didn't mean she loved one less; just differently. This offers an intriguing view into the theme of Infidelity, because in this story, the infidelity was consensual and acknowledged, even encouraged. It challenges the definition in that can something be called an infidelity if all parties are in agreement? It also touches upon the theme of Love, in that the definition of love is really up to the participants involved. It is also shown to not have any knowledge of boundaries, and is no respecter of age, gender, or propriety.

When Goucho arrives at their house to pay his respects, the girls are intrigued over how their father receives Goucho so warmly. They hug and rock back and forth as if dancing. One wouldn't usually expect her father to be happy to see and to embrace the man who has been cheating with his wife for years. Through Ellen's thoughts of the past and Lizzie's stories about what she knows, both girls try to figure out exactly how the arrangement between their parents and Mr. DeCuervo worked. All the while, Ellen is also contemplating and finally decides to cancel her upcoming wedding to John. She sees how desperately, yet uniquely, her mother loved two men and realizes that she doesn't love John that way. She wants a man who loves her enough to be by her side during rough times.

The title of the story comes from Lila's explanation of her situation with the two men. She tells that giving out love to different people doesn't mean that there is less love, like there would be with slices of a pie. This resonates with Ellen who decides that love, just as it was for her mother, can never be confined to the traditional view and socially defined belief of what a 'normal' marriage should be.

Discussion Question 1

What did Lila, Danny, and Mr. DeCuervo do throughout Ellen's childhood to keep the secret of their mutual relationship?

Discussion Question 2

What does Lila think about the arrangement that her mother had with the two men?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Infidelity in this story.

Vocabulary

autonomy, svelte, aggrieved, benediction, exquisite



“Song of Solomon,” p. 25-32

Summary

In "Song of Solomon" the reader sees Kate getting herself and the baby, Sarah, ready to accidentally/on purpose run into Dr. Sheldon at his church. Although she isn't Jewish, she hopes that doesn't matter. She is very particular about making sure that she and the baby are both dressed well and that the baby is well fed and rested to ensure that she won't be fussy in church. Kate wants to make a good impression. If Dr. Sheldon sees how great Kate looks and acts and how well she takes care of Sarah, he may want to marry her and become a family.

When she arrives at the synagogue, she is sweaty and flustered, but tries to act nonchalant and surprised to run into Dr. Sheldon. She's happy he isn't with a wife or girlfriend. The point of view switches to Dr. Sheldon's, as he introduces her to friends. He is thinking that she must think he's old and bald and not worth her time. At the same time, she is thinking that he sees her as a crazy young woman who is lonely and tired. In actuality, they are both admiring the others' good qualities. They like each other, but neither are brave enough to be the first to say it. Just when they think that it's not going anywhere, Dr. Sheldon motions for Kate and Sarah to go with him into the church, leaving the reader to assume that they will sit together then continue a relationship from there.

Analysis

“Song of Solomon,” presents the story of Kate, who has fallen for her doctor. It is clear that Kate is not only alone with her newborn, but that she is desperate to make a deep emotional connection with someone. Though her doctor is much older than her, and is involved in a faith that she doesn't belong to, she believes that they would be happy. This is the compulsion that sends her to the Jewish synagogue, hoping to run into him.

Interestingly enough, Dr. Sheldon has noticed Kate, too. He is much older, and yet, he is drawn to her. When she arrives at the synagogue, he is excited to introduce her around to the others. For both Sheldon and Kate, it is a short time where they both feel connected to each other and to the community. When Sheldon asks her to come inside and sit with him, it is symbolic of him welcoming her into his life.

The theme of Beauty Being in the Eye of the Beholder is touched upon in this story as both Dr. Sheldon and Kate notice the outer and inner beauty of one another. Kate is drawn to his kindness and his smile, while Dr. Sheldon is drawn to her easy smile, love for her child, and the curve of her hips. Though it is not stated, it is evident that they will go forward with an attempt at a relationship. Love, as a theme, is also suggested in that neither Kate, nor Dr. Sheldon were, initially, looking for love, or for a relationship.



However, they were brought together and noticed in one another a similar longing and desire for a family.

Discussion Question 1

What makes Dr. Sheldon different from other doctors at a time when single and pregnant was not a common occurrence?

Discussion Question 2

What clues does the author give the reader to indicate that Dr. Sheldon and Kate will end up together?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Beauty as it is presented in this story.

Vocabulary

shul, synagogue, self-deprecatingly, pallid, ethereally



“Sleepwalking,” p. 33-54

Summary

In the story, "Sleepwalking", the reader meets, Lionel. He was a musician who loved women, and for the last year or so of his marriage loved alcohol as well. He had been married three times. His first wife, Loretta, was not a good housekeeper and was not a faithful woman, but was the only black woman Lionel had married. Although Ruth, his mother, hated Loretta for years, she clung to the fact that Loretta was at least black.

His second wife, Anita, was half Italian and was also a terrible drug addict who died when Lion, their son, was five. Lionel hasn't has the best track record with women. Julia, also half-Italian, was a musician, and a relatively good housekeeper, who balanced the checkbook, and was extremely disliked by Ruth. Julia had been unfaithful to Lionel once, but he had been unfaithful several times and had betrayed her and the kids by drinking to excess. He couldn't come to terms with the fact that he was no longer the fantastic, sought-after musician he once was. Although Ruth was not nice and didn't care for her, Julia thinks that they all need each other to survive. At first, the boys were so distraught, they both slept with Julia to comfort each other. From the beginning, Lion had loved Julia as his own mother and called her "Ma."

Lionel was older than Julia, and although she loved him, he was very difficult to deal with. Lion had always been so helpful to Julia around the house, with Buster the younger brother, in every way a good son could be. One night, not long after Buster returned to his own bed, Lion came to Julia's bedroom door and asked to come in. Julia felt sad and vulnerable too and wanted to comfort Lion. Unfortunately, the comfort turned into an inappropriate sexual encounter between a young man of 19 and his step-mother. In the morning, she had immediate regrets; however, he was in love (or lust). Julia realized what a horrible mistake she had made. She had potentially ruined this boy's life. She called a friend out of state and asked him to take Lion for the rest of the summer to work for him. Although she believed she was doing the right thing, Lion wanted no part of it. Although he was hurting, he wanted to stay there with Julia, Buster, and Ruth.

No one could ever know about what had happened between them, but Julia agreed to let him stay. For the rest of the summer, he got into fights, drinking, and other trouble. He was no longer the polite young man he used to be; even his grandmother, Ruth, was shocked that he was so rude, and that Julia wasn't reigning him in. Eventually, Lion left a note saying that he'd gone with friends, and planned to go straight back to school from there if that would be alright. He asked only because he didn't have the money for boarding school and needed Julia to continue paying. Julia and Buster stayed there, continued to eat Sunday dinner at Ruth's, and missed Lion and Lionel.



Analysis

The theme of Love is examined from a different viewpoint in this story. First, there is the love that Lionel seemed to have for several different women. He was in 'love' with being 'in love' and ended up with several disastrous marriages. The last marriage, to Julia, lasted longer, most likely only because Lionel had aged and was no longer in the lime light. Thus, love is defined as a sense of duty to another. However, this is stretched to its limites when Julia engages in sexual misconduct with her 19-year-old stepson.

Out of her grief and need to escape her despondency over Lionel's death, she accepts the advances of her stepson, something she deeply regrets the next morning. Thus, the author seems to be suggesting that love (or lust) is no respecter of boundaries, and that two people found comfort in each other's arms for one night. Unfortunately, it meant something quite different to both parties. For some reason, Lion thought that the relationship would continue, whereas Julia saw the mistake for what it was.

Love acted as the catalyst that changed Lion from an A student with ambitions, to a D student, who was belligerent and aggressive. When he is sent away for the summer, Julia is certain that his feelings for her will pass and that they can pick up where they all left off, putting that incident behind them. She is wrong. His feelings for her don't change, but they do harden into hate. He never comes home again, and only speaks to Julia when he needs money for school.

The theme of Human Connection, is also touched upon in this story. The reader sees that Lionel is never home, leaving Julia to raise both Lion and Buster on her own. Her mother-in-law is little help, and offers nothing but criticism. Julia is well off, but still must work, so there is very little adult interaction between the children and adults as they are growing up. In the ultimate bid for attention, Lion crosses a desperate line, and Julia is weak enough to allow it.

Discussion Question 1

What sort of future does the author suggest for Lion and Julia?

Discussion Question 2

How would Ruth react if she found out?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Love in this chapter.

Vocabulary

insipid, prowling, trellis, cholera, wallow



“Hyacinths,” p. 57-72

Summary

The story "Hyacinths" depicts the unhappy life of a young boy named David. His mother died when he was only two years old and since then he has lived an existence that has been filled with sadness, fear, and longing. His father, Walter, was never a kind or caring individual and with the death of his wife, he views his young son as a nuisance.

When David is six years old his father decides that he's finally old enough to start helping out on the farm. He gives him a calf to take care of and warns him that the calf had better not die from neglect. The reader sees that there are some bright points in David's life as there are other family members who drop by from time to time to check on David. His uncles, Francis and Hirim, along with their families come by to celebrate on David's birthday.

While playing around with his cousins in the barn, and showing off his new calf, one of his cousins, Willie, finds Walter's tools. David, fearing the beating that he will get if anything gets damaged, quickly tells Willie to put them back and to quit touching them. Older than David, Willie shoves him down and goes to the gun cabinet, which is not locked, and pulls out a shotgun. David screams at him to put it back and they wrestle over the gun. It has been raining and the floor is muddy. Both boys slip, fall, and the gun discharges, killing Willie. David and the other cousins run for help, but there is nothing that can be done. David's father immediately starts beating him, punching him with his fists. Before he is harmed further David's Aunt Ida steps in and takes him to the other part of the house, cleans him up, dresses his wounds, and puts him to bed.

But David's father will not be consoled, or calmed, and when his brothers aren't watching him, Walter goes up to David's room with a loaded rifle. He intends to kill David, so that he and his brother's losses are equal. Noticing that his brother is gone, Hirim runs up the stairs just in time to stop Walter from killing David. Hirim and his wife Fritzi take David home with them to Deluth, Minnesota. David thrives on his uncle's farm until many years later when he receives a note from his father saying that he is coming to get him.

12 years later, the reader sees David grown and married. His wife, Galen, daughters Rose and Violet, are all on a trip to see David's hometown in Canada. They stop at a hotel just outside of David's hometown and everyone, but David, goes down for a late night swim. David dozes, but is wakened when he hears Rose screaming in sheer terror. David runs down to the pool where he sees his youngest daughter, Violet, floating. He jumps in and pulls her up onto the paving and starts doing CPR. After Violet responds and David is holding her close, Galen strolls in. She hadn't even been in the pool area. David can't imagine how she could be so nonchalant about what just happened. When he looks up to give her a piece of his mind, instead of seeing Galen,



he sees his long dead cousin, Willie, with a gaping hole in his chest, just as it was that fateful day so many years ago. Willie smiles and tells him that he was lucky this time.

Analysis

David's father is an extremely harsh person. This can be seen in full color on David's sixth birthday, when Walter wants to punish him for the accidental shooting of David's cousin, Willie. In Walter's mind, it is an eye for an eye, and if his brother is now without a son, then he, Walter, should also be without a son. Walter's brother-in-law, Hiram, won't allow it, and is appalled at Walter's rationale. He takes David that night, out of the house to Minnesota to live with Fritzi and him, and to protect him from his father, Walter.

Through the use of imagery and metaphor, a vivid picture is painted of life on the farm and what actually happens in the barn on that horrible day. The irony of the situation is that, though it was a tragic accident, it eventually led to David being removed from an oppressive and abusive situation. While living with his Uncle Hiram (Uncle Hi) and his Aunt Fritzi, they continually argue over whether or not David should be Jewish. If he's to become Jewish, he needed to be circumcised. David is not invested either way. He doesn't know what it means to be circumcised, so he doesn't care what they decide. This demonstrates the theme of The Desire for Human Connection. David is willing to do almost anything that his aunt and uncle would ask of him because he knows that he was rescued from a terrible situation, and that they don't blame him for his cousin's death.

When David begs to become Jewish because his father is coming to get him, it is symbolic of David making that final leap in deciding who he wants to be. When he converts to Judaism, his father no longer wants anything to do with him. David would rather endure the pain of circumcision than to go back to living with his father.

The story jumps to David as an adult. He is married to a woman, Galen, who is very detached and only cares about music and her children. In fact, it would seem that she mirrors many of the same traits as David's father, Walter. When they arrive at that hotel at night outside of his hometown, all three girls get their bathing suits on to go swimming. It is only natural for a father to assume that the mother will be monitoring the children. When David gets around to going to the pool, he hears Rose screaming in the dark unlit pool. She can't find Violet. David dives in and saves Violet's life. Galen walks up to see what the commotion was, making David realize that she hadn't even been at the pool.

David's vision of his dead cousin, Willie, represents an unresolved guilt over his cousin's death. Placed in a life and death situation, once again, and revolving around a child, all of those fears surface. David believes that some sort of divine retribution is owed to him, something that his father beat into him because of his cousin's death.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the symbolism of Willie's ghost showing up at the pool.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Walter's character.

Discussion Question 3

Why did Walter want David back after he'd been living with Hiram and Fritzi?

Vocabulary

reins, kasher, belligerent, lobbying, connived, beret, secateurs



“The Sight of You,” p. 73-86

Summary

This is one of the shorter stories in the collection. "The Sight of You" features Galen from the past story, who is grown and married to David, whom the reader met in the last story. Many years after the swimming pool incident, the reader sees that Galen and David's relationship isn't any better, and in fact, is worse. Galen is infatuated with a man named Henry, who is also married. After many clandestine meetings Galen gives in to Henry's pressure and agrees to leave David.

However, it becomes clear to Galen that Henry wants her to enter into the same sort of relationship that she had with David, namely, marriage. Galen is repulsed by the idea of being bound to yet another man, so she backs out of the agreement to leave David. She leaves Henry wondering what he has done to deserve such cold and harsh judgement from her.

Analysis

Galen Nichols, an orphan at the age of 16, married David Silverstein, her assigned psychiatrist. He was married at the time, but fell head over heels in love with Galen. David even followed her to a work study in Paris, claiming that he left his wife, loves Galen, and wants to marry her. But Galen is damaged. She is much like David's father in that she has a shallow well of emotion, and it runs more dry than anything. When he tells her he loves her, she says that she's glad he came to visit and to have a safe trip going home. She does not return the sentiment, but does call him when she returns, and after a year of proposals, she ends up marrying him.

They have two daughters, Violet and Rose. David, blindly acts as if their life is okay, but in reality, Galen has fallen for another married man, Henry, from their club, who is married to Marie and has two boys. Galen loves watching Henry swim and play tennis at the club; they meet occasionally for an affair, but she isn't in love with him. She detachedly tells Henry that she'll leave David to be with him. Henry is so happy; he wants to get married right away and fight for custody of his boys, so they can live as one big happy family. This does not delight Galen at all.

The theme of Love defines how someone's perception of love can be set and/or damaged at an early age. Since the author, herself, is a licensed psychotherapist, it is likely that she has called upon her knowledge of this and has worked it into her stories. Galen, ironically, is an artist, whose sheer life's work is depicting emotional scenes, capturing emotion on the canvas....and yet, she doesn't feel any of that, herself. Thus, she depicts love, but can't reflect it.

Galen enjoys sex, but doesn't like the commitment or the idea of belonging to someone else. When she finds out that Henry wants exactly that, she decides it would be better



just to stay where she is without upsetting her life, her children, and the family routine. Being with Henry will be too hard. She doesn't want to spend years trying to win over his children while raising them. At least David is used to her eccentricity, and understands that she will wind up sleeping on the floor by the bed instead of in it with him. Starting over, especially to end up with a situation worse than the one she is in now, doesn't make sense to her. No one is worth that to her. She is unable to connect emotionally with anyone or anything, other than herself. This in itself demonstrates the theme of the Desire for Human Connection.

Discussion Question 1

Why does David stick around when Galen is so emotionally distant?

Discussion Question 2

What makes Galen decide that she'll leave David for Henry?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Love in this story.

Vocabulary

organdy, countertransference, thwarted, curdled, unconsciousness



“Silver Water,” p. 87-98

Summary

In "Silver Water" the reader meets a young girl named, Rose. She's David's oldest daughter. This is the young girl that the reader met in the previous story, whose sister, Violet, almost drown in a hotel pool. Rose is shown to have been completely normal before her decline. She sings so beautifully that everyone believes that she is destined to be a singing sensation when she is older. Unfortunately, by the time she is 15, she has begun to change for the worse.

Rose stops singing. She stops combing her hair or taking interest in her clothing. Her mood swings are legendary and her mother, Galen, is at her wits end as to how to help her. Both Galen and David, at first, believe that it is some sort of normal teenaged angst, but when she begins exhibiting bizarre behavior, David, who is a psychiatrist, knows that something is horribly wrong.

As a family, they see many therapists. None seem to help. Eventually, they all become tired of the process. Rose acts out, to shock new doctors, by slowly singing while rubbing her breasts; when the doctors are shocked Galen and Violet outright laugh, and even David cracks a smile. Finally, they find a therapist who can handle Rose and whom she likes. She takes her meds, sings in the church choir, and is on the right track. Then this miracle man passes away, and Rose cannot deal with it. She quits choir. In treatment facilities, she becomes a handful for the staff because she sleeps with and/or propositions the other patients.

When she's kicked out of a facility and refuses to take her medication, her mom and dad are forced to care for her at home. They are unable to readmit her into a facility until she is at least forty-five days symptom-free, meaning no hospitalization. So they continue with their care at home. This is an overwhelming task. Because they don't want Violet to worry about them or Rose, they tell her all is going well, but upon visiting Violet sees for herself things aren't fine. As a large girl, Rose becomes difficult to handle when she throws a tantrum.

One episode is so violent that Rose knocks Galen into a wall where she hits her head and is knocked out for several hours. When Rose comes out of her fit and realizes what she's done to her family, she begs forgiveness and asks them not to hate her, then hides in her bed. One morning after a terrible tantrum, Violet gets up to check on Rose in her room. When she doesn't find her, she follows footprints into the woods where she finds Rose barely breathing, clutching a mostly empty bottle of pills. Instead of calling for her parents or for 911, Violet knows that although this is a sad tragedy, it will be for the best. Violet can't continue watching her aging parents being battered physically and emotionally. Even Rose knew in moments of lucidity that she did not want to behave that way. Rose is ashamed and so very tired. Violet understands this, and stays with her sister until she is dead.



Analysis

Because Rose doesn't start her life in this state, it is hard for her family to come to terms with how to deal with her. Although David, Rose's dad, is a psychiatrist himself, the reader would think that he would know what to do for her, but that's the very point. No one knows exactly how to help her. Each person who suffers from mental illness exhibits different habits, fears, good days, and reactions to people, therapy, and medication. This entire story revolves around the theme of Mental Illness.

Rose, who begins the book, showing off her beautiful voice in the parking lot after an opera, by the time she is fifteen has her first breakdown. She gains a lot of weight, wears the same clothes, comes home from school beaming with joy one day and devastatingly depressed the next. Her mother, Galen, is a musician and an artist, and is known to be an eccentric, but Rose's actions go way beyond that. Violet, her younger sister, adores her, looks up to her, and is devastated when she has bad episodes.

Mental Illness as a theme shows how the actual illness has a ripple effect on everyone it touches. The story suggests that Rose suffers from schizophrenia, and as a result her illness dictates how the family lives for many years. Thus, the illness, while belonging to Rose, is really suffered by the entire family. It should be said that both David and Galen wish to shield their younger daughter from the brunt of Rose's episodes, trying to give Violet the most normal type of life as possible. But, when Rose's favorite doctor passes away, Rose goes into a tailspin that they can't suppress or hide from Violet any longer. It is only when Violet becomes involved, directly, that the perspective is gained to enable a solution to present itself.

It is only Violet, loving her sister as she does, that understands that Rose does not want to do the things that she does, and that she is in deep emotional and psychological pain. When Violet finds her sister in the woods, attempting suicide, she loves her sister enough to honor her wishes. Interestingly, her parents do not fault her for allowing Rose to die. The funeral is seen as a release and a remembrance of Rose, rather than the mentally ill patient she had been.

The theme of Love is explored in this story, as it is in many of the other short stories in this collection. In this story, love is shown through several sets of eyes and perspectives. First, there is Galen and David's love for their daughter. They both go to great lengths to get her the help that she needs. Galen tries to reach her using her music, but it doesn't work. Violet loves her sister to the point that she is willing to help her to die when it is apparent that Rose's quality of life will never be good. Lastly, Rose loved her parents and her family. She understood the burden she placed on them, felt badly that she could not control herself, and ultimately, sacrificed her life so that they could move forward, having a better chance at a less complicated life.

Discussion Question 1

Compare Rose and Violet.



Discussion Question 2

How did Violet honor her sister's wishes?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Mental Illness as it is presented in this chapter.

Vocabulary

reticence, brusquely, emphatically, collegiality, wistfully, neurotic, paranoia



“Faultlines,” p. 101-110

Summary

In the story, "Faultlines" Henry starts off explaining to the reader that the only reason his boys have a father at home right now is because the woman he really loves, named Mary, doesn't love him back. Marie, his wife, is jealous and angry, but doesn't say why she stays with Henry. And, in a hurtful move, Henry has invited Mary and her husband over for a meal. As she prepares dinner, Marie wants to prepare herself for what to expect, and asks Henry what Mary is like. He wants to tell her how beautiful and smart Mary is, but doesn't want to make Marie mad before their guests arrive. He then realizes that once Marie sees for herself, she'll be mad anyway. He decides not to elaborate on Mary's finer points and prepares himself for dinner.

Meanwhile, Nathan and Mary are getting dressed to go to dinner at Henry and Marie's. Mary decides she shouldn't tell Nathan that she finds Henry attractive, nor that she wants to sleep with him. She wants to tell him that it would just be a fling, then she'll come right back to Nathan. Henry, Mary decides, is good looking, but not as interesting and smart as Nathan. She decides not to say those things. When they arrive, everyone is polite and friendly. The ladies get along very well. Mary sees that Marie is a lovely person and a wonderful cook. She would never want to do anything with Henry behind his wife's back. Despite Mary's stunning looks, Marie likes her. Mary focuses her conversation and attention on Marie and their discussion, instead of watching Henry. Likewise, Henry and Nathan get along and enjoy their discussion about wines. Nathan enjoys having someone to discuss wine with, even though Henry isn't the smartest, most interesting guy around. Nathan and Marie are compatible as well. They both love to cook, and he helps out in the kitchen.

While Nathan and Marie get coffee and dessert in the kitchen, Mary and Henry take a look at the garden. Mary has decided that Marie is too nice of a person for her to hurt, and they have two lovely boys. She is definitely not going to sleep with Henry. At the same time, Henry is thinking no such thing. He doesn't want to marry her, as he did Galen, but he still wants to sleep with her. When Mary gets her heel caught and stumbles, Henry is right there to catch her. She turns out to be the person Henry had hoped for. They kiss, even after realizing that Henry has a nice family, and it would be wrong to disturb that. In spite of the fact that her intelligent, loving boyfriend, Nathan, and Henry's wife, Marie, are just inside the door, Mary kisses Henry.

Analysis

This short story focuses on Henry as he navigates through a dinner party at his house, where the main attendee is a woman that he has been having fantasies about for a while. She arrives with her boyfriend, Nathan, and all of them seem to get along very well, finding common interests. Though by the end of the party, Mary has decided that



she likes Henry's wife too much to hurt her, she and Henry find themselves having a moment, and the affair begins anyway. It is sure to run its disastrous course.

The theme of Infidelity is demonstrated in this story. The mental anguish and consideration that all parties, except Nathan, undergo are chronicled. Thus, the author would seem to be stating that infidelity does not only involve the two parties have the affair, but both families and family members, especially the wronged spouse. That Henry invites Mary to the house in order to hurt Marie is telling. He is upset with Mary because she's focused too much on the house and the kids, the routine, and has ceased to be his lover and partner. As a result he is looking for that connection elsewhere. At the dinner party the wine that Henry discusses with Nathan represents their bonding over a shared item, much like both of their desire to have Mary.

This story is one of three connected stories in the collection. They are in a section titled, Henry and Marie, and the reader will see their names crop up in several other stories, keeping the thread of infidelity and love continuing. In the short story, 'Only You' the reader sees Mary turning to infidelity, herself, as she remakes herself with the help of her hairdresser.

The theme of Love is touched upon, as well, in this story. Though the depiction of love is that of love denied, love longed for, and love lost and regained. This shows the roller coaster ride that all couples endure, and seems to suggest that those who are able to weather the storm are the couples that end up finding love on their own terms as they age.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Henry just leave Marie if he's not happy with her and wants to play around with other women?

Discussion Question 2

What changes to make Mary kiss Henry after she had just decided she wouldn't hurt Marie or his kids?

Discussion Question 3

What could be the reason that Marie stays and has to continue to worry about him cheating?

Vocabulary

scowl, obscurely, hysteria, castrato, gabardine, emphatic, impish, tenacious



“Only You,” p. 111-120

Summary

Titled, "Only You" this story features Marie and Henry, again. However, the viewpoint and focus is on Marie. Marie's friends who are not happy in their marriages visit Marie's house to look at her husband, Henry. She is well aware of this. However, this time Marie is not jealous because none of her friends are Henry's type. They all look too much like her. Marie decides she wants to be beautiful, again. She finds a salon, makes friends with the hairstylist, Alvin, and decides to get her hair dyed.

The day that she builds the courage to get it done, Alvin is out sick. Marie gathers soup, bread, a blanket, and magazines and heads over to Alvin's house to make him feel better. He's so thankful for her kindness that he won't let her pay to have her hair done. He updates her style and becomes her friend. Alvin asks her to help him prepare ladies and their hair before weddings. She loves it so much and does such a good job that he asks her to go to a convention with him.

Henry is not concerned at all. He's only glad that Marie's happier and looks better. While at the convention, Marie and Alvin have a great time, eating, drinking, and dancing. Then, one night, Alvin tells Marie that he wants to wear her lingerie. She's puzzled, but agrees. He puts on her under garments, makeup, and a wig and appears before her as his transvestite self. She's surprised, but tells him he's beautiful. He can tell that she loves him, that's why although he's nervous, he feels that she'll accept him as he is. He takes the chance and tells her that he wants to get close to her. She agrees; he lays her on the bed, kisses her, and then, he opens her robe and tells her she's beautiful. The story ends with them on the bed.

Analysis

This story features several themes. The first is that of Beauty Being in the Eye of the Beholder. Marie's husband, Henry, is not attracted to her in the least. Marie knows this, and takes some small comfort in the fact that the women that come over to oggle her husband, won't get anywhere with him either because they all look like her. However, her hairdresser sees her in a different light. He thinks she is beautiful and helps bring out that inner beauty by doing her hair and giving her a makeover. Beyond that, he gives her the gift of showing her who he truly was; a transvestite. The fact that he has made her feel beautiful and wanted, makes his confession and declaration easy for her to accept. She thinks he's beautiful, too.

The other theme that is explored in this chapter is that of Love. Marie cares for Henry, but she doesn't believe that she is actually in love with him anymore. They stay together out of duty and a desire for their children to remain in a stable environment. But, on the inside, Marie is screaming for someone to love her for who she is, not what she can or



will do for them. She is shown to be a truly kind and generous person, as exemplified by her taking the food and blanket over to Alvyn when he was ill.

Infidelity is also explored as a theme in this story. Marie has long accused her husband of cheating on her, has endured it for so many years, and now, finds herself in the situation where she's being invited to cheat. The tables are turned in this instance because she doesn't feel that it is cheating. She believes that it is justified because Henry has been cheating on her. On a deeper level, it is something that Marie needs desperately in order to attain and regain some of her self respect back after years of being told that she was ugly and unwanted by her husband.

Discussion Question 1

Why isn't Henry jealous of Alvin and Marie's friendship?

Discussion Question 2

What is it about Alvin that makes Marie feel better about herself?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder in this story.

Vocabulary

transvestite, illusions, parodying, indignant, stalactites



“Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines,” p. 121-130

Summary

In the short story, "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines" the focus is on Susie, a young girl who comes from a well-to-do family and lives in an upscale neighborhood. Susie is miserable with her life. She is overweight, a fact that her mother doesn't let her forget. The kids on the bus and at school pick on her. She makes friends with Mr. Klein who owns a local fur store. He picks her up from school on Mondays, takes her to his store, has her strip down to her undergarments, and lets her try on all of the furs in his store after which, he gives her a box of chocolates and takes her home. Susie doesn't think anything is unusual about this weekly routine. She is so overjoyed to have someone tell her she's beautiful, to clothe her in furs that make her feel beautiful, and to have one day a week when she doesn't have to worry about being tortured on the school bus.

One Monday, Mr. Klein does not pick her up after school. As she walks home in the rain, he passes her on the road because she lives on his street. He takes her to the store, but changes his mind. Before she undresses, he places his face against her neck, then tells her they must go and can no longer continue their weekly visits. He can no longer drive her to school in the mornings. Although she is devastated, she takes her mother's earlier suggestion about taking piano lessons and after the music teacher pulls her sleeves up one day during the lesson, she believes that he thinks she's beautiful, and she falls in love with Mr. Canetti, her piano teacher.

Analysis

In this short story the reader is placed in the perspective of viewing life through Susie's eyes. Though she is from a wealthy family, she is impoverished nonetheless. Her deficit lies in the area of human interaction and touch, kindness and concern. It is apparent that her parents are far too busy and disinterested to really take the time to get to know Susie, or to understand how upset and depressed she is because of her treatment by other children at school. This demonstrates the theme of Children Who Crave Attention. Neglected, not unlike David in the story 'Hyacinth', Susie, too, is desperate for someone to care. So, when her next door neighbor takes pity on her and begins driving her to school each day, so she can avoid the bullies, it seems like a nice gesture.

Unfortunately, either on Susie's part or Mr. Klein's part, it quickly becomes inappropriate as he has her model, practically nude, in his furs after hours on Monday evenings. His conscience gets the better of him and after a while he tells Susie that they must stop their evening meetings. Susie is devastated because in her eyes, here is yet another adult rejecting her. The symbolism of the furs should be noted, as well. Representative of a persona that Susie is trying out, they are also a symbol of exploitation by Mr. Klein.



Unfortunately, this would seem to be a pattern for Susie as the reader sees her becoming similarly attracted to, and misreading social cues, with her new piano teacher, who has not approached her in any inappropriate way. However, for someone so starved for attention and affection, the merest of gestures is enough to send her into a spiral of 'love' all over again. Susie's story also demonstrates the theme of Love, but from a different facet. This shows the side of love that can be desperate, compulsive, and irrational. It also demonstrates just how far human beings, especially younger children and teens, will go in order to be accepted, loved, and acknowledged.

Discussion Question 1

What was Susie's mindset when she agreed to model the furs for Mr. Klein?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Susie believe that Mr. Canetti thinks she's beautiful, and why does she fall in love with him?

Discussion Question 3

What prompted her mother to suddenly become interested enough to ask what Susie was doing and if she wants to take piano lessons?

Vocabulary

cachepots, ensemble, foyer, repertoire, incidental, conjure, ostentatiously



“Semper Fidelis,” p. 131-143

Summary

The story, "Semper Fidelis" features an unnamed 18-year-old woman who marries Max, a retired Marine of 50. It is many years later and Max is terminally ill. Max wants to watch her slowly undress before she lays on the cot next to his deathbed. He wants to know details about where she went, what clothes she changed into, to whom she spoke, and with whom she had a sexual encounter. Although she has not had sex with anyone, he continues on and on insisting that she did and that she tell him every detail. On the last night of his life, she pretends to go out, but really just has tea in the kitchen with the nurse, Dawn, then send her home early. Upon returning to Max's room that night, she decides to risk lying in bed with him, trying not to hurt his failing body. He again asks about her sexual encounter of the night.

Although she did not have one, to please him, she describes in detail a made up encounter with Ray from the deli department. When he doesn't feel that she's giving enough detail, he stops to ask her leading questions. Because she has not really had sex with Ray, she uses Ray's name, but describes past sexual experiences that she's actually had with her husband. He's doesn't catch on and is enthralled by her descriptions. She ends her story by saying it was the best sex she had ever had... ironically, he's pleased that she told him and that she enjoyed it, but he doesn't realize she is really talking about him, and then, in the night, he dies.

Analysis

This short story demonstrates the themes of Love and Infidelity. The theme of Love is explored from two different perspectives in this story. First, there is the perspective of love from the wife's viewpoint. She truly loved her husband, even though he cheated on her repeatedly throughout their marriage. From Max's standpoint, he loved that he had his wife and that she was so much younger than he. He can't comprehend that she wouldn't cheat on him, though she tried to tell him often enough that she didn't. In the end, because she loves him so much, she fabricates fake sexual encounters for Max's pleasure.

Secondly, this story is about infidelity. Ironically, Max wants to hear about her indiscretions, almost as if he wants to justify his cheating because she is cheating, too. However, she isn't and hasn't ever cheated on him. Thus, her infidelity is only fabricated, whereas his were very real. In a twist of fate, her best sexual encounter that she describes was one that she had with him many years before he was ill, only he doesn't remember it. He dies with a smile on his face, and she decides to go and move things along with Ray, now that she is truly single again.



The title of the story is also ironic, in that it is the marine corp's motto: Ever Faithful. It is evident which one was, and which one wasn't. The marine whose motto it was, couldn't be faithful, and the wife who was mistreated, was ever faithful.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Max want his wife to have sex with someone else, and why would he want to hear the details?

Discussion Question 2

Why is the story called Semper Fidelis?

Discussion Question 3

Talk about all of the irony that the author uses in this story.

Vocabulary

Semper Fidelis, feigning, vagrant, ominously, cleave, solicitous, fetish, sadistic, pedantic



“When the Year Grows Old,” p. 145-161

Summary

In the story, "When the Year Grows Old" Kay Feldman's mother, Laura, is shown to have been a controlled housewife and mother. Her husband Martin, a very stern man, demanded dinner at six, no fast food or take-out food – ever, laundry and the house must be clean, and absolutely no pets. When Kay comes home from school to find her mother, whom she had never seen smoke or drink, smoking cigarettes in the house and drinking coffee, she is shocked.

In fact, when Kay first arrives, she can't find her mother, but when she finally finds her in the basement and approaches her in the basement, Laura is a different person. She is dressed in clothes from an earlier time, not the proper slacks, shirt, and belt that she usually wore. She is smoking cigarettes, quoting poetry from Robert Blake, and has a kitten that she's named Blake, whom she's allowing to drink from her good china. She says that she is typing her work and dinner will be late.

Kay is sure her dad is more than upset with her mother, but to Kay's surprise, her normally taciturn father exhibits more patience with her than Kay has ever seen him have with anyone. Each day Laura grows progressively worse. More cigarettes, more poetry, no food, no sleeping, until finally, Martin calmly coaxes her from her new basement home to go to the doctor's office. During the time of her mother's basement life, and while her mother is in the hospital, Martin, her father, brings home take-out food, and Kay cleans up.

Kay is not happy about staying with her father. She hates him and blames him for whatever her mother is going through. She doesn't know that when she was only a baby, Laura experienced something similar, leaving Martin to care solely for the four month old. Kay feels as if her dad has gradually withdrawn from her over the years. She is sure he is ashamed of her.

When her mother arrives back home, she is back in her normal clothes. She is almost robotic and unsmiling. First, she asks where her cat is. When Kay answers that Martin had gotten rid of it, Laura put her hand to her forehead and moves toward her bedroom. She passes Kay without acknowledgement, and Kay knows that things may never be the same again.

Analysis

The themes that are demonstrated in this short story include that of Mental Illness, and of course, Love. Kay offers the reader her view of her mother, from that of a child and a grown woman. She is shocked at her mother's behavior because she's never known her mother to act that way. However, her father had seen this behavior before, a long time ago, and as a result, he is kind, and patient, in a way that Kay had never seen



demonstrated by him. As a general rule, the reader is made to understand that Martin was controlling and taciturn for most of Kay's growing up years. However, with the knowledge that he kept things regimented for Laura's sake, it becomes clear to the reader, if not to Kay, that he did what he did because he loved Laura, and it was what she needed. The type of love exhibited here, then, is sacrifice and concern, empathy, for one's spouse.

The theme of Mental Illness is also heavily demonstrated, as the reader sees Laura regress into an earlier time, allowing herself to lapse back into a different lifestyle and way of being. The reader, as well as Laura, sees that at one time her mother was a highly creative person, so much so that she would forget to eat, care for herself, and in an almost manic fashion, devote every ounce of her being to whatever she was working on. Unfortunately, after a few days she collapsed and was placed back onto her medication by Martin, who is able to take her to the hospital.

When Laura returns she is back to her old self, going through the usual movements, but without the vibrancy of her earlier creative self. Her mental illness both gave and took away her ability to be creative normally. On some level, the reader knows that Laura is aware that she has been heavily medicated and that she is expected to remain on the drugs, but on the other hand, it is also evident that she is saddened because she will not be allowed to create any longer. A part of her has been suppressed, as it had been suppressed for many, many years.

As a work of feminist literature, this story is very telling as it depicts the acceptance of a man's priorities and idealized image of marriage and domestic bliss over her own joy and creative life. This subjugation of self for other is one that is realized in this work, and is a small thread that runs through many of the stories, but none so much as this one.

Discussion Question 1

What did Kay find out about her mother and father that she never knew?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the feminist implications in this story.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the themes of Mental Illness and Love in this story.

Vocabulary

demented, evasion, acclimated, cowering, resolute, batik, lunacy



“Psychoanalysis Changed My Life,” p. 163-175

Summary

The last story of the cycle is titled, "Psychoanalysis Changed My Life". The story begins when Marianne goes to see Dr. Zurmer, hoping to discuss her dysfunctional relationship with her parents. She describes many and various dreams hoping that the doctor will give her some insight into her life. Marianne tells Dr. Zurmer that her mother had an affair; her dad divorced her mother who retained custody of Marianne; and she rarely got to see her father who lived out of state. She blames her mother for all of the disconnectedness in her life. Her mother continually invites her to visit for the weekend, but Marianne won't go because she holds a grudge. She describes her mother, Lilly, as looking just like the flower, tall, thin, and willowy. The doctor thinks she should go see her mother.

After one of their sessions, Dr. Zurmer collapses with what later is discovered to be a small stroke. She refuses to go to the hospital, and asks Marianne, who is a doctor, to take her home to her own bed. Marianne obliges, takes her home, sets her up in her bed, and calls continually to check on her. When it comes time for their next appointment, Dr. Zurmer asks Marianne to come to her house for the session, because she's still sick. Marianne does and while there, she notices the many photographs of the Zurmer family throughout the years.

Not long after their visit, Mr. Zurmer calls Marianne and asks if she'd come over to visit his wife. Surprised by the request, Marianne comes. When she asks the doctor why she asked her over, she replies that she finds her interesting and is now her friend. Since they are now friends, Marianne asks about the photos. Dr. Zurmer is happy to talk about her family. When it's time for Marianne to go home, Dr. Zurmer tells her to wait in the kitchen and say goodbye to her husband. When she gets there, Mr. Zurmer is nowhere to be seen, but their single son, Alex is, and he asks her to have tea.

Analysis

In this story, the reader meets Marianne, who is a medical doctor. She has come to the conclusion that her anger toward her mother has made her unable to connect on a deeper level with anyone. Thus, she believes seeing a psychoanalyst will help her sort through the clutter and find some resolution. However, what Marianne receives is far more than a simple series of therapy sessions. In essence, she finds friendship, and potential love, even though she wasn't really looking for it, yet.

The theme of Love is demonstrated in this story when Marianne becomes more than just a patient with Dr. Zurmer. They become friends, and thus, the idea that she can't



form deep attachments with people is debunked by that simple act by Dr. Zurmer. Then, later, while she is at Dr. Zurmer's home, she is introduced to Alex, Dr. Zurmer's son, and the insinuation is that they will fall in love. Friendship as love, and intimacy as love are exemplified in this story. It should also be noted that the theme of the Desire for Human Connection, began with Marianne's inability to bond with her mother, because she blamed her mother for the divorce. Then, later, the Desire for Human Connection, cropped up when Marianne found that she was unable to trust or love deeply. Nonetheless, she craved connection.

In an interesting twist, while it starts out with Marianne coming to Dr. Zurmer for help, in the end, the tables are turned, and it is Marianne who is providing the help for Dr. Zurmer (when Zurmer has a small stroke). The irony is, of course, that physician heal thyself was never more true in this instance. By helping Zurmer, she was helping herself by forming a close bond with someone, and then, at the end of the story, realizes that she can find and enjoy love with someone.

Discussion Question 1

What role did Dr. Zurmer play in helping Marianne recover from her problem?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Love as it appears in this story.

Discussion Question 3

Why would Dr. Zurmer make sure to set up her son to meet Marianne, knowing what she knows about Marianne?

Vocabulary

wafting, arcs, penchant, arrogant, turreted, moat, brocade, narcissistic



Characters

Kate

Kate is a young single woman who has recently had a baby. She is tired and alone and has a massive crush on her doctor, Dr. Sheldon. She begins to like him immediately when he doesn't make her feel bad about being a single pregnant woman. Although she's not Jewish, like him, she wants to go to his church and try to impress him outside of the hospital. She feels that maybe if he sees how nice she looks and how well she cares for Sarah, he will be interested in dating her or more. Kate appears in the short story, "Song of Soloman".

Dr. Sheldon

Dr. Sheldon is an obstetrician who is recommended to Kate when her co-workers find that she is pregnant. Apparently, he is not surprised or judgmental about single pregnant women. He is a kind man who is well liked by his patients and by his co-workers, but is very insecure about himself as a desirable man, not as a doctor. He's settled in his career, but is a single, mature, slightly overweight (according to him) man who is graying and showing signs of baldness. He doesn't believe that this pretty young girl could possibly be interested in him, even though he is smitten with her and can already see them married with a family and a white picket fence. Sheldon appears in the short story, "Song of Soloman".

Lionel, Jr. (Lion)

Lionel Jr. is a 19-year-old young man who is very confused. He's devastated by his father's death. His mother passed when he was young. The one stable person in his life has been his step-mother, Julia, who is younger than his father. Although he calls her "Ma," in a moment of despair and grief, Lion turns to Julia. His innocent hug for comfort quickly turns into him pursuing sex with her. He is later confused because at the time it happens, she does not resist or say no at all. He wakes with a new lease on life to find that Julia realizes her mistake and wants to send him away. He refuses to go, but becomes more and more out of control as the summer goes on. Finally, he leaves a note that he's going off with a friend and will be returning to school abroad from there, if that's okay, which really means, "if you'll still pay." She does, and he is not seen again. Lion appears in the short story, "Sleepwalking".

Gabriel Tyner Sampson (Buster)

Buster is a young boy who is saddened by his father's death. As any child, he is quick to move back into the normal groove of life. He returns to soccer camp and is totally content in his progress there. He is, however, saddened by the disappearance of his



brother, Lion, who didn't even say goodbye to him. Although he is sad, he bounces back to his daily life with his mom, school, friends, sports, and weekly dinner at his grandmother's house. Buster appears in the short story, "Sleepwalking".

Lionel, Sr.

Lionel is a musician and moves to the beat of a different drum than everyday regular people. Although he has previously won awards, he is not as popular and needed as he once was. He's had three wives; first, Loretta, the only black woman he married who turned out to be trouble for him; then, there was Anita, Lion's mom, she was half Italian and a severe drug addict who ended up dying when Lion was five. His third and final wife, Julia, is the most stable of them all. She has taken Lion in as her own and given Lionel Sr. another son, Buster. Although they are relatively happy, Lionel continues to have affairs, and in the final years of their marriage becomes an alcoholic. He dies while Buster is still young, and Lionel is 19. Lionel appears in the short story, "Sleepwalking".

Ruth/Grandmother

Prior to losing her son, Ruth has recently lost her husband as well. Her daughter-in-law, Julia, thinks this will be a common point they can share, but Ruth is far stronger a person than Julia, more judgmental and mean as well. Although Lionel has been married three times and Julia may be the better of the three, Ruth cannot admit it. She finds the only redeeming quality in Lionel's only living ex-wife, the fact that she's black, to try to bother Julia. Ruth is floored when Lion begins to act out and becomes a smart-mouth. She chastises him for his behavior and Julia for not correcting it. Once Lion goes back to school, at least, she still has Buster....and Julia....to have with her at Sunday dinner. Ruth appears in the short story, "Sleepwalking".

Ida

Ida is one of two of Walter's sisters. She is presumed to be an old maid type figure and takes care of Walter and David since David's mom died. She realizes how harsh her brother is and tries to protect David from him. She saves him from the beating his father is giving to him directly after Willie is shot. She gives David a bath and puts him to bed. Although she is sad to see David go to live with Hi and Fritz, she is relieved that David will finally be safe. Ida appears in the short story, "Hyacinths".

Hiram

Hiram is David's mother's brother. He is married to Fritz, and they live in Duluth, MN. They happily arrive for David's sixth birthday, only to end up taking David in the night to protect him from his father. When Walter threatens to kill David, Hiram doesn't let him and takes him away from Walter. Hiram raises David as his own son. He wants him to become Jewish and be circumcised. Fritz fights him on this point until the day that



Walter sends a letter saying he plans to get David back. After that, David becomes a real Jewish boy and stays with Hiram and Fritzi. Hiram appears in the short story, "Hyacinths".

Fritzi

Fritzi is Hiram's wife, Walter's sister-in-law. She is very loving and very girly. She worries about decorations and colors and fabrics. Mostly, she worries about David and is happy when Hiram saves him and takes him home with them. She is happy to raise him as her own. She is a loving person. Fritzi appears in the short story, "Hyacinths".

Myrtle

Myrtle is Walter's sister. She is married to William, Sr. and is the mother of Willie and Percy. Myrtle appears in the short story, "Hyacinths".

Lizzie and Ellen

The two sisters from "Love is Not a Pie" who discover that their mother has had an unconventional marriage her entire life.

Julia

In the story, "Sleepwalking", Julia has a regrettable sexual encounter with her 19-year-old stepson after her husband, Lionel died.

David

David started life out roughly, with an abusive father. He later was rescued by his uncle Hiram and was raised as a Jewish boy in Canada. He later marries Galen and they have two children, Rose and Violet. David seems to always be seeing connection with someone on a deeper level, but never seems to make that connection, because he surrounds himself with people who are most like his abusers. David appears in several stories: "Hyacinths", "Silver Waters", and "The Sight of You".

Henry

Henry is a nice looking man and he knows it. He is married to Marie, but has his eye, most recently, on a woman named Mary, in the story, "Faultlines". He wants to divorce his wife, Marie, and marry Mary, a woman he knows from his office. Mary does not want to have an affair with Henry, but ends up doing so anyway. Henry shows up in two stories, "Faultlines", and "Only You".



Marie

Marie is married to Henry and is featured in both the short stories "Faultlines" and "Only You". In the latter story Marie finds herself and a deep love with her hairdresser, who is also a transvestite.

Mary

Mary is a girl that works in the same office as Henry, in the story, "Faultlines". Henry invites Mary and her boyfriend, Nathan over for a dinner party. Henry is hoping to seduce Mary, but Mary decides that she likes Henry's wife too much to do that to her. However, later, they share a moment and the affair begins.

Susie

Susie is featured in the story, "Light Breaks Where no Sun Shines". She is a young teen girl who is overweight and tormented by her parents and peers. She falls for the inappropriate attentions of her neighbor who owns a fur company. She accepts rides to school from him, and in exchange on Mondays she strips down and walks around in his furs at his store.

Mr. Klein

In "Light Breaks Where no Sun Shines", Mr. Klein is the man that has Susie strip and wear his furs from his store. He gives her attention, though he never touches her. He makes her feel beautiful.

Max

In the story, "Semper Fidelis", Max is the retired, and dying, marine. When he was fifty he married a young girl who was only 18. As the story opens, he is on his deathbed, but still likes to hear about his wife's supposed infidelities.

Unnamed Wife

Max's wife is never given a name. This may be for the very real reason that Max never viewed her as a person, but as a possession. She is nameless because she doesn't 'need' a name in his book. Though he cheated on her repeatedly during their marriage, it was she who was ever faithful, as the title of the story, "Semper Fidelis", suggests.



Kay

In the story, "When the Year Grows Old", the reader meets Kay who has returned home to find her mother acting strangely. She thinks it is because of her father's oppressive personality. However, she later learns that her mother had always suffered from a type of mental illness, which they managed to hide and suppress most of Kay's growing up years.

Laura

Laura, in "When the Year Grows Old", is Kay's mother. When Kay finds her, Laura has become highly creative, writing, painting, composing, and sculpting in the family's basement. This is out of character for her, since she was always a candidate for perfect housewife. As far as Kay ever knew, her mother cooked, cleaned, and did whatever her father said, and not once did Kay ever suspect her mother had a creative bone in her body. Laura's creativity wasn't valued and was viewed as 'crazy' and so she became what was expected of her....crazy.

Martin

Martin, in "When the Year Grows Old" is Laura's husband, and Kay's father. He was in the military for many years and ran a tight ship. When Kay was a baby, according to Martin, Laura had a manic episode and had to be hospitalized. Ever since then he'd been careful to keep her on her medication and to make sure that there was a strict routine adhered to. While his daughter, Kay, just thought he was being oppressive, in reality, it was the only way that Martin, in his own mind, could control Laura's manic outbursts.

Marianne

In the story, "Psychoanalysis Changed My Life", the protagonist is Marianne Lowe, a medical doctor. She's decided to obtain some psychotherapy for her mother issues. She believes she can't form deep connections with people because of her mother and father's nasty divorce when she was little.

Dr. Zurmer

An unconventional psychotherapist, in the story "Psychotherapy Changed My Life" Dr. Zurmer recommends many things to Marianne during their sessions together. When Dr. Zurmer suffers a small stroke, she insists that Marianne take her to her home instead of to a hospital. Marianne comes to the house to check on her frequently and they become friends. Later, Dr. Zurmer introduces her to her son, Alex.

Alex Zurmer

Alex Zurmer is Dr. Zurmer's son in the story "Psychoanalysis Changed My Life". In the end of the story Alex is introduced to Marianne, one of Dr. Zumer's patients. It is assumed that they fall in love.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Jewish Religion

This symbol is depicted in the short story, 'Song of Soloman' and in the story, "Hyacinths". In "Hyacinths", David is saved by an uncle who is Jewish and David is not Jewish. His aunt argues with his uncle about whether or not David should convert to Judaism, which would require David to be circumcised. When David's father wants to take David back home, he tells his aunt and uncle that he doesn't care what has to happen he wants to be Jewish and want to be a doctor like Uncle Hi. Therefore, for David, being Jewish is freedom from his father.

In "Song of Solman" the Jewish Religion is, once again, freedom, and a bringing together, of two people. Kate and Dr. Sheldon meet at the Jewish Synagogue and realize that they both have feelings for one another.

Watching from a Distance

This shows up in the story, "The Sight of You" when Galen and Henry have their two year affair. They are together less than they are watching each other from afar. Voyeurism plays a big role in their lives. Galen says, "Men see something in me, or something missing, that they like...a lot of times men want you and then get mad about wanting you, whether they have you or not" (82). Galen watches Henry at his construction site and at the club.

Being a Good Mother

In "Song of Soloman" Kate believes that proving to Dr. Sheldon that she is a good mother, that her baby is clean, taken care of, and well-behaved, she will be more attractive as a potential spouse.

Dancing

In the first story, "Love is Not a Pie" the reader sees that as children at the lake on summer vacations, dancing was a big part of their nightly ritual. Lila, Ellen and Lizzie's mother, loved to dance and moved freely, like her spirit. Ellen, Lizzie, and Gisela loved to dance with Lila and have a fun time bouncing around and expressing themselves through movement. Lila danced with Danny, her husband, who was an awkward dancer at best, but a good sport about trying. Everyone was enchanted by the impassioned, elegant movement between Lila and Goucho as they danced together. This graceful flowing movement between them symbolized their freedom and ease in their relationship as a couple.



Music

In "Sleepwalking" music figures prominently. Music envelopes their whole lives. Lionel is a musician which leads him to lead a loose and free lifestyle which includes alcohol and women. Julia writes about music, and that's how they meet. The boys are surrounded by music everyday – live from their father and only selected types played in their home. The music industry can be part of their problems in life, but music itself is a soothing escape.

Wine

In the story, "Faultlines" Henry spends two hours looking for the perfect wine to impress Mary, knowing that his own wife doesn't even drink wine. The irony of it all is that Mary doesn't like wine either, but Nathan does. The wine was meant to be a seductive tool for Henry with Mary, but Nathan is the one who is most interested in this item and who wants to talk about various other wines. The wine doesn't help Henry get Mary.

Nourishment

In the story, "Only You" when Alvin gets sick, Marie gives him soup and kindness as nourishment for his body and soul. In turn, Alvin nourishes Marie's insecure self-esteem by making her beautiful with a new hair style and make up.

Chocolates and Furs

In the short story, "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines", these are two items that are considered extravagant or indulgences. To a young girl who is told she's fat and unattractive, such indulgences would be a nice escape from her everyday real world.

The Fake Sexual Encounter

In "Semper Fidelis" although the young wife lied to appease her dying husband, she proved that she wanted to please him until the end. She lied and told him what he wanted to hear to make him happy.

White Flowers

Marianne in the story "Psychoanalysis Changed My Life", dreams of white flowers. She claims that the dreams are about her mother, Lily, who "was like a white flower, thin, pale, graceful."



Willie's Ghost

In the story, "Hyacinths" David rescues his daughter Violet from a hotel pool where she nearly drowns. When he pulls her out of the water David believes that he sees the ghost of Willie, his long dead cousin, whom he'd accidentally killed when they were boys.

Rose's Medication

In "Silver Waters" Rose has been given some medication, at the end of the story. They are supposed to keep her calm so she won't hurt anyone. Rose hates living as she is being forced to live and she is in mental anguish. When she goes out into the woods and takes all of the pills, it is her way of releasing her family from the burden of taking care of her, and it is her way of freeing herself from a life that was nothing but misery.

Mr. Klein's Furs

In the story, "Light Breaks Where the Sun Doesn't Shine", Mr. Klein owns a fur shop where he has Susie strip down to her underwear and walk around in his furs. The furs, then, symbolize Mr. Klein's friendship, his kindness wrapping itself around Susie. However, it also is exploitation, not only of the animals who were killed to make the fur coats, but of the young girl who doesn't know any better.

Cigarettes, Coffee, and Poetry

In the story, "When the Year Grows Old", Kay could tell that something was wrong with her mother because she was drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and writing poetry.



Settings

Dr. Zurmer's Office

The story, "Psychoanalysis Changed My Life", begins here with Marianne lying down during a psychiatric session with Dr. Zurmer.

The Zurmer Home

In the story, "Psychoanalysis Changed My Life" Marianne visits the home first to bring home the ailing doctor, then for her visits, and finally, as a friend who they set up with their son in the end.

Max's House

Max, in "Semper Fidelis" is restricted to his deathbed. His wife and the nurse are mostly in there with him, but do go into the kitchen for tea.

The Mall and the Grocery Store

In "Semper Fidelis" the young wife went on her Thursday night shopping trips to the mall and the grocery store where she would smile at Ray who worked in the deli.

Susie's House

In the story, "Light Breaks Where the Sun Doesn't Shine" Susie lies on the floor at her home, ignored for the most part, except the one shocking afternoon when her mother asks if she'd like to take piano lessons. The house is stylish and probably not kid friendly.

Hotel at Rosebank, Canada

This is where Violet, in "Hyacinths" nearly drowns in the pool. David is very upset with Galen, Violet's mother, because she was not even by the pool when their daughter nearly drown. The pool was at a hotel where they stayed in anticipation of going to visit David's childhood home.



Themes and Motifs

The Desire for Human Connection

The theme of Desiring Human Connection flows through many of the stories in this collection. The first instance, and appearance, is in the short story, "Love is Not a Pie" where both sisters realize that they didn't know their mother at all, and that her views on love and connection were different from what they had thought. This makes Ellen, the older sister, reconsider what it is that she truly wants, and realizes that she cannot marry John, whom she does not feel connected to.

Additionally, in "Hyacinths" David, as a boy, and as a grown man, desperately desires love and compassion from his family. Unfortunately, when he marries, he marries a woman who is very much like his emotionless and abusive father. It leaves him feeling even lonelier than before. Likewise, Susie in the story, "Light Breaks Where the Sun Doesn't Shine" is a lonely, overweight, unattractive girl who is criticized and/or ignored by her parents and picked on at school. She is the prime target for anyone who will show her any kind of positive attention or a tender touch. When Mr. Klein is kind to her one day by taking her to school, she confesses to him how the other children treat her. He listens to her and is empathetic. Susie misreads this and soon is willing to do whatever she thinks will please him.

Henry, in "The Sight of You" also craves connection, but he doesn't want to connect with his wife. He would rather play the field and see how many women he can find to satisfy his need to have his ego stroked. He finds himself oddly unsatisfied though he has numerous affairs. Marie, his wife, understands that he has been cheating, but determines to stay in the relationship for her own reasons. Later, in "Only You", a story that focuses solely on Marie, the reader sees her reaching out to connect with her hairdresser, who started out as a platonic friendship. He sees her sadness and loneliness and recognizes it in himself. As a result, they end up in bed together.

It is clear that nearly all of the characters in the book don't have the kind of love that they wish they had, whether it is a romantic love, or that of a parent for a child, or a child for a parent. All are searching, all are desperate, and all are very sad because they feel as if they have been denied something. Some of the characters, like Marianne in "Psychoanalysis" blame their parents for their inability to connect deeply with anyone.

Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

This theme crops up in several of the short stories. First, it is depicted in "Song of Solomon". Both Kate and Dr. Sheldon view each other, not physically, but as each other is as a person. They see the inner beauty in each other and it is suggested by the author that they will become a couple.



In "Only You" when Alvin dyes and highlights Marie's hair and gives her a new style, Henry tells her that he never noticed that she has a nice neck. Unlike Marie's husband, who doesn't appreciate her, and cheats on her constantly, Alvin, tells Marie she's beautiful all the time. He makes her shine on the inside and on the outside. He is a true self-esteem builder. However, he wants to feel beautiful, too. Wearing women's clothes and makeup makes him feel beautiful. Because he feels safe and loved by Marie, he decides to share this part of himself with her. She tells him he is beautiful.

In "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines" Susie just wants to feel beautiful. As an overweight teenager she has had her fair share of animosity and prejudice. The students at school are cruel and bully her. Thus, when Mr. Klein, and later her new piano teacher, are kind to her, she takes this with a glimmer of hope. When she wears Mr. Klein's furs she feels glamorous and beautiful.

In each story, there is an instance of someone feeling ugly or unwanted, whether through infidelity or neglect. This is shown to happen to a character, regardless of gender, of age, or of situation/circumstance. In each occurrence, it is shown that without having someone in their life to tell them that they are wanted, that there is something about them that is of value, the characters lose their ability to connect to other human beings, or to value themselves.

Infidelity

Infidelity and indiscretion is rampant through this collection of short stories. First, in "Love is Not a Pie" the reader sees Lila sharing her bed with two men, but only one is her husband (though he is aware of Lila's lover). This infidelity is viewed in a different way than most of the other situations that are depicted in the novel. This infidelity was known by her husband, and even encouraged, it would seem. Thus, this infidelity was shown to be of benefit.

In "Sleepwalking" the indiscretion occurs when Julia sleeps with her 19-year-old stepson after her husband's death. While it impacts Julia and Lion, it is Julia who determines that it was wrong and should never happen again. Lion does not share her view on it and it sets him off on a long campaign to lower his character and bring shame on the family.

In "The Sight of You" the reader sees Henry considering having an affair with an office co-worker, Mary. Henry is married to Marie, who is beautiful, but doesn't think she is due to Henry's emotional abuse. His continued infidelities with women over the course of their marriage has left Marie's self esteem in the toilet. When Mary arrives, Marie finds that she likes her, and hates that her husband will more than likely sleep with her, too. However, Mary likes Marie so much that for a moment, she determines that she will not have an affair with Henry. Then, in the garden, Mary changes her mind.

Marie determines to have her own affair in "Only You". Though she was never seeking out an affair, the kindness and gentleness, the honesty, and friendship of her



hairdresser, Alvin, gives her the love and attention that she'd been missing from her marriage. In this instance, the author seems to be stating that in cases of extreme spousal neglect, infidelity is a survival mechanism, which ensures that a person connects, if even briefly, with someone who will make them feel as if they are of value.

Love

The theme of Love winds through all of the stories in the collection. As a motivation, a binding element, a desired object, and a driving force, it moves the characters through each story, often ending in an unresolved state. In "Love is Not a Pie" the sisters, Ellen and Lizzie realize that love cannot necessarily be placed in a nice, neat little box. Their mother loved two men, who knew about each other, and both loved her back. It was clear that they cared greatly for one another, too.

In the "Song of Solomon" Kate hopes to find love with Dr. Sheldon whom she felt an instant connection to, even though he was much older than her and her doctor. She reaches out to him and in one of the stories that has a happy ending, Sheldon feels something for her, too. When he introduces her to everyone at church and then asks her to sit with him, it is assumed that he is asking her into his life, as well as his church.

In "Sleepwalking" the obsessive nature of Love is explored as the reader sees the aftermath of Julia's indiscretion with her stepson, Lion. Though Julia is adamant about forgetting the entire episode, Lion is not. His obsession with Julia changes him and makes him less than he was originally. Because he cannot deal with the rejection, he ends up cutting not only Julia out of his life, but his entire family.

In "Semper Fidelis" the reader sees Love through the kindness and caring of the unnamed wife. Max is the wife's foil, in that he had cheated on her and was not faithful at all. However, though she knew about his affairs, not once had Max's wife strayed. She lied to him when he asked her to, but the reader is shown that she really did care for and love Max, despite his treatment of her. In this respect, the reader is shown the deep and loyal nature of Love when it is freely given.

In "Psychoanalysis Changed My Life" Marianne doesn't believe she can experience love deeply because of her parents' nasty divorce. Dr. Zurmer is quick to show her that not only can she connect well enough to make a true friend, but that she is worthy and able to find and create a deep romantic feeling for someone. Love is shown to be a healing element in this essence as it is able to help Marianne heal herself from a childhood trauma. This is also true of Marie in 'Only You' as she finds acceptance and love from Alvin, who also finds the same from her. Thus, Love is shown to not only be supportive and nurturing, healing, and fulfilling, but accepting of the other.

Mental Illness

Mental Illness as a theme makes a frequent appearance in "Come to Me". In "Silver Water" the focus is directly on mental illness and how it can have a devastating effect on



the family as well. Violet looks up to her sister, and it is because of her love for her sister that she's able to allow her sister to die. Her sister had a particularly bad case of schizophrenia and went from being a beautiful and talented young girl to an overweight shell who did inappropriate things and often hurt her family members physically. Though her family loved Rose, she understood the toll that her illness was taking on the family. The only control she had over her life was the choice to end it.

Rose's mother, Galen, is featured in several stories, but in all of them she is shown to be without the ability to form deep emotional bonds with anyone. Though she is talented and artistic, the very emotions that she captures in her music and on the canvas, she can't feel, personally. It is a great irony. She credits it from a disconnect stemming from her childhood, living as an orphan.

Laura, Kay's mother in "When the Year Grows Old" also suffers from a mental illness, most likely manic depression. Her normal demeanor of a quite housewife, shifts as Kay returns home to find her mother smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, and writing poetry. Kay never knew her mother could even write poetry, or aspired to be a writer. It is then that Kay learns that her father had been helping her mother for most of Kay's life in order to keep her illness in check.

Mental illness is also used by the author as a feminist statement. In many of the instances of mental instability it is tied to some objectification or subjugation of a woman or her dreams by a man, or society. This is seen particularly in "When the Year Grows Old" as Laura, who is possibly a very good poet, wasn't allowed to be creative, because her creative process threatened the acceptable view of who she was supposed to be as a wife. Again, this feminist ideal is expressed in the series of three stories involving Henry and Marie. Henry's view of women indicates a belief that women are objects to be used and tossed aside.

Styles

Point of View

Many of the stories offered in "Come to Me" by Amy Bloom are written in first person from the point of view of the main character. The main protagonists of the stories are all curious about something that has happened, or they are deeply wounded by something in their present or past. All of them worry about their future. The point of view is most often easily followed, though there are times when flashbacks are utilized and the reader must make the leap with the writer to understand the interior landscape of the protagonist.

Language and Meaning

The language and the ensuing meaning in all of the short stories offer the mature reader a very real and raw look into the life and lives of those who struggle with some of the more stressful and traumatic events that can occur to another human being. Having said that, then, the topics covered are of a mature nature, including sexual orientation, infidelity, and mental illness. The vocabulary used ranks on a high lexicon scale and is not recommended for moderate to lower reading levels.

Structure

The structure of the entire novel is that of a collection of stories, some interrelated, some unrelated completely. They are all bound by the themes of traumatic inner turmoil caused by extrinsic circumstances. The extrinsic circumstances vary, but the interior monologues and struggles begin to show a repeating pattern of confrontation, struggle to understand and, then, finally, some sort of resolution.



Quotes

It was like nothing else in my life, that river of love that I could dip into and leave and return to once more and find it still flowing, undisturbed by my comings and goings.

-- Galen (The Sight of you paragraph Page 76)

Importance: This statement is a metaphor for Galen's relationship with Henry before he wants to marry her. She is happy to come in and out of the affair at will. She doesn't want to be tied down. A river flows free, or it becomes stagnant.

I pretended I was dead too, as I assumed I soon would be.

-- David (Hyacinths paragraph Page 64)

Importance: David knows that regardless of what happened or whose fault it is, he will be blamed for the incident in the barn. He'd rather pretend to be dead because he knows his dad will want to kill him, and that is exactly what happens.

I think because I chose to love him, chose to be his mother and not just his father's wife, Lion gave me back everything he could.

-- Julia (Sleepwalking paragraph Page 36)

Importance: This statement is important because in the beginning, it shows Lion's devotion to Julia as his mom. It also foreshadows the fact that Lion later gives her sexual favors as well.

Like his father, he only put his love out once, and God help you if you didn't take the hint.

-- Julia (Sleepwalking paragraph Page 41)

Importance: This statement compares Lion to his father, Lionel. It explains that neither male is going to beg for love or shower a woman with affection. They will let someone know that they love them in a minimalist way, and it's up to that person to catch the hint.

She hadn't raised Lionel to be a good husband; she's raised him to be a warrior, a god, a genius surrounded by courtiers.

-- Julia (Sleepwalking paragraph Page 44)

Importance: This statement explains that Ruth, Lionel's mother, did not raise him to be any of the things that make a good husband. He was put on a pedestal to be served, which made him hard to deal with.

I almost fell over her. Huge and white in the moonlight, her flowered smock bleached in the light and shadow, her sweatpants now completely wet. Her head was flung back, her white, white neck exposed like a lost Greek column.

-- Violet (Silver Waters paragraph Page 96)



Importance: In this quote, Violet has found Rosie in the woods. Her sister has taken a massive dose of pills, and Violet determines to sit with her so that she won't die alone.

If you take your medication, after a while you'll be able to drive the car.
-- Galen (Silver Water paragraph Page 93)

Importance: Many times when an unstable person refuses to follow the doctor's orders, especially about taking medication, it may be necessary to work out a deal with her.

Rose was still nuts, but at least we'd all had a little fun.
-- Violet (Silver Water paragraph Page 90)

Importance: This statement goes back to something mentioned in the analysis. Sometimes one must laugh to avoid crying. By the time this family found Dr. Thorne, their five-year savior, not only was Rose trying to shock each new therapist, but they all started chiming in and agreeing with the offhanded things she was saying to these doctors.

She loved Nathan and his fine, searching mind and his sweet humor and his endless patience.
-- Mary (Faultlines paragraph Page 107)

Importance: All the while that Mary is listing the things she loves about Nathan, she is wanting to sleep with Henry. It's ironic that one of the qualities that she loves about Nathan is his endless patience, leading the reader to wonder if that is foreshadowing for an inevitable affair with Henry and a forgiving heart from Nathan.

...her jealousy made Henry curl up inside himself, like a mollusk avoiding a pin.
-- Henry (Faultlines paragraph Page 102)

Importance: This simile helps the reader visualize how much Henry hates Marie's constant jealousy, but as usual, he's only thinking of himself. He put himself into that position.

Love is not a pie.
-- Lila (Love is Not a Pie paragraph page 8)

Importance: Lila tells Lizzie that love is not like a pie, where it is diminished as it is consumed. She is telling Lizzie about her unconventional arrangement with the next door neighbor, Goucho.

I went to sit in the kitchen, staring at the moths smacking themselves against the screen door. I could relate to that.
-- Julia (Sleepwalking paragraph page 45)

Importance: This is after Julia has slept with her stepson. She is berating herself for allowing it to happen and is wondering about the ramifications.