

The Carnival at Bray Study Guide

The Carnival at Bray by Jessie Ann Foley

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Plot Summary

The Carnival at Bray is a young adult novel by Jessie Ann Foley. The story follows the experiences of Maggie Lynch, a sixteen year-old girl from Chicago. Maggie, her younger sister Ronnie, and their mother Laura move from Chicago to Ireland after Laura marries Colm Byrne. Byrne is returning to his native country to help his brother manage the family construction business. As a young teen, Maggie is not thrilled with the move because she doesn't feel like she fits in with the other kids. To make matters worse, the family is somewhat isolated since they live on the outskirts of Bray.

Maggie is not only struggling with her new life in a foreign country, but she is having problems with her family, too. It's apparent that her stepfather is unaccustomed to dealing with kids. Maggie's mother acts ten years younger than her real age, and Maggie's Uncle Kevin, a rocker with whom she has always been especially close, has taken to using heavy drugs back in Chicago. Indeed, Maggie's life is undergoing dramatic changes.

Having made no new friends her own age, Maggie befriends the elderly men who live nearby, including ninety-nine year-old Dan Sean O' Callaghan. Dan Sean becomes a grandfatherly figure in her life, a source of sage advice. They spend hours conversing. One night after spending time talking with Dan Sean, Maggie gets lost on her way home. By chance, she meets Eoin Brennan, a seventeen year-old local who helps direct her home. She falls for him instantly. However, Maggie's difficulties at home and adjusting to Ireland cause her to reach out for the first boy she can find. This happens to be Paul, who convinces Maggie to perform oral sex on him. It is not a good experience at all for Maggie.

Christmas arrives and Maggie's grandmother and Uncle Kevin come to Ireland for the holidays. After learning about Maggie's interest in Eoin, Kevin finds out that Eoin is single. Maggie is excited over Kevin's news; however, another event greatly upsets her. At a local pub's Christmas party, Maggie's mother has too much to drink and stumbles around singing "Dancing Queen." When Laura is confronted by Kevin over her display, Colm comes to her defense. The heated argument leads to Colm and Kevin coming to blows. Maggie's Uncle Kevin decides to leave for Chicago that night. Though upset, Maggie does her best to enjoy the holidays. The highlight comes when she and Eoin end up kissing on New Year's. Though it is not her first kiss, it is her favorite.

Maggie's joy over sharing a kiss with Eoin is short-lived. On New Year's Day, the family learns that Kevin has died. A month and-a-half later, Maggie finds a package addressed to her from Kevin. It contains a letter explaining that he committed suicide because he just couldn't get his life together. The package also contains two tickets to an upcoming concert in Rome for Nirvana.

Maggie and Eoin run away together to Rome to see the concert. They enjoy the show and later tour Rome. Back at their hotel room, they confess their love to one another and end up having sex. It is a wonderful night for both of them. The next morning, things



go downhill. Maggie's mother, Colm, and the police arrive to bring Maggie and Eoin back. Though Maggie will not be expelled from school, she is forbidden from seeing Eoin again. Eoin refuses to make the same deal, and he is expelled. Maggie feels as if she has betrayed Eoin; so, she asks Dan Sean for advice. Dan Sean advises her to write Eoin a short, honest letter, which she does. The letter asks for a meeting with Eoin in Dublin outside of Nirvana's concert there. Eoin agrees to the meeting. He holds nothing against her.

As the novel draws to a close, Maggie's mother returns to Chicago with Ronnie because she and Colm Byrne have divorced. Maggie, however, remains in Ireland, finishing up her last year at school. Her school had been paid for by Dan Sean before his death at the age of 101. Maggie has decided to stay on in Ireland with Eoin as the novel ends.



Part I, Chapter 1 – Part 1, Chapter 4

Summary

The Carnival at Bray is a young adult novel by Jessie Ann Foley. The main character is sixteen year-old American Maggie Lynch who moves with her mother, younger sister, and new stepfather to Bray, Ireland. From the very start of the novel, the groundwork is laid for Maggie's coming of age.

Part 1, Chapter 1 – At the beginning of the novel, it is September, 1993. Maggie's mother, Laura Lynch, has married Colm Byrne, a man five years younger. The family has moved to Bray, Ireland, from Chicago, Illinois, so that Colm can help his brother run the family's construction business. Sixteen year-old Maggie and her little sister Ronnie attend the carnival at Bray on the Irish coastline while their mother and new stepfather enjoy their honeymoon.

It begins to rain at the carnival, and Maggie takes shelter under the Ferris wheel. When the rain ends, Maggie gets on the ride. Once on the Ferris wheel she can see the carnival and the town, including Saint Paul's Church. She can see her mother and Colm at the Quayside Pub, sharing a table and obviously in love with one another. Maggie feels very alone. She wonders if anyone would notice if she tumbled into the sea to the east.

Maggie's feeling of isolation is not a surprise. The move to another country was an abrupt change in Maggie's life. It came on the heels of her mother marrying Colm after only four months of dating. While her younger sister Ronnie fits in with the Irish kids, Maggie does not. She thinks that it's because of her style and fashion sense.

Part 1, Chapter 2 – Maggie's Uncle Kevin, who is twenty-six and still living at home with Nanny Ei, is more like a brother to Maggie than an uncle. Heart surgery as a child kept him from playing sports, so Kevin became interested in music. He is especially interested in playing a guitar. Since the family is Catholic, Kevin also serves as Maggie's godfather.

When it's time for the family to leave for Ronnie's tae-kwon-do tournament in Milwaukee, Kevin offers to look after Maggie overnight. Laura, Kevin's sister, believes her younger brother is too irresponsible for such a task, but Nanny Ei explains that everyone needs another chance. With the family gone and Maggie feeling a little better, Kevin takes Maggie to a Smashing Pumpkins concert. On the way to the concert he picks up his friends--Rockhead, Taco, and Jeremy. Rockhead and Jeremy smoke a joint as Kevin drives.

With parking spaces all taken up Kevin parks in front of a fire hydrant, calling it an unjust law not to be able to park there. Once in the concert, Maggie loses track of her uncle, only to find him making out with a blonde girl in a shredded t-shirt named Sonja. After



Kevin buys everyone a soda, they head for home. Kevin throws the two parking tickets he had been given for illegal parking into the sewer. Kevin and Maggie spend the night at Sonja's. During the night, Maggie awakes to find her uncle and Sonja having sex. She romanticizes about her discovery and how it is right that Maggie and Sonja should be together.

The next morning, Kevin and Maggie eat breakfast and return home to discover that Nanni Ei, Colm, Laura, and Ronnie had gotten back early because of a hotel fire. Everyone is furious with Kevin. At the going-away party for Colm, Laura, Maggie, and Ronnie a week later, Maggie is surprised to see that Kevin is not there. Late in the night, when everyone is drunk, Kevin bangs on the window and waves in passing. Maggie feels disgusted with Kevin for being flaky and with her mother and Colm for being so drunk.

Part 1, Chapter 3 – As Part I, Chapter 3 begins, it is late October. Maggie is reading through an issue of Spin Magazine, part of a care-package sent by Kevin. Twizzlers, Selfish Fetus's new single, and numerous other September music magazines were also in the package.

Since Maggie's mother works part-time as a cashier at Dunne's and Ronnie often goes out with friends, Maggie is alone most of the time. She hasn't made any new friends in Ireland. When Colm asks Maggie if she would like to go look at a litter of puppies that Mike O'Callaghan's dog has had, she agrees. She and her stepfather visit Mike and his dad, Dan Sean O'Callaghan, at Dan Sean's home.

As the men converse, Maggie feels like she is a part of the conversation. They even include her with a drink of port. A short time later, Colm leaves to pick up Laura. Maggie asks to stay awhile longer at Dan Sean's, and Colm allows her to do so. A short time later, Mike leaves for dinner with his wife, and Maggie continues to stay and talk to Dan Sean.

As night comes and Maggie leaves, she gets lost in the dark. She runs into a boy, who is a little older, named Eoin. Eoin puts a gentle hand on her back and points her in the right direction. Maggie is grateful that no one is home when she arrives because she is sick to her stomach from the port. She heads straight to bed with a bad headache. As she goes to sleep, she can't help but think of Eoin and his hand on her back.

Part 1, Chapter 4 – It is now November. Maggie has befriended a girl at Saint Brigid's School named Aine. Aine is very much into academics because she hopes to study pharmacy at Trinity College in Dublin. Trying to escape her blue collar roots, Aine dresses like a professional.

Ronnie has a slumber party for her eleventh birthday, which is well-attended, leading Colm to escape to Quayside and Maggie to escape with Aine. Maggie crosses the Dargle River and gets her bearings by using the Bray carnival Ferris wheel. She also carries around her uncle's old broken Cub Scout compass with her because she is terrible with directions. Getting lost makes her think back to Kevin's urging her to go and



see Nirvana in Rome. She knows that her mother would never let her go to Italy on her own. Maggie realizes that with her sense of direction, it's probably for the best.

Maggie meets Aine at HMV, a music store. Paddy, one of the store workers, also attends Saint Brigid's. He hits on Aine and invites her and Maggie to go to the carnival with him and his co-worker Paul. At the Bray carnival, Aine and Paddy walk ahead of Maggie and Paul, who seems to be a decent guy. The four head to Bray's Head to enjoy the view. The view is romantic, but Paul's kiss with Maggie –her very first kiss –is not. They decide to leave Aine and Paddy alone. They part ways at the bottom of the Head.

At home, during the night, Maggie can hear Colm and Laura heatedly discussing Kevin having stolen from Nanny Ei to pay for an addiction, and Colm wonders whether Kevin should come for Christmas or not. In the morning, Maggie thinks about her first kiss and realizes she didn't feel anything at all with Paul.

Analysis

Coming of age and role models are complementary themes introduced early in the story. Though usually responsible, Maggie throws caution to the wind when she is left in the care of her Uncle Kevin, who is a rocker. The rest of her family are on an overnight trip. Since Maggie has the summer flu, her mother allows her to stay in the care of Kevin. Kevin talks Maggie into going to a Smashing Pumpkins concert in Chicago. At the concert, he meets a girl named Sonja. He decides to go home with Sonja, and he takes Maggie with them. Maggie overhears her Uncle Kevin and Sonja having sex. She romanticizes that it seems right. Understandably, when Kevin takes Maggie back to her house the next morning, the entire family is furious with him. He has proven himself to be a very bad role model.

The theme of family is an important theme from the story's beginning. The reason Maggie moves to Ireland is because of changes in her family. She loves her Uncle Kevin, her grandmother Nanny Ei, and her little sister Ronnie; but, she doesn't always get along with Laura, her mother. It is Laura's marriage to Colm that brings the family to Ireland.

Though Colm seems to love Laura, he finds it hard to take on his two stepdaughters, Maggie and Ronnie. He struggles with being a stepfather, but he does his best. For example, he brings Maggie to meet the neighbors and to see about a new litter of puppies at Mike's farm. At the same time, Colm also provides a jarring dose of reality to Laura. Though she believes her brother Kevin is irresponsible, she does not consider him to be horrible. Colm disagrees, arguing that stealing money from Nanni Ei to pay for a drug habit is a terrible and dangerous thing to do. Colm isn't sure that Kevin should be coming for Christmas. Since Maggie adores her Uncle Kevin, that would be very upsetting.

In this first section of the novel, the story's setting is established by glimpses of Irish culture as compared to American culture. Kevin is a rocker who loves music. He is part



of a band, loves the Smashing Pumpkins and Nirvana, and goes to see all the shows that he can. Maggie, too, loves music, in no small part due to the influence of her Uncle Kevin.

In Ireland, the locals are just as crazy about music, but much of the older local taste tends toward traditional Irish music, which Maggie also comes to enjoy. There are also major differences between American culture and Irish culture, socially, as well. For example, in the United States, the drinking age is twenty-one. In Ireland, there is no drinking age. Maggie is given warmed port by Dan Sean during their first meeting, which ultimately causes her to throw up. In America, people tend to keep friends of the same age. In Ireland, the young and the old intermingle without concern. Maggie feels at home among the old men and Colm while they are at Dan Sean's house. She feels more comfortable with them than with kids her own age.

Two main symbols of the story appear in Part I. The title "Carnival at Bray" symbolizes the journey taken by Maggie as she comes of age in the novel. When the novel begins, it is the end of carnival season, of one period of time. Metaphorically, this represents Maggie's old life in America. Just as Maggie's new life in Ireland begins at the carnival at the beginning of the novel, the next part of her life begins at the carnival at the end of the novel.

In tandem with the title's symbolism, The Ferris wheel is an attraction which moves in a full circle. It is the single most visible attraction at the carnival. At the beginning of the story, she rides the Ferris wheel alone at the end of carnival season; but in the spring Maggie does not ride alone. The Ferris wheel at first signifies the loneliness and incompleteness of Maggie. At the end of the novel, it comes to signal her happiness and her completeness having come full-circle.

Discussion Question 1

Why has Maggie's family moved to Ireland? How does Maggie feel about the move? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Maggie feel as if she fits in with the elderly men who live nearby, rather than her peers?

Discussion Question 3

What is Maggie's first kiss like? How does she feel about it? Why?

Vocabulary

whiplash, abruptly, infectious, trilled, doted, emanated, decrepit, ignoramuses, transcended, intermittent, morbidity, agility, cadence, autonomic, pretentious, profane, effusive



Part 1, Chapter 5 – Part 1, Chapter 8

Summary

Part 1, Chapter 5 – Sister Geneve teaches theology and English at Saint Brigid's. She is well-liked by the students. The day before Christmas break, Sister Geneve plays a video about the birth of Jesus Christ for her students. During the film, Aine and Maggie pass notes. Aine and Paddy have become serious, and they are already saying they love one another. Aine also plans to buy a fancy bra so that she can take her shirt off for Paddy at New Year's.

As school lets out for vacation, Maggie is thrilled to see Kevin waiting outside for her. All of Maggie's classmates do their best not to stare, but Maggie is thrilled, for Kevin adds an air of mystery to her that she did not have before. She notices he is much thinner, but Kevin dismisses it as a rock star's diet. They get food at Harry and Rose's on Strand Road, and Kevin explains he quit the band Selfish Fetus due to creative differences with Rockhead, who wanted to take the band in a pop direction. Kevin refuses to change his musical style. He's starting a new band.

Christmas arrives, and Maggie is very happy to have her entire family around. Down at the Quayside, Maggie notices Eoin again, busing tables. When he sees Maggie, he smiles, and Kevin notices this. Maggie tells Kevin Eoin's name, and Kevin says it sounds like something from a Sir Walter Scott novel. Kevin then goes and orders a drink from owner and proprietor Rosie Horan. He has a ten minute conversation with her during which time he learns that she is the aunt and caretaker of seventeen year-old Eoin Brennan, who is the star forward of the school's football (soccer) team. Eoin is single. Kevin then convinces one of the in-house band members to let him play a song on guitar. He plays and sings "Fairytale of New York," an Irish song. The entire crowd at the Quayside is mesmerized, cheering for him when he finishes.

While Nanny Ei and Ronnie head home, Maggie remains, hoping to see Eoin. When Laura starts singing "Dancing Queen," Maggie is embarrassed; but, when Eoin comes to talk to Maggie, he tells her not to be embarrassed by her mother. He asks her if she can find her way home now and says he is glad Maggie is still there. All of the men are now watching a drunk Laura sing about the bar. Kevin intervenes, trying to get Laura to head home. Laura begins cursing at him, which causes Kevin to get angry. Colm intervenes, and he and Kevin exchange heated words. They come to blows, upending tables and chairs and breaking glasses. Kevin's nose is broken in the process. As he and Maggie walk home together, Kevin explains he is headed home early. He says that the marriage between Laura and Colm will not last.

Part 1, Chapter 6 – Breakfast the next morning is subdued. Nanny Ei attempts to keep conversations going without much success. Colm says there are no hard feelings between him and Kevin, but Nanny Ei announces that Kevin has left. Laura is furious. She thinks she and Colm look like the bad guys because Kevin is always trying to pit



her against her children. Maggie starts to defend Kevin, but she stops, not wanting to cry. Colm tells everyone that Kevin is a drug addict who is old enough to take care of himself. Maggie realizes that Kevin's addiction is plain as day in his thinness and unhealthy look. Maggie tells them all that she'd still pick Kevin over them any day of the week. Maggie then goes to comfort Ronnie, who has gone to cry in her bedroom.

Maggie visits Dan Sean and Mike. Dan Sean falls asleep, and Mike explains that it is good of Maggie to come and visit his father Dan. Dan Sean refuses to move in with Mike because his best memories have been in his own house. At home, Maggie and Ronnie put together a puzzle of the world before going to sleep.

Part 1, Chapter 7 – A few days later, Nanny Eli heads back ahead of schedule because she is worried about Kevin. Aine convinces Maggie to go on another double date with her, Paddy, and Paul because Aine's mother will not let her go out on dates alone. At the carnival that night, Paul breaks out some liquor, which Aine and Paddy decline. Feeling unhappy about Christmas, Maggie decides to drink with him. Paddy quotes Latin from Tibullus for Aine. He says that he doesn't expect Maggie would appreciate it because she is from a rough crowd, referring to Kevin. Maggie is defensive immediately. Paddy says Kevin got what was coming to him. Maggie then throws the now-empty whiskey bottle she and Paul have been drinking from at Paddy. The bottle misses and shatters. A shard cuts Aine's face right below her eye. Paddy calls Maggie a mad bitch and says it must run in the family. Paul and Maggie then head out on their own. Paul takes off Maggie's clothing. After a heated petting session, he instructs her to perform oral sex on him, which she does. Paul then walks Maggie home, saying he might call her or something. In the shower the next morning, Maggie cries. She never would have imagined she'd be a girl to give up her body to a boy she didn't even like. She wonders how many other childish promises she'll break before long.

Part 1, Chapter 8 – Maggie feels alone once more, though she has come to fall in love with the Irish landscape. Colm repairs the door frame he broken when fighting with Kevin, and the family goes to Rosie's for New Year's Eve. Maggie dresses in a miniskirt and black boots. She gets two Cidonas –one for herself, and one for Ronnie –during which time she and Eoin wave to one another. As the New Year comes on, everyone in the pub dances together. Maggie and Eoin end up holding hands while the others are dancing. During a slower song, Maggie and Eoin dance together. Then they kiss. They steal away to the alley and kiss some more. It is electrifying to Maggie. Eoin walks her home later, and they kiss again at Maggie's door. Her entire body trembles. In the morning, Colm and Laura come into Maggie's room to say something has happened to Kevin.

Analysis

The theme of role models is especially important in this section of the novel, as Kevin and Nanny Ei come to visit Ireland for Christmas. Kevin's drug use is apparent in his physique and his face. Kevin describes his nutrition as a "rocker's diet." Maggie, however, willfully ignores this, wanting only to think the best of Kevin. She sees him in



an idealized form –one which is later shattered by Colm, who confirms what Maggie already knew but didn't want to admit about Kevin's drug use.

At the same time, Maggie becomes incredibly disappointed and disgusted with her mother, who drunkenly dances around the local pub as if she were ten or fifteen years younger. Alcohol proves to be symbolic of both poor role models and irresponsibility. Maggie's mother earns the stares of all the patrons and a lecture from Kevin, which evolves into a fistfight with Colm. The reader should note the hypocrisy in a drug-addict lecturing a woman about drinking too much. Likewise, Colm's lack of a reaction to his wife's drunkenness underscores his own irresponsibility. Like it or not, he is now a husband and a father, not a single man watching a single woman make an idiot out of herself at a bar. Colm only intervenes when Kevin gets loud with Laura.

This section of the novel continues unfolding the theme of coming of age, as Maggie moves well beyond the experience of her first kiss. She has a rough sexual encounter with Paul which is more mechanical and crude than anything else. It is significant to the story that this occurs at the empty carnival grounds of Bray -desolate and lonely in the winter. This reflects the way that Maggie truly feels -desolate and empty. She feels even worse afterwards. The following morning, she cries in the shower attempting to wash herself clean because she knows that her dreams of a loving first kiss and loving first sexual experience have been shattered. She wonders what other promises she made to herself while younger will also be broken when all is said and done. Her irresponsibility has taken a toll on her. Maggie is not only brokenhearted over her first sexual experience. Her idealistic view of her Uncle Kevin has been shattered. As mentioned previously, Colm's cold confrontation with Maggie over Kevin's drug addiction confirms what Maggie already knew. She is having to grow up and face the harsh realities of life. Everything is not always like it seems, or like she wants it to be, whether it is sex or her Uncle Kevin's lifestyle.

Interestingly enough, Maggie's immediate family –her sister, her mother, and her stepfather – become more distant. Her hope for a loving, stable family is fractured. Maggie's mother is more interested in being a new bride and living like she is still in her twenties. Colm is more interested in behaving like a single man than a husband and a father. Kevin, who lectures his sister about appropriate and responsible behavior in public, steals money from his own mother to support his drug habit. Maggie's only real source of responsible advice comes from Dan Sean, who has quickly become a grandfatherly figure to her. It is Dan Sean who will make the difference in Maggie's life.

Discussion Question 1

What causes the bar fight? How do Kevin, Colm, and Maggie react? In your opinion, who is right in this situation? Why?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe Maggie refuses to acknowledge what she already knows about her Uncle Kevin's drug addiction? How does Maggie react when she finally acknowledges this truth?

Discussion Question 3

Three of Maggie's ideals in life –her Uncle Kevin, her first kiss, and her first sexual experience –are shattered in this section of the novel. What brings about Maggie's loss of innocence in each situation? How does Maggie react? Why?

Vocabulary

aesthetic, sedated, ungulate, unobtrusive, subtle, sauntering, sylph, cajoled, interjected, imperiously, penance, impromptu



Part 2, Chapter 9 –Part 2, Chapter 13

Summary

Part 2, Chapter 9 – There is a beautiful bird sanctuary at the edge of Montrose Harbor in northern Chicago, beside which Kevin used to work as a lifeguard in the summer. The family came to refer to the place as Kevin's beach. He looked young and healthy at that time. But, that was before he became addicted to drugs.

Now, after learning about Kevin's death, Maggie and Laura have made the seven-hour flight back to Chicago from Bray, being able to afford only two plane tickets. Maggie learns that Kevin had gone out the night before with friends. He returned home later after visiting the bird sanctuary. He had died in his sleep because his heart simply stopped beating.

Maggie goes into her Uncle Kevin's room, which smells of cigarettes. It is filled with stacks of books that were recommended to him by his Belarusian librarian friend, Paviel. Maggie remembers how Kevin had once given her a list of books to read, including books about Communism, books that made Kevin believe that not all women were totally insane, and books with excellent sex scenes. Maggie sees that Kevin has been reading the book "On the Road" by Jack Kerouac. She opens up to the place he last bookmarked. There is an underlined a sentence about how easy and how good the act of leaving felt. Maggie takes one of Kevin's shirts, a black-and-gray-plaid flannel.

Before the wake, Nanny Ei warns Maggie to stay away from Kevin's loser friends. Maggie tells Laura she looks really pretty, which causes Laura to nearly cry and Maggie to realize that she has been cruel to her mother. Maggie and Nanny Ei kneel and pray before Kevin's body in the casket. Maggie slips a guitar pick into Kevin's pocket. Before the funeral, Maggie notes that her mother, who always looked younger, suddenly looks old. Maggie feels sad and lonely, knowing she now ranks among Dan Sean and Sister Geneve, who have lost people many years before. Maggie struggles to deal with the world still moving on while things seem to have stopped for her.

Part 2, Chapter 10 – Back in Bray on Saturday, Eoin visits Maggie to see how she is doing and to pay his respect. He invites Maggie to take a bus to Dublin for a few hours. Maggie lies to her mom, telling her she is only going with some friends. She remembers her Uncle Kevin's advice about only telling parents the most vital information, for the more they are told, the more they will ask. Maggie then rushes to shower, get dressed, and do her hair.

Maggie is thrilled to be with Eoin. They hold hands as they walk through Dublin and go to the Old Library at Trinity College, where Eoin is friends with the elderly ticket-taker Donie. Donie is happy to see Eoin. He asks about Mary, Eoin's mother. Eoin reports that his mom is doing as well as can be expected. In the library, Eoin shows Maggie many of the exhibits, including the Book of Kells, a 1,200 year-old work by Catholic monks.



While eating lunch later, Eoin explains that his mother used to be a pretty well-known singer of traditional Irish songs. She had an agent and made good money. However, she slowly became schizophrenic to the point of trying to strangle Eoin one night. Mary is now in and out of hospitals. Eoin feels bad about it, but Maggie reassures him he shouldn't, that families can do horrible things. It doesn't reflect on the individual.

Maggie agrees to go with Eoin to visit his mother in the hospital. They can hear her singing from down the hall as they approach her room. Mary is thrilled to see her son and glad to meet Maggie. Mary announces she needs to practice for several shows coming up at large opera houses.. On the way home, Eoin explains that he humors his mother and tells her polite lies to keep things good for her. Eoin falls asleep, and Maggie puts her head on his shoulder, realizing that a person is more than just how they look. It is who they are inside that matters most.

Part 2, Chapter 11 – It is February, and during a rare snowstorm, Maggie reads and skims through many of the books her uncle had recommended. Maggie goes to see Dan Sean. She asks him for advice about Eoin, who hasn't kissed her since New Year's. Dan tells Maggie that young people over think things. She should just put on some nice perfume. As Maggie heads out, she is surprised to see Sister Geneve coming in. Sister Geneve is Dan's non-blood related niece.

On the phone, Eoin invites Maggie to go bowling. Maggie agrees to go, praying that her uncle would approve of Eoin. She knows she must wear the perfect perfume. She is then surprised to discover a package from Kevin addressed to her. It is postmarked December 31, 1993. The package from Kevin contains a letter for Maggie, which says that by now she knows what he has done. He explains it wasn't the drugs or his bad band. He is to blame for always screwing up. The letter tells her to live, that responsibility will come soon enough. Enclosed with the letter are two orange tickets to Nirvana in Rome in four days –on February 22. Kevin tells Maggie to take Eoin.

Maggie is stunned, not just by the tickets, but by the fact that her Uncle Kevin had committed suicide and it had been covered up. She now realizes that she was told to stay away from Kevin's friends at the funeral because they knew the truth. She waits for her mother and Colm to get home. Then, she asks them directly about how Kevin died, showing them the letter. Laura relents. She explains she and Nanny Ei tried to protect Maggie from the truth. Kevin took his own life instead of dealing with the rough times in life. He committed suicide by taking an entire bottle of blood-thinning pills meant for his heart. Then, he cut his wrists. Maggie spends the night with Billy, Dan Sean's pet goat.

Part 2, Chapter 12 – Maggie wakes up and knows she cannot go back on her plan. She has been praying to her uncle instead of God for the past several weeks. Finding the package is as if her uncle has answered her prayers. She is determined to go to Rome. The next morning, she bathes at Dan Sean's, and he gives her the address of the Church of Lord, Where Are You Going. A convent hotel nearby, the Casa di Santa Barbara, can be reached by taking the bus towards Volpi. Dan explains Maggie will receive a good rate if Maggie mentions his name to Marta. Maggie then takes the train to Dublin. She gets a room at Nora Barnacle's Beds 4 Cheap, a hostel-like place.



There, she meets a beautiful hippie girl about five or six years older named Ashley Green, who is from California. Ashley is traveling across Europe. A young Ghanan man named Ehi is playing the guitar. He has been traveling with Ashley for six months. They are in a non-committed relationship. Maggie pretends to be eighteen and takes a cigarette from Ashley. Ashley invites Maggie out that night with everyone. Maggie does her best to make herself look eighteen, and then she goes out. Drinking beer with Maggie, Ashley explains that she is from a wealthy family, but took a year off from UCLA to travel the world. It has now been eighteen months, and Ashley is fending for herself, having not spoken to her family in four months. Maggie, Ashley, Ehi, and their friends go to the park, where they encourage Maggie to sing for Ehi, so he can play along on the guitar. They drink and smoke weed. When Maggie wakes up in the morning in the hostel room, she is in her underwear under a sheet with her uncle's flannel shirt folded underneath her head like a pillow, and the room is empty—including all of its people and all of Maggie's money and concert tickets.

Part 2, Chapter 13 – Maggie, panicked by the theft and sickened by the weed and alcohol, calls Eoin, who arrives on the train a short time later. She realizes she looks the way Nanny Ei used to criticize Kevin for looking. Eoin gets Maggie something to eat, and Maggie explains what has happened. Eoin wants to find Ashley and Ehi, get the tickets back, and then fly to Rome. Maggie curses herself for having been so stupid. They track down Ashley and Ehi to the Lord Mayor's Lounge of the Shelbourne Hotel, where they confront Ashley and Ehi, who are drinking champagne. Maggie and Eoin demand the tickets be returned, and Ashley hands them over. Maggie sees that Ashley has stolen Shelbourne silver nut bowls in her bag. Maggie drinks the rest of Ashley's champagne and puts the concert tickets in her bra. Then, as she and Eoin leave, Maggie tells the manager about the nut bowls that Ashley has stolen. Maggie and Eoin kiss in the rain. The next morning, Eoin returns home to grab his money for the trip to Rome.

Analysis

The death of Maggie's Uncle Kevin is devastating to Maggie and to her family—though his death is not unexpected given his weak heart and his drug addiction. While Laura and Nanny Ei describe Kevin's passing as peaceful, Maggie learns through her uncle's own letter, and by later admission of Laura, that Kevin committed suicide because he couldn't get his life together. The reality, as Maggie and the others realize, is that Kevin simply didn't want to face the responsibilities that come with life. Laura herself knows this to be true, as she seems more interested in being a young bride rather than a mother. Both Kevin and Laura shirk their responsibilities in life and end up setting a bad example for Maggie, who will live by their example as the novel unfolds.

Even her decision to run away to Rome to see a concert without asking permission is a serious deviation from the norm by Maggie. Most immediately, Maggie's decision to smoke weed and drink leaves her incapacitated and exposed to a robbery. Attempting to experience life like her uncle, Maggie's irresponsibility (and the poor example of Kevin as a role model) leads to a revelation. While looking in the mirror, she reminds



herself of her Uncle Kevin and how Nanny Ei used to criticize Kevin for doing the exact same things Maggie is now doing.

It is significant that Kevin visited a bird sanctuary before he died. Birds are symbolic of flight and freedom, and Kevin now has freedom from life. Maggie, however, does not want to let her uncle go. Her taking of one of his old shirts is symbolic of her desire to hold onto him, even if it is only a part of him.

Maggie continues to visit Dan Sean and to seek his advice about numerous things, including how to get Eoin to kiss her again. While she does not consciously reflect on Dan Sean's grandfatherly role in her life, she does turn to him as a grandfatherly figure. For example, his instructions to her about Rome include directions to stay at a convent hotel, with the intention being that if Maggie is going to go to Rome, she will be staying at a place he recommends where he knows she cannot get into trouble.

At the same time, the theme of family also returns to the fore by way of the revelation of Eoin's own family experiences and situation. Mary, his mother, is schizophrenic. She is often confined for long periods of time to the hospital, where she believes she is in training for future performances at opera houses. Eoin deeply loves his mother, despite her illness, and her attempt once to strangle him to death.

It is also in this section of novel that Catholicism becomes clearer as a theme. Apart from the fact that Maggie attends a Catholic school, the hold that Catholicism has on Ireland is deeply resonant and respected by many in Ireland, including Dan Sean. Dan Sean directs Maggie to a specific convent hotel, due to his own religious travels to Rome in the past. Dan Sean takes his Catholic faith very seriously, and he actively pursues it. Among the younger members of Ireland, though they are Catholic, they are not as proactive in the faith as Dan Sean. Maggie is amazed to see the Book of Kells, for example, and is amazed by the faith that inspired it. She longs to have that kind of faith, and Eoin sadly says that not many people do, anymore. Despite not everyone having that deep and abiding faith, Catholicism is still culturally important and integral to the history of Ireland, as evidenced by the prominent display the Book of Kells has in the Old Library at Trinity College.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Nany Ei and Laura withhold the true nature of Kevin's death from Maggie? Do you agree or disagree with their decision to do so? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Despite knowing that much of the reason for Kevin's death was brought about by his irresponsibility and refusal to face the responsibilities of life, Maggie follows in his footsteps by seeking to go to Rome, drinking, and smoking weed. Why does she do this? Do you believe this behavior is irresponsible? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Evaluate Kevin's advice to Maggie to act irresponsibly now, and live responsibly later. Do you believe this is good advice? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

sanctuary, inhospitable, nascent, degenerates, superstitious, vigorous, imperceptibly, reverberated, chivalrous



Part 2, Chapter 14 – Part 3, Chapter 18

Summary

Part 2, Chapter 14 — While all the flights to Rome are gone, Maggie and Eoin make a flight to Bologna. From there, they catch a train to Rome. The Italian landscape is beautiful. In Rome, pretending to be married, Maggie and Eoin take Room 19 at the convent hotel, where they mention Dan Sean's name to Marta. While Maggie takes a shower, Eoin explores the hotel, nearly kissing her as he leaves. In the communal bathroom, Maggie is surprised to see the girls there walking around completely naked in front of one another. Talking to two of them with tattoos, Maggie learns they are all there for the Nirvana concert. Dressed up for dinner, Maggie feels sexy, as she knows that Eoin and all the men around her are checking her out. While eating, Maggie and Eoin toast to Kevin. Eoin tells Maggie he may not like the music they are going to hear, for he has grown up listening to traditional Irish music, courtesy of his mother. Maggie tells him not to worry, to just listen to the music when it happens. After dinner, Maggie and Eoin go sightseeing and visit the Trevi Fountain, where they throw in coins. Back in the hotel, they cuddle close, and Eoin puts his hands on her thigh.

Part 2, Chapter 15 – After breakfast the next morning, Maggie and Eoin go to the church of Domino Quo Vadis and San Sebastian to get Dan Sean a vial of Holy Water. There, Maggie also lights a candle in honor of her uncle, and prays. That evening, Maggie and Eoin go to the show. They then go to the show. Afterward, the girls from the hotel offer them a ride back. On the way, the girls and their dates snort cocaine, but Eoin and Maggie pass. Maggie wonders if she would have said no if Eoin had said yes. Eoin and Maggie decide to get out at the Coliseum. There, they declare their love for one another and kiss in the rain. Back at the hostel, they have sex. The next morning, Maggie's mother, Colm, and the police show up. Laura hugs Maggie, then slaps her across the face.

Part 3, Chapter 16 – An expulsion hearing is held at Saint Brigid's, due to Maggie's having skipped school and broken the rules of comportment by running off to the Continent with a boy. Maggie and her mother meet with Sister Joan, the principal, Sister Geneve, who represents the faculty, and various other individuals. Sister Joan explains that character, inside and outside of school, matters. They want to know what Maggie has to say, why she thinks she should not be expelled. It is explained that they want her to stay, but she must convince them as to why. Laura explains the entire background situation with her family, with Kevin, and with the tickets. Sister Geneve says that Maggie is a quiet but good student who has an ear for poetry. This impresses Laura, who thought all Maggie cared about was music. The sisters on the review board hand down their verdict. As Christians, they believe in forgiveness, and they will let Maggie remain at Saint Brigid's in exchange for working hard in school and bringing up her grades –and breaking up with Eoin. Laura agrees to this immediately on Maggie's behalf. Maggie promises to abide by these rules.



Part 3, Chapter 17 – Maggie is heartbroken. Laura tells her she will meet someone new, but Maggie can't get over Eoin. She thinks that perhaps they'll be able to meet up again when high school ends. Laura drives Maggie to school. At lunch, Maggie feels more alone than ever, until Nigella Joyce, the most popular girl in class has Maggie sit with her and her friends. They are excited and happy to have Maggie with them. They tell her that Eoin refused the same kind of deal offered to Maggie. As a result, he was kicked out of Saint Brendan's. Maggie feels horrible. She wonders if Eoin can ever forgive her.

Part 3, Chapter 18 – Dan Sean, in the lead-up to his 100th birthday, advises Maggie to write a short, plain, and honest letter to Eoin about what has happened. Laura later tells Maggie that she and Colm have decided to divorce, because Colm is too young for kids. He and Laura were both swept away by what they thought was love. The idea is to move home. Maggie is stunned. She tells her mother that she has fallen in love, that moving back is only about Laura, and not about the rest of them. They moved with her to Ireland because she wanted to, and now she wants them to move back to the United States. Laura says there will be other boys, and Maggie says she doesn't want to grow up to be a slut like Laura. Laura then leaves the room, telling Maggie that one day Maggie will understand how much she just hurt her.

At Dan Sean's 100th birthday party, the entire town and countryside show up. Maggie anxiously looks for Eoin, but she cannot find him anywhere. Maggie looks sad as she is approached by Sister Geneve. Geneve explains that Eoin had been attending Saint Brendan's school on charity, and they were looking for the right reason to expel him. Eoin is now attending vocational school at Greystones. Sister Geneve agrees to pass on Maggie's letter to Eoin, which is an apology, and a request for a rendezvous.

Analysis

Despite the irresponsible parts of Maggie's trip to Rome so far, she is able to experience other cultures and other countries along the way. She comes to find great beauty in the Italian landscape, and learns that the United States isn't the only nation to hold traditional views about certain things. For example, in Italy, the convent hotel insists that its visitors be married if they are of the opposite sex. Eoin, who knows that Ireland is much the same way, due in large part to tradition and to Catholicism, explains that he and Maggie are indeed married in order to be able to rent a room. In the United States, where nudism and nudity are not commonplace, the girls at the hotel have no problem walking around completely naked. Maggie also comes to discover that some things such as the love of music are universal, as evidenced by the people who have poured in from all over the world to see Nirvana play in Rome, including other Americans.

Catholicism and tradition also come to the fore at Maggie's expulsion hearing. Sister Joan and the others explain that students must set a good example in and out of school. However, since they are Christians and believe wholeheartedly in forgiveness, they hope that they can find reason to allow Maggie to stay in school, rather than to expel her. They request that Maggie cease seeing Eoin, a condition to which Laura readily



agrees on behalf of her daughter. They are concerned that irresponsibility will creep in and affect the other kids at school.

In small towns like Bray, Laura's drunken behavior, Kevin's fistfight with Colm, and Maggie's running off to Rome with a boy without permission bode ill for the family's reputation and for Maggie's ability to have any say in what punishment she faces. Eoin's rejection of the same deal leads to his expulsion, leading Sister Geneve to comment on the sometimes fickle nature of charity leading to the school looking for a reason to expel Eoin. Dealing with Maggie, Saint Brigid's school has been far more Catholic and far more Christian in nature, than in the charity donators at Saint Brendan's.

Irresponsibility is also key during Maggie's time in Rome. At long last, she has a positive influence in her life in the form of Eoin. Unlike Laura who behaves poorly while drunk in public, and acts as if she is a teenager rather than a mom, and unlike Kevin, whose selfishness and drug addiction ruled his life, Eoin is selfless, thinks of others before himself, and has a strong willpower to say no to destructive behavior. For example, when offered cocaine, Eoin passes without hesitation, leading Maggie to pass as well, and to wonder what she would have done if Eoin had not been present.

While Maggie has grown a lot during her time in Ireland and her visit in Europe, she still has a very long way to go if she can't use her common sense to turn down drugs. However, in the rain, as Maggie and Eoin declare their love to one another, the rain symbolically washes Maggie clean of her past, for she is made new in Eoin's love for her. She now wants to be a better person for him, for she has something to live for beside herself –and that is Eoin. Here, she begins a journey of redemption as she continues to come of age –a journey of redemption in which Maggie now seeks forgiveness from Eoin for bowing to the pressure of her mother, and the school faculty.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe that Maggie would have snorted cocaine if Eoin had not been with her? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Eoin decide to accompany Maggie on her trip to Rome to see Nirvana? Why does he attend the Nirvana concert? How does this make Maggie feel? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What sorts of similarities and differences exist so far in the novel between the United States, Ireland, and Italy? How does Maggie handle some of these differences? How does she handle them when she is with Eoin?

Vocabulary

genuflected, filigreed, jostled, haggard, skittered, comportment, expulsion, reputation, inquisition, diligent, beatific, pariah, promiscuous, enthroned, illicit



Part 3, Chapter 19 - Epilogue: May 1995

Summary

Part 3, Chapter 19 – It is now the spring. Maggie wonders if she will remain in Ireland, or will end up back in Chicago, and where she will be when she is older. She goes to visit Dan Sean, only to find Sister Geneve sitting with him, and realizes that Geneve is in love with Dan Sean. She realizes now that that is why Geneve passed the letter along: Geneve knows what it is like to be in love with someone when the whole town would be against such a thing. As Maggie heads through town, she learns that Kurt Cobain, frontman for Nirvana, has committed suicide at the age of twenty-seven. Maggie, saddened, catches the train to Dublin, to go the RDS near Beweley's Hotel, where she has proposed meeting Eoin before the Nirvana show would have been starting. Maggie worries what will happen if Eoin is not there, or even if he is. Eoin appears, and they kiss.

Epilogue: May 1995 – Dan Sean has passed away. Only Maggie knows why Sister Geneve truly weeps at the funeral. Maggie and her family return to Chicago, but Maggie is taken on as a boarder at Saint Brigid's, courtesy of an anonymous donor, whom Maggie knows would have been Dan Sean. After the funeral, Maggie and Eoin become the first people to ride the Ferris Wheel at the carnival at Bray when it opens for the season.

Analysis

As the novel comes to a close, so does the theme of coming of age. Maggie, having experienced real love, sexual awakening, and what real responsibility is through Eoin, has become a young woman. She is far more mature now than when the novel began, having experienced different cultures and different parts of the world, but also recognizing that she needs to pull back from her irresponsible tendencies. Through her love for Eoin, she is made whole again, much the way that sinners are made whole again through Christ. This clear reflection on Christianity in general, and Catholicism in particular, should not be missed by the reader. Just as Christ is a reason for people to do better in their lives, Eoin becomes Maggie's reason to do better in her life. She does not want to end up like her uncle, or like Kurt Cobain. In the midst of the horror of the aftermath of Cobain's suicide, Maggie finds redeeming love and forgiveness from Eoin.

Maggie also comes to realize that popularity, and going along with the crowd, isn't everything. Wanting to fit in isn't necessarily all that she has believed it would be. She decides to continue seeing Eoin even though she has been told not to, reinforced by her secret knowledge that Sister Geneve herself secretly loves Dan Sean. It is a kind of love the community of Bray would not approve of, but in which Maggie and Geneve find solace. Yet, in a last true measure of real Catholic charity, an anonymous benefactor has paid for Maggie's tuition. Though done anonymously, Maggie knows Dan Sean is



responsible. Real charity is meant to be anonymous, not a reason for self-congratulation or self-promotion. It is almost as if Dan Sean knows that Maggie has found herself as a human being and a Catholic, and so endeavors to provide for her as a final act of faith.

The reader should also note how the novel ends with the Carnival at Bray. Just as the old season of the carnival, and the old part of Maggie's life began the novel, the new season of the carnival, and the new part of Maggie's life, end the novel. The carnival once again appears symbolic of all of the ups and downs of life, and of the different experiences which make up a life. Maggie and Eoin ultimately ride the Ferris Wheel at Bray, which itself becomes symbolic of things coming full-circle. When the novel began, Maggie rode the Ferris Wheel alone. Now, she rides it with the love of her life.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you believe Eoin forgives Maggie for not refusing the deal? Would you have done the same thing if you had been in Eoin's place? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Maggie to return to Ireland to finish out her school year? Does she have any idea where she'll be in ten or twenty years? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways has Maggie changed since the beginning of the novel? Do you believe she is better off now, or is worse off now? Why?

Vocabulary

matted, inverted, tradition, reacquainting, cert, corrugated



Characters

Maggie Lynch

Maggie Lynch is the main character and principal protagonist in the novel "The Carnival at Bray" by Jessie Ann Foley. Maggie is the daughter of Laura, granddaughter of Nanni Ei, sister of Ronnie, and stepdaughter of Colm. At sixteen years old, Maggie is a sweet, impressionable, and inexperienced girl who longs to fit in, and longs for love. A Chicago native, she feels very alone, having moved to Ireland to be with her family after Laura's remarriage to Colm. Maggie also misses her young, rebellious uncle, Kevin, who adds a touch of irresponsibility to Maggie's life. Maggie loves that he is a rocker, and enjoys going to see shows with him, as well as keeping up to date on good music. However, Maggie's idealized envisioning of her uncle leads her to willingly ignore his drug use and reckless personal behavior. While in Ireland, Maggie does come to feel at home among the elderly, and falls in love with the landscape. While her own mother, stepfather, and sister grow distant, Maggie grows close to Dan Sean, who becomes a grandfatherly figure to her, offering her sage advice and wisdom. However, many of Maggie's choices ultimately cause her to suffer heartache. Her desire to fit leads to a horrible sexual encounter with Paul, and her idealization of Kevin leads to her having to confront reality about his true nature as a drug-addict. Eventually, Maggie meets and falls head-over-heels for Eoin Brennan, a local boy one year older than she. It is through Eoin that Maggie will experience a kiss the way she truly envisioned it would be.

When Kevin takes his own life, he sends Maggie a package with two tickets to see Nirvana in Rome. Maggie decides to take his advice and live irresponsibly and in the moment, which leads to her drinking and smoking weed, and subsequently being robbed. She realizes she is headed down a destructive path, which is averted when Eoin agrees to accompany her to Rome for the concert. It is through Eoin that Maggie sees what real responsibility looks like. Life can be enjoyed without being reckless, and Eoin is proof of this for Maggie. While in Rome, Maggie and Eoin consummate their relationship after declaring love for one another. Maggie knows that Eoin makes her a better person. However, Maggie and Eoin are caught, and brought back to Ireland to face the consequences for running away. Maggie is given the choice to stop seeing Eoin or be expelled from school, and Maggie consents to not seeing Eoin anymore. When she learns that Eoin was expelled for refusing the very same kind of deal, Maggie feels horrible. Sending along a letter of apology with a request for a meeting to Eoin at Dan Sean's advice, Maggie is thrilled when Eoin shows up and forgives her. When her mother divorces Colm and moves back to Chicago with Ronnie, Maggie remains at school in Ireland, her tuition paid for by Dan Sean.

Eoin Brennan

Eoin Brennan is a seventeen year-old local in Bray, Ireland, who attends Saint Brendan's School, works at the Quayside, and has a relationship with Maggie after



directing her home late one night. Eoin is very mature for his age, and very responsible. He lives with his Aunt Rosie, who runs the Quayside, and he often visits his mother, Mary, who is confined to the hospital with schizophrenia. Eoin, out of love for Maggie, agrees to go with her to see Nirvana in Rome, even though he doesn't know anything about Nirvana. Eoin helps Maggie to track down her stolen tickets, pays for the trip to Rome, and proves to be a positive influence on her. After the concert, when offered cocaine, Eoin passes without hesitation, and Maggie follows suit. In the rain at the Coliseum, Eoin and Maggie confess their love for one another. Back at the hotel, Eoin and Maggie make love for the first time. Eoin's unconditional love for Maggie causes her to want to be a better person, and even after Maggie takes the deal that Eoin refuses to stop seeing one another, he still forgives her. His forgiveness is borne of his love for her, and in so doing, he becomes a Christ-like figure.

Kevin Lynch

Kevin Lynch is the twenty-six year-old uncle of Maggie and Ronnie, the younger brother of Laura, and the son of Nanni Ei. Kevin still lives at home, doesn't seem to have a job, and spends most of his time going to concerts, getting high, or playing with his band, Selfish Fetus. Kevin is himself very selfish, and as his drug addiction worsens, he steals money from his own mother to support his habit. His habit not only endangers his life in the usual way, but Kevin, having a weak heart, is that much more susceptible to the hazardous effects of drugs. Kevin is also consistently irresponsible and reckless. For example, he brings his sick niece to see a live show, after which he makes her spend the night at a girlfriend's apartment so he can have sex. Despite this, he is idealized in Maggie's eyes, and idealization that is ultimately shattered between the Christmas fight with Colm, and Kevin's suicide. Kevin's last act before death is to mail Maggie two concert tickets for Nirvana in Rome, and to encourage her to live for the moment, and to be responsible later.

Laura Lynch

Laura Lynch is the mother of Maggie and Ronnie, and the new wife of Colm Byrne. Laura, who seems to be in her mid-to-late thirties, dresses and behaves as if she is ten or twenty years younger. She is frequently drunk and is more interested in her new husband than in being a responsible mother. Laura Prior to her marriage to Colm, Laura's first husband had abandoned her, after which she went through a quick succession of different men. This annoyed and disgusted Maggie, which leads to great distance between mother and daughter. Laura ultimately divorces Colm, knowing that he is not ready for a family, and knowing that she herself is not set for marriage. She moves back to Chicago with Ronnie, but allows Maggie to return to Ireland for school.



Colm Byrne

Colm Byrne is the stepfather of Maggie and Ronnie, and the new husband of Laura. While seemingly in love with Laura, whom he is five years younger than, Colm is not ready for the responsibilities of sudden fatherhood, though he tries his best. Colm cannot stand Kevin, especially because Kevin is a drug-addict and recklessly irresponsible. While at the Quayside for Christmas, Colm and Kevin get into a fistfight over Kevin demanding that Laura behave responsibly, rather than drunkenly. Colm, as it turns out, is more interested in being a single guy than a married father, and this ultimately leads to a mutual decision to divorce.

Ronnie Lynch

Ronnie Lynch is the little sister of Maggie, the daughter of Laura, the stepdaughter of Colm, the granddaughter of Nanny Ei, and the younger niece of Kevin. Turning eleven during the novel, Ronnie is a sweet kid who takes to Ireland quickly, making friends at the drop of a hat.

Nanny Ei

Nanny Ei is the grandmother of Maggie and Ronnie, and the mother of Laura and Kevin. She is an incredibly sweet and patient woman, who is ceaselessly forgiving of Kevin for his irresponsibility and poor judgment, including stealing money from her to pay for his drug habit.

Dan Sean O' Callaghan

Dan Sean O' Callaghan is the ninety-nine year-old nearby neighbor of Colm, to whom Colm introduces Maggie. Dan is a widower, and his only child died years before. He is ardently and devoutly Catholic, enjoys good liquor, and is in good health. He becomes a source of sage wisdom and advice to Maggie through the course of the novel, something of a grandfatherly figure to her.

Sister Geneve

Sister Geneve is the theology and English teacher at Saint Brigid's school. She wears plainclothes rather than a smock and habit, and is gentle, kind, and friendly. All the students at Saint Brigid's love her, and want to do better when she is around. Geneve is a non-blood-related niece of Dan Sean. Thirty years younger than Dan, Geneve is also secretly in love with him, which Maggie later discovers but does not tell anyone. Geneve, for loving someone she is not allowed to love, agrees to deliver Maggie's apology letter to Eoin for her, feeling a kindred spirit with Maggie.



Ashley Green

Ashley Green is an American from California traveling through Europe with Ehi, a Ghanaian musician. Ashley, from a rich family, decided to take off a year from school at UCLA to travel the world. Bankrolled by her parents, she fell out of touch with them when she did not come back. Heavy into weed and drinking, Ashley lies, cheats, and steals for easy money, to continue getting around on. She apparently plans to return to California, soon. She ends up stealing Maggie's money and concert tickets when Maggie is passed out from weed and alcohol given to her by Ashley. Maggie and Eoin later confront Ashley for the return of the tickets, and out her for stealing silver nut bowls from a fancy hotel.



Symbols and Symbolism

Care Packages

Care packages are sent to Maggie in Ireland from her Uncle Kevin in order to help her cope with the new setting she finds herself in. The care packages include issues of Spin, and other music magazines, as well as Twizzlers, and music. Among the music sent over is a single tape from Kevin's band, Selfish Fetus.

Concert Tickets

Concert tickets to Nirvana in Rome are purchased by Kevin, and mailed to Maggie just before he commits suicide. Orange in color, Maggie jealously protects them as she journeys to the concert. They are stolen by Ashley when Maggie is passed out from weed and alcohol, and they are later tracked down and found by Maggie and Eoin.

Alcohol

Alcohol in various forms, from beer to whiskey to port, is consumed in copious amounts by many of the characters in the novel. Whenever Laura visits the Quayside, she drinks beyond the point of excess. Prior to her first sexual experience with Paul, Maggie helps him drink an entire bottle of whiskey. While in Dublin with Ashley, Ehi, and their friends, Maggie drinks to excess and smokes weed, leading her to pass out and be robbed.

Drugs

Drugs in various forms, from weed to cocaine, can be seen in various places in the novel, and are used by various people, all to destructive ends. Kevin is the most notorious of all, injecting heroin to the point where it emaciates him. Kevin even goes so far as to steal money from his own mother to support his habit. Maggie almost follows Kevin down the same road, smoking weed and drinking to excess, causing her to pass out, get robbed, and assume a similar, sallow facial expression that Nanny Ei always criticized Kevin for. After the concert, Maggie is offered cocaine, but turns it down because Eoin turns it down. She wonders if she would have been strong enough to turn it down on her own, and realizes that Eoin is the positive influence in her life that she needs in order to avoid following in her uncle's footsteps.

Silver Nut Bowls

Silver nut bowls are hidden away in Ashley's bag by Ashley and Ehi when they dine at the Lord Mayor's Lounge at the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin. When Eoin and Maggie



arrive to demand the return of the stolen tickets, they point out to the management that Ashley and Ehi are thieves because they stole the nut bowls.

Rain

Rain appears in various places throughout the novel, each time being symbolic of something important or momentous. For example, at the beginning of the novel, the presence of rain at the Bray carnival isn't only illustrative of the overcast weather of the region, but also is a cold and isolating event. The rain drives Maggie under the Ferris Wheel by herself, forcing her to reflect on loneliness and how sad she feels in Ireland. Another example of rain comes in Rome. It is in the rain at the Coliseum that Eoin and Maggie confess their love for one another. The rain here serves to wash away the past, to cleanse Maggie of all that she has done wrong, for she finds redemption and forgiveness in Eoin's love for her. She is made new through his love, and the rain is thus symbolic of this washing clean.

The Ferris Wheel

The Ferris wheel is one of the major attractions at the Bray Carnival. It demonstrates how Maggie's life comes full-circle by the end of the novel, just as the Ferris wheel is circular itself. When the novel begins, Maggie waits beneath the Ferris wheel for the rain to stop, alone, and then rides the Ferris wheel, alone, with carnival season at an end. In the spring, there is no rain, and Maggie does not ride it alone, but with Eoin. Just as her new life in Ireland begins at the carnival at the beginning of the novel, the next stage of her life begins at the carnival at the end of the novel.

Tuition

Tuition is payment for room and board at Saint Brigid's School. Maggie's decision to remain in Ireland and board at the school will cost money, which is provided for in an anonymous donation. Maggie knows in her heart that it is Dan Sean who secretly provided the tuition for her.

Flannel shirt

A black-and-gray checkered flannel shirt is taken from Kevin's closet by Maggie after he dies. She takes it to remind herself of him, and to keep a part of him with her.

Book Lists

Book lists are compiled by Kevin and given to Maggie in an effort to get her to read more. Each list of books comprises a specific genre or category. For example, two of the lists include books about Communism, and books with great sex scenes.

The Carnival at Bray

Carnival at Bray is a seasonal carnival at Bray, Ireland, which has significant meaning from the beginning until the end of the novel. The carnival with all of its rides, its ups and downs, and its different experiences is symbolic of human life with all of its ups and downs, rides, and different experiences. When the novel begins, carnival season is ending, and Maggie has just moved to Ireland. Her old life, like the old season of the carnival, is ending. When the novel ends, the new carnival season is beginning, just as the next stage in Maggie's life with Eoin is beginning.



Settings

Bray

Bray, located in County Wicklow on the eastern coast of Ireland, is a bustling town surrounded by farms and hills. Bray is the hometown of Colm, Dan Sean, Eoin Brennan, and numerous other characters in the novel. Bray is home to a carnival along the beach, and Bray is the town to which Maggie, Ronnie, Laura, and Colm move at the beginning of the novel. The town of Bray itself is medium in size, large enough to have popular retail stores, but also small enough to enable gossip and make anonymity impossible. Maggie, at first bitterly lonely in Bray, comes to fall in love with the land and the town. When the novel ends, instead of returning to Chicago, Maggie decides to stay on in Bray with Eoin.

Chicago

Chicago is a major city in Illinois, and is home to a massive population of Irish-Americans. Chicago is the hometown of Maggie Lynch, and her family, including Laura, Ronnie, Kevin, and Nanny Ei. Chicago has a happening music scene that in which Kevin is well-embedded, attending shows, playing shows, and making music. It is in Chicago that Laura and Colm get married, and decide to move to Ireland. It is also in Chicago that Kevin later commits suicide, and the city from which Kevin mails Nirvana tickets to Maggie.

Dublin

Dublin is the capital city of Ireland, and is located about twenty minutes north of Bray. Dublin is accessible by car, bus, and train, and is where Eoin visits his mother in the hospital. It is also where Eoin brings Maggie to visit his mother, and to take her on a date. Maggie later returns to Dublin and spends a few days in the seedy part of the city with Ashley and other drifters, before heading to Rome with Eoin.

Rome

Rome is the capital city of Italy, and is where Nirvana is playing a concert at the end of February to which Maggie and Eoin decide to go. There, they stay at a convent hotel recommended by Dan Sean, go to the concert, visit the Coliseum and declare their love for one another, and make love for the first time. It is also where Laura and Colm come with the police to bring Maggie and Eoin back to Bray.

Coliseum

The Coliseum is a massive tourist attraction in Rome, Italy, once the site of gladiatorial combat, circuses, and other events during the days of the Roman Empire. It is in the rain at the Coliseum after the Nirvana concert that Eoin and Maggie confess their love to one another in the rain. A construction project once built for blood spectacles has now become a spectacle for love between Maggie and Eoin.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Coming of age is an important theme in the novel *The Carnival at Bray* by Jessie Ann Foley. Coming of age involves the personal, spiritual, moral, or emotional growth and maturation of an individual often based on real world experiences. These experiences may lead the individual astray before bringing the individual to a better place, as is the case with Maggie in the novel.

When the novel begins, Maggie is a sweet, naïve, sixteen year-old girl who longs to be loved and to fit in. She is an idealist, believing the best in people, including her uncle, Kevin, whom she willfully ignores is a drug-addict while focusing only on what she perceives to be his good qualities. Maggie is without a real parental role-model in her life, for her stepfather, Colm, is new to fatherhood and unsure of how to handle kids, and her mother is more worried about drinking and behaving as if she were ten or twenty years younger than being a mother. As such, Maggie ends up looking to Dan Sean as a grandfatherly figure, and to Kevin as an older-brother figure. Yet even then, Kevin's adventurism wins out over Dan Sean's moral stability and sound advice.

Maggie is so desperate for love and is so lonely because of her family situation that she engages in risky behavior. This creates a need for more responsible behavior on her part. Her irresponsible behavior involves heavy drinking and an awkward and crude first sexual experience with Paul. Afterwards, Maggie is shocked and upset by what has happened, realizing that her childhood dream of a loving first sexual encounter has been destroyed due to her poor choices. Yet, she continues to make more mistakes at the encouragement of her uncle, who tells her not worry about responsibilities until later. Because she so dearly loves her uncle, and because she has no real, positive and proactive role model in her life, Maggie takes his advice and runs away to Dublin. There, she drinks to excess, smokes weed, passes out, and is robbed of her money and the tickets. The next morning, she looks haggard in the mirror, and sees the way her uncle always looked. She realizes she has gone too far.

Eoin's arrival also means intervention for Maggie, both in Dublin and in Rome. He adds a conscience of responsibility, so to speak, for Maggie. After the concert, Maggie refuses to snort cocaine because Eoin has refused to snort cocaine. She finds herself wondering if she would have been strong enough to say no if Eoin had not been there. She realizes, then, that her irresponsibility and her living in the moment have prevented her from actually living. The time she spends with Eoin in Rome makes her realize that she can enjoy life without doing drugs or drinking. She makes love with Eoin for the first time in Rome as well. She realizes that Eoin is the positive role model, source of love, and source of acceptance that she needs in her life. As such, she completely turns her life around in a very mature and very responsible fashion. At the Coliseum, in the rain, Maggie and Eoin declare their love for one another, and Maggie comes to find forgiveness and redemption in Eoin's love for her. As such, the rain becomes cleansing,



and Maggie is reborn. She is now more responsible, more considerate, more mature, and can carry on a real relationship, and a positive, normal life with Eoin.

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel *The Carnival at Bray* by Jessie Ann Foley. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Thematically, family may or may not appear as a wholly positive thing, and as a result, may fail the individual. Such is certainly the case with Maggie.

Maggie's mother, Laura, is not a typical mother. She is more obsessed with behaving and drinking as if she is ten or twenty years younger than she is, and is more worried about her new husband rather than being a role model or a mother to her daughters. Maggie sees her mother making a fool out of herself by drunkenly singing and dancing provocatively around the Quayside. Colm, who is more reserved than Laura, though five years younger, is not ready to be a father. Not only does he have to become a husband on his wedding day, but he also becomes the father to two growing girls, a responsibility for which he is not yet prepared. As such, Maggie and Ronnie do not have real parental figures in their life, and the drunken behavior of Laura, especially, distances her daughters from her.

Maggie is much closer with her Uncle Kevin, Laura's younger brother. Kevin realizes he has a special relationship with his niece, but also realizes that Maggie's mother is not the best role model ever. Yet, rather than doing anything to have a good influence on Maggie, Kevin insists on irresponsibility. He sneaks her out to a Smashing Pumpkins concert when she is sick, after which he brings her back to his girlfriend's apartment so he can have sex. Kevin is, likewise, a hardcore drug user and addict, stealing money from his own mother in order to feed his habit. Before he commits suicide because he doesn't want to deal with the realities of life, he sends Maggie two Nirvana tickets to their concert in Rome, and encourages her to run off without permission to see the show, and tells her to be irresponsible now. As a result, Maggie begins following in his footsteps, drinking heavily and beginning to experiment with drugs before Eoin pulls her back.

Only in Dan Sean does Maggie find a readily available, positive family influence. Dan Sean becomes something of a grandfatherly figure to Maggie, communicating to her his affection, Catholic faith, sage wisdom, and sound advice. For example, Maggie seeks out his thoughts on why Eoin hasn't kissed her recently. Dan Sean advises her not to overthink things, and to simply wear some perfume. When Maggie agrees to stop seeing Eoin, she asks Dan Sean for advice on how to proceed. He tells her to write a simple, honest letter to Eoin, spelling everything out. When Maggie says she is headed to Rome, Dan Sean refuses to let her go unless she agrees to stay where he tells her she should stay—at a convent hotel. This is done in order to keep her clean, and keep



her out of trouble, as well as to keep her safe while she is in Rome. Dan Sean provides more familial love and kindness than Maggie's own family.

Role Models

Role models form an important theme in the novel *The Carnival at Bray* by Jessie Ann Foley. Role models serve as examples about how to live one's life or conduct one's affairs. Role models can be positive or negative. Role models prove to be especially important for Maggie during the course of the novel, and affect her in different ways.

Maggie is surrounded by poor role-models in the novel. Her mother, Laura, who is in her mid-to-late-thirties, still behaves as if she is ten or twenty years younger. Laura enjoys drinking to excess, and parading around the Quayside uninhibitedly and provocatively – even in front of her own daughters. She is more interested in being young and being a new wife than in being a mother or a role-model to her own daughters. Indeed, prior to her marriage, Laura went through a quick succession of men, one after another, and set a horrible example for Maggie in the process. Laura's loose ways –between men and drinking –create a palpable distance between Maggie and Laura, and even start to normalize the behavior of heavy drinking to Maggie, who herself ends up drinking heavily and irresponsibly, leading to a crude sexual encounter and robbery.

Kevin, as a role model, is horrible. He is completely irresponsible, totally selfish, and lives dangerously. Rather than tending to his niece while she is supposed to be home due to sickness, he brings her out to a Smashing Pumpkins concert, after which time he brings Maggie to his girlfriend's apartment so he can have sex with his girlfriend. He doesn't have a real job, and spends his life bumming money to get high. He even steals money from his own mother in order to feed his addiction. Kevin's ultimate act of irresponsibility is to commit suicide rather than have to deal with the harsh realities of life, and getting his act together. He willingly explains he keeps screwing up, and doesn't want to own up to the responsibilities of getting himself clean. His gift of concert tickets to Maggie, along with the encouragement of telling her to go to the concert without permission, open the door to her irresponsibility. She drinks heavily, begins experimenting with drugs, and is robbed of her innocence—all before Eoin enters the picture.

When Eoin enters the picture, he provides a form of intervention for Maggie. He brings her back from the edge and sets her on the right path again. He is confident, mature, and incredibly responsible, refusing to drink heavily or do drugs of any kind at all. Because he says no to cocaine after the concert, so too does Maggie. Maggie realizes he is the kind of strong role model she needs in her life, and knows she can be better through Eoin and his love for her. While one can certainly question Eoin's decision to run away with Maggie to Rome, even then, it is done out of love for Maggie, rather than selfishness. He knows she is going one way or another, so he goes along with her out of love, and to protect her. It is a good thing that he does, for he is able to bring her back from the edge, back toward responsibility, and help her to get back on the right path.



Maggie ultimately decides to stay in Ireland because of Eoin. Her love for Eoin in no small part comes from her admiration of his responsible, steady nature.

Culture

Culture is an important theme in the novel *The Carnival at Bray* by Jessie Ann Foley. There are two kinds of culture presented in the novel, art and social. Social culture refers to the traditions, customs, practices, observances, and social attitudes of a society or group of people. Artistic culture refers to the artistic products of such a culture, including music, art, poetry, literature, architecture, and so on. Both forms of culture are present in the novel.

Social culture in the novel is presented as a comparison and contrasting of various places, including Ireland, the United States, and Rome. Maggie experiences the culture of these places firsthand. In the United States, the legal drinking age is twenty-one. In Ireland, there is no drinking age. Maggie and other teenagers drink right along with the adults. In the United States, the young and the old usually keep to separate groups. In Ireland, the young and the old intermix freely and regularly. In the United States, it is not uncommon for boys and girls to date one another individually. In Ireland, only double-dating is usually allowed early on, as Aine must have Paul and Maggie along in order to see Paddy. This owes largely to tradition and the careful nature of Catholicism.

Indeed, in the United States, Ireland, and Rome, Catholicism is strongly felt, if not always practiced. Catholicism is very popular in heavily Irish-American Chicago. It is also very present in Ireland and in Italy, especially Rome. While the older generations in all countries are more devout and more dedicated to the faith, even the young observe and respect the faith. Ireland prizes its Catholic history, demonstrated in the scene where Eoin shows Maggie the Book of Kells, leading Maggie to remark on wanting to have such strong faith someday. Catholicism is also heavily felt in Rome, the birthplace of the faith. At the convent hotel where Eoin and Maggie stay, they must pretend to be married in order to stay in the same room. At nearly all hotels in the United States, this kind of questioning would not occur.

Artistic culture can also be seen throughout the novel, most notably in terms of music. Maggie absolutely loves music, a love owed in no small part to her uncle, Kevin. Kevin himself is a musician, and is deeply embedded in the Chicago music scene. Kevin makes sure to keep Maggie informed about music with magazines, tapes, and CDs that he mails over to Ireland in care packages. When Maggie travels to Rome for Nirvana's concert, she is amazed to see so many people from around the world, including other Americans as well. Music is a cultural phenomenon that brings all ages and nations together, and this is clearly the case in Rome. While in Rome, Maggie is also amazed by the architecture and sculptures. She is infinitely impressed by the fountains throughout the city, and by the Coliseum itself.



Catholicism

Catholicism is an important theme in the novel *The Carnival at Bray*. Catholicism is the world's single largest Christian religion, and is practiced and affirmed by over one billion people worldwide. Catholicism is widely practiced in the United States, in Ireland, and in Rome, and affects and guides the plot of the novel in numerous ways.

Maggie and her family are all Catholics. They all believe in God and in Jesus Christ. As people, they are imperfect (as are all people), falling short of the guidelines and standards set by the Catholic Church for living, but are saved and redeemed through Christ. No one in the novel is perfect. This is especially clear in the case of Laura, who would rather party than be a mom, and would rather act younger than acting her own age. It is even more clear in the case of Kevin, who would rather do drugs and steal money from his mother to do drugs than get a job or try to live cleanly and responsibly. While Nanny Ei's faith is strong, faith between Laura and Kevin is weak. Faith with Maggie is of a moderate kind –she prays and carries out traditional Catholic practices and rituals, such as the lighting of votive candles, but she longs to have a stronger faith someday. She does not have the kind of faith of the monks who wrote the *Book of Kells*, or Dan Sean, who makes regular pilgrimages to the holy places in Rome.

Catholicism also affects the novel in numerous other ways as well. For example, in Ireland, as a result of tradition and Catholicism, many teens are not allowed to go on single dates. Instead, they most go on double dates, as is made clear by Aine, Paddy, Maggie, and Paul. Aine's mother will not allow her to go out on a single date. In Rome, the convent hotel at which Maggie and Eoin stay will not allow them to take the same room unless they are married. As a result, Eoin and Maggie pretend to be married in order to stay together. At the Coliseum in Rome, Maggie and Eoin confess their love to one another, and Maggie is made clean again in the rain as she finds redemption and forgiveness in Eoin's love for her –a very Christ-like moment. Sister Geneve, because she is a nun, cannot act on her love for Dan Sean, even though it is clear to Maggie that Geneve is deeply in love with him.

When Maggie faces expulsion from Saint Brigid's, the hearing committee does not castigate or condemn Maggie for what she has done in Rome, but rationally explains that her character, in and out of school, matters, and reflects on her and the school itself. They want her to stay, but they need to know that Maggie is willing to do better and actually wants to remain at school. They believe forgiveness, just as Christ did, is key. The entire idea of Catholicism, and Christianity at large, owes heavily to the idea of forgiveness. While Saint Brendan's School falls short of this Christian practice with Eoin's expulsion in regards to charity providing his tuition, Saint Brigid's School does not falter. Indeed, owing to his Catholic nature, and his grandfatherly relationship with Maggie, and knowing that she has become a decent young woman, Dan Sean happily – and anonymously, according to Catholic tradition –provides tuition for Maggie to continue to attend school at Saint Brigid's.

Styles

Point of View

Jessie Ann Foley tells her novel “The Carnival at Bray” from the third-person limited-omniscient point of view, with the narrator following closely the thoughts, words, and actions of main character and principal protagonist, Maggie. This allows Foley the ability not only to tell Maggie’s story, but also allows her to fill in contextual information, as well as other important information for the reader to gain a better sense of the world in 1993, in addition to the events of the book itself. For example, in Part II, Chapter 9, the narration begins with a description of the bird sanctuary at Montrose Harbor in North Chicago, which in turn leads to Kevin’s visiting the place before committing suicide. Here, Foley is able to add contextual information to better explain the events of the novel by describing not only the bird sanctuary itself, but its importance in the overall plot.

Language and Meaning

Jessie Ann Foley tells her novel “The Carnival at Bray” in language that is gentle, average, and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the novel is aimed at an audience of young adults, mainly teens, and so the language must be written at a level which they can easily understand. Secondly, the novel itself is about the experiences of a sixteen year-old girl who is sweet but average, and the language employed to tell her story is thus appropriate to her age, and is gentle and average. This lends a degree of realism to the novel, making the characters and situations much more believable for the reader.

Structure

Jessie Ann Foley divides her novel “The Carnival at Bray” into three major parts, with each part being further subdivided into nineteen chapters, and an epilogue. Each major part of the book deals with a major event or situation in Maggie’s life. Part I, for example, deals with Maggie’s settling into Ireland, while Part II deals with the aftermath of Kevin’s death, and the subsequent trip to Rome. Each chapter therein deals with a specific series of events or a specific situation in which Maggie finds herself. For example, Part III, Chapter 16, deals with Maggie’s appearance at an expulsion review board hearing following her excursion in Rome throughout much of Part II.



Quotes

I'm never going to fit in here, she thought.

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 1 paragraph 14)

Importance: When the novel begins, Maggie is an American transplant living in Ireland, having recently arrived due to her mother's remarriage. Maggie, who has always felt a little out of place, nevertheless feels even more out of place in a new country, and among new people with new customs. Here, her worries about fitting in will become defining to her, ultimately leading her to make some bad choices.

I'm on the rock star's diet.

-- Kevin (Part 1, Chapter 5 paragraph 16)

Importance: Kevin's appearance in Ireland for Christmas worries Maggie because he has become so thin. He tells her not to worry, that he is on a diet- but the kind of diet he is on is no one related to food. He has glossed over his use of heavy drugs, including heroin, which Maggie also willingly overlooks.

If she didn't have anyone to miss in Ireland or Chicago, what difference did it make where she lived?

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 8 paragraph 1)

Importance: Maggie continues to feel sad and out of place. With her family absorbed in their own affairs, and without any friends or romantic prospects, Maggie feels as if she doesn't belong anywhere. As such, she knows it does not matter where she lives –if she stays in Ireland, or goes back to Chicago. She is listless, and drifting, without anyone to pull her down.

Who dies at twenty-six?

-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 9 paragraph 9)

Importance: Maggie is stunned by Kevin's death. It has been chalked up to his bad heart, though it will later be revealed to have been a suicide. Maggie cannot fathom how anyone can die at such a young age. This is especially haunting to Maggie, not only because she was so close with Kevin emotionally, but also because Kevin is only ten years older than Maggie, herself.

I wish I had that kind of faith.

-- Maggie Lynch (Part 2, Chapter 10 paragraph 56)

Importance: Maggie is amazed looking at the Book of Kells at the Old Library in Trinity College, and her reflection on faith is not merely religious, but personal as well. Maggie needs a guiding light in her life, something, or someone, to have faith in, and such a person will turn out to be Eoin.



There will always be time to do the responsible thing. Before that, live.
-- Kevin (Part 2, Chapter 12 paragraph 70)

Importance: Kevin's suicide letter to Maggie gives her two tickets to the Nirvana concert in Rome, which he tells her to attend without asking permission. He also hands her down some hypocritical and horrible advice, telling her to live in the moment, and do the responsible thing later. Kevin has lived by his own advice –and ended up a drug addict stealing money from his mother, and never grew up. He committed suicide, even though he had the vast majority of his life still to live and be responsible. Due to Kevin's advice, Maggie will get drunk, experiment with drugs, pass out, and be robbed.

I can be the person who won't hurt you.
-- Eoin Brennan (Part 2, Chapter 13 paragraph 137)

Importance: In a tender moment between Eoin and Maggie, Eoin tells Maggie he knows her life has been chaotic and full of bad family moments. Eoin is mature, strong-willed, steady, and stable, and offers Maggie the chance to hold onto something real for once.

She loved that he was here not because he liked the band, but because it meant something to her.
-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 15 paragraph 3)

Importance: Eoin's decision to come to Rome and attend the concert with Maggie has nothing to do with Nirvana, but everything to do with Maggie. No one has ever done something for Maggie like this before, and no one has ever done something for her in a romantic fashion like this for Maggie before, either. Eoin is Maggie's saving grace.

But to Maggie, love was like art –you went after it with a single ferocity... You didn't just move on to some other thing.
-- Narrator (Part 3, Chapter 17 paragraph 3)

Importance: Maggie is heartbroken after having to accept to refuse to see Eoin again in order to avoid expulsion. While Laura tells Maggie there will be other guys in her life, and that she will move on, Maggie disagrees. She has found who she wants, and who she loves, and like writing a piece of music or painting a picture, she will not rest until it is complete, until she has Eoin as hers.

This is about you and Colm and you know it! But guess what, Mom? You brought me here, and I fell in love, too.
-- Maggie Lynch (Part 3, Chapter 18 paragraph 35)

Importance: Maggie, here, defends her love not only for Eoin, but for Ireland as well. Laura has to realize that her decisions affect more than just Laura, and that the family can't just suddenly pick up and move on at a whim, because Laura wants to. Maggie is further incensed by the fact that her mother couches her desire to return to Chicago as



having to do with Nanni Ei living alone, and Kevin's suicide, when the desire to return is solely predicated on things not working out with Colm.

She was going to say, and she was going to love Eoin, always, because that's what living people do.

-- Narrator (Part 3, Chapter 19 paragraph 28)

Importance: Here, the narrator reflects on Maggie's decision to remain in Ireland, and to continue loving Eoin, no matter the struggles of the past. Despite all the heartache of life, love must shine through. This is especially poignant given that Maggie and Eoin reunite as Kurt Cobain commits suicide. Death is surrender; life is testament of the battles of love.

Only Maggie knew why Sister Geneve wept.

-- Narrator (Epilogue: May 1995 paragraph 3)

Importance: Maggie learns that Sister Geneve has long been in love with Dan Sean. Yet, because Sister Geneve is a nun, she unable to act on those feelings, and Maggie knows that the entire town would disapprove of such a thing if it was to happen. While everyone cries when Dan Sean dies at the age of 101, only Maggie truly knows why Sister Geneve is really crying –for love lost.