

The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper Study Guide

**The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper by Phaedra
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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Patrick, Phaedra. *The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper*. MIRA Books. 2016.

The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper is a novel focused on the transformative journey of its protagonist, Arthur Pepper, following the death of Arthur's wife and his discovery of a mysterious charm bracelet that she left behind. The narrative is related from a limited-perspective third person narrator focused on Arthur's point of view. When the novel begins, Arthur is sad and lonely. His wife has been dead for a year. He does not see much of his grown daughter, the divorced Lucy, and his grown son Dan has his own family and business in Australia. Arthur takes comfort in his daily routine because it is something that reassures him as always being there. He is looked after by his younger neighbor Bernadette, who herself is a widower with a teenage son set for college.

Arthur decides the one-year anniversary of Miriam's death is time enough to clean out her old things and begin to move on. In one of her boots, he discovers a gold bracelet with eight charms—including an elephant, a flower, a book, a paint palette, a tiger, a thimble, a heart, and a ring. Arthur cannot recall seeing the bracelet before, and discovers a phone number from India on the elephant. Curious, Arthur calls the number, and speaks with a gentleman named Rajesh Mehra who reveals Miriam was once his nanny. Arthur did not know that Miriam had ever been to India. Rajesh encourages Arthur to learn about all the charms; at the same time Arthur decides he needs to know more.

As the novel unfolds, Arthur finds himself traveling all over England in pursuit of the clues emanating from the charms. Along the way, he grows much closer to Bernadette (with possible romance in the future) while serving as a good male role model to her son. Arthur also reconnects with his own children, who come to support Arthur in his journey. Arthur struggles to understand why his wife would keep so much of her life a secret from him, but through chance encounters with good strangers, he comes to consider their thoughts that perhaps the past did not matter to Miriam like the present did. Arthur struggles to accept this, and to accept some of the things he learns—such as that his wife once had an affair with a famous French novelist, and that his wife was the passenger in a car accident that killed her then-boyfriend, the younger brother of Miriam's childhood friend, Sonny Yardley.

Arthur comes to realize that he loves his wife no matter what, and that if she did not tell him about her past, it was for the best. He receives a bundle of letters from Sonny Yardley written to her by Miriam. Arthur reads through the letters, reads about how Miriam had fallen in love with him and how much she wanted to devote her life to him—and then he destroys the letters to symbolically let go of the past. As the novel ends, Arthur and Lucy have plans to go to Australia to visit Dan for Christmas, while Lucy is now dating one of Arthur's neighbors. Before Australia, Arthur travels to India to experience a new culture, and to meet Rajesh Mehra.



“The Surprise in the Wardrobe” – “Lucy and the Tortoise”

Summary

In “The Surprise in the Wardrobe,” Arthur begins the day with his usual routine, changing nothing even after the death of his beloved wife, Miriam. He awakens at 7:30, showers, dresses in gray pants and a mustard-yellow sweater-vest, shaves, eats breakfast at 8:00, lightly cleans the kitchen, and gets on with his day. But on May 15, things are different because it is the one-year anniversary of Miriam’s death. Arthur now lives alone, as Miriam is dead and his children, Dan and Lucy, are both grown. Arthur feels lonely, but he does his best to avoid Bernadette Patterson, his neighbor who worries for him. Arthur takes comfort in routine, but Bernadette frequently interrupts his daily routine. Today, she gives him a lilac-colored leaflet with the words “Bereavement Buddies” on it. Arthur puts it with other similar flyers in his house, then heads upstairs with garbage bags. He thinks about how he used to be able to run up the stairs after his kids while playing without a problem, but now it is a difficult climb.

He thinks about how his wife contracted pneumonia and died in bed while looking out the window. In the bedroom, he begins to go through Miriam’s things, throwing away some and bagging others for charity. In one of Miriam’s boots, he discovers a small, heart-shaped, scarlet leather box in which is a beautiful gold-link charm bracelet with a heart fastener. There are eight charms, including an elephant, a flower, a book, a paint palette, a tiger, a thimble, a heart, and a ring. Arthur is perplexed by the bracelet, but does not want to bother his children to see if they know anything about it. He feels his children slipping away, as neither attended Miriam’s funeral (Lucy because she was too sensitive, Dan because he lived too far away) and as neither are in touch often. Examining the elephant charm, Arthur finds “Ayah. 0091 832 221 897”—a name and phone number. When Arthur calls the number, he reaches the Mehra residence and asks about Miriam. He is stunned to learn that the person on the other end knows about Miriam.

In “The Elephant,” Arthur feels torn, both curious and as if he is prying into his wife’s life, as trust had been a cornerstone of their marriage. A man named Rajesh Mehra comes onto the phone, and explains that Miriam took care of him when he was a boy. Mehra is sad to learn of Miriam’s death, noting she was his ayah (a nanny) in Goa, India. Mehra explains he was a naughty kid at the age of 11 and that Miriam was his favorite ayah, but that it was his fault she left. He explains that Miriam was his first crush as a boy, and that she always loved the elephant charm with the emerald, which then belonged to his mother. Mehra reveals that he became jealous when Miriam went out on a date with his white English teacher, causing him to tell his father about this. Mehra did not expect his father to fire Miriam as a result, so in guilt, Mehra gave Miriam the elephant charm. Mehra explains that Miriam inspired him to be more honest in life. He relates that he does not know anything about the bracelet, but he does reveal that Miriam wrote to him



in 1963 from Graystock Manor in Bath, England, where she spoke of tigers and staying at the manor with friends. Arthur mentions there is a tiger charm on the bracelet, prompting Mehra to tell Arthur that Bath is his next port of call, and it is clear that Arthur will find out the stories behind the charms one by one. Mehra tells Arthur that if he ever travels to India, he will be welcome at Mehra's place.

In "The Great Escape," Arthur thinks about how he does not sleep well without Miriam beside him. Arthur had hoped that clearing out Miriam's old things would help him to move on, but the discovery of the charm bracelet has presented an obstacle. He equates it to a door having been opened, and he has now stepped through it. Arthur tends to Frederica, a fern plant his wife kept that he now keeps in loving memory of her. Arthur recalls how dark the early days were without Miriam, to the point that he did not even want to eat but Bernadette insisted, telling him the body is like a train that needs coal on a journey. Arthur recalls never expecting to plan on any journey. Bernadette is a widow who works at LadyBLovely, a boutique shop that was frequented by Miriam in town. Bernadette pays Arthur another visit that afternoon, noticing he is distracted. He admits he is considering visiting Graystock. Bernadette invites him along with her and her son, Nathan, as they will be looking at colleges in the area, meaning Arthur can step away to visit the manor. Arthur worries about leaving his routine, but realizes Bernadette hopes he will be a manly influence on Nathan, reminding him of his responsibilities. Arthur realizes Bernadette needs him, so he decides to go.

In "On the Way," Arthur, Bernadette, and Nathan head out. Nathan is not very talkative and without much life in him. Arthur tries a number of times to engage Nathan in conversation, but Nathan is noncommittal. At a rest stop, Nathan finally talks to Arthur, asking if Arthur and his mother are dating. Arthur explains this is not the case. The three later arrive at the bed and breakfast at which they will be staying. In his own room, Arthur wonders aloud why Miriam never told him about India. Arthur looks at the tiger charm, which snarls and has pointed gold teeth.

In "Lucy and the Tortoise," Lucy Pepper is described as being 36 and a teacher. Lucy misses her mom and longs for her own husband and children. She feels as if this dream has gone because she has had a miscarriage and her husband, Anthony, is long gone, having walked out on her. Lucy still berates herself for not attending her mom's funeral. When Lucy goes to visit her dad, she is stunned to learn from his neighbor Terry that Arthur has gone away with Bernadette. Terry is carrying a tortoise that belongs to the two redheaded kids next door, and which always gets away. Lucy calls her dad who explains he is set to visit Graystock while Bernadette and Nathan visit colleges. Lucy worries about her father breaking from his routine and panics that his mind is going.

Analysis

If there are two things that form the core of Arthur Pepper's character at the start of the novel, it is that he is a likeable guy with charm (and the "Curious Charms" of the title refer not only to Arthur, but to the bracelet), and that he is a man of routine. Readers should note that Arthur takes comfort in routine because it is something that has not



changed in his life. His wife is dead and his children are grown, and the loneliness in his house is still relatively new. Arthur's routine gives him a reason to keep moving and to keep his mind focused on things that must be done, and on things that do not change. When Arthur breaks his routine, this is such a shock to Lucy that she can only imagine he is suffering from dementia. The tortoise here is symbolic of Arthur escaping from his routine. Just as Terry has to bring the tortoise home to safety, Lucy thinks she must now bring her father home to safety as well. Indeed, Lucy's consideration that her father's mind must be going is a lighthearted spate of humor in the midst of Arthur's sadness.

The third-person narrator here deftly moves between the stories of Arthur and Lucy, creating a fuller, more dimensional portrait of both characters—but also creating the propensity for a dynamic between the two in which Lucy comes to view herself as something of a caregiver, while Arthur himself still considers himself to be the caregiver between the two. It is clear that, though they have grown distant, the father and daughter love one another deeply. Both have suffered crucial losses in their lives, but they seem to be missing one another at the moment. The narrator allows readers to see into both the lives of Arthur and Lucy, and the potential for reconnection is real given their common love and kindness. As Phaedra Patrick argues here thematically, there is more depth to a human life than most people will often suspect. The same is true of Miriam and the charm bracelet. The charm bracelet symbolizes mysteries about her life which Arthur now seeks to have answered, even despite his routine.

If there is one thing which throws Arthur off beside the bracelet, it is Bernadette (though not in a bad way). Bernadette, who seems to be in her late thirties, is beautiful, kind, and herself very much a caregiver. It is clear she respects and has a soft spot for Arthur in her heart—and as readers will later learn, this is more romantic in nature than anything else. For the moment, Bernadette not only wants to keep Arthur company and help take care of him, but she also recognizes he is a good man and can be a good influence on her son. Arthur does not recognize it yet, though he will very soon, that it is very human to want to be needed. Arthur considers at present the interruption of his routine an annoyance, but already he is warming toward Bernadette and Nathan.

Arthur's conversation with Rajesh Mehra on the phone convinces him that he needs to pursue the mystery of his wife's life before him by way of the bracelet—and this prompts him to head off on a trip with Bernadette and Nathan. Life is a series of journeys, Patrick argues, and no journey is ever the last. Arthur will embark on a series of smaller journeys through the course of the novel as he attempts to learn more about his wife's life, to handle her death, and to accept the past. Arthur's coming to terms with his wife's past and his own decision to move on in life will be the greatest journey of them all, because it is a metaphysical, overarching journey which encompasses all others. As Patrick argues, and as Arthur will come to accept, the past may not be easy to understand and to accept, but the past very much matters.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Arthur so religiously stick to his routine? What is the one thing that can break him out of his routine? Why is this so?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the gold bracelet with its charms prove so distracting and off-putting to Arthur? Why does he decide that pursuing the mystery of the bracelet is worth putting off his routine?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Arthur agree to go along with Bernadette on the college trip she takes with Nathan? Why is Bernadette so anxious for Arthur to go along?

Vocabulary

bereavement, decimated, affliction, frivolous, tantalizing, decadence, opulence, opportunism, peckish, regimented



“Bed and Breakfast” – “London”

Summary

In “Bed and Breakfast,” Arthur, Bernadette, and Nathan have breakfast. Bernadette explains that she did not sleep well because she had a lot on her mind. She worries about Arthur going off on his own to Graystock Manor.

In “The Tiger,” Arthur travels to Graystock Manor. From Bath, the walk is long and difficult for Arthur. At the Manor, he can tell it has seen better days. It is surrounded by black iron fencing, and does not seem to be open. He calls to see if he can catch anyone’s attention, and a woman comes to speak to him. He explains that he is looking for his lost dog. As the woman heads away, Arthur climbs the fence and sneaks in where he falls, gets hurt, and comes face to face with a tiger who scratches him. Arthur realizes he is probably going to die, but a man calls the tiger off. The tiger is named Elsie, and is called off by Lord Graystock himself. Graystock invites Arthur in, saying he no longer has money or good looks, but that he does have a wife named Kate. Arthur asks them both about Miriam. Neither recognizes the name, so Arthur shows them the charm. Graystock recognizes the charm, saying it was his calling card in the 1960s, given to friends, family, and lovers. Kate encourages Arthur to stay the night due to his injuries. Arthur agrees, and is invited to dine with Graystock and Kate. The room Arthur is given has orange and black tiger stripes on the wall. Kate tells Arthur she will have a look through their old things to see what she can find regarding Miriam.

In “The Photograph,” Arthur breakfasts with Kate, who gives him a pair of electric blue trousers in place of his damaged, dirtied gray pants. Kate reveals her father was a showman and an abusive drunk, and so she, along with her father’s tiger cubs, sought shelter with Graystock. Arthur and Kate then go through old photos, and Arthur discovers one of Miriam as a young woman curled up in bed with another man. He becomes very jealous of this. Kate explains that the man is Francois De Chauffant, whom she describes as the most arrogant man ever. Chauffant, Kate explains, was a novelist who stole Graystock’s life story and used it in a book, ruining the friendship between them. Arthur wonders how Miriam could have dated someone so anti-establishment as Chauffant, only to end up with Arthur himself. Arthur points out Miriam, but Kate cannot recall her. Kate insists that Arthur take the photo with him. Arthur confirms to Kate he is going to try to find Chauffant. When Arthur sets off to the train station, he realizes he has 12 missed calls, with 11 of them from Bernadette. He gives Bernadette his location, and she comes to pick him up.

In “Lucy and Dan,” at lunch Lucy discovers her dad has left her a voicemail about his visit to Graystock. She is especially concerned about his statement that he was attacked by a tiger. She begins to wonder if she will have to move back home to care for her father full-time. She knows Dan would not do it, because the relationship between him and Arthur is even worse. Lucy decides to call Dan, who works at and owns his own mechanic shop. She tells Dan about their dad’s trip, and how it worries her. Dan is not



worried and thinks it is fine that their dad is out enjoying life again. Lucy thinks 12 months is too soon. Dan argues that a day trip does not imply romance. He urges Lucy not to worry about their father and urges her to have her own family. He does not know about Lucy's miscarriage, so she lets the comment go.

In "Mobile Technology," Arthur, Bernadette, and Nathan arrive home. Bernadette insists Arthur come over for coffee. Arthur would rather be at home, but he agrees. While Bernadette prepares coffee, Arthur tries to get Nathan to talk about his future, but Nathan is again not interested. When Arthur begins to speak to Nathan about music and his phone, Nathan begins to speak more openly. He asks Nathan to look up anything about *Chaufant* he can find. Nathan explains that they studied him at school, and that his novel, *Stories We Tell*, is considered a classic. Arthur knows it is the novel that ended the friendship between *Chaufant* and *Graystock*. Arthur tells Bernadette and Nathan he would like to visit a novelist's house in London, which seems to catch Nathan's attention.

In "London," Arthur heads to London. He enjoys the sights and sounds of the city until he remembers that he once laughed at Miriam's suggestion they go to London for their thirtieth anniversary. Arthur plays tourist for the day, doing things like visiting Parliament, Big Ben, and the London Eye—things he knows he should have done with Miriam. While seeking a bite to eat, Arthur runs into a young man who is impressed by the fact that Arthur was married so long, and who wants to get married himself. The man explains that he is torn between two girls, his girlfriend Donna and his lover, Manda. Arthur explains that Manda might be more exciting now, but it might not last into the marriage, while Donna deserves better than to be cheated on. The man decides to pay for Arthur's lunch. Arthur asks the man if it would bother him if he had a girl who had a life before him he did not know about. The man says it would not, because maybe there is a reason she did not tell him, or that perhaps she was happy with the present and had no need to look back.

Analysis

The narrator continues to move back and forth between Arthur and Lucy through this section of the novel. Arthur continues in his journey to understand his wife's past, while Lucy struggles to understand why Arthur is doing what he is doing in the present. This allows readers to continue to learn more about Arthur and Lucy (and later Dan), and it helps readers to recognize they are fully-formed, dimensional characters who are approaching the present situation from vastly different perspectives. Readers still see that Arthur and Lucy are approaching the present from a place of crucial loss, and that at the moment, they are like two ships passing in the night: they simply cannot seem to connect at present. As Patrick thematically argues, it is very human to want to be needed. Without a husband or child, Lucy wants to be needed by Arthur.

There is more depth to a human life than people often suspect, Patrick also continues to argue—and the gold charm bracelet is symbolic proof of that. Arthur continues to track down clues relating to the charms, including the tiger which leads him to *Graystock*



Manor, and then on to London. Arthur would have never imagined that his wife would have once cared for tigers—or that he himself would be attacked by a tiger. Here, tigers come to symbolize the passions of the past (as tigers themselves are passionate, wild creatures). At Graystock, Arthur is forced to confront the first aspect of Miriam’s past that he has difficulty accepting—that she was the lover of a famous and egotistical French novelist. This is very disconcerting to Arthur—and understandably so—that his wife would have been with another man. But his love for Miriam is a love for Miriam as a whole, no matter her past.

The past may not be easy to understand or accept, but it matters, Patrick continues to argue. The past forms who we are in the present, and the present therefore heavily relies on the past. Arthur’s charming nature is apparent through his conversation with the man in the suit in London who wants to be married, but is currently seeing two women. Not only does Arthur give the man advice and help to set him straight (the man needs his help—it is human to be needed), but the man also gives Arthur an important perspective. Perhaps Miriam did not tell him about the past because she was happy with the present and had no desire or cause to look back. This thought comforts and reassures Arthur.

At home, readers should note that Bernadette continues to care for Arthur—and that Arthur continues to reach out to Bernadette’s son. In fact, Arthur involves Nathan in his journey to learn more about Chauffant, and Nathan provides help. Again, this illustrates the theme that it is human to be needed. Both Bernadette and Nathan feel needed by Arthur—and the fulfillment that comes with being needed allows people to grow closer and to open up more. Nathan is more talkative than he has ever been, readers will note, when Arthur asks him to research Chauffant online. In a sense, readers can see that the tiger, which represents the passions of the past, attacks Arthur—symbolically meaning the past nearly overcomes Arthur—but Arthur’s being needed in the present, and Arthur’s realization that he needs others in his life—helps him to be able to overcome the past. His journey becomes a shared journey as a result.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Lucy worry so much about her father? Why does Dan not worry as much? How does Lucy’s concern cause her to approach Arthur? How does Arthur respond?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Arthur seek out Nathan’s help in looking up information about Chauffant? How does Nathan respond? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What about Miriam’s past does Arthur begin to struggle with? Why? Do you think Arthur is justified in his struggle to accept the past? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

nonchalantly, anecdotes, albeit, eccentric, chastised, maelstrom, idyllic



“The Book” – “Green Shoots”

Summary

In “The Book,” Arthur arrives at Francois De Chauffant’s house and is amazed by how large and wealthy-looking it is. It causes Arthur to wonder if he could have done more for his family if he had been more focused on business success. A young man named Sebastian answers the door, to whom Arthur explains his wife has died, and that he is trying to track down her friends. Sebastian explains that Chauffant has Alzheimer’s, and that he was with Chauffant romantically before Chauffant went downhill. Arthur asks about Miriam. Sebastian explains Chauffant is homosexual, but slept with girls and women in the 1960s and 1970s as well, though he never stayed with anyone for long. Sebastian agrees to allow Arthur in to see Chauffant for a few minutes. Arthur is glad to find that Chauffant can still read. Arthur shows Chauffant the photo, but Chauffant does not recognize it. Arthur then shows him the book charm with the words “ma chérie” inscribed, but Chauffant does not recognize this, either.

Arthur worries about Sebastian being alone with Chauffant as Sebastian bears bruises on his arms from dealing with Chauffant, but Sebastian says he would be lonely otherwise and that he is in the country illegally. He recognizes “ma chérie” in the charm as being the name of a 1963 poem by Chauffant, and so he gives Arthur a copy of the book in which it appears. Arthur tells Sebastian his whole life is still ahead of him, and urges him to leave and find his life on his own, or to find someone his own age. Outside, Arthur reads the poem. It is about a brief but meaningful romance. Arthur is sickened by the poem, knowing it can only be about his wife, and knowing the romance must have been important enough to be memorialized in a poem. He leaves the book on a bench and continues on in his journey.

In “Lucy the Second,” Arthur wonders what his next step shall be. He has not yet thought beyond finding Chauffant. He thinks about how he feels like no one without Miriam. Arthur heads into a hostel on a whim. There, he sees five German girls which reminds him of courting Miriam when they were younger. Arthur wonders if all of his best days are now behind him. Feeling sad, he goes to bed. He is awakened by the German girls when they return at three in the morning. He listens to one of them having sex, disturbed that such a thing would go on in a room full of others. It is one of the things he does not like about the modern age. In the morning, the man who slept with one of the German girls, an American, tells Arthur they should sneak out. He asks if Arthur knows the way to King’s Cross Station, so Arthur leads the way. There, a young man in baggy pants steals Arthur’s wallet.

Arthur shouts and chases after the thief. Another young man hands Arthur his dog, then tells Arthur to wait there. He returns a few moments later, having successfully retaken the wallet. He, Arthur, and the dog sit down on a bench. The dog takes well to Arthur, which surprises the young man. The dog’s name is Lucy. Arthur explains his daughter’s name is Lucy. The young man reveals his name to be Mike, and that he is unemployed



and poor. Arthur buys Mike lunch. Mike asks for Arthur's story, so Arthur tells him. Mike suggests going to see a shop owner around the corner about the gold bracelet. Arthur agrees and heads to Jeff's pawn shop with Mike. Jeff takes a look at the bracelet, explains that it is 18-karat gold, that the bracelet is Victorian, and that the charms vary in age and kind. Jeff notes the heart was added most recently, as it is modern in design and has not been soldered in place yet. He thinks the flower could be acrostic—a Victorian tradition where a piece of jewelry was set with gemstones in such a way as to spell out a name or message. The flower itself is seemingly from the 1920s; however, it is done in art nouveau style and seems to spell out "dearest" while featuring a pearl, perhaps alluding to a person named Pearl. Arthur tries to remember if Miriam's mother was named Pearl. Jeff also points out that the paint palette charm has the initials S.Y. on it. Without a place to stay for the night, Arthur accepts an invitation to Mike's apartment.

In "Mike's Apartment," Arthur is impressed to discover that, despite Mike's situation and poverty, he has a bookshelf crammed with books because he loves to read. Mike encourages Arthur in his search, saying the charms on the bracelet could be lucky charms. Mike encourages Arthur not to waste the rest of his life, saying Arthur could have twenty years left. Arthur worries about Miriam's life before him, but Mike explains that sometimes people live a chapter of their lives, then close the book on it and do not want to go back. Mike explains he wasted five years of his own life on drugs and does not like to look back. Now, he looks to the future, wanting to find a job and a good girl. When Arthur wakes in the morning, he is panicked to find the bracelet gone. Mike reassures him, opening up a dictionary he has hollowed out to store valuables, including the bracelet. He explains he has done so because he has been robbed before, having lost his father's gold Rolex (engraved with his father's name, Gerald) to a thief, probably his neighbor. Arthur offers Mike money for staying, but Mike refuses, instead encouraging Arthur on in his search.

In "The Flower," Arthur knows he must now find out more about Miriam's mother, so he travels to Thornapple. He wants to find out more about Miriam's childhood and why she left home to begin with. As Arthur has traveled, he realizes the people he has met have awakened in him a desire to help others in need. He heads down to No. 48 and knocks. A young mother answers and invites Arthur in to have a look around after Arthur explains that his wife used to live there. Arthur can remember evenings spent courting Miriam—with Miriam's mother perched in the middle. He then heads to see Vera at the Post Office, who confirms that Miriam's mother's name was indeed Pearl. She also reveals that Pearl went through a difficult divorce, and a difficult subsequent relationship with a rough boyfriend. Vera believes this is why Miriam left home, traveling to India with the doctor she worked for at the time. Arthur then heads home, which is not far away. Bernadette and Nathan welcome him back. Arthur then calls his daughter, wanting to pay her a visit, wanting to start over, and wanting to be a family again.

In "Green Shoots," Arthur wakes up late because his alarm clock has stopped. He realizes he is enjoying ignoring his routine. He chats with Terry outside, who is supportive and encouraging of Arthur getting out and about. Terry and Arthur agree to get together soon and hang out. He then walks happily over to Lucy's house. There, he



heads out back as Lucy is gardening. Lucy explains that she has been really worried about him, at which time Arthur fully reveals why he is traveling around so much. Lucy is amazed to learn that her mother had been to India, and is amazed to learn about the things her father tells her. Arthur recognizes as well that Lucy is not doing well, and so he sits her down and asks her to tell him what is wrong. She begins explaining and crying, so Arthur holds her. It is then that she confesses she has had a miscarriage. Arthur and Lucy are very grateful to have one another. Arthur reassures Lucy that he does not have dementia, despite her initial concerns. Arthur shows her the bracelet, which Lucy examines. She encourages Arthur to carry on the search. In a box of Miriam's old photos, Arthur and Lucy find a scrap of paper dated 1969 from the Gold Thimble in Paris, the year Arthur and Miriam were married. There is also a photo of the shop, and Arthur realizes it cannot be a coincidence. He decides he and Lucy must go to France.

Analysis

At long last, Arthur and Lucy finally begin their process of healing. Readers should note that Arthur and Lucy begin reconnecting in Lucy's garden. While connections can be made between Lucy and her mother—both of whom shared a love of gardening—what should be paid attention to is that planting a garden (sowing seeds) will yield beautiful results. Arthur and Lucy are sowing the seeds for a renewed relationship with one another in the garden, ordaining that there will be growth as time goes on. When Arthur decides he will go to Paris in pursuit of information about the gold thimble, it is agreed that Lucy will accompany him. They have recognized that they have serious need of one another in their own respective lives, and their joining together on Arthur's journey symbolizes the fact that they are both taking the next step in their lives.

Readers should also note that Arthur's charms—both his personality and the bracelet—continue to lead him all over the place, and to encounter all sorts of people. Arthur proves to be a source of great emotional and moral support to Sebastian, who has been struggling with being a caregiver to the abusive and narcissistic Chauffant. It is clear why Miriam did not stick around long with Chauffant—and this gives Arthur some comfort. The past may not be easy to understand or accept, but it matters, Patrick continues to argue—and Arthur continues to come around to understanding. Previously, Arthur wondered how Miriam could choose someone like him over a famous, wealthy writer—and now it is very clear.

There is more depth to a human life than people often suspect, Patrick here continues to argue, and Arthur has almost fallen victim to this twice. First, he did not ever imagine his wife would have gone to a place like India, or that she would have been involved with a famous writer—but then, he begins to consider her life in a second way, as one without any real depth: she was restless and seemed to drift around without real purpose, shacking up where she could. However, her rejection of Chauffant demonstrates a depth and strength of character that Arthur cannot forget Miriam had: just because she journeyed around so much, and just because she had a romance with a jerk, does not mean she herself was shallow. Indeed, Arthur's own journey is now



enriching his life and adding a greater dimension to it. Miriam's journeys helped lead her to Arthur; Arthur's journeys now help him to better understand Miriam. As Mike so tellingly explains, sometimes people live a chapter of their lives they do not wish to repeat or recall. This may well be the case for Miriam.

Miriam's early flightiness is revealed to be rooted in a difficult home life—symbolized by the flower. Miriam's roots were not good apart from her mother, and so it is understandable why she would take to the road to try to find meaning in her life, and to try to find a better life. There is more depth to a human life than one often expects, and this is certainly the case for Miriam. Arthur now struggles to understand how someone as rootless as Miriam should have wanted to settle for someone like him, and could have wanted to settle into a quiet life given everything she had done. The next clue proves telling, as it is the Gold Thimble by way of the gold thimble charm—a part of the bracelet from right before Arthur and Miriam married.

Discussion Question 1

How do Arthur and Lucy finally connect? Why does this matter so much to both of them? What does it mean for their future, and for Arthur's journey?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Arthur continue to struggle so much with Miriam's relationship with Chauffant? What ultimately helps put his mind at ease about this part of her past? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Mike asserts that sometimes, people close a chapter on their past because they do not wish to look back for one reason or another. Why is this so? Does this apply to Mike? Could it apply to Miriam? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

opulent, assertively, voracious, lithe, exuberant, exuberant, emblazoned, gander, exquisite, acrostic, decrepit



“The Thimble” – “Bernadette”

Summary

In “The Thimble,” Arthur and Lucy travel to Paris. Arthur reflects on how his wife loved France and French culture. He finds Paris to be beautiful. Lucy does not go to the Gold Thimble, however, as she is still sad about her own marriage. Arthur arrives at the shop, which bears a sign noting it is run by Sylvie Bourdin. Inside, Arthur speaks with Madame Sylvie Bourdin. Sylvie recognizes a picture of Miriam at once, and realizes she is speaking with Arthur before Arthur properly introduces himself. Sylvie confirms it was she who gave Miriam the gold thimble charm as a wedding gift, and she is sorry to hear of Miriam’s passing. Sylvie explains that she was one of Chauffant’s girlfriends when she met Miriam, and the two of them ditched Chauffant for Paris. She explains it was Miriam who helped her to begin her wedding dress shop when they stumbled upon another shop closing down and selling off its inventory. Arthur later meets up with Lucy to reveal what he has learned. Lucy is happy to hear. Arthur explains he has learned that the things people say and do are how people remember someone. He wonders if he will be remembered so kindly. Lucy assures him he is being silly. Their waiter, Claude, asks Lucy to go for a walk with him that evening, while Sylvie asks Arthur to dinner.

In “Paris Match,” as Arthur gets ready for dinner he finds himself missing Bernadette. Before their arranged dates, Arthur and Lucy walk through the city. They find a store with a closing sale, at which Lucy encourages Arthur to buy new clothing. He then meets Sylvie and the two dine at Chez Rupert, where she is a friend of the owner. They talk about Miriam, and Sylvie reveals that Miriam’s dream was to have a family, a house in the country, and a beautiful garden. Arthur is heartened by this. Sylvie explains that Miriam got it right by having a family, while she herself was too busy with work to ever even get married. Arthur and Sylvie enjoy their time together and kiss, but when Sylvie invites Arthur home for coffee, he hesitates. He explains that he is still in love with Miriam. Sylvie gently says she understands. Sylvie encourages Arthur to seek out Sonny Yardley, as it is her initials that are on the paint palette. She believes Sonny’s brother may have been an artist, but warns Arthur that he may learn something he does not like. Back at the hotel, Arthur and Lucy meet up, and both agree that their nights were not meant to last for more than one night.

In “Bookface,” Arthur is happy to be back home, but he realizes he has only three charms left to learn about. Arthur is surprised when Nathan pays him a visit to learn about his travels. Arthur asks Nathan for his help with Bookface, by which Nathan realizes that Arthur must mean Facebook. Nathan promises to help find Sonny Yardley. Nathan explains he has been looking for his mom, but she has not been around. He says he wants to know why his mom wants to send him so far away for college. Arthur explains it is not because she does not love him, but because she wants him to attend a good school. Nathan tells Arthur that he wants to be a baker. Nathan asks for Arthur’s help in appealing to his mom to let him go into baking. Nathan then confesses he is



worried about his mom, for he has found medical papers lying around that say she has to go visit the cancer unit. Arthur reassures Nathan that everything will be okay. That night, Nathan reveals he has found two Sonny Yardleys: one is eighteen and has pink hair; the other teaches jewelry at Scarborough College.

In “The Paint Palette,” Arthur is unable to get a hold of Bernadette. He visits with Terry and learns Terry’s wife has left him for someone else, but that Terry enjoyed a good relationship with his mother. When Sonny Yardley does not return his call, Arthur decides to seek her out at Scarborough College. There, he learns Sonny has been out sick, and a man named Adam has been teaching her classes. While waiting for Adam to call his wife, Arthur discovers a painting of a half-nude Miriam. Half of Arthur wants to yank the painting from the wall while the other half of him wants to know who painted it. When Adam disappears again, two college girls approach Arthur under the assumption he is to be their nude model. Arthur is stunned, trying to explain, but the girls beg him to model so they do not fail their final. Arthur reluctantly agrees, and finds himself modeling for an entire class of college kids. As Arthur models, he realizes he wants the painting of Miriam to stay up, because it is a beautiful painting lovingly done. The college kids end up being thrilled with Arthur as a model. Adam returns and apologizes as the class ends, noting his wife has decided to give him a second chance, and agreeing to help Arthur track down anything that can be found about Sonny Yardley. Nothing can be found, so Adam promises to have Sonny get in touch with Arthur. He explains the painting of Miriam is actually by Martin, Sonny’s brother, who only painted for a short time.

In “Bernadette,” Bernadette comes next door to visit Arthur. She brings him a wimberry pie. Bernadette says she enjoys taking care of others, including Arthur. Arthur invites her in for lunch. Arthur notes that today, Bernadette seems slower and sad. At lunch, he gives her the gift he purchased for her in Paris—a lavender bag. Bernadette is thinking about her dead husband, so Arthur decides to confide in her about Miriam’s past in greater detail. When Bernadette goes to do the dishes, she begins to cry. She admits she has found a lump in her breast and is awaiting test results. Arthur volunteers to go with Miriam to get the test results the following day. Bernadette thanks him, but declines as she leaves. Arthur’s phone rings. It is Sonny Yardley.

Analysis

Again in this section of the novel, the thematic idea that there is more depth to a human life than people often suspect is explored. Through Sylvie, Arthur learns that, despite her difficult past and the rootlessness of her youth, Miriam ultimately wanted to settle down, have a family, and have a stable home life. In other words, Miriam wanted everything she did not have when she was very young. Arthur learns that their life together was a dream come true for Miriam, which explains why she did not consider Arthur someone she settled for (as Arthur believed), but as someone she could settle down with and love forever. Arthur is now gaining a much clearer, broader, and deeper understanding of who his wife was. Herein, the gold thimble charm symbolizes not only



Miriam's friendship with Sylvie, but dreams coming true. Arthur was Miriam's dream come true.

Arthur's time in Paris also helps him to realize three important things. First, no journey in life is ever the last. Arthur had previously imagined he would live out the rest of his life in a quiet routine. Now, he is in Paris with his daughter. Second, not having any romance in his life anymore is not a foregone conclusion. His kiss with Sylvie and Bernadette's obvious attraction to him demonstrate that he is still desirable and still lovable. Third, Patrick makes the thematic argument that the things people say and do are how they will be remembered through Arthur when he and Lucy talk at the café. This is clearly the case for Miriam. Arthur hopes that he will be remembered just as fondly as Miriam. Lucy assures him that this will be so. Here, Arthur demonstrates his need for comfort—and Lucy demonstrates her need to provide care. In a sense, the golden thimble charm here comes to symbolize a renewed sense of family and friendship for Arthur and Lucy as well as its symbolism regarding the friendship between Miriam and Sylvie. At the same time, the chance romances Arthur and Lucy enjoy in Paris—Arthur with Sylvie and Lucy with the waiter—demonstrate the potential for new dreams and new journeys.

Still, despite the unfolding potential for the future, the past remains critical in Arthur's life at the present. The past may not be easy to understand or accept, but it matters. Sylvie proves to be the key to the door regarding the worst part of Miriam's history—and readers can debate whether Sylvie reveals this to Arthur in spite over his rejection or because she recognizes that Arthur wants a fuller, more accurate understanding of his wife's history. Sylvie leads Arthur to the Yardley family and Scarborough College. There, Arthur is shocked to discover a nude painting of his wife, and is humorously shocked to be persuaded into modeling for college kids. Arthur realizes here that he is needed once again—and so he obliges. As Arthur will come soon to fully recognize, he wants to be needed. And as Patrick continues to argue, it is human nature to want to be needed.

Discussion Question 1

What does Arthur learn about Miriam and her dreams in Paris? Why does this have such an important effect on Arthur?

Discussion Question 2

What is the trip to Paris like for both Lucy and Arthur with respect to their own romantic lives? Why is this important?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Arthur ultimately agree to model for the college kids? What is the experience like for him? What comparisons are to be made between him and Miriam in this endeavor?

Vocabulary

git, maudlin, bewildered, spontaneous, disdainful, incredulously



“The Ring” – “The Future”

Summary

In “The Ring,” Sonny expresses unhappiness over Arthur just showing up at the college unannounced. Sonny denies knowing a Sylvie Bourdin, and expresses only minimal interest in hearing about Miriam. Sonny says the paint palette charm should be thrown away, as it is a part of her history she does not care to remember. At Arthur’s coaxing, Sonny admits to being very good friends with Miriam a long time ago, realizing Arthur has no idea about the past. She admits to creating the palette for Miriam. Sonny explains she and Miriam had been friends since childhood, but then after Miriam had traveled around, she came home and set her sights on Sonny’s younger brother, Martin. She explains that within a few months, Miriam and Martin were engaged, and Martin was seeking to buy a diamond ring. Sonny says that, while out driving in their father’s car to impress Miriam (even though Martin did not have a license), Martin crashed into a tree. Sonny says that Miriam received only a cut, while Martin went into a coma and died three weeks later. Sonny says that by not telling Arthur about Martin, Miriam was a liar and threw Sonny over for her brother and wrecked their family’s lives. Arthur begins crying, saying he loved Miriam no matter what.

In “Crappy Birthday,” Arthur turns 70 the next day. All night, he is plagued by nightmares of Martin, and barely able to sleep as his mind focuses on what he has learned from Sonny. He writes a letter to Sonny, imploring her to forgive Miriam. He then sets out to mail the letter as it begins to rain. Instead, he walks down to the sea. He does not know how he will continue to live without Miriam and now hates the bracelet, considering he might throw it into the sea for how it has upended his life and all he has known. He then discovers a little crab that has been trapped in a tide pool, so Arthur carries the crab down to the water to let him swim to safety. Arthur realizes Miriam never told him the things he has learned about her past because she thought it for the best. He forgives her for not telling him these things, then begins to laugh and dance in and out of the water. He knows the only way forward is to forgive and forget. Arthur gets a hot chocolate at a local café, then catches the bus home. He receives a text from Bernadette, asking him to call her.

In “Memories,” Arthur arrives home to be surprised for his birthday by Lucy, Bernadette, and others. Arthur is stunned to find Dan is also present, and the father and son hug. Lucy and Dan insist Arthur go and change out of his wet clothes, which he does. Dan explains he will be staying for a week. At the first chance he gets, Arthur asks about Bernadette’s test results. She explains everything is fine. Arthur is thrilled to hear this. Nathan then arrives bearing a cake he has baked for Arthur, and explains that he and his mom have had a talk and he will indeed be pursuing baking. In the front room, Lucy has arranged family photos all over the walls. She and Arthur notice that in one photo, Miriam is wearing the bracelet, meaning she did not intentionally keep it a secret. Lucy says that Dan has something to tell Arthur the following day.



In “The Heart,” when Arthur awakens in the morning, he is thrilled to know both his children have spent the night. That morning, Dan tells Arthur that he saw the bracelet once when he was home sick from school, but that he never saw it again afterwards. Dan explains the last charm—the heart—which he purchased. He says that his family helped him pick it out and that he sent it only a few weeks before Miriam died. Dan promises he will bring his family over to visit from Australia at least once a year. Arthur, Dan, and Lucy decide to go to the beach.

In “Letters Home,” when Arthur gets back he discovers a bundle of letters at his door. They are letters written to Sonny by Miriam, and Sonny has given them to Arthur with apologies for his wife’s death and a request not to contact her again. Arthur reads the letters before bed that night, including one in which Miriam talks about her coming wedding to Arthur, whom she describes lovingly and glowingly. When he finishes reading, he tears up the letters in order to let her past go.

In “Finders Keepers,” six weeks have passed. Arthur goes to Jeff’s shop to sell the bracelet. Jeff is happy to buy it, but worries it may have too much emotional attachment for Arthur. Arthur assures him it does not, that it had been forgotten about for years, and that he only wants it to go to a good home. Arthur only wishes to keep the elephant since this is the charm that started off the journey. The bracelet, even without the elephant, fetches 1,000 pounds. Arthur then goes to visit Sebastian but learns from a neighbor Sebastian had moved out some weeks before, and that Chauffant has died that very morning. Arthur then writes to the Graystocks, sending them 200 pounds for tiger food. A young girl playing music for money catches Arthur’s attention, so he drops her 20 pounds. Arthur goes to Mike’s apartment next, but Mike is not home. He then breaks into the apartment next to Mike’s with his old lock picks, where he discovers the gold Rolex with “Gerald” inscribed on it. He barely gets out of the apartment in time as the neighbor returns.

In “Journey’s End?,” Lucy reveals she is continuing to date Terry, and things are getting serious. Lucy helps Arthur pack for a trip. He will be gone for a month. Arthur says goodbye to Bernadette, and the two embrace. Arthur realizes that he likes having Bernadette in his arms. Nathan then drives him to the airport. As Arthur’s plane takes off, he knows he is on his next journey.

In “The Future,” Arthur thinks about how he will spend Christmas in Australia with Dan and Lucy. In the present, Arthur is in India, and meets with Rajesh Mehra. Rajesh is thrilled to meet Arthur and intrigued to learn about Miriam’s life. Lucy calls to check on Arthur. Arthur thanks her for the call, tells her he is fine, gives her his love, and returns to his visit with Rajesh. Rajesh says such a call is the circle of life, and to enjoy it. Arthur agrees. Rajesh explains that Miriam told him she believed in true love, that she would only ever marry the man she was meant to be with, and that she would be with him for the rest of her life. Rajesh believes Miriam found the love of her life in Arthur. The two men drink a toast to Miriam and watch the sun set.



Analysis

The things people say and do are how they will be remembered, Patrick argues in this final section of the novel. While most of Miriam's early life has been good, and good memories have followed because of her, not everything is golden. No one is perfect, and accidents will happen. Miriam's love for Sonny's brother, and the accidental car crash, led to a scorching, decades-long hatred harbored against her by Sonny. The things people say and do are how they will be remembered, and Sonny certainly has her own memories of Miriam. Arthur does not hate his wife for this, but feels a need to protect and defend her against Sonny's anger. However, the darkest moments of Arthur's journey to find out more about his wife's life have led to a moment of transformation.

Readers should note that Arthur heads out in the rain in heartache and sadness, and that he ends up in the ocean as well. Here, the rain may be seen to symbolize sadness and heartbreak, but it does not. The rain, as water, in conjunction with the water of the ocean, symbolizes a cleansing renewal. Readers should very carefully note that Arthur here has an epiphany. He realizes his wife has not told him about the past because she thought it for the best (especially with memories as painful as the car accident which Miriam clearly did not wish to revisit)—and that he loves her no matter what. The past may not be easy to understand or accept, but it matters, and Arthur has come around to accepting it. He knows he has had a lovely and wonderful life with Miriam, and this is enough. This is symbolized by his tearing up of the old letters, and this action in turn also symbolizes his moving on to the next part of his life.

The next part of Arthur's life is apparent. Arthur now clearly recognizes that he wants to be needed. Knowing he matters to others means a lot to Arthur—and gives him purpose. He recognizes that it is indeed very human to want to be needed, just as Patrick has been arguing all along. The potential for romance with Bernadette is very clear when Arthur considers how much he likes to have Bernadette in his arms. The relationship between Arthur, Lucy, and Dan improves tremendously—and paves the way for a family trip to Australia for the coming Christmas season. Readers should note that the selling of the bracelet by Arthur, save the elephant charm, symbolizes his break with the past—but his acknowledging of where his journey began. He uses some of the money to do good things and then sets out for India to visit Rajesh. One journey of Arthur's life has ended, but another has now begun. As Patrick argues, no journey in life is ever the last.

Discussion Question 1

What does Arthur at last come to believe regarding his wife's past, especially where it concerns his own life? Why? Do you believe Arthur has drawn the correct conclusion? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Do you believe it is fair for Sonny to harbor such hatred for, and to have for so long blamed Miriam for Martin's death? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Arthur choose to travel to India? What is his time there like, especially once he meets Rajesh? What does this mean for Arthur with respect to his next journey in life? Why?

Vocabulary

maniacally, conjured, pristine, condolences, narcissistic



Characters

Arthur Pepper

Arthur Pepper is the 69-year-old widowed husband of Miriam, a retired locksmith, and the father of Lucy and Dan. Arthur struggles with Miriam's death and the growing up of Lucy and Dan by taking comfort in daily routines. Hoping to move on by removing her things from the house, Arthur instead stumbles upon her old bracelet—and sets out on a journey to find out what the charms meant to Miriam.

Along the way, Arthur meets good people who warm up to him quickly because of his charming, friendly nature; Arthur changes, and has his life changed by, those he meets. His journey awakens in him a desire to help others in need, to travel and explore, and to understand that no journey in life is ever the last. Along the way, Arthur also reconnects with his two children, and comes to let go of the past so that he may have his own future.

Miriam Pepper

Miriam Pepper, nee Kempster, is the deceased wife of Arthur, and the mother of Lucy and Dan. Miriam is spoken of, remembered, and reflected upon, but never seen in person, alive. Miriam, as a young woman, was a free spirit who was determined to find love and settle down to have a family.

Miriam's life before Arthur she kept a secret because she thought it was for the best, and because she was content to leave the past in the past and live fully for her present life. Miriam did, however, retain small mementos of her past in the form of a charm bracelet that she ultimately came to wear less and less until she simply tucked it away in a boot.

Lucy Pepper

Lucy Pepper is the daughter of Arthur and Miriam. Having been left by her husband and having suffered a miscarriage, Lucy is struggling for her next step in life while becoming increasingly worried about her father. When Arthur breaks from his routine, Lucy worries he may be suffering from dementia, but only when Arthur reaches out to her and explains what is going on does she relax. Through the latter half of the novel, Lucy and Arthur renew their father-daughter relationship as Lucy accompanies Arthur to Paris and as Arthur later encourages Lucy to date Terry.



Dan Pepper

Dan Pepper is the son of Arthur and Miriam. Now living in Australia where he owns and operates his own car mechanic chop, Dan is happily married and has his own family. Dan travels to London for his dad's seventieth birthday, and the two reconnect. Dan promises he will bring his family over to visit once a year from now on, and Arthur arranges with Lucy to visit Dan and his family in Australia at Christmas.

Bernadette Patterson

Bernadette Patterson is the mother of Nathan and the neighbor of Arthur. A widow in her late thirties, Bernadette is gorgeous and utterly kind. She loves to take care of others, including Nathan and Arthur. Indeed, Bernadette comes to have romantic feelings for Arthur through the novel, and real romance between the two is indeed possible by the end of the novel.

Nathan Patterson

Nathan Patterson is the teenage son of Bernadette. Nathan is very sullen and does not like to talk, but his growing friendship with Arthur brings him out of his shell and gives him a good male role model to look up to. Nathan helps Arthur in his search for clues online, and Arthur helps encourage Nathan to pursue his dream of wanting to be a baker.

Rajesh Mehra

Rajesh Mehra is a wealthy Indian man who is happily married with children. Rajesh is contacted by Arthur through the phone number on the elephant charm. Rajesh reveals he was once a child under the care of Miriam as a nanny, and credits Miriam with helping him to live an honest life. Rajesh insists that Arthur will be most welcome at his home should Arthur ever visit India. At the end of the novel, Arthur does just that.

Mike

Mike is a down-on-his-luck guy in London who owns a dog named Lucy, and who serves to be a source of support and wisdom for Arthur. Mike chases down the pickpocket who steals Arthur's wallet, and tells Arthur that it is possible Miriam did not bring up the past because it was a chapter of her life she was done with, and did not wish to recall. Mike explains this is the case for him, as he wasted five years of his life on drugs. He now wants a good job and a good girl along with a good future.



Sylvie Bourdin

Sylvie Bourdin is one of Miriam's old friends who met her through Chauffant. Sylvie owns and runs the Gold Thimble, a wedding dress shop in Paris that was made possible through Miriam's help and encouragement many years before. Sylvie, work-oriented, never married or had a family, and nearly has a romantic affair with Arthur. It is through Sylvie that Arthur learns of Sonny Yardley.

Sonny Yardley

Sonny Yardley is a jewelry professor at Scarborough College and an old friend of Miriam's. Sonny has harbored a decades-long hatred and anger for Miriam after the accidental death of Sonny's younger brother, Martin. Sonny blames the death on Miriam due to the romance that occurred between Miriam and Martin. However, Sonny is kind enough to later send along letters from Miriam so that Arthur may do as he wishes with them.



Symbols and Symbolism

Charm Bracelet

The charm bracelet symbolizes mystery and important memories. While cleaning out Miriam's old things, Arthur discovers the gold link bracelet with a heart-shaped fastener in one of her boots. There are eight charms on the bracelet, including an elephant, a flower, a book, a paint palette, a tiger, a thimble, a heart, and a ring. Arthur had hoped that cleaning out Miriam's old things would help him to move forward, but the bracelet seems to defy this because it forces him back into the past to learn more about Miriam's life—making the charms curious for him. As it is explained to Arthur in London, a charm bracelet is like wearing memories on the wrist—memories that matter for one reason or another that are worth recalling. Arthur ultimately sells the bracelet as it has no real sentimental value to him, keeping only the elephant charm.

Frederica

Frederica is a fern plant that symbolizes Arthur's love for Miriam. Miriam kept the plant while alive, and the plant lived on after she died. This made Arthur feel guilty for considering throwing it out, after which time he tenderly took care of it and restored it to health out of love for his wife's memory. In effect, he may not have been able to save Miriam, but he could save Frederica.

Elephant Charm

The elephant charm symbolizes guilt, Miriam's time in India as an ayah (nanny), and a journey. The elephant charm, embedded with an emerald, is inscribed with the phone number "Ayah. 0091 832 221 897." It is a gift given in guilt to Miriam by Rajesh Mehra for getting Miriam fired unintentionally. The elephant charm ultimately becomes the only part of the bracelet Arthur keeps, as it propelled him down his newest journey in life.

Tortoise

The tortoise symbolizes Arthur escaping his routine. Arthur is like the turtle, old and slow, but able to still move around. The tortoise escapes from the two kids next door to Arthur when Lucy comes around to see him, learning he has gone to Graystock and fearing he may have dementia. Arthur is like the tortoise—he has gone out of his comfort zone and must now be returned.



Tiger Charm

The tiger charm symbolizes the passions of the past. Tigers are wild, passionate animals. They are kept by Lord Graystock and tiger charms were given out as his calling card. Miriam received such a charm after staying with Graystock, and having a brief, passionate romance with Chauffant. It is something in Miriam's past, and something she does not regret.

Flower Charm

The flower symbolizes the past from which Miriam fled—her own roots. Done in the art nouveau style of the 1920s with a Victorian acrostic, the flower seems to spell out “dearest” based on the arrangement of precious stones on the charm, as well as to feature a pearl in the center. Arthur tries to remember if Miriam's mother was named Pearl, and learns this was indeed the case. Miriam had a difficult home life between her father leaving and her mother's next boyfriend, so it is clear and understandable why she would not want to stick around.

Gold Thimble Charm

The gold thimble symbolizes friendship and following dreams. The gold thimble charm was a gift to Miriam from Sylvie in thanks not only for friendship, but for helping Sylvie to open up her dress shop and fulfilling her dreams. Miriam's wedding to Arthur was a dream come true for her.

Paint Palette Charm

The paint palette symbolizes tragedy and hatred. The paint palette charm was a gift given to Miriam by Sonny Yardley. Sonny harbors intense hatred and anger toward Miriam even to this day over the accidental death of her brother, Martin, which Sonny blames Miriam for. It is the darkest part of Miriam's past, even though it can be argued she cannot be blamed. Arthur accepts things as they are, and declares that he still loves Miriam despite the tragedy.

Water

Water, in the form of rain and the sea, symbolizes renewal. After learning about the death of Martin, Arthur feels heartbroken and desperate to defend his wife. In the pouring rain, he heads down to the sea intent on throwing away the bracelet while wondering how he can live without Miriam, only to have an epiphany. He realizes Miriam protected him from the past because she thought it was for the best. He realizes he can only move on by forgiving and forgetting. As he does so, he becomes happy, dancing in



and out of the sea and getting soaked by the rain. The rain proves to be cleansing and thus symbolizes his renewal.

Miriam's Letters

Miriam's letters to Sonny are torn up by Arthur, and symbolize letting the past go. Arthur reads through the old letters to learn more about the past and to fill in the final pieces of his wife's history. When he is finished reading, he tears up the letters because he is ready to let the past go. He knows about the past now, and that is enough. Keeping the letters would be like holding onto the past, but tearing them up and throwing them out demonstrates Arthur's decision to move forward.



Settings

Thornapple

Thornapple is the small English town near Scarborough where Arthur Pepper makes his home. Located on the border of the country, Thornapple is a warm and friendly place (apart from Vera the gossiping post office worker). It is where Arthur has lived his whole life, and where Miriam grew up and later returned to be with Arthur. Thornapple is also where Lucy lives and teaches school. It is from Thornapple that Arthur sets out on his journey to learn more about Miriam, and it is in Thornapple that Arthur reconnects with his children, grows closer to Bernadette, and serves as a role model for Nathan.

India

India is where Miriam first traveled to get away from home, and India is where Arthur visits at the end of the novel. It was in India that Miriam worked as a nanny to Rajesh, and it was from India that Miriam traveled to Graystock Manor, and later London. Arthur visits India at the end of the novel to experience something new, and to enjoy a new culture. Arthur is warmly welcomed in India by Rajesh.

London

London is the capital of England, and where Arthur travels to confront Chauffant. Arthur feels regret in London, as he never wanted to visit with Miriam, telling her the place would be horrible—only to find out he actually enjoys it. He wishes he had been more adventurous and open-minded while Miriam was alive as a result. It is in London that Arthur meets a wide cast of characters, from the supportive Mike to the troubled Sebastian. It is in London that Arthur comes to be more comfortable with his wife's past, if not yet totally accepting of it.

Paris

Paris is the capital of France, and is where Arthur and Lucy travel so that Arthur may visit the Gold Thimble. Paris, Arthur learns, is where Miriam traveled with Sylvie after Chauffant, and is where Miriam helped Sylvie to establish her wedding dress shop. It is in Paris that Arthur kisses Sylvie, finds himself thinking about Bernadette, and realizes that the things a person says and does will be how others remember them. Paris proves to be a new start in many ways for Arthur, reinvigorating his desire to truly reconnect with his children.

Scarborough College

Scarborough College is where Sonny teaches jewelry, and where Arthur visits to learn more about Miriam. It is at Scarborough that Arthur is unable to meet with Sonny, but where he discovers a painting of his wife. It is also at Scarborough where Arthur is persuaded to do nude modeling for a class of college kids in danger of failing without a model for their final projects.



Themes and Motifs

The Unexpected Depth of Human Life

Author Phaedra Patrick argues that there is more depth to a human life than people often suspect in *The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper*. On the surface, human lives may seem relatively straightforward, but this is rarely ever the case. Often, there is a side to people that others do not know about. This is clearly the case in the novel.

There was more to Miriam than Arthur believed he knew, and he learns this as he discovers the charm bracelet and follows the meaning of each of the charms with respect to his wife's life. He learns his wife, when younger, had a varied and wide-ranging life, spanning continents, romances, and identities. He learns that his wife experienced beautiful and good adventures, as well as suffering heartache and tragedy—from her time in India to her affair with Chauffant to the relationship with Martin. He also learns that, despite her varied past, she wanted to marry and have kids more than anything else—and so Arthur was Miriam's dream come true.

To Lucy, Arthur seems a simple and straightforward kind of guy. He has a routine that he sticks to, and that is that. He will not even take tea at the wrong time of day. However, when Arthur suddenly goes away overnight, Lucy goes into a panic. Her first assumption is that her father has gone crazy. However, she quickly comes to learn her father is far more romantic and far more devastated by Miriam's passing than Lucy had previously realized. She also comes to learn that her father is looking for his next step in life, and looking to do something that will allow others to remember him in a good and positive way.

Arthur's reconnection with Lucy and Dan's reconnection with Lucy allow them to see Lucy far deeper than they have before. They learn about Lucy's miscarriage and discover she has been hiding great emotional pain in order to try to be the caretaker for Arthur. Arthur himself also comes to learn more about Bernadette and Nathan. Nathan is not merely a non-responsive kid, but a teenager who has dreams of becoming a baker. Bernadette is not merely the worrywart of the neighborhood who likes to take care of everyone, but a deeply beautiful woman, inside and out, who has had a cancer scare and who actually has romantic inclinations toward Arthur.

Life is a Series of Journeys

Life is a series of journeys, and no journey ever is the last. In the novel, Arthur makes one overarching journey that encompasses a host of smaller but integral journeys. These journeys help form Arthur's life, help him to learn new things, and allow him to face the future with bright prospects.

Arthur believes that, as a 69-year-old widow at the beginning of the novel, his life has two journeys left. The first journey is small but monumental: he must get over his wife's



death and move on. Second, he must prepare for the final years of his life. However, the discovery of the bracelet propels Arthur down a series of new journeys, including the one major, overarching journey—that he must come to accept his wife’s past and must move on in his own life. The smaller journeys will add up to the larger journey.

Arthur's journeys take him around town, to different parts of England, including London, and as far away as Paris and India (first by call, later by visit). At every step along the way, Arthur learns more about himself, has a better perspective on his wife, and has a better outlook on life itself. For example, speaking with the man in the gray suit and later speaking with Mike, Arthur learns that sometimes the past is meant to be let go of or forgotten because it involves painful memories, or because that part of one’s life is simply over. Arthur comes to accept his wife’s past as it is, realizes he loves her all the more, and realizes he must move on.

Arthur’s newest journey in life—which opens up the possibility for an array of new journeys—comes in accepting that his life is not over, that he wants to be needed, and that he wants to experience new things. By the end of the novel, Arthur stands on the edge of romance with Bernadette. He has reestablished relationships with his children. He is set to journey to India and to Australia. He is set for the greater, metaphysical journey of the next stage of his life, which promises to be just as good, if not better than the last.

The Importance of the Past

The past may not be easy to understand or accept, but it matters, the author argues in her novel *The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper*. So much of Arthur’s life in the present in the novel is predicated on his desire to learn more about Miriam’s past because of the symbolic mystery of the bracelet. Arthur is warned by some—like Sylvie—that he will not like the past that he finds, but he knows the past is crucial to understanding who someone is (or was).

The bracelet offers up the mystery of the past through its eight charms. By tracking down clues and speaking to people involved in Miriam’s life, Arthur is able to reconstruct her time as a new adult, between her teenage years and early twenties prior to meeting him. He discovers a number of things about her past which prove jarring to him not so much because he did not know them, but because he does not think they are in keeping with the woman that he did know.

The most startling things that Arthur learns about his wife have to do with her relationship with Chauffant, her nude modeling for art, and the death of Martin. Arthur quickly comes to accept her modeling as art, but her time with Chauffant baffles him until he learns that the romance was brief and that Miriam quickly saw through the egotistical novelist. Arthur likewise is struck by the death of Martin, but does not and will not blame Miriam for an accident she had no direct control over.



Arthur's acceptance of the past comes through his encounters with others. Arthur learns that there are many reasons a person may want to do away with their past—and that it could be because of painful memories, of simply being done with the past, of being happy in the present, and so on. Arthur himself comes to accept that his wife was still the same wonderful woman he loved and lived with for 40 years as man and wife, whether or not that past was unusual or startling. He comes to realize that his wife did not tell him about the past because she thought it was for the best. He respects her decision retrospectively, and by accepting the past, he can now look to the future.

The Desire to be Needed

The desire to be needed is very much a naturally human emotion. In the novel, Patrick expounds upon the human desire to be needed, to matter, and to have a purpose. When his wife was alive and his children were small, Arthur had a purpose: to take care of his family. With his wife gone and his children grown, Arthur is lonely and lacks purpose.

Arthur embraces his routine because it gives him not only comfort, but purpose. He has requirements of himself every day that have to be met. Bernadette's own desire to take care of Arthur comes not only through her own sense of loss, but because she loves to help and has romantic feelings for Arthur. Arthur comes to accede to Bernadette's request that Arthur talk to Nathan about his future—and Arthur in turn asks for Nathan's help regarding his wife's past. Therein, Arthur, Bernadette, and Nathan fill voids of need in one another's lives, and come to matter. When Bernadette has her cancer scare, she very much needs to be able to tell Arthur about it, and to confide in him about it. Arthur finds he enjoys being there for others.

Lucy, who is without a husband and who has suffered a miscarriage, wants to feel as if she too is needed and has a purpose. She devotes herself to her father as a result. Through Lucy, Arthur comes to realize that, although his kids are grown, they are not invincible, still suffer, and still very much need and want him in their lives. This gives Arthur a renewed sense of purpose in fatherhood, but it also allows him to be able to depend on his children as well.

However, for much of the first part of the novel, Arthur does not recognize any of this. He wants only his routine and his sadness—but his discovery of the charm bracelet gives him a new sense of purpose: he must find out what it means and how it factored into his wife's past. This newfound sense of purpose ultimately paves the way to the real and actual purpose Arthur now has in his life—to begin the next journey in his life, and to matter to the people who want him and need him in their lives, just as Arthur wants and needs them in his.

A Person's Actions are How They are Remembered

In *The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper*, author Phaedra Patrick asserts that the things people say and do are how they will be remembered. Patrick comes to argue this



through Arthur, who in turn explains it as a realization to Lucy while they are both in Paris. The past is a powerful thing, and it is formed extensively by those things which people say and do.

Arthur learns this through his pursuit of Miriam's past. He learns about how her gentleness and honesty inspired Rajesh to live an honest, good life. Rajesh thus has only good and positive memories of Miriam. Miriam's own past was rooted in heartache and difficulty at home—and so she wanted her own stable, happy home and family with Arthur. As one of a number of girls in and out of the lives of the Graystocks and Chauffant, Miriam was scarcely noticed—though her time with Chauffant did inspire a notable poem in memory of his time with her.

Arthur learns as well that Sylvie holds Miriam in high regards as she draws on her memories of Miriam. It was Miriam's encouragement and help that allowed Sylvie to open up her wedding dress shop and achieve her dreams. Arthur learns, however, that not all memories of Miriam are good. Through meeting Sonny, he learns Sonny can only ever blame Miriam (unfairly, in Arthur's mind) for the death of her brother, Martin. The car accident and the relationship between Miriam and Martin haunts Sonny even decades later.

Upon learning these things about Miriam, and seeing what an effect she has had on the lives of others—and how they have recalled her in memory—he is galvanized to begin a new phase, or journey, in his own life. He tells Lucy he worries how people will remember him. Though Lucy reassures him that people will remember him well, Arthur decides to engage his life fully. He could have several decades left to live, and he will not waste them. Instead, he will do good and matter well in the lives of those around him.



Styles

Point of View

Phaedra Patrick relates her novel *The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper* from a third-person limited perspective from the point of view of an unidentified narrator who alternates between following events in Arthur's life, and more limitedly, events in Lucy's life. The third-person narrator allows Patrick to add depth and dimension not only to Arthur's character, but to Lucy's character as well since she becomes such an important part in his life through the course of the novel, just as she had been in the past as a child.

Arthur and Lucy both enter a new stage in life through their reconnecting with one another. The limited perspective of the narration also allows for mystery: the narrator does not know everything, and does not tell the reader everything. This keeps the reader guessing just as Arthur must keep guessing regarding everything from the bracelet's origins and meanings to how Bernadette's test results have come out. This compels the reader to continue reading, just as it compels Arthur to want to seek out answers.

Language and Meaning

Phaedra Patrick tells her novel in language that is gentle and reflective. This is done for a number of reasons. First, the language is reflective of the story's nature: it is essentially about a man getting over the death of his wife and looking for the next phase in his life. There is no need for coarse, cruel, or even crude language in the novel as a result. Second, apart from the very plot of the novel, the language is reflective of the character of Arthur: he is a simple, kind, and gentle man who does not use foul language—and so the narrative language being used to tell his story does not rely on such unkind language, either. Third, the reflective nature of the language has to do with Arthur considering and recalling the past, as well as considering his life in the present, allowing him to draw lessons. Consider, for example, in "The Thimble" when Arthur tells Lucy, "You know, through my travels and meeting people who were part of Miriam's life, I'm learning that it's the things you say and do that people remember you for" (195). Fourth, the novel is meant to be uplifting and encouraging of readers to do good things in their lives, and to never believe their journey is over. The inspirational nature of the novel relies on gentle and kind language to make such an effective message.

Structure

Phaedra Patrick divides her novel *The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper* into 29 unnumbered, titled chapters. Each chapter reflects more a vignette or short story than it does a systematic chapter, as each comprises a core sequence of events or a specific episode in Arthur's overall journey. Just as the charms are not numbered, but stories in



and of themselves, so too are the chapters of Arthur's life not numbered, but given titles reflecting their events. Note that Mike even refers to life's past as a "chapter" while Arthur is in London, and Arthur's own life has become a series of stories, journeys, and adventures rather than a routinely-ordered and numbered sequence of days. The vignette-like chapters in essence become Arthur's own charms, and the book itself his own sort of bracelet.

The plot structure of the novel follows a traditional arc with exposition establishing Arthur's circumstances and back-story in the early chapters. The discovery of the charm bracelet serves as the catalytic event that sets the story into motion and begins the rising action of the narrative. The action continues to rise as Arthur's journey into his wife's past takes him out of his home and across cities, countries, and continents. The climax of the story comes with Arthur's epiphany on the beach and his realization that he loves his wife and is finally able to move on with his own life. The falling action and denouement come in the last chapter, with Arthur's visit to India, his meeting with Rajesh, and the revelation that Arthur has several new journeys ahead of him.



Quotes

After over forty years of marriage it was just him in the house now...

-- Narrator (The Surprise in the Wardrobe)

Importance: Loneliness is still relatively new to Arthur when the novel begins. He takes comfort in routine because it is the one thing that has not changed in his life. His wife is dead and his children are grown, and so the routine also forces him not to think about his loneliness.

Aha. Then that might be your next port of call. You will find out the stories of the charms one by one, yes?

-- Rajesh Mehra (The Elephant)

Importance: Mehra reveals the origins of the elephant charm on the bracelet to Arthur. Mehra verbalizes what is already beginning to form in Arthur's mind: Arthur must seek out the stories behind the charms one by one. It will help him learn more about his wife—but also help him deal with the anniversary of her death.

But the newly discovered charm bracelet was an obstacle to his intentions. It raised questions where once there were none. It had opened a door and he had stepped through it.

-- Narrator (The Great Escape)

Importance: Arthur faces a conundrum the morning after finding the bracelet. He had hoped that by disposing of Miriam's things, he could begin to move on. Now, the bracelet being found means he cannot move on until he fully understands what the bracelet is, what it means, and what it is in context of Miriam's life.

It would make her who she was. I mean, there might be reasons that she didn't tell me. Some people live for the day and don't look back. Why look back at the past if you're happy with the present?

-- Man in the suit in London (London)

Importance: Arthur converses with a young man in his thirties torn between two girls, but wanting to be married. Arthur gives the man some advice, then asks the man if it would bother him if he met a girl who had a life before him that he did not know about (referencing Miriam). The man explains simply that there would probably be a reason for this, perhaps as simple as being happy in the present and having no real use for the past. This comforts Arthur a little.

Charm bracelets are special to people. The charms usually mean something significant and important. It's like wearing memories on your wrist.

-- Jeff (Lucy the Second)

Importance: Here, Mike brings Arthur to his friend Jeff's pawn shop, where Jeff



examines Miriam's charm bracelet. He points out a number of important details and provides some clues for Arthur. He also explains the significance of a charm bracelet.

You know, through my travels and meeting people who were part of Miriam's life, I'm learning that it's the things you say and do that people remember you for.

-- Arthur (The Thimble)

Importance: As Arthur travels with Lucy to Paris to the Gold Thimble, he tells her he has learned a lot. He reveals that he now knows the things people say and do will live after them in the memories of others. This is how the dead are remembered. Arthur can only hope that he will be remembered fondly.

She killed my brother, Martin.

-- Sonny (The Ring)

Importance: Sonny receives the worst information about Miriam's past through Sonny. Sonny blames Miriam for a car accident in which her young brother was attempting to drive to impress Miriam, leading to a crash. The crash in turn led to her brother's death while Miriam walked away with only a scratch. Decades later, Sonny still harbors intense hatred for Miriam, while Arthur still loves Miriam no matter the past.

After all these years, I implore you to search your heart to forgive her.

-- Arthur (Crappy Birthday)

Importance: After learning about Miriam, Martin, and Sonny, Arthur feels it necessary to defend his wife. He writes to Sonny, asking her to let go of the past and to forgive Miriam. He then sets out to mail the letter, desperate to protect and defend his wife. Instead, he ends up down by the sea.

He had to forgive and forget. There was no other way.

-- Arthur (Crappy Birthday)

Importance: Down at the sea, Arthur contemplates throwing away the bracelet for the trouble and heartache it has caused him. Instead, he has an epiphany. He realizes Miriam did not tell him what he has learned because she wanted to protect him, that she thought it was for the best. Arthur forgives her for the past, realizing the only way he can move forward is to forgive her for excluding him.

After that, he took each letter in turn and tore it into tiny squares... It was time to let her past go.

-- Narrator (Letters Home)

Importance: When Sonny passes along Miriam's old letters to Arthur, Arthur stays up late into the night reading them. He learns much more about the past—and about how much Miriam loved him and could not wait to marry him. When he is finished, he symbolically rips up the letters to signify the fact that he is letting the past go. He had forty wonderful years with Miriam, and that was more than enough for him.



He was on his way. On his next journey.
-- Narrator (Journey's End?)

Importance: Here, Will boards a plane to bring him to Australia to visit Dan and his family. He has completed his most recent journey—learning about his wife's past, and learning how to forgive and move on. He now faces his next journey in life—one which will transform him in new ways as he leaves the country to visit his son. It is a new beginning rather than an ending.

To my wonderful wife.
-- Arthur (The Future)

Importance: Arthur journeys to India to meet Rajesh Mehra, but also to experience a new country and a new culture. It is the next part of his life. While there, Rajesh and Arthur reflect fondly on Miriam, and toast to her memory and her kindness. She has inspired them both, and both men now honor her.