

Don't Let Me Go Study Guide

Don't Let Me Go by Catherine Ryan Hyde

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Plot Summary

“Don’t Let Me Go” by Catherine Ryan Hyde revolves around nine year-old Grace and all the lives she manages to touch in her apartment building. When the novel begins, Grace’s mother Eileen is strung out on drugs. Grace sits outside on Billy’s porch, hoping someone will see her and help. Billy, who suffers from agoraphobia, does see her. He asks her about why she is sitting there day after day. She tells Billy about her mother’s addiction and that she is refusing to see her mother until her mother gets clean. So, Billy and all of the neighbors help in the care of Grace, until Eileen finally frees herself from her drug addiction. In the process, the residents of the building learn more about the trials that each of them faces every day. A real community based on friendship is formed. Most importantly, Grace learns that there are people who care and who will always be there for her. Eileen finally overcomes her addiction and realizes that in granting Grace permission to continue her friendship with those who have cared for her, she will be able to finally have a good relationship with her daughter.



Chapters 1 - 7

Summary

Chapter 1

Billy Shine watches the bleary winter afternoon move toward night through his sliding glass door in Los Angeles. Billy speaks to himself and sees that the little girl is still sitting on his front steps. He resolves to see what she wants. Billy is agoraphobic. This means that he is terrified of the outside world. As such, he has not left his apartment for twelve years. The girl does not seem to be more than nine or ten, and she looks depressed. Billy introduces himself. The girl introduces herself as Grace. Billy explains his real name is Donald Feldman. However, since he was once in show business, he needed a good stage name. He explains that he wasn't cut out for dancing, or for life. He tells Grace she should go inside because it is getting dark. She reluctantly goes down the stairs to her apartment.

Billy does not sleep well that night. The next day, Grace is back on his porch. Mrs. Hinman, who lives in the attic apartment, is coming home with a bag of groceries and a bottle of wine. Mrs. Hinman tells Grace that she should be inside, but Grace says she wants to be outside because her mother is sleeping—even though it is four o'clock in the afternoon. Later on, Billy hears a loud pounding sound downstairs. Eventually, it stops. Billy imagines that, perhaps, Grace's mom is not a very good mom. A few minutes later, Billy hears voices in the hall, between Mrs. Hinman and Rayleen, a pretty black girl who works as a manicurist. She begs Mrs. Hinman not to call Child Protective Services on the little girl.

Chapter 2

Grace dislikes Curtis Schoenfeld, whom she calls a stink head. Curtis is one of the children that Grace knows from church meetings, along with Anna and River Lee. Curtis is about twelve and in a wheelchair, and he teases Grace, asking about her mother going out. She calls Curtis a poop head, interrupting the meeting, and forcing Eileen, Grace's mother, to bring her outside to scold her about not being quiet. Grace asks her mother if she is on drugs again. Eileen wants to know what else Grace wants from her, because she goes to meetings, calls Yolanda every day, and is working her ass off. They return to the meeting. Grace has heard the other adults talk about their struggles with drugs, some going so far as to give up their kids for more drugs. After the meeting, Yolanda gives Grace her phone number to call in the event of an emergency. She tells Grace not to tell Eileen. Yolanda then drives Eileen and Grace home.

Chapter 3

Outside, Felipe Alvarez, an upstairs neighbor, is talking to Grace, while Jake Lafferty approaches them, looking unhappy. Jake tells Felipe to leave Grace alone, and Felipe



and Jake exchange racial remarks, until Grace intervenes. Felipe wants to know why Jake always has a chip on his shoulder. He explains that he was only asking Grace why she isn't in school. Before Jake can say anything, Grace intervenes again. Jake asks her why she isn't in school. Jake encourages her to go and try to wake up her mother. When she leaves, Jake and Felipe return to arguing. Grace returns, saying her mother won't wake up, and Jake and Felipe step to the side out of earshot. Felipe leaves to head down the street, while Jake turns back to talk to Grace. As he does, he sees Billy. He shouts, asking Billy what he is looking at. Stunned, Billy shuts the door and falls back. A few hours later, he checks to see if Grace is outside, and she is still there. Billy, unable to walk outside, crawls out on his stomach to talk to Grace.

Billy asks Grace why she is outside once more. She explains that she is outside so somebody knows she is in trouble. Someone who lives in the building has to help so that Grace can stay with her mom. She asks Billy to help her, and Billy says he can't even help himself. Billy feels worthless and useless, and the girl is clearly crestfallen. Billy then slithers back inside for the night.

Chapter 4

Yolanda picks up Grace for school the next day. She explains to Grace that she has had a long talk with Eileen and that Eileen has made promises that she will be there to get Grace from school. Grace tells Yolanda that Eileen has broken promises before. But Eileen is there to pick Grace up. They got to an AA meeting that night on the bus, and a well-put together man looks at Eileen strangely, which makes Grace feel uncomfortable. Eileen takes some kind of pill and a swig of water, explaining to Grace that she has a headache. At the meeting, Eileen looks sleepy, which makes Grace understand that her mom has taken drugs, and it makes Grace angry. Eileen is driven home by an elderly woman named Mary Jo, and Grace has to help get Eileen into the house. Mary Jo stays with Grace until Yolanda shows up.

When Yolanda arrives, she explains to Grace that they have a situation. Yolanda spends the night and brings Grace to school the following day. Rayleen picks her up from school because she has an early afternoon off. She and Yolanda are going to ask Mrs. Hinman to help bring home Grace. They drop off Grace's bookbag, at which time Rayleen sees Eileen passed out in bed. Rayleen examines the kitchen cupboards, seeing they are mostly empty. She decides to order a pizza. Someone calls, and Rayleen takes the phone from Grace, explaining that Eileen has had some issues with her back, and is on heavy medication. Rayleen says she will be taking care of Grace until Eileen is better. She explains she is in Apartment D, upstairs. Rayleen then brings Grace upstairs to talk to Mrs. Hinman. Mrs. Hinman is old and cannot walk twenty blocks (ten each way) to school and back. Rayleen also explains to Mrs. Hinman that she has lied to Grace's social worker, pretending to be a babysitter, and that she will now become a babysitter. They consider having Jake bring home Grace from school, but Rayleen doesn't want Grace to be around a bigoted man. Felipe is a possibility. They then go speak to Felipe, who looks sad, as if he has been crying. He has given up construction to work in a restaurant. Rayleen asks Felipe if he can walk home with Grace from school. Felipe would, but he doesn't want to have to deal with Jake.



Rayleen says she will smooth things over with Jake. All that is needed is someone to watch Grace until Rayleen gets home. Grace suggests Billy. Rayleen doesn't believe that Grace has met Billy. They decide to go and meet him.

Chapter 5

Rayleen and Grace knock on Billy's door. He invites them in, and agrees to letting Grace come over for two hours every afternoon. Grace is so excited she hugs Billy, who is overwhelmed with sensation at the touch of another person after fifteen years of no contact. Grace believes this means Billy likes her, even though she believes nobody else does. He explains he likes her because she is brave. Rayleen thanks him, and then they leave. A few hours later, Jake knocks on Billy's door, wanting to know more about Billy. He asks if Billy is a homosexual, because homosexuals are more likely to be child predators. Billy doesn't answer the question directly, but says that most molesters are married guys Jake's age, and says that Grace is a little girl, not a little boy.

When Grace comes over the following afternoon, she talks about Yolanda being her mother's sponsor at Narcotics Anonymous. She also explains that she told Jake that Billy was a dancer, which Billy takes as the reason why Jake came around to ask questions. Grace asks Billy to teach her to dance, and he agrees to do so.

Chapter 6

The following day, Felipe brings Grace to Rayleen's hair and nail salon on the boulevard. She asks if Felipe will teach her some Spanish, and he agrees. She asks why Felipe is sad, and he says it is grown-up man-woman stuff. Grace asks if Felipe likes her, and Felipe says he does, especially because Grace asked to learn a little Spanish, and that shows him respect. At the salon, Rayleen wants to tackle Grace's hair. Bella, a large Nigerian-American woman, is also working there. Grace likes Bella quickly. Bella cuts Grace's hair and styles it, and Rayleen gives her fake nails. Grace asks if Rayleen likes her, and if so, what does she like. Rayleen says she does like Grace, and likes Grace because Grace is a survivor and doesn't complain.

Chapter 7

Billy is furious that Rayleen didn't tell him where Grace would be, and Billy is so nervous he has bitten his fingernails into stubs. He leaps out into the hall in anger. Rayleen and Grace apologize. Billy then scrambles back inside, and compliments Grace on her hair. He then gives her a tap dance lesson. Eileen knocks on the door and tells him he is too loud. Eileen tells Billy to tell Grace to come home if he sees her. Grace goes down to see her mom, and her mom is already passed out again. She then returns to Billy's, but Billy doesn't want to risk waking Eileen with another lesson. He agrees to watch her on the patio from inside. She works solidly at dancing for an hour. Billy realizes she could be a dancer if she wanted to. Rayleen is happy to see Grace getting along well.



Analysis

When Catherine Ryan Hyde's novel "Don't Let Me Go" begins, Grace Ferguson is a nine year-old with a problem that no young child should ever have to deal with. Her mother is a useless drug addict. Grace knows she is in trouble. So, she begins sitting on Billy's porch, praying that someone will see that she is in trouble. At about the same time, Billy, Jake, Rayleen, Mrs. Hinman, and Felipe, all notice Grace, and they realize that something is indeed wrong. But, it is Billy that Grace really opens up to, explaining the problem that she has.

Each of the characters that Catherine Ryan Hyde introduces to the reader is incredibly unique. Each of them appears to not even notice the others outside of passing greetings. But, Grace gives all of them a point of focus. She serves as a lens that allows them to see one another and to get to know one another over time. This is especially difficult for the agoraphobic Billy, who hasn't been out of his apartment in twelve long years. Only for Grace has he done such a courageous and heroic thing.

While the others are aware of Grace's home problems, it is Rayleen who sees them firsthand. Having survived the foster care system, Rayleen does not want Grace to have to deal with the same issues she has had to deal with years before. As such, she becomes something of the ringleader in getting Grace taken care of. It becomes a community effort, one that will have far-reaching implications –which will result in friendship.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Grace sit on Billy's porch rather than seeking out someone to ask for help? Why does Billy ultimately decide to speak to Grace?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Rayleen decide to become Grace's babysitter? Why is she so willing to do so? Who else agrees to help? Why? Who does not? Why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Billy agree to give Grace tap dance lessons? What does Billy learn about Grace while instructing her? How does this reflect on Billy?

Vocabulary

Comically, disheveled, consensus, inevitable, theatrically, macabre, incomprehensible, indefinable, bellowed, downhearted, phenomenon, cacophony, abysmal.



Chapters 8-14

Summary

Chapter 8

Two days later, Eileen calls for Grace from her apartment steps. Grace is getting a pedicure from Rayleen and eating Chinese food. Eileen looks a wreck, and she tells Grace that she wants her home, now. Grace explains that she is eating, and her mother relents and goes back into her apartment. When Grace goes home, Eileen notices for the first time that Grace's hair has been cut. This infuriates Eileen, who confronts Rayleen. Grace explains her hair was knotted and needed help. Eileen begins crying. She and Grace return to their apartment. An hour later, Grace returns to Rayleen's, asking to spend the night, because her mom is loaded again. Rayleen makes a place for Grace on the couch.

Chapter 9

When Grace goes to Billy's, he notices she is not happy. He asks why. She explains that Jake told Felipe that everything everyone is doing is enabling her mother. Without a reason to quit, and with Grace being cared for, Eileen has no reason to get clean. Grace asks if it is true; Billy does not answer. Grace decides she wants to dance, and Billy worries Eileen will come up angry once more. Billy says if they could get some plywood, they could do dance lessons on the rug, because the rug will muffle the sound of the plywood. She imagines that perhaps Felipe could bring home plywood. Felipe would have to use Jake's truck, but Felipe doesn't want to have to ask Jake. Grace is sad that her mother may not get clean again. She remembers when her mother used to be clean, and everything in their house was clean, and there was food in the kitchen.

When Rayleen arrives, Grace runs to ask for Jake's help with a piece of plywood. Meanwhile, Billy asks Rayleen if they are enabling Eileen. Rayleen has not considered it before. She says it is possible they are enabling her, or that she would still behave the same way, with Grace. Rayleen hates Jake. She hates him as well because he is right.

Chapter 10

Jake readily agrees to getting plywood for Grace, who is ecstatic. She thanks him and shares the good news with Rayleen and Billy, who are surprised but pleased. After dinner at Rayleen's, Jake delivers the plywood. He knocks on the door, and then leaves before Grace answers, only to see the plywood. They go down to thank him, and he tells them the plywood is a gift, especially because tap dance is a good hobby to have, because it is good exercise. They thank him, and he says he can be a nice guy. He asks whether or not Rayleen had heard about his enabling comments, and she tells him that she did not tell Grace that they were wrong comments. With Billy's help, they bring the plywood into his apartment, and then Grace dances.



Chapter 11

Loud bangs that night awaken everyone. Rayleen and Grace go to check on Billy, while Felipe checks on Jake and Mrs. Hinman. They discover as well that somebody has given Grace a gift certificate to Dancer's World for tap shoes. Grace is thrilled. They do not know who it is from. Everyone in the building is accounted for, except for Jake, who is apparently not home. It is speculated the gift certificate might be from Jake. The next day, Grace gets shoes, and explains that the guy who got the gift certificate was grumpy and rude, according to the cashier. So Billy believes it is indeed Jake who got the gift certificate, though he is worried about Jake not being around the night before.

Chapter 12

Grace and the others learn that Jake has committed suicide. Rayleen convenes a meeting of everyone in Billy's apartment so Grace can tell them they need to stop enabling her mother. They have to find a way to stop Eileen from using drugs. Grace suggests using herself as leverage. Rayleen agrees to go and talk to Eileen, telling Eileen she has three choices: Lose Grace to the county, lose Grace to them, or get clean. Grace goes to talk to Mrs. Hinman while Rayleen tries to get a hold of Eileen. Grace asks if Mrs. Hinman knows about Jake, and she says it is such a tragedy because he was only 56 years old, and his whole family had shut him out, including his grown sons. Mrs. Hinman wants to bring out her old sewing machine and make some dresses for Grace.

Downstairs, Mrs. Katz, a social worker, drops by unexpectedly to see how Grace is. Rayleen introduces her to Grace. Grace explains she is doing wonderfully, and Mrs. Katz leaves. Rayleen later breaks down in tears over how the county services never investigate enough, but when they get involved, they go too far.

Chapter 13

Grace asks Billy if she could be a dancer. Billy says she could, if she was willing to put in all the hard work. Grace's mom wakes up, and is alert enough to talk to Rayleen, who comes home from work quickly. Rayleen and Eileen speak outside. Eileen then rushes to Billy's door, banging on it, begging her to come out, saying that she still loves Grace, asking if Grace still loves her. Grace starts to cry, saying she is not sure she can do this, but Billy tells her to be strong. Eileen says she will get better. When Grace does not answer, she goes back to her apartment and slams the door. Grace cries herself to sleep. When Rayleen returns later, she brings Grace back to her apartment, telling Billy she hopes they are doing the right thing.

Chapter 14

Grace meets Peter Lafferty, Jake's son, who is going through his things. Peter is interested to hear that Jake was so kind to Grace before he died. He explains he has five siblings, but he was the only one who spoke to his father every so often, until a few weeks before when Jake went too far. They discover a litter box in Jake's bathroom. There is a cat under Jake's bed. They lure the cat out with a can of salmon. Grace



decides to keep the cat and names him Mr. Lafferty. Peter and Rayleen are allergic to cats, so Grace asks Billy if Mr. Lafferty can live with him. Billy says he is afraid of animals, and Grace blurts out that he is afraid of everything. Grace announces that nobody should have nobody, and then she goes to get the cat's litter box and food from upstairs. But as soon as she ventures out into the hall, her mother grabs her.

Analysis

Perhaps by far the most reviled character, Jake, who seems to be a bitter, angry, and bigoted middle-aged man, also turns out to be depressed. He commits suicide. However, before he dies, he commits two final acts of goodwill for the group, and specifically for Grace. He buys her a sheet of plywood on which to practice tap dancing. Later he gets a gift certificate for Grace to use to buy tap dance shoes. This makes everyone realize that Jake was not totally bad after all. Grace continues on with her dance lessons at Billy's apartment. Already, Grace has had a profound impact on the lives of her neighbors without even realizing it.

Grace, however, is not distracted from the work she knows has to be done. That job is to get her mother clean and off drugs. She decides to use herself as leverage, saying that she will not see her mother until her mother is clean. Everyone ultimately backs Grace on this decision, and Eileen returns to her drug-induced stupor. Interestingly enough, it is Jake who makes a profound statement before he dies. He says that Rayleen, Billy, and the others are enabling Eileen by all that they are doing. This troubles everyone, but they remain committed to their cause, to get Eileen clean. The situation becomes much more desperate when Ms. Katz, from Child Protective Services, begins coming around to check on Grace to see how she is doing.

Discussion Question 1

What does Jake do for Grace and the others before he commits suicide? Why is this important? What implications do his actions have?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe that Jake Lafferty is truly a mean person? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Rayleen lie to Ms. Katz? Is her decision to do so a sound decision? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

Underscore, enabling, pathetically, crestfallen, interjected, punctuated, devoid, exasperated, vigorously.



Chapter 15-21

Summary

Chapter 15

Impatiently, Billy and the cat wait. Two and-a-half hours later, Rayleen shows up looking for Grace. She cannot be found anywhere. Rayleen can't get an answer from the apartment downstairs. Later on, Billy hears tap dancing coming from downstairs, and he knows Grace is okay. He tells Rayleen, who goes to tell Felipe. After Billy falls asleep, he wakes up to see the cat next to him, and screams. The cat ultimately curls up beside Billy and falls asleep. Later that day, Felipe reports that Eileen was at school to pick up Grace. He and Felipe get to talking. Billy explains his parents are filthy rich, with emphasis on the filthy. As Felipe leaves, he tells Billy it is okay if Billy is gay, that he is not prejudiced.

Chapter 16

Felipe and Eileen are both present at Grace's school the following day, but it is Eileen who roughly grabs Grace to bring her home. Grace explains she will be tap dancing in front of almost the entire school for an assembly. Eileen wants to know what Felipe is doing, and Felipe explains he is there to pick up Grace in case Eileen is not. At the apartment, a bag is there for Grace, full of clothes made by Mrs. Hinman. Grace is thrilled. Eileen smokes, and Grace is unhappy she is smoking inside. Eileen nags Grace about her tapping. Grace becomes enraged, telling Eileen all the things that happened while she was gone. As Grace goes to leave, Eileen locks the door with the chain. When Grace goes to climb up on a chair. Eileen pulls it away, and Grace falls to the floor, hitting her right hip and shoulder.

Eileen demands to know why Grace is being so out of control, and she explains that she wants to go see her cat and her friends. Eileen says they tried to take Grace away from her, but Grace counters that they cared for her while Eileen was loaded. Eileen announces she has a headache. She is going to take some aspirin, and Grace should not go anywhere while she does. Grace goes to dance in the kitchen. A short time later, Eileen is out on the couch. Grace leaves the apartment and goes to thank Mrs. Hinman for the dresses.

Chapter 17

Grace shows up at Billy's door, sad and unhappy. She hugs Billy, and she is horribly upset because she couldn't let Billy know where she was. When Grace goes to say hello to her cat, he notices she is limping. He asks how it happened, and Grace explains. In an instant, Billy rushes down the stairs and begins pounding on Eileen's door. He screams that she will never hurt Grace again, but there is no response. Grace brings Billy back to his apartment, and she is amazed at what Billy has done. Grace



wonders why her mother can't get over her addiction if Grace is more important, the way Billy gets over his addiction to his apartment because Grace is more important. Rayleen arrives later, and is impressed, though worried because Billy seems to be very tired and without much energy. Grace asks Rayleen to gather everybody together for a meeting.

Grace tells Billy about the assembly that is coming up in three months. Billy thinks Grace should perform a daring number so she can shine, rather than rely on a safe number. Grace agrees.

Chapter 18

Grace discovers a girl named Emily has moved into Jake's old apartment. She appears to be about eighteen or nineteen. Emily is from Iowa. Emily heads upstairs as Mrs. Hinman comes down. Grace declares the meeting is about how people shouldn't be alone. She wants to know why everyone is alone. Mrs. Hinman explains that she was deeply in love with her husband. When he passed away, she was alone because she had let a lot of friendships drift away. She and her husband Marv ended up with something missing in their lives. Yolanda arrives and asks about Grace being taken away from her mother, and Grace explains the situation. Yolanda finds it brilliant. Yolanda says she is with them, and goes down to inform Eileen that she needs to be clean for thirty days before she can get Grace back.

Grace goes to see Billy. She tells him she wants him in the audience for her show. Billy says he doesn't know if he can. The next day, Emily moves out, saying the room she has rented has bad energy in it.

Chapter 19

Billy breaks out his own dance shoes. He plots out a dance routine for Grace while the cat watches. Grace arrives and introduces Billy to their new neighbor, Jesse, a black man in his forties with a gray beard and an earring stud in his left ear. Jesse is not worried about Emily or the apartment, saying he will chase away bad spirits by burning white sage. She believes Jesse likes Rayleen, because he said he was too busy to attend their meeting, until he met Rayleen. Grace heads out to organize the meeting, and Billy realizes he will have to be at Grace's performance.

Chapter 20

At the next meeting, Grace prods the others to speak about being alone following Mrs. Hinman's previous revelation. Rayleen admits she's feeling pressured and isn't ready to speak about it. Felipe decides he will go next. Felipe explains that up until a few weeks before, he was engaged and had a little son. She has left him for another man whom she had been seeing all along. He asks how he is supposed to see his son Diego. He receives the reply that maybe Diego is not his son. Billy is too tense to remain in the room any longer, so he leaves.



Jesse decides to speak next. He explains that he grew up in the area, but he is only back from his home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, because his mother is dying. He will be leaving soon. He explains that he and his mother never really got along, that they never really saw eye to eye. He says while they did not get along, he loves her, and it is tough to break a bond with a mother. This causes Grace to cry, and everyone huddles around her. She rushes out, saying she must go and see her cat. In reality, she wants to see Billy. Grace tells Billy that she misses her mother. Grace goes over to see how the meeting is going, and Jesse is apologizing to everyone for making Grace cry. Jesse later apologizes for making Grace cry, and Grace explains he didn't do it intentionally, that he was only telling the truth. Grace then goes down to see her mom, who is almost awake. Grace tells Eileen she loves her, but Eileen swats at her half-consciously, hitting Grace. Grace cries and runs to Rayleen's. Rayleen makes her a sandwich, and Grace asks if she and Jesse are getting along well. Rayleen is annoyed, saying she doesn't want to be fixed up with a man she barely knows. Grace then goes to Billy's.

Grace tells Billy she doesn't think Rayleen likes Jesse being back, and Billy says it usually takes more than just liking to get people to go out. Billy says he is going to try to walk a tiny bit of the way to school with Grace and Rayleen. Grace is excited. Billy says he doesn't want the new guy to think he is a freak.

Chapter 21

Jesse comes to Billy's apartment with a bottle of red wine and two glasses. Billy explains the situation with Grace. Jesse invites Billy to his apartment for the smudging ceremony. He asks about Rayleen, and whether or not Rayleen could be interested in her, because he is getting mixed signals. Billy admits to not knowing too much about Rayleen. Billy suggests giving Rayleen more time, because Rayleen is an incredibly good person. Jesse hugs Billy and says thank you to him, and then heads down the hall. Billy does not sleep that night.

The following morning, Grace and Rayleen hold Billy's hands, and he goes down the front steps. He even makes it three buildings down before deciding to turn back. He runs back and finds himself locked out of the building. Mrs. Hinman looks down from the window and says she will head on down. But Billy begins to panic, banging against the door, and it is Jesse who opens it. Jesse tells Billy not to give up, because he had an uncle who was also agoraphobic.

Analysis

It is incredibly difficult for Grace to refuse to see her mother, and seemingly just as difficult for Eileen to not see Grace. Ultimately, Eileen is compelled to seize her own daughter, but is not compelled to choose her daughter above drugs, for Eileen goes back to drugs without batting an eye. This leaves Grace up to her own devices, and Grace ultimately returns to her newly found friends and neighbors, in order to continue on with the plan. However, the involvement of both Yolanda and county services gives Eileen pause to think at least.



At the same time, Jesse moves into the building, and Jesse proves to be a valuable ally –as well as a good friend –in the building’s struggle to see that Grace’s mom gets clean. Jesse is into alternative healing and arts, and his own cause for appearance –to see his mother before his mother dies –reminds everyone (especially Grace) of the gravity of the situation. There is a lot at stake that goes beyond being swept into the foster care system, or being able to keep up a charade in front of Ms. Katz. Eileen’s very life is at stake. Not only do drugs kill mothers, but they also emotionally kill children. There is a strong bond between mothers and their children, no matter what the mother is like, and these bonds are hard to break.

At the same time that Eileen begins to deal with her own struggles, Billy begins to deal with his own struggle more and more. Every step Billy takes out of his apartment is a step in the right direction, and is a step toward –and in support of –Grace. Before Grace, Billy had no real reason to get back and try life again. But, with Grace, he has a very real reason for it.

Discussion Question 1

What reflective importance does Jesse bring to bear on Grace’s situation? What is so harrowing and upsetting to Grace about what Jesse reveals?

Discussion Question 2

Before he died, Jake charged the others that their actions were only enabling Eileen. Was Jake correct? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What similarities are there between Eileen and Billy? How are the two different? How do they each battle their own addictions? How does Grace help them to do so?

Vocabulary

Peripheral, consciousness, elaborate, aspect, attribute, uncharacteristic, momentous, volatile, tragedies, subsequent, indignation, choreography, syncopated, sophisticated, insubstantial, amiable.



Chapters 22-28

Summary

Chapter 22

Grace and Billy head upstairs to Jesse's apartment. Rayleen has cut and blow-dried Billy's hair, and he now looks like a regular person. Jesse performs the smudging ceremony, burning white sage. Jesse smudges his neighbors as well. The next day, Jesse goes along with Grace and Rayleen to see if they can get Billy out of the apartment for longer. They head down to the school, and Billy makes it all the way there. He then turns around and charges home, with Jesse in tow. Rayleen apologizes for being grouchy with Grace the other day and explains she just doesn't want to be in a relationship yet.

Chapter 23

Rayleen visits Billy. She says she isn't very trusting with men and that she has issues from being in the foster care system. Rayleen is worried that she is too shut-off from people, like Jake Lafferty was. Billy says that isn't the case. He tells her she doesn't have to decide whether or not to marry Jesse, but whether or not to go grab a coffee with him.

Mrs. Hinman comes to visit Billy later on, waking him up from a nap. She asks him about a dance outfit for Grace and why Billy has kept himself shut up in his apartment for more than a decade. She wonders how he survives alone because she is alone herself at age eighty-nine, while Billy is thirty-seven. He explains he has everything delivered to his house, but he must pay extra because of the bad neighborhood. He also explains his parents deposit money into his bank account once a month—just enough to get by. He also doesn't have a phone, just to save some money each month. He reassures Mrs. Hinman that she has neighbors who will help her if need be. She says she feels better now and remarks that Grace has changed everything.

Billy helps Grace practice for the school assembly. She is intrigued to know if Jesse and Rayleen have gone out. Rayleen gives Billy a \$20 to order pizza, saying she is going out for the night. Grace is thrilled. Later on, Grace asks Billy what happened to him. Billy explains he's always had panic attacks. Dancing helped him to get through those panic attacks. But, eventually, he began having them on the way to shows and auditions. He started going to fewer and fewer, until he finally stopped. Staying inside becomes addictive, he explains. Grace tells Billy she wants to be a dancer because he has inspired her.

Chapter 24

While rehearsing, Grace and Billy hear someone knocking on Rayleen's door. They go to investigate. It is Ms. Katz. Billy is nervous, but invites her in. Grace explains she



mostly lives at Rayleen's place. Ms. Katz takes notes. She explains that she has just spoken to Eileen, who has no idea about any back injuries. Ms. Katz goes on to say that if Grace is living with Rayleen or Billy, there is a problem, because neither are registered as foster parents. As Ms. Katz goes to leave, saying she needs to meet with Rayleen another time, Grace panics, saying how happy she is and that she doesn't want to be taken away from her mother, and she begs Ms. Katz to watch her dance. Ms. Katz says she is impressed, but says she will be back after six to talk to Rayleen. Grace is mortified. Billy tells her to dance, that it will bring her back into the moment. Billy says he will dance with Grace. The two dance begin to dance. Then, they hear the knock on Rayleen's door.

Chapter 25

Rayleen reveals that they only have another month. Grace is sad. Her dance is in more than a month away, and her mom may not get clean in that time. Billy walks Rayleen to the end of the hall, where Rayleen's legs give out. Rayleen tells Billy that she could try an application to be a foster parent, but that once Grace is in the system, she will probably be lost. Meanwhile, Grace calls Yolanda to fill her in on the situation, and Yolanda says she will kick some addict's butt. The next morning, Billy hears Yolanda banging on Eileen's door. Billy makes some coffee and brings it downstairs to Yolanda. Yolanda thanks him and explains she's cleaning out Eileen's place by flushing everything she's got. Then after work, Yolanda will have to come back and see if Eileen has gotten more because drugs can be obtained with things other than money.

Grace feels like she is having a panic attack, and Billy tells her to dance it off. Yolanda visits Billy later on, returning his coffee pot. Rayleen reveals that Eileen is taking Oxy and hydrocodone, very heavy painkillers that can string people out for days. Yolanda believes Eileen has a chance, but it is slim. Everything now depends on Eileen. But only three addicts in on hundred ever get clean.

That night, Billy has a nightmare, and Grace goes to his apartment to check on him. She wants to know what the matter is. Grace tells Billy she will always find him. She tells him he is her best friend. Billy stays up the rest of the night.

Chapter 26

Grace, Rayleen, and Jesse are watching TV when Grace thinks she hears Yolanda. Waiting for Yolanda to come upstairs, which she always does, Grace gets sick to her stomach because she is so nervous. Yolanda shows up. She says Eileen is clean for the first time in a week. She knows that the county has been around. It put the fear of God in her. If Eileen can stay clean long enough, Yolanda believes she can talk some sense into Eileen. On the way home from school the next day, Grace sees Ms. Katz drive by. She has shown up for a surprise meeting. Grace gets a note from her mom saying she has been clean for two days, and she is doing it all for Grace. Grace is scared to believe it. Yolanda later reports that the county lady is going to be visiting between two and four times a month to make sure that Eileen stays clean. Grace brings



news of this to Billy. Billy thinks Grace should be happy about the good news while she can. Billy decides to teach Grace a waltz.

Chapter 27

Twenty-three days later, Rayleen knocks on Billy's door in the middle of the day when she should normally be at work. She explains that Jesse's mom has taken a turn for the worse. Rayleen will be going with Jesse to his mother's place. So, Billy will have to watch Grace for a few days and take her to school. Felipe says he will help, even though it is going to cut into his sleep schedule, but he will try. Billy tells Rayleen they will work it out. Felipe goes with Billy to bring Grace to school the next day, and Felipe tells Billy he has accomplished a lot. On the way home, an Hispanic male ridicules them, calling them gay. Felipe says that despite the cruelties of life, you have to do life anyway.

The next day, Billy walks Grace to school. He panics on the way there. Grace encourages him to dance with her the rest of the way, which they do. Billy then runs home. Later, Grace tells Billy she is afraid of everything that is coming. This includes the dance and her mom staying clean.

Chapter 28

Billy and Grace dance to school every day the rest of the week. More and more people watch, interested and curious. But, one morning Billy trips and falls, and his nose begins bleeding. A family rushes out to help. Grace brings Billy back home where his nose stops bleeding, but his face is all swollen up. Grace gets Billy some aspirin from Rayleen's apartment and gets Felipe to come down to check on Billy. Thankfully, his nose is not broken. Rayleen and Jesse return. He explains his mom has died. Jesse says he will take care of Billy while Grace goes to school with Felipe.

Analysis

The lives of the characters living in Grace's apartment building shift. Felipe's work schedule is altered; Mrs. Hinman has increased difficulties in getting around; and, Jesse and Rayleen leave for a short time. Grace comes to depend more and more on Billy. Life is full of change and circumstances that affect the way people live and do things. Billy has to step up to the plate to handle the changes that have come his way, and will have to do things he never imagined he would do again in order to take care of Grace. Indeed, changing circumstances also make it apparent to Eileen that she needs to clean up her act: there is no tomorrow, there are no more chances. She either has to clean up her act, or lose Grace forever. Indeed, her own life even hangs in the balance because of her dependency.

Interestingly enough, both Billy and Eileen appear to begin to recover. Billy is able to walk Grace all the way to school; Eileen is clean for more than two days, and she is able to have a rational discussion with Yolanda about the situation and everything that could happen if Eileen doesn't get her act together. Yolanda reports to the others not to



get overexcited, but this is a modicum of progress. Billy tells Grace to be happy for that, at least.

However, the biggest challenges for both Billy and Eileen are still to come. To get Grace back, Eileen must be clean for at least thirty days. Thereafter, she must stay clean because Ms. Katz will be visiting two to four times a month. One slip-up, and Grace is gone. Billy's greatest challenge also looms, which is going to Grace's dance performance. He is absolutely dreading it, but making progress toward it.

Discussion Question 1

When Yolanda becomes involved in Grace's plan, whose side does she take? Why? Is she correct in doing so? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Grace come to depend on Billy for getting her to school? How does Billy respond to this? Is he successful? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What are the most difficult things that lie ahead for both Eileen and Billy? How are they working toward these things?

Vocabulary

Preposterous, famine, slaughtered, bemoan, exertion, appreciable, acrid.



Chapters 29-34

Summary

Chapter 29

Billy explains his bad luck to Jesse. He also believes he cannot go to Grace's dance performance. Jesse says Billy must go. Billy explains that this is why he refused for so long to let people in –because they come to depend on you. Billy is also worried about appearing in public looking so ugly. Jesse offers him the use of sunglasses and a hat. Jesse says that friends don't just depend on you. You can depend on them. Grace visits Billy over the weekend several times to see how he is doing.

On Monday, Jesse brings some natural, non-drug, herbal pills to Billy so he can take them. They are Valerian root and Kava Kava. Jesse also brings concealer, to help with Billy's face. That night, Rayleen, Jesse, Billy, Felipe, and Mrs. Hinman all go to Grace's assembly. Eileen and Yolanda are already there. Eileen shoots dirty looks at the others. The show gets underway. Grace eventually takes the stage, and Billy says she looks beautiful. She performs perfectly. Billy and the audience get to their feet to applaud. Jesse throws a rose on stage that Grace picks up. Billy knows Grace is born to dance. Everyone tells Grace how well she did, but Eileen interrupts, dragging Grace away. Eileen tells them she has been clean for thirty days and shows them a bright orange plastic disc with gold writing on it . It says that she is taking her daughter back. If any of them ever go near Grace again, she will call the police and charge them with kidnapping.

Chapter 30

Grace is not happy to be home. Eileen is not amused by this, because all Grace wants to talk about are the neighbors and a cat. Yolanda comes over the next day with pizza. She mediates the issue between Grace and Eileen. Eileen is angry that Grace is miserable without the neighbors. Yolanda explains that Grace was coming alive with the neighbors. Yolanda talks straight with Eileen, saying that Eileen had checked out for the past year. So, others moved in to help Grace, and they all bonded. But, Eileen wants no more contact. She believes that Grace will get over it. Yolanda leaves. The next morning, Grace writes a note to Billy, and slips it under his door.

Eileen agrees to smoke outside from now on. Grace thanks her. Grace asks to stay home from school because her stomach is upset, and Eileen consents. Grace asks her to get her some ginger ale, and Eileen agrees. When she leaves, Grace runs up to Billy's apartment. He has left her a note in return, saying she is the shiniest thing ever. When Eileen gets home, she says perhaps a compromise is in order, feeling bad that she has made her daughter physically ill.

Chapter 31



Eileen goes to Billy for the cat. She tells Billy she will be back in an hour for the cat's things, and that Billy should write a note to Grace on how to take care of the cat. But the cat will not go with Eileen, so she brings Grace up to get the cat. Grace feels bad that Billy will be all alone. Billy tells her to take the cat. Twelve days later, Rayleen says that Jesse is going back home, and she is going with him. Jesse later stops by to say goodbye with some gifts –including an old set of red silk pajamas, a half-burned sage stick, and his car –which is being left in Felipe's name, but is intended for Billy, Felipe, and Mrs. Hinman. Three days later, Rayleen and Jesse leave. Four days later, the building superintendent, Casper, as well as Felipe and his girlfriend, Clara, move Mrs. Hinman downstairs into Rayleen's old apartment. Grace leaves Billy another note, but Grace does not come for the note he writes her in response.

Three months later, Felipe says he is moving in with Clara. As such, he will be leaving. Felipe tells Billy to take his chances to be happy. A month later, Billy sees Grace in the hall, but Eileen pulls her away. Billy then gets a letter from Rayleen, filling him in on everything that has happened. As a foster parent, she and Jesse have taken in Jamal, the four-year-old orphan of an overdose. Four months later, Mrs. Hinman dies. Felipe and Billy hold a memorial for her. Months pass again, and Billy realizes a whole year has gone by.

Chapter 32

Yolanda comes over. Grace is no longer dancing because she is bored of doing the same dance over and over again. However, lessons are too expensive. Yolanda has been going through the steps of the recovery program with Eileen, who makes amends with Grace. Eileen is sorry for taking Grace away from the neighbors. Yolanda and Grace tell her that “sorry” doesn't cut it, that there has to be action behind the word. At the church meeting that night, speakers talk about committing to God, and accepting things in life, or not accepting the bad things. Eileen herself says she used to think she knew a lot, but now, she doesn't know a single thing. Yolanda applauds this. Grace also runs into Curtis. She tells him that she hopes his parents get their act together. She explains she won't wish harm on anyone.

Chapter 33

At the end of June, Eileen goes to talk to Billy. She begins crying. She explains she is in a twelve-step program and that she needs to make amends with Billy. Billy explains the entire situation was to get Eileen cleaned up, so Grace could have her mom back. A few moments after Eileen leaves, Grace comes shrieking and cheering at Billy's door, asking him when they can dance.

Chapter 34

Billy, Grace, Felipe, and Clara go outside Los Angeles so they can see the stars. Grace has never seen them before. She is amazed. She knows that, like the stars, whether she can see them or not, people who love her will always be there.



Analysis

Eileen's physical recovery does not mean an immediate emotional recovery, as Grace, Yolanda, and the others come to find out. Eileen forbids Grace from seeing Billy, or anyone else, and is enraged that Grace should plot against her. However, Yolanda is quick to defend Grace, telling Eileen the cold, hard truth –that the entire situation is Eileen's fault. Eileen, entering a twelve-step recovery program, begins to make better changes in her life, including making peace with those that she has wronged. This is especially true of Grace, whom she ultimately comes to an understanding with. The hope for a better future is there.

Billy, meanwhile, overcomes his addiction to his room to such an extent that he is able to go out and do things, such as looking at the stars –all the way beyond the city of Los Angeles. He is also given permission to see Grace again, and Grace is overjoyed. Billy maintains his friendship with Felipe and Clara, as well, even though by that time, everyone else has moved out of the building or died. Billy would have essentially been all alone in the building –not for a lack of trying –but because the new couples did not wish to be friendly with him. Without Grace, Billy would have had no friends in the building at all. Without Billy, Grace would have had no friends in the building either. By allowing Billy and Grace to be friends, Eileen opens the door for friendship with her daughter.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Eileen forbid Grace from seeing Billy or any of the others following her thirtieth day of being clean? What is the effect on Grace? What is the effect on the others?

Discussion Question 2

How does life change for Billy in the year that Grace is forbidden from seeing him or the others? How does Billy respond? Could he be expected to respond any differently? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Eileen ultimately allow Grace to see Billy once again? What happens between Grace and her mother as a result? What happens to Billy as a result? Why?

Vocabulary

Assimilated, retroactively, traumatic, plaintive, ferociously, extracted, notoriously, excruciating.



Characters

Grace Ferguson

Grace Ferguson is the nine-year old protagonist of the novel "Don't Let Me Go" by Catherine Ryan Hyde. Grace is a kind, sweet, and thoughtful little girl who is the daughter of Eileen, a drug addict. Grace understands that her situation is dire. She begins sitting on Billy's front porch in hopes that someone will see that she is in trouble. Ultimately, all of the residents in the building discover that she is in trouble because of her courageous act. The members of the building, from Billy to Rayleen to Jake, all band together to help her out. Ultimately, the goal is for Eileen to get clean. Grace argues that she should not see her mother until such time. The others reluctantly agree. During this time, Billy teaches Grace how to tap dance, and all the neighbors -who have rarely spoken with one another before- become friends.

Ultimately, Eileen does get clean, but she takes Grace away from the others. Grace is miserable without being able to see Billy, Rayleen, Felipe, Mrs. Hinman, and Jesse. An entire year goes by in which time Rayleen, Jesse, and Felipe move out and Mrs. Hinman passes away. Only Billy remains in the building, and Eileen finally allows Grace to see Billy once again. This ultimately helps to solidify the relationship between Grace and Eileen.

Billy Shine

Billy Shine is a thirty-seven year-old man who lives in the same apartment building as Grace. His real name is Donald Feldman. He is a gay, a former professional dancer (with Billy Shine being his stage name). He now suffers from agoraphobia, which means that he is prone to panic attacks in the outside world. For the first time in twelve years, he ventures outside his apartment when Grace begins sitting on his front porch. He wants to find out what's wrong with her. Over time, Billy comes to help take care of Grace, and he teaches her how to dance. He protects her against Eileen, and even overcomes his agoraphobia to walk Grace to school. He manages to attend her dance performance at the school assembly with the others. When Grace is forbidden to see Billy anymore, his heart breaks. Only after a year is Grace allowed to come back to visit him. This gives Billy something to look forward to.

Rayleen Johnson

Rayleen Johnson is the beautiful, black neighbor of Billy Shine. She works as a manicurist. She is a product of the foster care system. Rayleen has severe trust issues with men, though she ultimately ends up dating new tenant Jesse. Rayleen spearheads the effort to take care of Grace, going so far as to lie to the social worker by saying that she is taking care of Grace as a babysitter while Eileen gets over a back injury. After



Grace is reunited with her drug-free mother and Rayleen moves out with Jesse, Rayleen keeps in touch with Billy through letters.

Jake Lafferty

At fifty-six years old, Jake Lafferty is a bigoted, unkind man who lives in the apartment building on the second floor. He has six grown children who refuse to speak to him. He suffers from depression. When he learns about what is going on with Grace, he surprises everyone by helping out with buying plywood for Grace to tap dance on. He gives her a gift certificate to buy tap dance shoes. Ultimately, Jake commits suicide. His cat becomes Grace's pet.

Felipe Alvarez

Felipe Alvarez is the kind, Hispanic tenant who lives on the second floor. He is a former construction worker who now works in restaurants. Having been abandoned by his wife and young son, he lives alone. He becomes part of the active effort to take care of Grace. He even helps Billy to overcome his agoraphobia. Felipe ultimately ends up dating a shy girl named Clara, and he moves out with her.

Eileen Ferguson

Eileen Ferguson is the mother of Grace, and the tenant who lives in the basement apartment. For unknown reasons, she has become addicted to painkillers. She spends days strung out on them, so deeply unconscious that she cannot be awakened. She is furious when she learns that Grace and the neighbors are using Grace against her to get clean. When child services and Yolanda, Eileen's sponsor, become involved, Eileen has no choice but to get clean. Thirty days later, as part of the deal, she gets Grace back. She forbids her from seeing Billy or the others for a year. As Eileen goes through the twelve-step program, she apologizes to those whom she has wronged -including Grace -and allows her to see Billy and the others again.

Mrs. Hinman

Mrs. Hinman is the kind, sweet, eighty-nine year-old widow who lives in the attic apartment of the building. Since she is adept at sewing and crafting, she begins to make clothes for Grace. When Rayleen moves out, Mrs. Hinman takes Rayleen's apartment, but she dies a year later.

Ms. Katz

Ms. Katz is a social worker from Los Angeles County Child Protective Services. She is called in to handle Grace's case. At first she is fooled by Grace's plight, but she later



becomes wise to it. She ultimately determines that, with Eileen clean, Grace can stay with her. However, Ms. Katz will be visiting Eileen two to four times a month, unannounced.

Emily

Emily is the eighteen year-old tenant who spends one night in Jake's old apartment before moving out. She is from Iowa. Though very nervous, she is very friendly toward Grace. Emily leaves because she says there is bad energy in the apartment.

Jesse

Jesse is the forty-something black man who moves into the apartment vacated by Emily. He is incredibly confident, kind, and patient. He specializes in alternative healing and herbal remedies. He has come to stay in Los Angeles for a few months from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, for his mother is dying. Jesse becomes a ready member of the group protecting Grace, and he ultimately falls in love with Rayleen. The two end up moving out together.



Symbols and Symbolism

Key

A key is carried by Grace throughout the novel. The key is how Grace gets into and out of her apartment whenever her mother is strung out on pills. The key is carefully guarded by Grace, for it allows her to get outside to make sure someone can see she is in trouble.

Plywood

A sheet of plywood is purchased by Jake Lafferty for Grace. She can practice tap dancing on it. The plywood is settled on Billy's carpeted living room floor, so that Grace's tapping will not wake up her mother.

Tap Dance Shoes

When Jake gives Rayleen a gift certificate to Dance World, Grace is able to buy her very own pair of tap dance shoes for dancing.

Clothes

Grace's clothes are dingy, dirty, and very worn. So, Mrs. Hinman decides to create new clothing for Grace, making everything from shirts and pants to dresses for her.

Orange Disc

An orange, key-chain-sized disc with gold writing is carried around by Eileen following thirty days of being clean. She lords it over Billy and the others at the end of Grace's dance performance, which is before Eileen takes Grace back.



Settings

Los Angeles

Located in southern California, Los Angeles is a diversely populated city that is home to the apartment building where Grace, Billy, and the others all live. The neighborhood in which Grace and the others live, however, is not a good neighborhood. It is obviously in a poorer part of Los Angeles.

Apartment Building

The apartment building, located in Los Angeles, is where much of the novel takes place. It is where Grace, Eileen, Billy, Mrs. Hinman, Jake, Felipe, Jesse, Rayleen, and Emily all live at one point or another. The apartment building is also home to Billy's porch, where Billy and the others first see Grace.

The Boulevard

The Boulevard is one of the famous main roads in Los Angeles. It is where the hair and nail salon at which Rayleen works is located.

Billy's Porch

Billy's porch is located on the ground floor level of the apartment building in which Billy lives. It is where Billy first finds Grace, who has chosen to sit there so someone will see she is in trouble. The porch later serves as an area for tap dancing lessons.

School

School is where Grace attends class. It is located ten blocks away from the apartment building. Eileen, Yolanda, Rayleen, Felipe, and Billy take turns walking Grace to and from school. School is also where Grace's dance performance is located and attended by everyone in the building.



Themes and Motifs

Friendship

Friendship is one of the major and dominant themes in Catherine Ryan Hyde's novel "Don't Let Me Go". Friendship involves mutual feelings of platonic love, compassion, concern, and loyalty, emotional and physical support and encouragement, for one or more people based on simple affinity or a cause for unity. In the novel, Grace serves to be the progenitor of such friendship.

When the novel begins, the tenants of the apartment building are all passing acquaintances. They say hello, but go about their own lives. They seemingly have nothing in common until Grace is discovered on Billy's porch. Grace becomes the something they all have in common, as they all endeavor to support, protect, care for, and help Grace in her struggle against her mother's drug addiction. Grace organizes weekly meetings, gets the tenants to talk to one another about themselves, and to work together. The friendship that grows between Grace and the others is infectious between the others themselves.

Throughout the novel, each of the tenants work with one another to assist Grace in some way. Mrs. Hinman creates new clothing for Grace, while Billy teaches Grace how to dance and how to lose her pain while dancing. Rayleen acts as a surrogate mother in many ways for Grace, while Felipe walks Grace home from school every day. Billy provides emotional support to Rayleen, who becomes romantically involved with Jesse, who in turns helps take care of Billy when Billy trips and injures himself. The apartment building becomes a community because of the newly found friendships.

Diversity

Diversity is a dominant theme in the novel "Don't Let Me Go" by Catherine Ryan Hyde. Diversity includes a mix of peoples, faiths, backgrounds, races, beliefs, and cultures. The novel is set in Los Angeles, a very diverse place to live. As such, the characters in the novel are very diverse, clashing with one another and, sometimes, their own selves. Such diversity can also mean good compatibility. Both are on display in the novel.

In terms of characters, Billy is a white, gay, agoraphobic Jewish former dancer. Rayleen is a single black woman who works as a manicurist. Felipe is Hispanic. He works in construction and, later, in restaurants. Jake Lafferty is the stereotypical white, middle-aged bigot with a heart of gold. Grace and Eileen are white. Jesse is a black man who is into alternative healing and herbal remedies. Yolanda is a Christian sponsor of an unidentified race from the church where Eileen seeks counseling. (Indeed, all of the characters believe in God.) Mrs. Hinman is an elderly, sweet old white woman.

Friction arises initially between Jake and Felipe (because of being Hispanic), and Jake and Billy (because of his homosexuality). The issues Jake has with Felipe and Billy later



prove inconsequential when Grace is involved. Friction is also seen when a passerby, who happens to be Hispanic, sees Felipe holding Billy's hand to steady him. He calls both men gay. This causes Felipe to temporarily break contact with Billy.

Compatibility also arises from diversity. Grace is the initial locus that brings everyone together. Everyone is able to contribute something to the common cause of Grace. The work schedules of Rayleen and Felipe allow them to walk to and from school with Grace. Mrs. Hinman possesses skills and talents from a bygone era. She is able to knit clothing for Grace. Billy is able to teach Grace how to tap dance. Everyone contributes in some way to Grace's welfare, due to their distinct backgrounds.

Self-Discovery

Self-discovery is a major theme in the novel "Don't Let Me Go" by Catherine Ryan Hyde. Self-discovery includes the moral and spiritual maturation of an individual based on real-world experiences. These experiences lead the individual to achieve a goal and/or learn something about their own self. Self-discovery is especially apparent with Rayleen and Billy in the novel.

When the novel begins, Rayleen works and comes home. She is content with being alone, for she does not trust men, and still hurts from her time in the foster care system. Indeed, she appears to be just getting by in terms of an actual life. Only when Grace enters the picture does Rayleen's life change. Her tentative friendships with Felipe and Billy blossom into real, close friendships, and she is able to trust men enough to begin a relationship with Jesse. Eventually, working and coming home are not enough for Rayleen anymore, who goes so far as to support Jesse when his mother dies, ultimately moving out with Jesse later on. As such, she is able to overcome her past and become a better human being.

When the novel begins, Billy has been a shut-in for twelve years, never bothering to go outside or make friends -until Grace enters his life. Brought on by Billy's panic attacks, his agoraphobia ultimately vanishes when he has to go outside to take care of Grace. Eventually, he is able to freely move around the building, then the city, and then outside the city once more. In terms of being able to be friends, he learns that he not only can be depended upon, but he can depend on others for help in troubled times. As such, he is able to find happiness and live a fuller life.

Styles

Point of View

Catherine Ryan Hyde writes "Don't Let Me Go" from the third-person limited-omniscient perspective. The third-person perspective allows Hyde to alternate between the characters of Billy and Grace, respectively, and the situations and events with which they are faced. It also allows the reader a single, unifying voice against a host of diverse people. The limited-omniscient compels the reader to remain in time with the characters, knowing no more than the characters know as they learn, securing a hint of drama about the novel, and keeping the reader guessing.

Language and Meaning

Catherine Ryan Hyde writes "Don't Let Me Go" in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least three reasons. The first is that Grace is a nine year-old girl, and so her language will be relatively simple and straightforward. The simplicity of the prose makes her character more believable. Billy, who has been a shut-in, is intelligent but rather uneducated. So, the simple prose lends his character believability as well. Third, the simple language allows the reader to easily follow the plot around all of the diverse people and events that transpire throughout the novel, allowing the reader to focus on the plot itself, rather than the writing.

Structure

Catherine Ryan Hyde structures her novel "Don't Let Me Go" into thirty-four consecutive, unnumbered, chronological chapters. Each chapter alternates back and forth between the plot revolving around Billy and Grace. The first chapter revolves around Billy; the second, Grace; the third, Billy, and so on throughout the rest of the novel.

Quotes

It's always hard to lose your mother. Always. If you loved her, if you hated her. If she smothered you, if she ignored you. It doesn't matter. She's your mother. Your mother. That's just a very tough bond to break.

-- Jesse (Chapter 20 paragraph 53)

Importance: At a meeting, Jesse explains his reason for moving into the building. It was to be with his mother as she dies. He explains that breaking a bond with one's mother is extraordinarily difficult, no matter the situation. His statement is very true, and it makes Grace cry. This makes the others realize the difficulty of Grace's situation with her mother. Also, it forces the others to reflect on their own lives..

Grace changed everything, didn't she?

-- Mrs. Hinman (Chapter 23 paragraph 145)

Importance: Paying a visit to Billy about Grace's upcoming dance performance, Mrs. Hinman and Billy speak about the way things have changed and how everyone has become friends. It all happened because of Grace. It is Mrs. Hinman who elaborates this verbally, by noting that Grace has indeed changed everything. No one is alone anymore because of her.

But you gotta do it anyway, right? I mean, it's life. You gotta do life. Right?

-- Felipe (Chapter 27 paragraph 65)

Importance: As Felipe and Billy walk home from dropping Grace off at school, a Hispanic man insults them in Spanish, saying they are gay. This leads Billy and Felipe to reflect on the horrors of the world, but that doesn't mean that life isn't worth living. Life has to be done anyway, sometimes in spite of itself.

I wasn't cut out for anything. Life. Life is something I'm just not cut out for.

-- Billy (Chapter 1 paragraph 60)

Importance: This is Billy's answer to Grace when Grace asks him why he has shut himself up in the apartment. Billy's response seems to be a generic answer for all of the characters throughout the novel,. They don't want to deal with some aspect of life, so they have withdrawn from life itself.

You either feel things or you don't. You don't get to pick and choose.

-- Grace (Chapter 7 paragraph 43)

Importance: Here, Grace speaks to Billy about her life and about the struggles she is facing. It is a very mature statement for a young girl to make. She is explaining that things happen and people feel things because of them. They don't get to choose how they feel. Otherwise, everybody would always be happy.



Quote 10

Did Grace tell you what I said about what you guys are doing? Did she tell you I said you're only enabling her mom to stay addicted?

-- Jake (Chapter 10 paragraph 111)

Importance: After Jake purchases plywood for Grace, he provides a much needed dose of sobering reality to Rayleen and the others. Although they are helping Grace, they are also enabling Eileen to stay hooked on drugs. Without the responsibility of Grace, Eileen can do all the drugs she wants and not worry about Grace.

That's the county for you. They never do enough, except when they do too much.

-- Rayleen (Chapter 12 paragraph 202)

Importance: Here, Rayleen reflects on the brief and cursory visit of Ms. Katz to see how Grace is doing. Rayleen laments that the county is too quick and brief with their visits. However, when they get involved, they get too involved and end up hurting children more than helping them.

Quote 11

You may not hurt Grace. Do you hear me? You may not. Ever. Not ever again. I'm right here. Right upstairs from you. And I will not allow it. You hurt this girl again over my dead body. Do you understand me?

-- Billy (Chapter 17 paragraph 43)

Importance: When Billy discovers that Eileen has hurt Grace, he gets angry. He rushes out of his apartment to warn Eileen that she will never again hurt Grace. This is important because it shows that Billy has finally drawn a line, and that he is willing to come out of his apartment, fight his agoraphobia, and defend Grace, all in the name of saving Grace.

If I sit inside, then nobody will know I'm in trouble. And so then nobody will help me.

-- Grace (Chapter 3 paragraph 121)

Importance: Billy is finally able to solicit from Grace her reasoning for sitting outside on his porch. She explains that she does it so someone will know she is in trouble. Grace's action and reason prove to be the catalyst for the rest of the novel's plot.

Quote 12