

The Dive From Clausen's Pier Study Guide

The Dive From Clausen's Pier by Ann Packer

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide refers to the First Vintage Contemporaries Edition of *The Dive from Clausen's Pier* by Ann Packer, April 2003. ISBN: 0-375-72713-2

The Dive from Clausen's Pier, by Ann Packer, tells the story of Carrie Bell, a twenty-three year old woman who is engaged to her high school sweetheart. Unhappy in the relationship, she is considering ending it when her fiancé Mike dives off Clausen's Pier into shallow water and breaks his neck.

In ICU, family and friends wait for news about Mike's condition. If he wakes up from the medically induced coma, Mike will have a long rehabilitation period, but he will never walk again. Overwhelmed by Mike's accident, Carrie is not sure about what she should do and whether any response she has to the accident is the right one. When Mike regains consciousness, Mike's friend Rooster makes it clear that Mike needs Carrie, but Carrie begins to think otherwise.

At a dinner party hosted by one of Carrie's co-workers at the library, she meets a man named Kilroy who lives in New York City. Kilroy leaves her a note before he goes back to the New York.

One day Mike confronts Carrie about their relationship. While he still loves her, he realizes that their relationship was strained even before the accident. After leaving the hospital, Carrie gets in her car and decides to leave Wisconsin. She does not tell her friends, including her best friend Jamie, or her family where she is going.

Carrie arrives in New York and tracks down Simon, a friend from school with whom she had previously reconnected. Simon invites her to stay at the apartment he shares with four other roommates. She stays in a small alcove in the apartment and tracks down Kilroy.

Carrie and Kilroy quickly begin a relationship. She spends a lot of time comparing Kilroy to Mike, acknowledging the differences in their personalities and their sexual appetites. Her relationship with Kilroy is far more physical than she ever was with Mike, but the relationship with Kilroy is not easy. Kilroy is evasive about his past and elements in his life. He does not believe that a person is a sum of the facts about them, and that the act of being together is enough to know someone.

Carrie finally reaches out to people back home, but is not ready to return to Wisconsin. She thinks about getting a job and begins to take fashion classes at Parsons. After Carrie learns that Rooster is getting married, she agrees to come home for the wedding, but at the last minute changes her mind.

When Carrie finally decides that she should go back, she tries to reconnect with Mike. She feels guilty about how she left him, but wants to continue her relationship with



Kilroy. She asks Kilroy to join her in Wisconsin, but he tells her that his place is in New York.

Carrie's departure also caused a nearly irreparable rift in her friendship with Jamie. After one of Jamie's sisters is brutally attacked, Jamie cuts off Carrie because she thinks Carrie should have been able to do something to prevent the attack. Carrie continues to try and repair her friendship with Jamie and is eventually able to do so.

While Mike and Carrie do not get back together, Carrie slips her engagement ring on her right hand and tells Mike that it is now a friendship ring. She decides to stay in Wisconsin to be there for him.



Part 1, Chapters 1-8

Summary

The novel opens with a brief prologue of Carrie remembering how Mike teased her about her memory and how she would remember what people were wearing. Mike and Carrie were on their way to Clausen's Pier for the Memorial Day holiday. Carrie knew their relationship was fading, but she did not know how to break it off given that they had been together since high school. After meeting their friends at the pier, they all ate and drank beer from the cooler. Carrie noticed that the water looked low. Mike decided to dive off the pier.

In Chapter 1 of Part One : Intensive Care, the scene switches to Carrie thinking about Mike's diving accident at Clausen's Pier. Even though she knows that the accident happened to Mike, she feels like it happened to her. She is struck by her lack of crying while everyone else around her is in tears. Mike suffered a broken neck in the accident, and he is in a coma. Waiting for Mike to wake up, Carrie thinks about how she treated him that day and in the months preceding and how she does not want that to be their last interaction. Back at her apartment, she spends her nights sewing, something she has been doing for eleven years. When she is at the hospital, she feels like Mrs. Mayer, Mike's mother, is watching how she acts. One day, Carrie decides not to go to the hospital. Mrs. Mayer calls and invites her to come over to the house. The women talk and Mrs. Mayer mentions how proud Mike was when he bought Carrie's engagement ring. Traces of Mike are all over the house because Mike has not moved out of his parents' house.

Carrie goes to Mike's room, remembering time they spent together. When she returns to work, Carrie is invited by her co-worker Viktor, a man from Poland, to a dinner party the following week; Carrie reluctantly accepts the invitation. At the hospital, Rooster, Mike's best friend, remains positive. Like Mrs. Mayer, he thinks that Mike will wake up. Carrie is not so sure. She talks to John Junior, Mike's younger brother, who tells Carrie he has a job at an ice cream parlor. He tells her to stop by for a scoop. In the hospital lobby, Rooster introduces Carrie to Joan, one of the ICU nurses. Stu, another friend of Mike's, tells Carrie about a time when he and Mike and Rooster went walking across some ice and Mike was fearless. The next day a young boy fell through the same ice and died.

In Chapter 2, Carrie remembers being in school with Mike and his playing hockey and how they met and meeting Mike's family. She thinks about how her father left her mother when she was young. She has few memories of him. She had thrown away the pencil sharpener he gave her when she was in the fourth grade.

In Chapter 3, Carrie goes to the farmer's market and remembers making Mike a cherry pie and Rooster giving her a cherry pitter after he learns what is involved in making the pie. After the farmer's market, Carrie goes to visit her mother and offers to make her some new curtains. Later she spends time with Jamie and they talk about relationships.



Jamie is shocked when Carrie makes a cutting joke about being a Mike as “vegetable” (44). Jamie offers to listen if Carrie needs to talk, but Carrie declines. At the hospital, Rooster tells Carrie about Joan saying people could wake up and be fine mentally. When Carrie reflects on her relationship with Mike, she realizes that she did not want Mike to change, and recognizes that she changed.

In Chapter 4, Carrie visits her favorite fabric store to look at silks, but she does not buy anything. She stops by the ice cream parlor where John Junior works and takes him up on his offer for a free ice cream. They talk and Carrie starts crying; she tells John she should go to the hospital, but cannot make herself go. John eventually tells her he understands. At home, Carrie wonders if Mrs. Mayer is waiting for her to show up at the hospital. She thinks about how Mike must have known something was wrong with their relationship.

In Chapter 5, Carrie attends Viktor’s dinner party. While there she meets a man named Kilroy, who is visiting from New York City. They make small talk, and he compliments her necklace. He tells her he shoots pool at a bar called McClanahan’s. She asks what he does for a living. He dismisses the question. Instead, he assesses that Carrie has lived in Madison her entire life and she is probably engaged to her high school sweetheart. She tells him he was almost right, Kilroy’s comments bother her. The next morning, she wakes with a headache, having consumed too much Polish vodka the night before. At a going away party for her friend Christine, Carrie receives a phone call from Mrs. Mayer.

In Chapter 6, Mike wakes up and now Carrie cries “freely” (65). Rooster takes her to the hospital to see Mike. The doctor explains that while everyone has been coping with Mike’s accident for the previous month, Mike is waking up to bad news. Mike is told he injured the “lower part of the cervical spine” (67), leaving him with mobility in his shoulders and upper arms and the ability to breathe on his own. He is otherwise paralyzed and needs surgery. When Mike sees Carrie, he apologizes. He appears relieved when she tells him that she loves him. After surgery, Mike asks Carrie to kiss him, and she complies.

In Chapter 7, Mike begins rehab. One afternoon, Jamie, Stu, Carrie, and Rooster go to a park. Rooster tells them he has a date with Joan and the friends tease him. They talk about Mike. Rooster confesses that Mike is worried about something; Carrie walks away. Jamie apologizes for Rooster, but Carrie wants to be alone. Later, Carrie runs into Simon Rhodes, a friend from her high school French class. They catch up and he tells her he moved to New York. He asks about Mike and she tells Simon about the accident. They continue their conversation and Carrie asks if Simon was gay and he says yes. Carrie confides in Simon about Mike in a way that she has not been able to with her other friends. He admits that he is glad he ran into her.

In Chapter 8, Carrie is at work at the library when Rooster arrives. He tells her he thinks she should “try harder” (85) with Mike and that she needs to forget what happened between them before the accident to be there for Mike now. When Rooster does not get the response he expects, he accuses Carrie of being a “cold woman” (86). Carrie knows



Mike needs her and goes to the hospital. Later, Jamie reaches out to Carrie, asking why Carrie was missing work and telling her she is worried about her. Carrie assures her she is fine. Simon calls to meet up with Carrie before going back to New York. She invites him over for a drink and before he arrives, Carrie's mother shows up. Her mother leaves after Simon gets there and the two talk. He asks what she is going to do. She tells him that she is going back to work.

Analysis

The novel opens with a brief prologue that introduces Carrie as the first-person narrator thinking about being with Mike, her fiancée. The passage leads to Carrie noticing the water level and Mike diving into the water. This segues into Part One: Intensive Care Unit.

Mike's accident has left him a quadriplegic and in a coma. There is uncertainty as to whether or not his will wake from the coma, or what kind of brain damage may be involved, if any. This aptly introduces the theme of loss and alienation by taking so much away from Mike and leaving him isolated from the world in his coma.

The isolation extends to Carrie as well. Because the story is told from her point of view, it is almost as if Carrie is outside of the situation as well. She is an observer of what is transpiring, but she also an active observer. She takes action where needed and understands what she needs in the aftermath of the accident.

Mike and Carrie have been in a committed relationship since they were in high school. This introduces the theme of identity. Because the two have effectively grown up together, their identities are intertwined. Carrie has been unhappy in the relationship for a while prior to the accident, but this is hardly noticed. Mike is happy in the relationship and this carries over into the group.

Carrie is isolated within her group of friends. After the accident, she is also having difficulty connecting with her best friend Jamie. They have been friends since elementary school and now Carrie understands how she is changing and this is causing a rift in their friendship. It does not mean that Jamie is not also changing, but the changes the women are experiencing are not complimentary of each other.

This is why Carrie's interactions with Simon become important. They reconnect at the park after Carrie walks away from Rooster. Rooster has indicated that something was troubling Mike prior to the accident. Carrie knows that the issue bothering Mike was likely the way Carrie was pulling away. Rooster may know more specifics than he is letting on, but it prompts Carrie to leave the group. Carrie understands that within that group of people, the allegiance is to Mike and to keeping the group of friends they have fostered together. This addresses the theme of loyalty.

But when Carrie runs into Simon, she is able to communicate with him in a way that she is unable to with the rest of her friends. This is likely because Simon holds no allegiance to any member of her group of friends. Simon's focus can be on Carrie and that is what



Carrie needs. The theme of guilt can be seen in the way Carrie feels guilty for feeling the way she does about Mike in the wake of his accident. Carrie does not stop feeling the way she felt prior to the accident, but because she never took action in breaking things off with Mike, the act of doing so now seems cruel.

Carrie is trapped between being loyal to Mike and wanting to be free of the relationship. She is at a crossroads where she is tasked with figuring out who she is without Mike, or if she stays, who she is with a Mike who is radically different.

While Mike remains in his coma, Carrie and Jamie have an awkward exchange. While Jamie is talking about potential love interests, Carrie refers to Mike as a “vegetable” (44). It reads as an unnecessarily cruel joke, but it is a touchstone for Carrie. It is her way of processing what has happened and the seriousness of the situation. She knows that Mike will never walk again, or be able to function without assistance, but at this point, she does not know whether or not he will wake up. This comment is more for her benefit than to shock or upset Jamie. She does not know what to think or expect.

Carrie is reluctant to talk about relationships with Jamie at this point regardless. It is difficult for Carrie to express what she is feeling because, were Mike and Carrie to break it, it changes the dynamic of a tight-knit group of friends. Jamie may try to convince Carrie to stick it out and that is not what Carrie wants to hear.

Mike does wake up from the coma and has not suffered any lasting brain trauma. As the doctor points out to Carrie and the family: Mike is waking up to his reality, whereas the rest of the family has had time to begin to process the accident. After Mike wakes up, Carrie is finally able to cry. Whether the tears are for Mike or for herself is unclear, but they are likely for both. Carrie must be relieved that Mike is mentally okay, but she also must deal with the guilt of wanting their relationship to be over. She does not feel like she can do anything about the relationship because of how she may be perceived.

One of the things Mike asks Carrie after he wakes up is for a kiss. She complies, but she is hesitant. When she feels Mike’s tongue brush against her lips, it demonstrates the contrast in where the two of them are in the relationship. Carrie is willing to kiss him because she thinks it will make him feel better, not because she wants to kiss him. Mike, on the other hand, is in the same place he wants to be in their relationship.

During Chapter 5, Carrie meets Kilroy at a dinner party. Carrie is interacting with people outside of her expected group of friends. While the interaction with Kilroy is brief, his mention of New York and Simon’s begins to lure Carrie outside of the life she has built in Madison. This brief interlude foreshadows a radical change for Carrie in the coming chapters.

Discussion Question 1

Carrie comments to Jamie about Mike being a “vegetable” (44). What does this reveal about her character?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Rooster confront Carrie about being there for Mike?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Carrie able to open up to Simon?

Vocabulary

contrary, innocuous, solicitously, deviation, bobbin, inexorably, isthmus, churlish, tenuously, genially, pronouncement, challis, temporal, spatial, pinnacle, peripheral, exponential, reticence, sullen, jacquard, ostensibly, bereft, eradicate, oscillating, quell, gouge, festooning, stupefied, cowed, impassive, ballast, caricature



Part 1, Chapters 9-14; Part 2, Chapters 15-16

Summary

In Chapter 9, after Jamie makes repeated attempts to get together, she and Carrie meet up to go to the hospital, Carrie wears a dress that she altered. Jamie compliments her. In Mike's room, they meet Jeff, Mike's roommate. Rooster is already there and Mike teases him about seeing Joan again. As the days go by, Carrie settles into a routine of work and visiting Mike.

One night Mike informs Carrie that she does not have to come to the hospital every day. She explains that she visits because she loves him. Mike points out that she loved him, but her feelings have changed. Carrie tells him they should wait and see.

In Chapter 10, Carrie gets together with Ania, Viktor's girlfriend, at a restaurant. Ania invites Carrie to join her women's group, but Carrie does not think it is for her. Jamie is at the restaurant with her mother Mrs. Fletcher. Jamie approaches Carrie and Ania. Ania excuses herself to return to work and Jamie checks in on how Carrie and Mike are doing. As they talk, Carrie tells Jamie about Ania's invitation to the women's group, and Jamie is agitated. Jamie wants things to go back to normal, but Carrie is struggling with the changes in her life. After lunch, Carrie goes to the fabric store and decides to buy some silk, even though she has never made anything from silk before. When she returns to her apartment, Tom, a friend of Viktor's arrives to deliver a note that Kilroy wrote to her: "Finally I know the reason for your sad eyes and silence, and I'm selfishly looking for forgiveness" (112). When Carrie visits the hospital later, Mike asks how she sees him when she thinks of him and whether or not she sees him only as paralyzed. She admits to sometimes and he tells her he would give anything for it to be different.

In Chapter 11, Carrie works with the silk and begins creating a nightgown and robe. At the hospital, Mrs. Mayer asks Carrie if she thinks Mike is depressed and Carrie nods, but Mike is managing physically. Mike is agitated with Carrie that evening and she asks if he wants her to leave and tells her "if you want" (119). The doctors have asked to report any changes in personality. Dave King, the therapist, checks in on Mike. Later, Dave approaches Carrie outside. They talk and Dave explains that Mike's uncertainty about how he fits in is natural. He also talks to Carrie about options Mike would have for a sex life and the possibility of children. Carrie bristles at the conversation.

In Chapter 12, Simon calls Carrie and they have a long conversation. She continues to confide in Simon. Later, Carrie talks to Mike's sister Julie and how Carrie did not go away to college because she did not want to leave Mike. Julie asks if they are still getting married and Carrie replies she does not know. Carrie thinks about the possibility of marriage. Around midnight, Carrie goes out alone to think and drive around. She runs into Lynn Fletcher, Jamie's younger sister in an empty parking lot. The girls talk and



Lynn confides to Carrie that she likes to flirt with the customers at her waitressing job and lead them on. After a couple drinks, she like to freak them out by telling them she is underage and out past her curfew. Carrie tells her it is dangerous to do so and Lynn makes Carrie promise not to tell Jamie, which she does.

Chapter 13, begins on Carrie's day off and she decides to spend it sewing. Jamie arrives and Carrie tries to hide the sewing from her, even though she is not sure why she does not want Jamie to see it. Jamie asks about it and compliments her work, suggesting Carrie could make money as a seamstress. Jamie tries to talk to Carrie about Mike, but again becomes agitated. She asks Carrie is she is mad at her. Jamie offers to stay with Carrie, but Carrie wants to be alone. Jamie leaves and Carrie thinks about Mike and what her life would be like if she were to leave him.

In Chapter 14, Carrie goes to see Mike and he notes that she is behaving differently. He finally asks her if they are through and while Carrie attempts to suggest otherwise, Mike knows and tells her that is a relief because he "was really tired of wondering" (145). Carrie goes home and tidies up and then starts packing a bag. She packs her clothes, including the silk nightgown and robe. She gets in the car and starts driving to New York without telling anyone she is leaving.

In Chapter 15 of Part Two: A Thousand Miles, Carrie arrives in New York and goes to Simon's apartment. He lives with three roommates in a brownstone that is rented from a partner in his law firm where he is a proofreader. Carrie decides to find Kilroy and went past McClanahan's bar. On the third day, she sees Kilroy and he recognizes her. They get together and talk. Carrie confides in Kilroy about all that has happened since Mike's accident and he understands that she needed to get away. Carrie backs away from the conversation, suggesting that she does not know Kilroy. He responds by suggesting that while she may not know specifics about him, she knows what it is like to spend time with him. He indulges a few questions and she asks about his name: Paul Eliot Fraser, but he is called Kilroy. They talk about pool and how he likes to hear the sirens at night. He tells her his bedroom is perfect for listening to them and suggests that it is inevitable that she will hear them there. A week later, Carrie and Kilroy have sex in his sparsely furnished apartment. Carrie thinks about how Kilroy differs from Mike as they have sex.

In Chapter 16, Carrie looks forward to being with Kilroy, having sex in his apartment. She notes that outside of the apartment they rarely touched. Kilroy decides to give Carrie a pool lesson at the bar; he thinks she is a natural. Afterwards he asks if she enjoyed herself. Her response is vague as she thinks of Mike.

Analysis

As Chapter 9 opens, Carrie continues to pull away from Jamie. Carrie has been avoiding her as she is likely sorting out what she needs to do. This continues to put a strain on their relationship and works to develop that theme. Jamie is complimentary of Carrie's dress. Carrie has made alterations, but Jamie notices the dress. The dress is like Carrie in a way: Jamie recognizes it, but she knows it is not the same.



The changes taking place for Carrie are gradual: she alters her dress, she spends time with different people, and now she is visiting Mike. Mike tells Carrie that she does not have to visit the hospital every day. During their talk, Carrie is able to admit to Mike that her feelings for him have changed. However, Mike feels the same as he has for Carrie. Because he loves her, he can begin the process of letting her go, although he likely does not expect her to leave the way she does. This exchange marks a shift in their relationship and it can be viewed as a loss for both of them. They are also both tasked with finding their identities without each other.

As Carrie is leaving the hospital, she has a chat with Dave King. He offers Carrie a lot of information about Mike's injury that she may have been thinking, but was not asking. He details the options they would have for the possibility of a sexual relationship and the possibility of having children together. This is beyond what Carrie is even considering. She may have wondered about sexual function, but she and Mike were not in a place where they were considering children. Dave's comments catch Carrie off guard.

The subject of sex is important, however, for Carrie's character development. She is twenty-three and has only had one lover. She and Mike lost their virginity together. In a way the conversation with Dave foreshadows Carrie's impending relationship with Kilroy and its emphasis on sexuality.

Carrie spends her time away from work and the hospital sewing. She treats herself to buying some silk to create a nightgown and a robe. She hides it from Jamie when Jamie shows up at the apartment. She is not sure why she does so and Jamie figures that Carrie tried to hide it so that Jamie would not mess it up. This exchange shows how wrapped up in themselves both of the girls are. They have similarly withdrawn in different ways, with both thinking first of how it affects themselves instead of the other.

After Jamie leaves, Carrie is left thinking about how different her life would be without Mike. As she works on her nightgown and robe, it is as if she is preparing for something she does not know if coming yet. She is preparing for the next part of her life.

As Carrie continues to grapple with how she feels and what she should do, she becomes restless. She goes out for a drive one night, which foreshadows her impending departure, and runs into Jamie's sister Lynn. Lynn's behavior is reckless and she acts like a foil for Carrie. While Carrie may be able to take a risk, Lynn is setting herself up for harm because of the risks she is taking. Lynn asks Carrie not to tell anyone about what she is doing with the men in the parking lot and Carrie agrees. Her loyalty to Lynn will come back to haunt her in later chapters.

The letter from Kilroy helps facilitate this process. Much like the way Carrie responds to Simon as an outsider, Carrie is able to connect with Kilroy. She considers how Kilroy observed her at the dinner party. It is as if she is finally being seen or recognized as an entity separate from Mike. The note Kilroy sends deepens his observation of her. He knows what happened to Mike, although he does not mention it specifically, and recognizes her sadness.



Mike and Carrie break up, but it is at Mike's suggestion. He and Carrie likely experience similar feelings of relief at the end of the relationship, but the reasons for the relief differ. The theme of relationships is further developed by how the two process the end of the relationship. Carrie has been wanting to be free of the relationship for a while, but Mike needs the relationship to end because he cannot handle the dread of knowing it will end. He needs to accept the loss in order to heal, whereas Carrie needs the loss to be able to come into her own identity.

Carrie packs up her clothes, including the nightgown and robe, and leaves in the middle of the night without telling anyone that she is leaving or where she is going. Like the end of the relationship with Mike, this is liberating. By taking the nightgown and robe with her, she is venturing out with possibility. The nightgown and robe were not to be shared with Mike, but rather they are for Carrie.

Once she reaches New York, it is not long before Carrie reconnects with Kilroy. They both recognize the importance of each other. There is an unspoken understanding between them. In a later chapter, this is understood to be grief, but for the moment, Carrie is able to connect with a man who is not Mike.

Understandably, Carrie compares Kilroy to Mike, especially when it comes to sex. The sex becomes meaningful for her. Kilroy appears to understand Carrie, but he also keeps her guessing. He likes to speak in abstractions, yet is forward with her, such as when he tells her she will see his bedroom.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Kilroy write to Carrie?

Discussion Question 2

What does Jamie thinking Carrie is mad at her reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Carrie leave without telling anyone where she is going?

Vocabulary

antidote, visceral, aversion, attuned, malevolent, ostentatiously, prerequisite, disdain, paraphernalia, renegade, atrophied, abhors, flippantly, oxymoron, livid, acquiescence, vigilance, dilapidated, convulsive, inadequate, permeated, acute, voluminous, embodiment, fickle, pariah, alcove, erratic, modulated, bodegas, untenable, redolent, vertigo, subversive, abrading, emanating, cynical, condensation, pernicious, malleable



Part 2, Chapters 17-27

Summary

Chapter 17 opens with Carrie having been gone for a couple weeks. She cannot bear thinking of Mike wondering about her as he lies in his hospital bed. She calls and tells her mother where she is. They discuss money and Carrie tells her she is okay. She also tells her mother that she feels guilty and that she thinks she is a bad person. Her mother explains that she already is who she is. Carrie begins to wonder if she abandoned everyone because she is like her father.

A few days later, Carrie calls and talks to Mike. She thinks that he sounds happier than he had in some time. When she later discusses it with Kilroy, Kilroy wonders if she wishes Mike had been more upset about her going or that he should be thinking about it.

Chapter 18 gives details about Simon's life, including the late nights at work and take-out. Carrie spends most of her time with Kilroy at his apartment. One night Simon takes Carrie to an art gallery where they run into Dillon, a friend of a friend of Simon's. Simon suggests getting a drink to Dillon, who responds vaguely.

In Chapter 19, Carrie spends more time with Kilroy. She notices fashion when she is in SoHo and finds a fabric store near Carnegie Hall. She decides to buy a bit of material to make a curtain for the window in the alcove of Simon's apartment because the morning light wakes her up. When Kilroy meets Simon and Greg, one of the other roommates, Carrie notices that he is annoyed by them. She wonders if he is jealous of their money because Kilroy is so frugal.

Later, while Carrie is working on her curtain, Lane, another roommate, stops in. Kilroy and Lane chat about Seward Hall, where Lane went to school and Kilroy knew someone who went there. Carrie finishes her curtain and puts her sewing machine away. That night, Carrie calls Mike and they talk about how she walks around getting to know the city. Then, she apologizes to him.

Chapter 20 finds Carrie waking from a night spent thinking about Kilroy and Mike. She stops by Lane's bedroom and the two visit. Carrie notes the bookcases and pictures around her room. Lane tells Carrie about her job as an assistant to an elderly writer called Miss Wolf. Lane also tells her that she is a poet and show her a chapbook. Carrie confesses that she did not expect to be in New York or her relationship with Kilroy. Later, Carrie buys a cardboard dresser from a hardware store so she can unpack her belongings at Simon's apartment. She goes to Kilroy's, and they have sex and do not speak afterwards.

Chapter 21 finds Carrie and Kilroy cooking dinner together. Carrie asks if they are making boeuf Bourguignon. Kilroy says it is beef stew because they are not in France.



He mentions a friend of his mother's who used a lot of foreign names for things when she spoke and it drove him crazy. He reveals that he once lived in France for two years about ten years ago. Noticing Carrie's look of confusion, he tells her that he is forty years old. She is taken aback. He reminds her that he defines forty, rather than forty defining him. He tells her he needs to make space on his bookshelves so he can get more books. They talk about Carrie's relationship with Mike's mother and how they got along. At the bookstore, Kilroy suggests that they should go to France together and he holds her hand on the way home. She starts thinking of Mike and the night before the accident. With Carrie visibly upset, Kilroy comforts her and tells her she needs time.

In Chapter 22, Carrie reads fashion magazines in the alcove and visits with Lane. She receives a cassette tape in the mail from Mike. She listens to it in her car. On the tape he tells her that Rooster is getting married to Joan and that the wedding will be in December and that he is sure Rooster wants Carrie to attend. He has a new roommate who is a fireman who was injured in a car accident. His rehab treatment is going well. He tells her that he thinks she should reach out to Jamie and that his counseling with Dave King is helping. He also thinks he may be home for Thanksgiving. Carrie rewinds the tape.

Later, Carrie meets Kilroy at McClanahan's and they have a beer. She tells Kilroy about the tape and then asks Kilroy why he never talks about previous girlfriends. He dismisses her question. They argue and Carrie leaves. She goes back to Simon's apartment and they talk. Simon called and asked Dillon out, and Dillion told him he was reorganizing filing cabinets. Alice, one of the other roommates compliments Carrie's shirt, which Carrie made. Carrie ends up calling Jamie and tries to explain why she had to leave. Jamie does not understand why Carrie was able to call Mike, but not her and starts crying. When Jamie learns that Carrie sublet her apartment in Madison, Jamie lets the phone receiver drop and walks away.

In Chapter 23, Kilroy arrives at Simon's apartment, which serves as his apology. They talk and he tells her he was a history major and went to Princeton. Carrie tells him about her conversation with Jamie and why she did not just hang up. Kilroy tells her it was because Jamie loves her and he loves her as well. Carrie spends Thanksgiving with Kilroy and her friends. While Carrie and Kilroy are getting ready, she tells him that she used to spend the holiday with Mike's family. While Kilroy is in the shower, the phone rings and Carrie answers: a woman is on the line. Kilroy gets out of the shower to take the phone call and Carrie asks if he is okay when he gets off the phone. At Simon's apartment, the group of friends celebrate Thanksgiving and Kilroy meets Lane's girlfriend Maura, who vaguely recognizes Kilroy's family name. On the way home, Carrie buys a postcard to send to Mike. She asks Kilroy if his parents live on the Upper East Side, and he confirms that they do and his family has money.

In Chapter 24, Rooster calls Carrie and invites her to his wedding and she accepts the invitation. Rooster wants to know if he can tell Mike that she is coming and she agrees. She decides she needs to make something nice to wear to the wedding and goes to Bergdorf Goodman and tries on a dress that she likes but cannot afford. She runs into Lane and Miss Wolf and is invited to join them for tea. Miss Wolf tells the girls that "the



family is the enemy of the artist” (252) and that the girls need to go out and see the world. On her way home, Carrie decides to get some green fabric and a pattern to make herself a dress and puts it on her credit card.

Carrie begins to create her dress in Chapter 25. Kilroy and Carrie exchange Christmas presents. He gives her a framed picture of Paris rooftops that he took and she gives him a shirt that she made. That night Carrie dreams that Mike is well again. While she already has her plane ticket purchased, Carrie decides she does not want to go home for the wedding. She calls and tells her mother she is not coming. Her mother tells her that Mike has been asking when she was arriving. It occurs to her that her mother will be spending Christmas alone because she is not making the trip back.

In Chapter 26, Carrie goes to the library and tries to find information about her father, but finds many men with his name. Later at Simon’s apartment, Carrie and Simon are talking and Simon sees the nightgown and robe she made. He is impressed and thinks she should become a designer. Simon takes Carrie to the Parsons School of Design to get her to enroll in classes. In order to afford them, she has to sell the car she bought with Mike. She begins classes. One afternoon, Kilroy takes Carrie to the Museum of Modern Art. They talk about the art they see and Kilroy tells Carrie she reminds him of someone else “or of myself with someone else” (276), but he does not tell her who.

In Chapter 27, Alice moves out of Simon’s apartment and Carrie is offered her room. She asks Kilroy what she should do and they get in a fight. She wants to know why Kilroy does not see his parents. They talk the argument through and Kilroy wants to know why Carrie does not just move in with him and she tells him it is too soon. Carrie moves into Alice’s old room and Carrie thinks about how she has gotten close with Simon like she used to be with Jamie. Carrie begins to think seriously about the possibility of going into fashion.

Analysis

By Chapter 17, Carrie has been in New York for a few weeks and the people back home still do not know where she is. While she thinks of how her disappearance must be affecting Mike, she calls her mother to tell her where she is. Her mother understands that Carrie needed to leave, but that does not assuage Carrie’s guilt. The themes of guilt and loyalty are expanded upon with the conversation between Carrie and her mother. Carrie is worried that she is a bad person for leaving. Her mother tells her that she is not a bad person, she just is who she is. This abstraction is reminiscent to how Kilroy relates to Carrie as well.

Carrie understandably feels guilty for leaving Mike. She is in mourning for a relationship that last many years. She has also radically changed her life. For someone who has never really left Madison, Wisconsin, New York is a vast place to be lost. Yes, she has Simon and Kilroy to guide her through, but this is Carrie’s journey. When her mother tells her that she is who she is, it gives Carrie permission to explore her sense of self. Maybe she needs to go to New York to stay, or maybe she needs to find something in



New York to bring back with her. Her decision to leave does not make her a bad person, but rather it gives her an opportunity to understand what she needs to fulfill who she is.

This is why Kilroy is an interesting match for Carrie. Unlike Mike, he does not have expectations for Carrie. Their relationship is fresh and interesting, but it is also challenging for Carrie. She expects to get to know someone by finding out details about their life, but Kilroy does not feel similarly. It is as if Kilroy is already living as Carrie's mother suggests she is: Kilroy is already who he is. It is exuded in his essence and this attracts Carrie, even though she does not completely comprehend it.

The relationship is not smooth sailing, however. They struggle to understand each other in conversation, but connect with each other sexually. Carrie moves away from comparing Mike and Kilroy as lovers and begins to find the comparisons outside of the bedroom. Mike and Kilroy are very different men. Kilroy is internal and can be aloof, while Mike was very much a what you see is what you get type of guy.

Carrie calls Mike from New York. She does not completely sever the relationship. She tells him about the city, but more importantly, she begins to notice that Mike sounds happier on the phone. Both Carrie and Mike needed to be free from each other to try and make sense of themselves. While Mike's situation is arguably the more difficult to understand, Carrie also needs this right of passage.

Carrie's relationship with Kilroy evolves quickly. While they are cooking dinner together, Carrie is shocked to learn Kilroy's age. It is not something that she actively considered. Rather she assumed he was close to her age or perhaps around thirty. Kilroy is not interested in the social constraints of age. He tells her that he defines what forty is. While Kilroy is worldly, he also seems to suffer from some kind of arrested development. He is not fulfilling the role that traditional social constructs would place upon him. The expectation might be for him to be married, with a good job, a house, and family. Instead he works temp jobs, lives in a minimalist apartment, and seems to just exist as he pleases. This may contribute to the assumption that he is younger than he is, but like Carrie, he is who he is.

He is evasive about his past. Carrie is able to talk to Kilroy about Mike, and he seems to be comfortable with this, but he does not talk about ex-girlfriends with Carrie. She confronts him about this and he remains evasive, even suggesting that there aren't any. This is not to suggest that Kilroy did not have any girlfriends previously, but rather that because he lives in the present, there is no need to consider the past. In this way, Kilroy helps to further develop the theme of loss and alienation.

When Carrie and Kilroy go to the Museum of Modern Art together, Kilroy is confronted with his past by his present. He recognizes something in Carrie that reminds him of the past, more specifically who he was in the past. He does not tell Carrie who she reminded him of, but the moment softens Kilroy and allows the reader to glimpse his vulnerability.



Carrie finally reaches out to Jamie and the conversation does not go well. It is difficult for either woman to understand that the rift between them has nothing to do with the other, but it does further develop the theme of identity. Carrie is working toward finding herself and Jamie is left with figuring out who she is without Carrie. When Carrie reveals that she is subletting her apartment in Madison, this devastates Jamie. Carrie is going on with her life in ways that Jamie is not included.

Rooster's wedding is an opportunity for Carrie to return to Madison with a purpose other than simply going home. Carrie wants to be invited to the wedding and accepts the invitation. She goes to the trouble of buying the fabric to make a dress, and even buys the plane ticket home. When it comes time to leave, however, Carrie does not want to. In a way her loyalties have shifted. Instead of being loyal to her friends in Madison, she is compelled to stay with her friends and Kilroy in New York.

As Kilroy explains to Carrie after Jamie leaves the phone hanging, Jamie is too hurt to hang up on Carrie. Hanging up on Carrie would be like a figurative end to their friendship and that is not what Jamie wants. Jamie wants things to go back to the way they were and that includes Carrie returning to Madison. Carrie, however, is beginning to see opportunity in New York.

The city was an escape and she could seek solace in Simon and Kilroy, but she is beginning to see the potential of the city for her development. The obvious career path for Carrie is something in fashion. She appreciates and observes fashion wherever she goes. She also takes pleasure in the creation of garments. With Simon's encouragement, Carrie enrolls at the Parsons School of Design. In order to do so, Carrie must sell the car that brought her to New York. While she does not need the car in the city, selling the car is an act of putting another part of her life with Mike behind her. Mike and Carrie bought the car together, and while Carrie hesitates at selling the car, she knows that Mike will not need the car anymore and she does not need it either.

Selling the car and enrolling in the design classes demonstrates Carrie coming into her own. She still needs the support of her friends to help her along her journey, but she is finding some autonomy.

One aspect of her life that troubles Carrie is the identity of her father. She has little memory of him and the one thing he gave her – a pencil sharpener – was discarded. As Carrie passes all the unfamiliar faces around her on the city streets, she begins to wonder if any of them could be him. This leads her to investigate her father at the library. While she does not come away with any concrete information on who he is or where he could be, she satisfies the need to look.

When she spoke to her mother after first coming to New York, she pondered whether or not she was like her father because she left. That Carrie abandoned trying to figure out the whereabouts of her father indicates that she is settling into her identity.



Discussion Question 1

How does the reveal about Kilroy's family having money shape his character?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Carrie choose not to go back to Madison for Rooster's wedding?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Miss Wolf make the comment to Lane and Carrie that "the family is enemy of the artist" (252)?

Vocabulary

dally, pretentious, jaded, adamantly, vehemently, feigned, phalanx, bridle, placate, leaden, vehemently, bourgeois, gesticulating, juxtapositions, emasculate, filched, affectation, iconography, gauntlet, complacence, odalisque, inscrutable, avidity, abomination, sinuous, abjectly, condescension, exegesis, sufferance



Part 2, Chapters 28-30; Part 3 Chapters 31-33

Summary

In Chapter 28, Carrie is leaving class and talking to one of her classmates. She sees Kilroy across the street leaning against a car. He tells her that it is a rental and that they should “practice traveling together before France” (289) and that they’re going to Montauk. When they get to the ocean, Kilroy asks if it is the first time she has seen it. She tells him no and that her mother had taken her to the New Jersey shore when she was young. They stay in a roadside motel and return the next day.

Back at Kilroy’s apartment, Kilroy finds a note addressed to him. He tells her he needs to run an errand and then relents and says he needs to go his parents. Carrie asks to go with him. They take the train to his parents’ brownstone. It is furnished lavishly with antiques. Kilroy introduces Carrie to his parents and they have a drink to mark an anniversary and leave.

In Chapter 29, Carrie notes that Kilroy is on edge and not communicating. She hears him slip out during the night and she reads the note, asking Kilroy to join them for a drink because he “must be thinking of the date as much as we are” (300). Carrie puts the note back. The next day, Carrie notices that Kilroy did not go to work and is in a mood. She asks if he wants her to leave, to which he replies “whatever” (302). She starts to leave, but he stops her. He explains that he is very different from his parents.

Chapter 30 picks up a couple weeks later. Kilroy and Carrie are back to normal. Carrie begins to think about getting to know Kilroy. She compares it to getting to know Mike. Since Mike and she had known each other for so long, she realizes she did not “preserve the pleasure of discovery” (313). A few days later, Carrie gets a phone call from Jamie, who is upset and crying on the phone. She tells Carrie that she needs her. She asks Carrie to come home and Carrie tells her it is not a good time. Jamie hangs up.

Chapter 31 begins Part Three: Kilroy Was Here. Carrie travels back to Madison and takes a cab to her mother’s house. She calls and checks in with Kilroy and he asks that she keep him posted. She waits for her mother to come home. Her mother has been at the hospital because Jamie’s mother, Mrs. Fletcher, tried to commit suicide and her recovery is currently in question. The next morning, Carrie goes to the Fletcher house and sees Mixie, Jamie’s other sister. Mixie tells Carrie that Lynn, Jamie’s youngest sister had been attacked. Lynn also told her sisters that she had run into Carrie and Carrie tells Mixie that Lynn made her promise not to tell anyone. Mixie details Lynn’s attack: that a man beat her and forced into a car to perform oral sex on him. Only Mixie knows the last part and she asks that Carrie not repeat it.



In Chapter 32, Carrie goes to the copy shop where Jamie works to see her, but she is not there. She goes to see Jamie at the house, but Jamie rejects her and refuses to let her in. That evening, Carrie goes to dinner with her mother and learns that Rooster and Joan are living next door. Carrie goes to visit Rooster and they talk about Mike until Rooster tells her he does not want to and they change the subject. Carrie tries to visit the Fletcher house again and sees Mr. Fletcher, Jamie's dad. She asks him to give Jamie a note. The next day, Carrie tries to see Jamie at work again and Jamie tells her she will call security if she does not leave.

In Chapter 33, Carrie looks through her old room and sees the Mayer house. She calls Kilroy and tells him Jamie will not see her and that she does not know why she is still in Madison. Kilroy explains that she is unable to leave because that is who she is. The next morning, Carrie decides to go and see Mike at his parents' house. He tells her that he has "imagined this so many times" (342). They visit and Carrie tells him that Lynn getting attacked. Mike shows her his new room and the handicapped-accessible bathroom that was built for him.

Analysis

The theme of identity continues to be developed as Carrie begins to find her way in her fashion classes. She likes them and wants to continue with them. When she is leaving class one day, she finds Kilroy standing outside of a rental car. He tells her that they need to practice travelling together if they are to go to France. This shows Kilroy's commitment to the relationship and demonstrates the theme of loyalty.

They go to Montauk, see the ocean, and stay in a roadside motel. The trip is brief, but it gets Kilroy out of the city, which is likely what he needed to do. Upon his return to the apartment, Kilroy finds a note addressed to him and it changes his mood drastically. Carrie is not sure how best to handle it and suggests leaving. Initially, he is fine with her leaving. When she actually starts to go, he asks her to get something to eat. Kilroy is not accustomed to telling people he needs them and this gesture shows that he needs Carrie. Carrie reads the note without Kilroy's permission. The note sheds some light on what could be bothering him.

While Kilroy may continue to keep secrets from Carrie, he is willing to share other aspects of himself with her. Taking her to meet his parents is not his idea; but, when Carrie asks, he agrees. Meeting his mother and father gives Carrie insight into Kilroy's past, but it does not necessarily give her insight into Kilroy. The length of time it takes for their relationship to return to normal foreshadows that whatever the anniversary marks it represents a very deep wound.

Jamie once again reaches out to Carrie, but it is not a social call. She needs Carrie and asks her to come back. Carrie tells Jamie that it is not a good time for her to come back. Carrie has already avoided going back to Madison with Rooster's wedding. It is as if Carrie were to return home she would not be able to get back. Carrie is fighting against going back and focusing on the life she is creating in New York.



Jamie hangs up on Carrie this time and this alarms Carrie. Once Carrie discovers what has happened: that Lynn was assaulted and Mrs. Fletcher, Jamie's mother, attempted suicide, Carrie rushes back to Madison. She does not get the reaction she expected. When Jamie rejects her being there, Carrie is able to fully see the extent of which their friendship has been damaged.

When Carrie talks to Mixie, she learns the full scope of Lynn's attack. The theme of guilt is addressed by how Mixie reveals that Lynn told everyone that she saw Carrie in the parking lot. This shifts blame to Carrie as if she had communicated her concerns about Lynn to Jamie that the assault could have been avoided. Carrie explains that she did not tell Jamie because she promised Lynn that she would not. Because Carrie has proven herself capable of keeping a secret, Mixie gives Carrie details about the assault, in the sexual assault to Carrie as a penalty. It is as if Carrie must know this as punishment for not interfering.

While Carrie is in Madison she checks in with Kilroy. He is supportive of her and understanding of what she is going through. As Jamie continues to reject Carrie's attempts to see her, she begins to wonder why she is still in Madison. Carrie is at a crossroads. She begins to understand that she cannot leave until she has seen Mike.

Carrie goes to visit Mike, and she is confronted with the power of her returning. Mike confesses that he has imagined her returning to him. While Carrie's feelings for Mike have not changed, she begins to understand why she left and why she may need to stay. She realizes the effect of her leaving on the people she used to care about.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Carrie ask to go with Kilroy to see his parents?

Discussion Question 2

What does Carrie's decision to read Kilroy's note reveal about their relationship?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mixie tell Carrie a detail about Lynn's attack that no one else knows?

Vocabulary

lilting, sarongs, capacious, proprietary, vehemence, rueful, decanter, countenance, precarious, sardonic, banal, emissaries, filigree, galvanized, cipher, dissonance, opaquely, abated



Part 3, Chapters 34-42

Summary

In Chapter 34, Carrie returns to the copy shop to see Julie and is rejected again. Carrie decides she should go back to New York and she books a flight. She runs into Rooster and learns that he and Joan are expecting a child. Rooster, Mike, and Carrie all go out to lunch. Mike talks about working for his father and how it is boring. Rooster and Carrie drop Mike off and end up talking about Mike. Rooster tells her that while she was away, Mike was talking about wanting to die; he even went so far as to ask for help in killing himself. He regrets telling Carrie, but feels she should know. He also wants her to know that Mike did not want Carrie to come back out of pity.

In Chapter 35, Carrie cancels her flight back to New York, which Kilroy is not happy about. Carrie goes to visit Mike. Mrs. Mayer is cold toward her. Later, she visits the fabric store and agrees to do some alterations for a woman in the store. When she talks with Kilroy on the phone, Carrie can sense him pulling away and he accuses her of getting drawn back in. Carrie goes back to see Mike and she asks Mike if they can just be friends. He tells her he still loves her.

In Chapter 36, Carrie is at her mother's house reading the newspaper when she sees Jamie standing on the sidewalk. When Carrie gets to the door, Jamie is gone. The next day, Carrie goes to see Mrs. Fletcher at the institution. When she gets there, Mrs. Fletcher shows her the garden and tells her that Jamie is lucky to have a friend like Carrie. Carrie notes that Mrs. Fletcher's personality has changed and that if one "hadn't known her before, you might assume she was the same, sweet maternal lady she's always been" (363). The next day, Mrs. Mayer agrees to show Carrie the lift on the van so that Carrie can take Mike out.

In Chapter 37, Kilroy confronts Carrie about not returning to New York. She insists that she is returning. He tells her that she will not come back and that she just does not realize it yet. She asks him to come to Madison, and he tells her no. They both feel they have given each other ultimatums. Carrie takes Mike to lunch over the next few days. Carrie continues talking with Kilroy on the phone. She is torn between the two men. Mrs. Mayer teaches Carrie how to move Mike from his wheelchair and Carrie starts taking Mike to his outpatient physical therapy. That evening, Carrie wonders if she will ever see Kilroy again and then looks to Mike and wonders if anything she can "do will be enough now" (374).

In Chapter 38, Carrie receives a call from Simon telling her she has been gone too long. She explains what has been going on and Simon is upset that he will not be able to see Carrie but once a year when he comes back to Madison. He tells her that Miss Wolf died and Lane is upset. Carrie asks to speak with Lane and invites her to visit. The next day, Carrie learns Mike quit his job. Mike talks to Carrie about Dave King explaining that one of the most difficult parts of his injury is "having to live with suicidal thoughts" (379).



Carrie asks if he has those thoughts a lot and he says not as much as he used to have them.

Lane arrives in Madison in Chapter 39. She brings back all of Carrie's clothes, including the nightgown and robe, but not the green dress. Carrie introduces her to her mother and they get along. The girls visit and talk about Kilroy. After Lane returns to New York, she finds that Lane has left her a signed copy of her poetry chapbook.

In Chapter 40, Carrie goes to talk to Mrs. Mayer about the upcoming Memorial Day weekend. The Mayers traditionally go to Door County for the weekend. Mrs. Mayer has decided not to go. Carrie tells her that she should go and that she will look after Mike. Carrie explains that while Mrs. Mayer may be disappointed in how she reacted after the accident, she is back now and wants to help. On Memorial Day, Mike asks Carrie to take him to Clausen's Reservoir. They go, but the path is not accessible. At a refreshment stand, Carrie overhears others comment about how Mike would be more comfortable at home. She confronts them that they would be more comfortable if he was at home. She shows Mike where the helicopter landed the day of the accident and that Rooster pulled him out of the water.

Back at home, they watch television together. Mike asks Carrie to take off her nightgown. She hesitates, but she complies. When he feels no arousal, he apologizes and tells her she can get dressed.

In Chapter 41, Carrie receives a package at her mother's house from Kilroy. He sent her the sewing machine and the framed photo he gave her at Christmas. She calls Kilroy and she tells him that she feels bad about them and he replies "So you've destroyed me" (398). She tells him to come to Madison, and he declines once again. He tells her that he had a younger brother who died at age twenty-one from leukemia and that his name was Mike. Carrie sobs on the phone, and he tells her he is going to hang up. He tells her to "Live well" (400) and disconnects the call. She thinks about getting a flight and going back, but then she thinks of Mike. She goes for a walk. When she gets back, she writes a note to Jamie about how she feels a great loss without her. She puts the letter in the Fletchers' mailbox and returns home.

In Chapter 42, Jamie shows up. They talk about Mrs. Fletcher coming home for a visit and Jamie apologizes for blaming Carrie for what happened. After Jamie leaves, Carrie and Mike go to lunch together. Mike tells her his old boss contacted him about coming back to work at the bank. Then he asks if she is back for good and she says yes. Instead of going straight home, Carrie takes Mike to the observatory at the hospital. Mike asks her if they ever would have gotten married. She tells him that it probably would not have been "the best idea" (413).

Analysis

In Chapter 34, Carrie gets a flight to return to New York. She is frustrated by Jamie's rejections and thinks she would be better off leaving. She changes her mind after



meeting with Rooster. Given how protective Rooster has been of Mike, it is surprising that he was as willing to speak with Carrie as he is. Rooster has matured, having gotten married and expecting his first child. He understands his place in the world and this reinforces the theme of identity. Rooster even recognizes the role he plays in Mike's life as well.

During their conversation, Rooster confides in Carrie about the suicidal thoughts that Mike experienced while she was gone. This reveal puts into perspective what Carrie left behind. She knew that Mike would have a rough time adjusting to his life after the accident, but she likely had not thought about how he would consider adjusting. Mike will later talk to Carrie about how people with his injury are often left with burden of considering suicide often. He accepts this as part of his reality.

Learning this about Mike is what prompts her to take a more active role in caring for Mike. She cancels her flight back to New York, but she still maintains the desire and plan to go back to the city and Kilroy.

Carrie's loyalty to Mike is doubted by Mrs. Mayer. Carrie may want to help, but her desire to do so is not welcomed by Mrs. Mayer. Where the two women once had a good relationship with one another, Carrie's leaving severed that bond. She needs to work to regain Mrs. Mayer's trust.

There are things Carrie needs to learn, such as how to operate the handicapped accessible van and moving him from his chair. She persists and Mrs. Mayer slowly begins to warm up to Carrie.

Lane comes to visit Carrie in Madison and brings her the clothes she had at the apartment, including the nightgown and robe. Carrie realizes that she is losing the new friendships she has fostered. When Lane leaves her chapbook, it is done so as a type of goodbye to acknowledge that Lane regarded her friendship warmly.

Carrie's relationship with Kilroy suffers as a result of her decision to stay. While Carrie does not see her return as being forever, Kilroy does. He knows she is not coming back, even if she does not. Kilroy finally tells Carrie about his brother Mike and how he died young from leukemia. This explores the themes of identity and relationships. Kilroy gravitated toward Carrie because he recognized loss. Together they could understand each other by identifying themselves as people who had suffered loss. While Kilroy owns this aspect of his life, there is not much he can do about it because his brother died. Where Carrie differs is that she has the opportunity to confront the loss she experienced with Mike and try to make it better.

Carrie and Mike may not be destined to be anything more than friends, but Carrie can work toward rebuilding their relationship. One of the ways in which Carrie demonstrates this is by caring for Mike over the Memorial Day weekend. This gives Mrs. Mayer a break from caring for Mike, and while she is reluctant at first, she has come around to see Carrie's renewed loyalty to Mike.



Mike and Carrie spend the anniversary of Mike's accident together. While Mike maintains his love for Carrie, he understands that their relationship has changed. Part of his process in accepting this is when he asks Carrie to take off her nightgown in front of him. While she is reluctant to do so, she does oblige. Mike wanted her to do this as a test of his capacity to achieve arousal. He feels nothing and tells her she can dress again. They make peace with their reality as friends instead of lovers.

Carrie is able to reconnect with Jamie. The trip back to Madison begins to heal the relationships Carrie thought she lost, but it does come at a price. She has lost her friendship with Simon, understanding that she might see him only once a year. And she has lost her relationship with Kilroy. Carrie asks Kilroy to come to Madison and he declines. Even though he loves her, New York and the identity he has forged in that city is where he belongs. He understands that Carrie needs to forge hers as well. While it is possible that the two encounter each other later on in life, Carrie is where she is needed and where she wants to be. By asking Kilroy to come to Madison, she demonstrates how she would rather bring him into her world instead of leaving her world for his.

She has also lost her fleeting dream of a fashion career. While this may not be permanent, it is unlikely. She still has the silk nightgown and robe that she made. She was unable to wear it with Mike or Kilroy, suggesting that another love awaits her in the future.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Carrie think that nothing she does will be enough?

Discussion Question 2

Did Carrie make the right decision by staying with Mike and not going back to New York and Kilroy?

Discussion Question 3

What does Carrie's decision to stay in Madison reveal about her character?

Vocabulary

charade, dowdier, bodice, lugubrious, tremulous, stalwart, provisional, morose, talisman, nonchalantly, disquisition, chastened, pontificate



Characters

Carrie Bell

Carrie Bell is twenty-three and living in her hometown of Madison, Wisconsin. She is engaged to her high school sweetheart Mike, but she feels the relationship has run its course. She is considering ending the relationship when Mike has an accident that leaves him a quadriplegic.

To the people around her, including her best friend Jamie, Carrie's behavior after the accident is viewed as strange and inappropriate. Unable to cope with what has happened to Mike, and by extension of the accident to herself, she flees Madison for New York City without telling anyone.

She wants to explore her life away from Madison and a life she felt stagnated. She struggles with the relationships with Mike and Kilroy, comparing both men to the other, depending on whom she is with at the time.

Guilt and a sense of loyalty lead her back to Madison and to Mike. While she is not interested in rekindling a romantic relationship with Mike, she believes she should be there for him as a friend.

Mike

Mike is Carrie's fiancé. They have been together since high school. He loves Carrie and does not fully recognize the difficulties in their relationship until after his accident.

He used to play hockey and was athletic. After diving into shallow water, Mike breaks his neck, leaving him a quadriplegic. He confronts Carrie about their relationship while he is in rehab.

He wants Carrie to stay with him because she wants to be there. He does not want her to stay with him out of pity.

Kilroy

Kilroy is the man Carrie has a relationship with in New York City. They first meet in Madison at Viktor's dinner party. Kilroy works temp jobs and hustles pool at McClanahan's Bar.

He is evasive about his past and bristles when Carrie asks him personal questions. He believes people can know each other by spending time together rather than by learning facts about each other.



He is from a wealthy family. His brother Mike died of cancer when they were younger. He is older than Carrie, eventually telling her that he is forty.

He wants to continue his relationship with Carrie on his terms. He refuses to leave New York when Carrie asks him to join her in Madison.

Jamie

Jamie has been Carrie's best friend since early elementary school. She has two sisters and a difficult relationship with her mother.

She has noticed changes in Carrie's behavior and this causes a rift in their friendship. She is hurt when Carrie does not tell her about going to New York. The friendship is all but severed after Jamie's sister Lynn is assaulted and Jamie learns that Carrie knew about Lynn's behavior that put her at risk for the attack and did not tell anyone.

She refuses to see Carrie when Carrie finally returns to Madison. They eventually reconcile.

Rooster

Rooster is Mike's best friend. He puts Carrie on notice after the accident to protect Mike.

Simon

Simon is a former classmate of Carrie's who came out as gay and moved to New York. They reconnect and he offers his place for her to stay while in New York.

Joan

Joan is one of the ICU nurses who cares for Mike after his accident. She later gets married to Rooster.

Mrs. Mayer

Mrs. Mayer is Mike's mother. Prior to Carrie leaving, she has a good relationship with Carrie. She is leery of Carrie when she returns to be a part of Mike's life again.

Lane

Lane is one of Simon's other roommates who befriends Carrie. She is lesbian and a poet who works as an assistant to Miss Wolf.

Viktor

Viktor is Carrie's coworker at the library. He is from Poland and invites Carrie to a dinner party after Mike's accident. She meets Kilroy at the party.



Symbols and Symbolism

Sewing

Sewing is symbolic of Carrie trying to piece her life together after Mike's accident and her decision to leave.

Dive

The dive symbolizes Mike's surety in his life and their engagement in contrast to Carrie.

Nightgown and Gown

The nightgown and robe symbolize that Carrie has not found who she belongs with because she is unable to wear them with either Mike or Kilroy.

The Green Dress

The green dress symbolizes possibility. Carrie does not wear the dress, suggesting that possibility awaits her in future.

Engagement Ring

The engagement ring symbolizes Carrie's commitment to Mike. She does not take the ring off until she switches it to her right hand as a friendship ring indicating her loyalty to Mike.

Pier

The pier symbolizes chance. Mike takes a chance and it costs him severely, but the accident prompts Carrie to take a chance in going to New York City, which she may not have done otherwise.

Kilroy's Apartment

Kilroy's apartment symbolizes how the relationship between Kilroy and Carrie will not last. Its starkness and his continued need to clear things to make room demonstrates how Kilroy will only make room for Carrie for so long.

Fabric

The fabric symbolizes Carrie's options. She selects the appropriate fabric that is best suited to her needs, just as she makes her choices about leaving and staying.

Tragedies with Someone Named Mike

The tragedies with someone named Mike symbolize the connections between Carrie and Kilroy and how they ultimately connected through grief. Kilroy's brother Mike had died of cancer.

Car

The car symbolizes how Mike and Carrie's relationship is in the past. They bought the car together, but Carrie sells it while she is in New York, indicating that their romantic relationship is over.



Settings

Clausen's Pier

Clausen's Pier is a place where people can go for recreation in Madison, Wisconsin. It is where Carrie and Mike and friends go on Memorial Day weekend. It is where Mike dives off the pier and breaks his neck.

The Mayer House

The Mayer House is where Mike lives with his parents. Prior to his accident, Mike was still living with his parents. His family converts part of the first floor of the house into a room and bathroom that is accessible for Mike when he comes home after rehab.

The Hospital

The hospital is where Mike is in ICU after the accident. Mike's family, friends, and Carrie spend time with him in the ICU. Rooster meets Joan, a nurse, in the ICU as well.

New York City

New York City is where Carrie goes when she decides she has to flee Wisconsin. It is where she lives with Simon and his roommates and begins her relationships with Kilroy. She also begins fashion classes at Parsons in New York.

Simon's Apartment

Simon's apartment is where Carrie ends up staying when she gets to New York City. She sleeps in a small alcove. There are four other roommates who live there, including Lane.

Kilroy's Apartment

Kilroy's apartment is austere. It is immaculate and furnished only with what he needs. Carrie spends a lot of her time staying with Kilroy there.



Themes and Motifs

Identity

The theme of identity is explored through the novel by how Carrie views herself in conjunction with others. While the narrative is told from her perspective, she does not necessarily see herself as a solitary being. Rather, she looks to her relationships with others to find her center.

This is first demonstrated at the opening of the novel when Carrie is clearly unhappy in her relationship with Mike. She does not take action and end the relationship, even though this is at the forefront of her thoughts. Mike's accident does not change the way Carrie feels, but her obligation to Mike remains. She is in the hospital with him, but she is not able to reconcile why she is there outside of obligation.

Her unhappiness in the relationship is not lost on Mike. He effectively gives her permission to leave – whether it is the hospital or their relationship – and she does so. While it may seem that Carrie goes to New York as a way to find herself, she is looking for Simon and her soon-to-be lover Kilroy.

When Carrie leaves Madison, she does not tell anyone where she is going. Instead, she waits a few weeks before she calls her mother. During their conversation, Carrie suggests that she is a bad person. Her mother does not directly counter this assessment. Instead, she suggests that Carrie is already who she is as a person. Rather than being good or bad, she is able to make the right decision for herself. Kilroy offers a similar assessment, which may be what prompts Carrie to return. Her identity is rooted in her friends and family in Madison. Instead of escaping to a new identity, she returns to modify her old life to better suit her needs.

Relationships

The theme of relationships is explored through platonic and sexual relationships. At the outset of the novel, Carrie is unhappy in her current relationship, which is the only relationship she has had. She has been with Mike since high school and he has been her only lover.

This changes when Carrie travels to New York and begins a relationship with Kilroy. She notes the differences in how the men approach sex. With Mike, it was something they did. With Kilroy, it is a way of communicating. This may be because of the difference in the men's ages. Mike is the same age as Carrie, while Kilroy is forty. Carrie falls in love with both men, but views her relationship with each of them differently.

There is another friendship connection that examples the theme of relationships. Carrie and Jamie have been best friends since elementary school, but they begin to see a rift in their friendship develop after Mike's accident. It is natural to think that the impetus for



this falling out is rooted in the stress of the accident, but Carrie was unhappy before it happened. Just as her relationship with Mike felt stagnated, that feeling may have contributed to how Carrie ended up pulling away from Jamie.

After Jamie's sister is attacked and her mother attempts suicide, Jamie reaches out to Carrie and asks her to come home. When Carrie tells her she cannot, it further damages the relationship in a way that Jamie does not want to repair. Carrie does not know what has happened to prompt Jamie's phone call. However, when she finds out, she rushes back to Madison. This is when Jamie rejects her.

Carrie works to mend her relationship with Jamie, and the women do seem to resolve the issues. In doing so, however, Carrie has damaged other relationships.

Simon served as a surrogate for Jamie while she was in New York. Simon actively misses Carrie. Their friendship is sacrificed when Carrie moves back to Madison. Similarly, her relationship with Kilroy is damaged when she goes back. She invited Kilroy to join her as a way to compromise, but Kilroy rejects the proposition. In leaving Madison, Carrie is able to return and see how she can best pursue a relationship with Mike. The time away has given her perspective. She knows that she cannot be with Mike as his future wife, but she knows that she needs to maintain her relationship with Mike as a friend.

Guilt

The author uses the theme of guilt to propel characters through the grieving process.

Carrie feels guilt for just about every decision she makes. She feels guilty for abandoning Mike. Not just their relationship, but for leaving him at a time when he is at his most vulnerable. When Carrie returns, she does not try to recapture their previous relationship. Just as Mike is adapting to his new reality, Carrie must do the same.

To do so, however, she must leave Kilroy behind. She loves him and wants to be with him, but he will not leave New York. Her relationship with him is ultimately educational. She is forced to confront what she wants and what she needs to do and accept the sacrifices that come with doing so. In this case, she must sacrifice her relationship with Kilroy.

Kilroy may be able to let Carrie go because of the guilt that he feels for the loss of his brother. While Carrie can maintain a relationship with Mike, Kilroy's brother is deceased. Both Carrie and Kilroy are not responsible for what happened to Mike or Kilroy's brother. Instead, they have to confront their survivor's guilt and make sense of how that informs how they live their lives. Kilroy has pared down his existence, stripping his life bare as if to emulate his brother's death. Carrie sacrifices part of her future, including Kilroy and her fashion pursuit, to be a friend to Mike.



Another way in which guilt is explored is in Carrie's relationship with Jamie. While Carrie was able to find a surrogate best friend in Simon, Jamie was left alone. In leaving Simon behind, she begins to see the extent of how her friendship with Jamie has suffered.

Her guilt is deepened by the news of Lynn's assault. Jamie believes that Carrie was wrong to not tell her about Lynn's high-risk behavior as though that contributed to the assault. Carrie must deal with the guilt of knowing that she could have intervened in Lynn's behavior, but chose to keep a promise to Lynn.

Loss and Alienation

The themes of loss and alienation are explored through the novel by what the characters are forced to give up.

The most obvious loss stems from Mike's accident. Mike is now a quadriplegic. He has lost the use of his limbs, his sexual function, and his independence. This alters the way in which he interacts with his friends, family, and everyday life. This leads to his isolation, which he attempts to accept. When Mike gives Carrie permission to leave, he is recognizing that their relationship was broken prior to the accident and that he does not expect her to commit to their relationship given his current condition. His isolation is further demonstrated by his reliance on others to go out into the world. Rooster takes him to lunch. Later, Carrie takes him out to eat and to his rehab appointment.

Carrie also experiences loss and alienation. She has gradually come to terms with her waning connection with Mike. After his accident, she grapples with the guilt and obligation of playing the role of fiancée. She is overwhelmed by the perceived expectations, which alienate her from her friends and Mike's family. When she finally reaches a breaking point, she flees Madison for New York. She travels alone and does not tell anyone that she is leaving or where she is going. She needs this isolation to process her grief for what had transpired.

In New York, she has Simon and quickly enters a relationship with Kilroy, yet she does spend time alone. Her time away does not offer her a respite from loss and alienation, however. In returning to Madison, Carrie comes to understand that she is losing Kilroy. Further, even though she has returned, she is alienated from Jamie, finally seeing the full scope of the difficulties in their relationship.

The way Kilroy lives his life exemplifies how loss and alienation can dictate how one goes on living after losing a loved one. Kilroy is withdrawn from his family, having been so since his brother's death. While it is not established whether or not Kilroy was ever close with his parents, he actively rejects the way they lead their lives. He gets by on as little as possible and lives in a sparse apartment which holds only what he needs. This shows how Kilroy has alienated himself from his family, which may be correlated to the loss of his brother.

Loyalty

The theme of loyalty is explored throughout the novel as a way for characters to find their paths.

Carrie and Mike have been in a committed relationship since they were in high school. Their relationship has lasted longer than some marriages do. They have grown up and settled into who they are or are becoming by the time the novel begins. Mike is devoted to Carrie, but he senses something is off in their relationship. Carrie does not know this for certain until after the accident, however.

Understandably, Carrie wants to be there for Mike after the accident, but her feelings for Mike have not changed. She wants out of the relationship, but she is loyal to him. While she begins to avoid the hospital, she continues to return.

At times this is prompted by Mrs. Mayer's interventions, she does so because she is dedicated to helping her son. Mrs. Mayer wants to do whatever is best for Mike and what will make him the most comfortable. While Carrie's loyalty comes into question after she leaves for New York, she returns and finds her place in Mike's life. When Carrie returns, she questions whether or not Carrie deserves to even be taught how to drive the van or move Mike. It is not until Carrie offers to care for Mike over the Memorial Day weekend that Mrs. Mayer begins to believe in Carrie's loyalty.

Rooster also demonstrates his loyalty to Mike. He pulls Mike out of the water after the accident and is at his side in the hospital. He also intervenes with Carrie when he thinks she is letting Mike down. Once Mike is home from the hospital, Rooster takes Mike out to lunch and spends time with him. He dedicated to his friend. He even goes so far as to tell Carrie about Mike's thoughts of suicide as way to help her understand what she ran away from. He does not do it to make her feel guilty, though understandably she does, but rather to help her understand what Mike needs from his friends. If Carrie was unable to handle that part of Mike's experience, then Rooster would rather have her know and decide to leave.

Styles

Point of View

The Dive from Clausen's Pier is told through a first-person narrative. Carrie Bell, the narrator, appears to be a reliable and self-aware individual. She is a twenty-three year old, college-educated woman who has really never left home. She is engaged to her high school sweetheart, but she is having doubts about the relationship.

After Mike's accident, Carrie leave Madison, Wisconsin, for New York City. Her mood shifts from guilt to possibility. She begins a new relationship with Kilroy, who helps her see the world differently. She remains free of responsibility, with her friends and lover providing for her during her stay in New York.

Her perspective shifts back to guilt when thinking of Mike and Jamie and all she left behind. When she returns, she sees how people are disappointed in her.

The intensity of her guilt wavers based on how she is being perceived. She felt that she abandoned Mike, but he was willing to let her go, while her relationship with Jamie suffered more.

Language and Meaning

The language is accessible with a confessional tone. The vocabulary is consistent with a college-educated narrator.

Terminology is used specific to sewing and sewing machines and is defined where appropriate. There is also sporadic medical terminology used in conjunction with Mike's accident, but the meaning is understood through context.

The dialogue is conversational as would be expected from a group of friends who have known each other since they were young. Kilroy's dialogue differs. It is more mature in tone and he speaks in abstractions. It marks a difference from Mike to further allow Carrie to compare the men. She concentrates more on how they differ rather than the similarities they may have.

There are occasional swear words that are used appropriately in context. Otherwise the novel is devoid of slang.

Structure

The novel is divided into three sections and forty-two chapters. The chapters are of relatively equal length of approximately ten pages each. The sections are as follows:

Part One: Intensive Care; Part Two: A Thousand Miles; and Part Three: Kilroy Was Here.

The novel takes place over the course of one year. It begins on Memorial Day when Mike has his accident and concludes on the first anniversary.

The format of the novel is traditional, though some flashbacks of Mike are included through Carrie's memories. These occur intermittently when she is reminded of Mike or is comparing Kilroy to Mike.

There is an awareness of the seasons changing to indicate the passage of time. Though the author occasionally specifies a date or gives parameters of time, the seasons are the reliable markers.



Quotes

That was how I resurrected the past: people in their outfits, or who sat next to whom, and from there on to what we talked about, what we were like at a certain time.”

-- Carrie as Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: The quote addresses how Carrie uses clothing as a touchstone in her life.

When I made something I thought of longevity; how the hours I put into it would yield me an exponential number of wearing them.”

-- Carrie as Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 29)

Importance: The quote demonstrates how Carrie values the history and quality of items that she creates. This foreshadows that she will return to Madison.

I'd want to die, too,' Mike said, and I felt a narrow gap open up between us because I wouldn't want to, couldn't see thinking in those terms at all.”

-- Mike and Carrie as Narrator (chapter 12 paragraph 38)

Importance: The quote shows the depth of Mike's commitment to Carrie in contrast to the disconnect she feels.

I'd been gone two weeks, three, and he had no idea what had happened to me. No one did.”

-- Carrie as Narrator (chapter 17 paragraph 1)

Importance: The quote illustrates how Carrie's need for autonomy enables her to get away from all the ties that would tempt her back to Madison.

It was as if he were frugal not by need but to make a point, the same point made by the inward frugality that kept his walls empty of pictures, his floors bare. It was a frugality that said: I don't need anything.”

-- Carrie as Narrator (chapter 19 paragraph 40)

Importance: The quote demonstrates Kilroy's detachment and his ability to let go.

We were sort of like this incredibly polite mother and daughter. She called me honey, and I helped her in her garden sometimes.”

-- Carrie (chapter 21 paragraph 91)

Importance: The quote gives insight into the relationship between Carrie and Mrs. Mayer.

Sex was our medium, as enlightening as a long exchange of information.”

-- Carrie as Narrator (chapter 23 paragraph 37)



Importance: The quote illustrates the importance of the physical relationship between Carrie and Kilroy and how sex is used as a method of communication in contrast to her relationship with Mike.

The family is the enemy of the artist – of any young person trying to live seriously and meaningfully. You have to go.”

-- Miss Wolf (chapter 24 paragraph 93)

Importance: The quote shows how Carrie will have to make a choice between moving on with her desire to pursue a career in fashion or returning to her family of friends in Madison.

Nothing. You just reminded me of someone else. Or of myself with someone else.”

-- Kilroy (chapter 27 paragraph 126)

Importance: The quote demonstrates how even though Kilroy tries to keep his life uncluttered, memory creeps up on him in a way he cannot control.

He was smiling, too, a smile that seemed to acknowledge that he was acting out of character, and that I liked it, and that he liked my liking it.”

-- Carrie as Narrator (chapter 28 paragraph 16)

Importance: The quote shows Kilroy's happiness in the relationship with Carrie, foreshadowing how he will feel genuine loss when she leaves.

Lynn told us about running into you out at that bar last summer. She was sure you'd told Jamie. She was hurt Jamie didn't seem to care.”

-- Mixie (chapter 31 paragraph 65)

Importance: The quote illustrates how Carrie's loyalty has unintended consequences. Her loyalty to Lynn hurt Jamie, just as her loyalty to Mike hurts Kilroy.

Two people, each on the run from a tragedy named Mike. Cry or puke, take your pick.”

-- Kilroy (chapter 41 paragraph 49)

Importance: The quote reveals what may have prompted Kilroy to send the note to Carrie when he learned that they both were affected by the loss of someone close to them.