

Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures Study Guide

**Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures by
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Plot Summary

Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures was written by Kate DiCamillo. Flora Belle Buckman is a self-described cynic who finds herself at odds with her mother after her parents' divorce. While reading a comic book her mother has asked her not to read, Flora sees the neighbor accidentally vacuum up a squirrel in her backyard. Flora comes to the rescue of the squirrel, who immediately exhibits unusual abilities. Flora believes the squirrel is a superhero and that her mother is its arch-nemesis. For this reason, Flora sets out to save her squirrel from her mother only to find it is the squirrel who saves them. Flora and Ulysses is an entertaining novel of family dynamics that takes both Flora and the reader on a journey of self-discovery.

Flora Belle Buckman has signed a contract with her mother in which she has agreed to stop reading so many comic books in favor of better literature. However, Flora shared the comic books about the unassuming janitor Alfred T. Slipper who fell into a vat of a cleaning fluid and became the superhero named Incandesto to her father. Flora's parents have recently gotten divorced, making his connection to her father even more important to Flora.

As Flora reads, she hears a noise in the neighbor's yard. As Flora watches from her bedroom window, she sees Mrs. Tickham accidentally vacuum up a squirrel. Flora runs over and rescues the squirrel, performing a version of CPR that brings the animal back to life. The squirrel then picks up the heavy vacuum, demonstrating what Flora sees as superhero characteristics. Flora takes the squirrel home, taking into the house without hiding it, but her mother misses the animal because she is absorbed in writing her latest romance novel.

Flora spends the evening with the squirrel. When Flora speaks to the squirrel, he seems to understand her, increasing her belief that he is a superhero. That night, the squirrel sneaks down to the kitchen where he rummages for food. After satiating his hunger, the squirrel then types several words on the typewriter Mrs. Buckman uses for her work. Mrs. Buckman is angry the next morning, thinking that Flora must have played with the machine. While they argue over the situation, the doorbell rings.

Flora opens the door and finds the neighbor woman, Mrs. Tickham, there. Mrs. Tickham wants to see the squirrel. Flora tells Mrs. Tickham that she has named the squirrel Ulysses and that she believes he wrote with her mother's typewriter. A moment later, Mrs. Tickham is joined by her nephew, a young man Flora's age who insists that he is suffering from temporary blindness. Flora dislikes this young man, William Spiver, immediately.

Flora, Mrs. Tickham, and William Spiver go to Mrs. Tickham's home to discuss Ulysses. While there, William Spiver expresses doubt as to whether Ulysses actually wrote with the typewriter, suggesting that they have him write on Mrs. Tickham's computer. Ulysses not only writes on the computer, but he composes a short poem.



Flora is called home. Her father has arrived to take her out for their weekly visit. When Flora returns home, she hides on the stairway to listen to her parents talk. As she does, Flora learns that her mother is convinced Ulysses is ill and she wants Mr. Buckman to kill and bury the animal. Flora is upset by this, now convinced that her mother is Ulysses's arch-nemesis.

Flora and her father go to a local diner to have breakfast. Flora insists on taking Ulysses inside with them. However, chaos ensues when the waitress insists on seeing Ulysses and frightens him with her sudden scream. Ulysses gets tangled in the woman's hair and then flies into the door when Flora encourages him to be himself. Flora and her father escape the diner and go to his new home, an apartment building that houses a mean, unpredictable cat.

While dodging the cat, Mr. Klaus, in the hallway, Flora insists on visiting a neighbor of her father whose door announces two doctors live there. When the door opens, Flora meets Dr. Meescham, a kindly doctorate of philosophy who is good friends with Mr. Buckman. Dr. Meescham examines a cut on Ulysses' head and declares him healthy. Afterward, they share jelly sandwiches as Dr. Meescham tells them stories of her childhood and her beloved, deceased husband.

When her father takes her home, Flora discovers William Spiver in the kitchen with her mother. Flora announces she wants to move in with her father. Mrs. Buckman becomes upset and says some cruel things. This only makes Flora's determination stronger, but then her father convinces her to stay with her mother for the time being. In fact, Mrs. Buckman seems nicer, even inviting Ulysses to eat dinner at the table with them.

During the night, Flora has warned Ulysses not to go into the kitchen, but he disobeys her because he wants to write on the typewriter. Just as he finishes a poem for Flora, Ulysses is caught by Mrs. Buckman. Mrs. Buckman forces Ulysses to write a note of lies to Flora before she takes him from the house. When Flora wakes in the night and finds Ulysses gone, she decides to enlist William Spiver's help in finding him.

Flora takes her mother's beloved lamp, one of the first things she bought with her romance novel money, and goes to the Tickham home in search of William Spiver. Flora manages to wake William Spiver, but he, in turn, wakes Mrs. Tickham. The three of them search for Ulysses in Mrs. Tickham's car, but soon run out of gas. They begin to walk. William Spiver trips over the lamp cord as they walk and his glasses are broken. William Spiver suddenly realizes he can see again.

Ulysses escapes from Mrs. Buckman where she has taken him to the woods. He flies to the home of Dr. Meescham. Flora, Mrs. Tickham, and William Spiver also go to the apartment building in search of Mr. Buckman. As they reunite, they hear screaming from the hallway. Mr. Klaus has attacked Mrs. Buckman who has just arrived. Ulysses saves Mrs. Buckman from the cat. Mrs. Buckman announces how she came home and found Flora missing and was terribly frightened for her wellbeing. This heals some old wounds and allows the family to settle into a new normal.



Chapters 1-13

Summary

Chapters 1-13

A comic book illustration shows Mr. Tickham giving his wife a new, multi-terrain vacuum cleaner for her birthday. The vacuum is so powerful that Mrs. Tickham loses control of it and it drags her out into the backyard.

Chapter 1

Flora Belle Buckman is reading a comic, *The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incadesto!*, when her mother calls up the stairs to remind her that she signed a contract promising to read true literature instead of comics. Flora ignores her. Flora is drawn to the window when she hears what sounds like a jet engine in the neighbor's yard. Flora sees her neighbor, Mrs. Tickham, being dragged through the yard by a large vacuum cleaner. There is a squirrel in the path of the vacuum and Flora tries to call a warning, but cannot be heard over the noise of the machine. Flora sees the squirrel get vacuumed up.

Chapter 2

Squirrels think mostly of food. Therefore, it was food the squirrel was thinking of as he was swallowed by a vacuum.

Chapter 3

The sucking up of the squirrel shuts off the vacuum.

Chapter 4

Flora runs from her room to the Tickham's backyard. Flora takes the squirrel out of the vacuum and checks him for a pulse. Flora has learned many things about emergency situations in a bonus comic at the back of most *The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incadesto! Called Terrible Things Can Happen to You!* One of those things is CPR. Flora performs a modified version of CPR on the squirrel.

Chapter 5

The squirrel sees a bright light and hears a kind voice. Then the squirrel is revived.

Chapter 6

Flora and Mrs. Tickham realize the squirrel has been saved. Mrs. Tickham begins to laugh hysterically.



Chapter 7

The squirrel is very hungry even though he feels as though his brain has increased in size. For this reason, the squirrel lifts the vacuum in hopes of finding food.

Chapter 8

Flora and Mrs. Tickham are shocked by the squirrel's actions. Mrs. Tickham thinks she has a brain tumor, but Flora thinks the squirrel might have been transformed into a superhero by his accident. Flora then decides to call the squirrel Ulysses because of the name written on the side of the vacuum.

Chapter 9

Flora introduces herself to the squirrel and tells him his new name.

Chapter 10

Flora takes Ulysses into her house, reminded by the noise of her mother's intensive typing that this is likely why her parents divorced. Mr. Buckman told her that her mother simply stopped loving him, but Flora thinks it was the typing and the resulting romance novels. On her way upstairs, Flora passes her mother's most beloved belonging, a lamp featuring a pretty shepherdess with a single lamb that her mother calls Mary Ann. Flora believes her mother loves Mary Ann more than she because of her obsessive behavior toward it.

Chapter 11

Flora takes Ulysses to her room and explains what happened to him and how he has now become a superhero. She uses her comic books as an illustration for her explanation. Ulysses appears to understand what she says.

Chapter 12

After dinner, Flora lies in bed and thinks of her father and how he used to read the Incandesto comics with her. Flora then reminds herself not to be too hopeful about Ulysses becoming a true superhero.

Chapter 13

Ulysses wakes in the night. He is very hungry. Ulysses goes downstairs to the kitchen and gorges on a bag of cheese puffs. Ulysses then discovers the typewriter and writes a few words.



Analysis

This novel is written both in prose and with the use of illustrated comics. In fact, the novel begins with a series of comic panels that show Flora's neighbor, Mrs. Tickham receiving a large, powerful vacuum for her birthday. This set of comic panels allows the reader to see the action as well as read it. The comic is then tied into the prose part of the story when the reader meets Flora and learns she is a fan of a comic book entitled 'The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incandesto!', a comic book she often read with her father before her parents divorced.

The first few chapters introduce the main characters. Flora is a ten year old girl whose parents recently divorced. Flora lives with her mother, but clearly dislikes her mother and her mother's profession as a romance novelist. Flora misses her father. Flora also considers herself a cynic, someone who believes the worst about people or events. For this reason, Flora has quite a dark outlook on life for such a young child. Flora's neighbor, Mrs. Tickham, is a kind lady who does not wish to harm anyone, or anything, as exemplified by her dismay when she accidentally sucks up a squirrel with her new vacuum.

The conflict that will propel the plot is also introduced in these early chapters. Flora's parents have recently divorced. Flora seems to identify closer with her father, a man she says is possibly the loneliest man in the world. This suggests to the reader that the divorce was not the idea of Mr. Buckman. Flora seems to agree with this idea, telling the reader that she believes her mother's obsession with her career as a romance writer has a great deal to do with the end of her parent's marriage. Again, it is clear there is a great deal of angst between Flora and her mother. The mention of the shepherdess lamp also indicates trouble as Flora seems to think her mother loves the lamp more than her.

Ulysses is a sort of comic relief in this part of the novel. Ulysses is the squirrel rescued from the vacuum. Ulysses appears to have gained some mental powers in the aftermath of the accident, allowing him to understand what Flora says to him and to type words on the typewriter belonging to Mrs. Buckman. Flora believes Ulysses is a superhero at a time when it seems the young girl could really use someone heroic in her life.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Flora a cynic? What does it mean to be a cynic? Why does Flora describe herself this way? What caused her to be this way?

Discussion Question 2

How does Ulysses get his special powers? What are his special powers? How might they change Flora's life as the novel progresses?



Discussion Question 3

What does Mrs. Buckman do for a living? What does Flora think of this profession? For what reason?

Vocabulary

Wonderful, superhero, arch-nemesis, heroic, trembled, unassuming, darkened, evil, beautiful, exactly, hallway, shepherdess, observe, defenseless, occurrences, unanticipated, quieter, divorce, manufacturing, carefully, imagined, strange, darkest, universe, furrowed, shouted, imagination, cynic, powers, enormous.



Chapters 14-32

Summary

Chapters 14-32

Chapter 14

Mrs. Buckman wakes her in the morning. Mrs. Buckman has discovered someone typed on her typewriter in the night and she thinks it was Flora despite Flora's insistence she did not. Flora believes it was Ulysses who typed on the machine.

Chapter 15

The doorbell rings and Mrs. Buckman sends Flora to answer because she believes it to be her ex-husband.

Chapter 16

When Flora opens the door, she is surprised to find Mrs. Tickham at the door. Mrs. Tickham wants to see Ulysses. Flora tells Mrs. Tickham that she believes Ulysses can type. Mrs. Buckman comes into the room and becomes upset when she sees Ulysses sitting on the top of her precious lamp, Mary Ann. Flora offers to remove Ulysses, but her mother insists the animal is diseased and will not let her.

Chapter 17

Another visitor comes to the door. He is William Spiver, Mrs. Tickham's nephew. William Spiver tells everyone he is temporarily blind despite his aunt's insistence that he is not.

Chapter 18

Mrs. Tickham offers to take the squirrel and return it to nature for Mrs. Buckman. Flora goes along with this plan because she knows Mrs. Tickham will not hurt Ulysses. Mrs. Buckman provides Mrs. Tickham with a pair of gloves. Flora, Mrs. Tickham, and William Spiver take Ulysses to Mrs. Tickham's house. Flora shows Mrs. Tickham the paper on which Ulysses wrote a short statement. Since there is some doubt as to whether Ulysses really wrote the words, William Spiver suggests they ask him to type on Mrs. Tickham's computer.

Chapter 19

Ulysses looks out the window and is inspired to write about the blue sky and Flora.

Chapter 20

Ulysses poem is about the blue sky and Flora's perfectly round head.



Chapter 21

Mrs. Tickham faints when she reads Ulysses words. Mrs. Tickham is truly shocked that the squirrel wrote poetry. William Spiver continues to be the cynical one while Flora continues to argue for Ulysses' superhero status. Flora begins to think that, because of his doubts, that William Spiver must be Ulysses' arch-nemesis.

Chapter 22

Flora returns home. Her father has arrived for their regular Saturday outing. Flora asks her father to wait while she goes upstairs to dress. Flora waits on the stairs as her parents begin a conversation in the living room, becoming an ear to learn and observe.

Chapter 23

Flora hears her mother as her father to kill Ulysses. This fact convinces Flora that her mother is actually Ulysses' arch-nemesis, not William Spiver.

Chapter 24

Ulysses, however, is not surprised by the words of Mrs. Buckman. Ulysses has had bad experiences with humans before.

Chapter 25

Flora is riding in the backseat of her father's car with Ulysses in a shoebox on her lap. Flora knows that there is a shovel and a sack in the trunk of her father's car for Ulysses. As they prepare to pull out of the driveway, Mrs. Tickham and William Spiver run toward them. William Spiver wants to apologize to Flora for being unkind about Ulysses' poetry. Mrs. Tickham, impressed by Ulysses, wants to read a poem to him. Flora tells William Spiver that her mother is Ulysses' arch-nemesis and asks him to beware her.

Chapter 26

Flora asks her father about the shovel and sack in the trunk. Rather than answer, Mr. Buckman suggests they stop for breakfast.

Chapter 27

Ulysses is excited at the idea of food even as he smells the scents of the city and thinks of the poem Mrs. Tickham read to him.

Chapter 28

They stop at a diner called the Giant Do-Nut. Flora insists on taking Ulysses inside the diner with them, but her father orders her to keep the lid on the shoebox.

Chapter 29



When the waitress comes to Flora's table, she thinks Flora has a doll in the shoebox. For this reason, the waitress insists on knowing what is inside the box. When the woman sees the squirrel, she screams. Ulysses then jumps from the box.

Chapter 30

Ulysses finds himself caught in the woman's large hairdo. The waitress screams and dances around, calling for help. Ulysses is scared. Then Ulysses hears Flora's voice, telling him to be who he is and act. For this reason, Ulysses flies.

Chapter 31

Flora watches helplessly as Ulysses remains caught in the waitress's hair. Her father begins to laugh. Flora trips the cook, who is coming toward Ulysses with a knife.

Chapter 32

In a set of comic panels, Ulysses flies over the chaos and right into the glass doors.

Analysis

Ulysses can type. This suggests to the reader that Flora might be correct in assuming that the squirrel is special, changed in some way by the accident. When Flora shows this skill to Mrs. Tickham, the woman faints. However, it is clear that Mrs. Tickham is on Flora's side as far as it goes with the squirrel. This, unfortunately, is not clear with Mrs. Buckman. Flora discovers that her mother wants the squirrel killed because she is convinced that it has some disease even though she never touched the animal, never came close to it, and has no reason to think so.

Flora, despite claiming to be a cynic, is very sure that Ulysses is a superhero. This has led her to believe Ulysses must have an arch-nemesis as does Incandesto in her comic books. For this reason, Flora has decided her mother, and possibly the odd boy next door, William Spiver, are the enemy. The reader suspects Flora already had a poor opinion of her mother because of the divorce between her parents. There is clearly some anger and, perhaps, some fear that her mother does not love her and will want to get rid of her as she did her father. For this reason, Flora is quick to allow herself to believe her mother Ulysses' arch-nemesis.

Flora and her father go on their weekly visit, but Flora knows that her father has been asked to kill Ulysses. However, Flora clearly trusts her father as she has brought Ulysses along and does nothing to try to protect him other than to warn him to be aware. When chaos breaks out as they stop for a meal and Ulysses gets loose, the reader can clearly see that Mr. Buckman is a sad man who needs some fun in his life. This comes for him while watching Flora and Ulysses fight their small battle. Mr. Buckman laughs, perhaps for the first time in years.



Discussion Question 1

Who typed on the typewriter belonging to Mrs. Buckman? Why does Mrs. Buckman blame Flora for this? Who does Flora believe did it?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mrs. Tickham want to see the squirrel? What does she think when Flora insists that the squirrel can type? How does Mrs. Tickham react to the poem the squirrel writes?

Discussion Question 3

How does Ulysses get out of a shoebox at a diner? Why? What happens when he does? How does Flora force Ulysses to focus and save himself, thus acting like a superhero?

Vocabulary

Syllable, twirling, hysteria, encouragement, advice, brilliant, loosened, understand, unspoken, intention, overhead, gigantic, delicious, descriptions, accompanied, monstrous, impossible, absolutely, instincts, airborne, scream, whiskered, acquainted, importance, nemesis, specific, untrustworthy, remembered, completely, insincere.



Chapters 33-41

Summary

Chapters 33-41

Chapter 33

Flora rushes to Ulysses and discovers he has a cut on his head. Ulysses is unconscious. Flora is worried that he is seriously hurt. Flora and her father rush to the car even as the cook threatens to call the police.

Chapter 34

As they drive away, Mr. Buckman continues to laugh. Flora, however, worries that Ulysses had a concussion, something she read about in *Terrible Things Can Happen to You!* Mr. Buckman assures her that Ulysses will be okay even as he continues to laugh.

Chapter 35

They arrive at the apartment building, the Blixen Arms, where Mr. Buckman lives. They run through the hallway because there is a cat that belongs to the landlord. The cat, Mr. Klaus, likes to scratch and bite people who walk in the hallways.

Chapter 36

As Flora waits for her father to open his apartment door, she notices a sign on his neighbor's door that says two doctors live there. Flora decides to knock on the door, hoping one of the doctors will help Ulysses. The woman who opens the door is elderly, but kind. She knows Flora before Flora has a chance to introduce herself. The woman invites Flora inside.

Chapter 37

Ulysses wakes as Dr. Meescham stares at him through a magnifying glass. Ulysses hears Dr. Meescham tell Flora that she is a doctor of philosophy. Her husband was a medical doctor, but he has died. Dr. Meescham then assures Flora that Ulysses does not have a concussion because his pupils are not dilated improperly.

Chapter 38

Dr. Meescham sends Ulysses and Flora into the living room to wait while she makes them sandwiches. As they wait, Flora and Ulysses notice a painting of a squid attacking a ship on the wall. Dr. Meescham tells them this painting was done by her husband and that it represents profound loneliness.



Chapter 39

Dr. Meescham brings Ulysses and Flora jelly sandwiches. As they eat, Dr. Meescham tells Flora that her father is a frequent visitor to her apartment and that he often talks about Flora. Dr. Meescham says that Mr. Buckman is very sad to have had to leave her after the divorce. Dr. Meescham also tells Flora about miracles and how everyone should believe in them. Finally, Mr. Buckman comes to join them. As he stands in the doorway, Mr. Buckman is attacked by Mr. Klaus.

Chapter 40

Mr. Buckman is rescued when Ulysses throws the cat off of his head.

Chapter 41

Mr. Buckman drives her home even though Flora does not want to go. Flora asks to feel her father's heart to reassure herself.

Analysis

Ulysses has done a miraculous thing with the fiasco in the diner. He has made Mr. Buckman laugh again. Flora does not see this as an action by Ulysses as a superhero, but the reader can imagine that Mr. Buckman has not laughed like this in a long time. This seems to be supported by some of the things Dr. Meescham, the neighbor of Mr. Buckman, says about him.

Flora saves Ulysses again after he hits his head. The damage is not as severe this time and, in the process, they make a new friend. Dr. Meescham is an older woman who has seen a great deal of life, some of it good, but some of it bad. Dr. Meescham tries to use her experiences to help Flora see the truth around her, but Flora is only a young child and can only see the danger that lies ahead for her friend, Ulysses.

Ulysses does commit a truly heroic act at the end of this collection of chapters. Ulysses saves Mr. Buckman from the cat, Mr. Klaus. It is quite an act that seems to seal the deal for Mr. Buckman, helping him make the decision to defy his wife and not kill Ulysses, if there was ever really a chance he would have.

Discussion Question 1

How does Ulysses hurt his head? How bad is this injury? Why does Flora worry he might need a doctor?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Mr. Buckman laugh so continuously after leaving the diner? What does Flora think of this laughter? What does this laughter signify for the reader?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Flora go to Dr. Meescham's apartment? What does she hope to get from Dr. Meescham? What does she get instead?

Vocabulary

Disappeared, melded, different, foreboding, peaceful, motion, illuminated, message, promise, wondered, happily, rescue, unconcerned, hovered, gauze, vanquished, inordinately, unprotected, nowhere, expecting, miraculous, actually, possibility, beauty, existed, believe, random, capacious, universe, random.



Chapters 42-55

Summary

Chapters 42-55

Chapter 42

Flora is nervous when she gets home, expecting something bad to happen. Her father, however, happily honks the horn several times while celebrating the heroism of Ulysses in saving him from the cat.

Chapter 43

Flora, Ulysses, and her father walk into the house and discover that William Spiver is there. William Spiver is helping Mrs. Buckman write her romance novel. Flora sees William Spiver's presence with the arch-nemesis as confirmation that he is an enemy as well.

Chapter 44

Flora confronts her mother and William Spiver. Mrs. Buckman is displeased to see the squirrel has returned with Flora. Mr. Buckman tries to tell his ex-wife why he did not kill the squirrel by describing Ulysses' heroic actions, but Mrs. Buckman has no sympathy for either the squirrel or her former husband, causing Flora to grow angry with her mother and accusing her of attempted murder of the squirrel.

Chapter 45

Flora calls her mother an arch-nemesis to her face and then announces that she plans to move in with her father. Mrs. Buckman, clearly upset, says something cruel. William Spiver encourages Mrs. Buckman to take back her hurtful words. When she does not, he tries to explain to Flora why he has come to the house. Flora does not believe that William Spiver came to the house simply to find her. Then Ulysses jumps over everyone's heads.

Chapter 46

Ulysses jumps through the air, hoping that he can cheer up Flora.

Chapter 47

Everyone grows quiet as they watch the squirrel fly through the air. Mrs. Buckman has enough and decides to leave the room. Ulysses begins to type, surprising Mr. Buckman.

Chapter 48



Flora and William Spiver are left alone in the kitchen with Ulysses when Mr. Buckman goes to speak to his former wife. Flora asks William Spiver why he is staying with his aunt and learns that his mother sent him away because he did not get along with his stepfather. William Spiver's biological father has died and his mother married a man who insists on calling William Spiver Billy instead of William.

Chapter 49

Flora's parents return to the room. Mr. Buckman tells Flora that she should remain with her mother, that her mother needs her now. Mr. Buckman assures Flora that everything will be okay with Ulysses. Mrs. Buckman then goes to the typewriter to see what Ulysses has been writing.

Chapter 50

Ulysses has only written a list of words, words he hopes to turn into poetry later. Mrs. Tickham comes over looking for William Spiver. Everyone seems disappointed by Ulysses' latest writing, except for Mr. Buckman.

Chapter 51

Mrs. Buckman makes dinner for Flora and Ulysses, insisting that Ulysses sit at the table with them. Flora is only made more suspicious by her mother's suddenly kind behavior. Flora is upset she cannot live with her father and she has grown fond of William Spiver, leaving her surprised by how much she misses him. Ulysses finds Flora's homesickness, as she calls it, interesting.

Chapter 52

After Flora goes to sleep, Ulysses sits in the window thinking of all the things he has learned that day, wishing he could write about them. However, Flora has told him to stay away from the typewriter. Ulysses decides to go to the typewriter anyway.

Chapter 53

Flora dreams of William Spiver.

Chapter 54

Ulysses writes in the dark kitchen. He has just finished when Mrs. Buckman comes into the room. Mrs. Buckman removes Ulysses' writing and places a fresh paper in the typewriter. Mrs. Buckman then dictates a letter she wants Ulysses to write to Flora.

Chapter 55

Flora's mother leaves the kitchen. Ulysses waits for her despite the sense that she will do something bad to him. Ulysses then remembers what Flora said to him in the diner and he begins to type again. Mrs. Buckman returns and stops Ulysses.



Analysis

Flora returns home with Ulysses and her father. Flora's mother is less than pleased to see that Ulysses is still alive. Matters only get worse when Flora announces that she wants to move in with her father. Mrs. Buckman says some cruel things that only reinforce Flora's sense that her mother does not love her anymore. For this reason and her fear for Ulysses, Flora continues to push her father to allow her to move in with him. Mr. Buckman, however, encourages Flora to remain with her mother. Mr. Buckman, clearly the more empathetic parent, understands that Flora and her mother need each other right now as they work out the problems between them.

Flora finds William Spiver at her home when she returns. At first, Flora feels that William Spiver's presence in her home proves that he is in league with her mother. However, William Spiver convinces Flora that he has only come to the house to see Flora because he missed her. Flora is touched by this and slowly begins to warm toward William Spiver. This continues as William Spiver tells Flora how his mother sent him away when William Spiver and his new stepfather conflict over the fact that his stepfather will not honor William Spiver's request not to be called Billy. Flora and William Spiver clearly have some things in common, especially when it comes to a difficult relationship with their mothers.

Mrs. Buckman forces Ulysses to write a note to Flora that leaves Ulysses feeling bad for lying. Then Mrs. Buckman takes Ulysses away. The reader suspects that Mrs. Buckman has decided to do what her husband did not, to kill Ulysses. This is a difficult moment for the reader as it appears that Mrs. Buckman truly is the arch-nemesis as Flora has predicted.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Flora not want to go home? Why is she upset when she finds William Spiver in her home? Why does Flora think that William Spiver is conspiring with her mother?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Flora want to move in with her father? How does her mother respond? How does Flora feel about this?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mrs. Buckman appear to accept Ulysses? What does she make Ulysses do in the middle of the night? Why does Mrs. Buckman take Ulysses away?



Vocabulary

Remember, footsteps, action, springtime, consume, misspellings, finished, untrue, dictation, willingness, insistent, reached, shepherdess, forward, protest, crumpled, wonderful, expanding, squids, considered, suspended, revenge, insult, travel, perfectly, somehow, accordion, comforting, temporarily, neon, irritation, universe.



Chapters 56-68 and Epilogue

Summary

Chapters 56-68 and Epilogue

Chapter 56

Flora wakes and finds Ulysses missing. When she goes to the kitchen, Flora discovers the note that Mrs. Buckman made Ulysses write. The note tells Flora that Ulysses has decided to return to the wild. It is signed Mr. Squirrel instead of Ulysses and the first letters of Flora's name appear at the bottom. Flora suspects this means that her mother forced Ulysses to write this letter. Flora realizes she cannot call the police, so she must go to someone she trusts. To her surprise, this thought leads her to William Spiver.

Chapter 57

Flora takes Mary Ann, the lamp, and stands outside the Tickham house calling for William Spiver. Eventually he wakes and peeks out his window. Flora tells William Spiver she needs his help and he quickly agrees. However, it takes him some time to hunt in the dark for his bathrobe. The noise wakes Mrs. Tickham. When she learns what is happening, Mrs. Tickham agrees to help as well.

Chapter 58

Mrs. Buckman has taken Ulysses to the woods. Ulysses knows he is about to die. However, there are so many things he still wants to do. Mrs. Buckman tells Ulysses that she is doing this because she wants Flora to be normal and happy.

Chapter 59

Mrs. Tickham, Flora, and William Spiver are riding around in Mrs. Tickham's car. They call Ulysses' name out the window, but have no idea where to go. William Spiver tries to show them reason by explaining that they should be trying to decide where Mrs. Buckman would have taken Ulysses, but they do not listen. Then they run out of gas.

Chapter 60

Ulysses holds on to the poem he wrote Flora just before Mrs. Buckman found him in the kitchen. Mrs. Buckman takes it from him and throws it on the ground. Mrs. Buckman then takes Ulysses from the bag. Ulysses fights Mrs. Buckman and escapes.

Chapter 61

Mrs. Tickham, Flora, and William Spiver walk along the side of the road, unsure where they are going. Mrs. Tickham recognizes a street that they have just passed, so she



seems to have an idea where they are. As they walk, William Spiver insists on holding onto Mrs. Tickham's arm. Mrs. Tickham continues to insist that there is nothing wrong with William Spiver's eyes. Mrs. Tickham says that he should never have pushed his stepfather's truck into the lake and he would not have been sent away.

Flora feels a connection with William Spiver. She asks to hold his hand. Mrs. Tickham takes the lamp while Flora and William Spiver walk together behind her.

Chapter 62

Ulysses flies over the city, but is not sure where to go. Eventually, Ulysses finds himself outside the Blixen Arms and Dr. Meescham's apartment.

Chapter 63

Dr. Meescham does not seem surprised that a squirrel has just flown through her window. Dr. Meescham is an insomniac who rarely sleeps. Her husband used to feed her sardines when she could not sleep, so she gets these for Ulysses.

Chapter 64

Flora finds herself surprised by the things people leave on the side of the road, including a plastic banana. As they walk, and talk, William Spiver does not see the cord dangling from Mary Ann and he trips. When he falls, he loses his glasses and they are broken. William Spiver realizes he can see again.

Chapter 65

Flora leads Mrs. Tickham and William Spiver to her father's apartment door. Flora knocks but there is no answer. Instead, Flora hears laughter coming from Dr. Meescham's apartment. Dr. Meescham opens her door and reveals that Mr. Buckman and Ulysses are both at her apartment. Flora greets Ulysses with a great deal of love. Then Flora introduces Mrs. Tickham and William Spiver to Dr. Meescham.

Chapter 66

Dr. Meescham explains to Flora and the others how Ulysses showed up in her apartment and they were trying to find out what happened. They decide they need a typewriter so Ulysses can tell his story, but before they can do anything they hear Mr. Klaus attacking someone. Then they hear Mrs. Buckman crying out to her former husband, asking about her baby. Flora assumes she means the lamp. Ulysses comes to Mrs. Buckman's rescue. Then Flora hears her mother ask Mr. Buckman about Flora and realizes her mother is so upset because of her.

Chapter 67

Mrs. Buckman tells everyone how she came home from the woods and found Flora missing. Mrs. Buckman explains to Flora that she was trying to get rid of Ulysses to



make everything normal for her. Flora continues to be surprised by the evidence that her mother loves her, especially when her mother tells everyone of a poem that Ulysses wrote for Flora and how it made her see her mistake.

Chapter 68

Ulysses watches the hubbub and thinks of all the poems he will write in the future.

Epilogue

The words of the poem speak of Ulysses great love for Flora. The words seem to express what Flora's mother could not.

Analysis

Flora wakes to find Ulysses missing. Flora is deeply upset by this and she quickly sets out to find him. To help her, Flora has decided to steal her mother's prized lamp to exchange for Ulysses. Flora asks William Spiver to help her and ends up getting Mrs. Tickham's help as well.

As Flora searches for Ulysses, she learns more about William Spiver. It is clear to the reader that William Spiver's mother has chosen her new husband over William Spiver. While William Spiver's behavior was outrageous toward his stepfather, it was a reaction to the disrespect he felt he was being treated with. It hurt William Spiver so deeply to have his mother choose her new husband over him, that William Spiver became temporarily blind. However, finding Flora and becoming her friend seems to have cured him.

Flora's story is like William Spiver's. However, Flora believes her mother has chosen her new career and her precious lamp over her, not a new man. Flora thinks her mother does not love her. As the story plays out, however, the reader discovers that Flora's mother not only loves her, but that the basis of their angst is because Mrs. Buckman worries that Flora will grow up unhappy because she is not normal. Mrs. Buckman is honestly trying to do what she believes is best for her daughter, but she has never stopped to really listen to Flora.

In the end, Ulysses once again saves this family. Ulysses has written a poem in response to Mrs. Buckman's declaration that her life would be easier if Flora went to live with her father. Ulysses' poem makes Mrs. Buckman realize what she has done by saying these words and to realize how deeply she does love her daughter. In this way, Ulysses truly is a hero.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Flora believe she can trade Ulysses for Mary Ann? What does this suggest about Flora's thoughts toward her mother and her mother's affection for this lamp?



Discussion Question 2

How does Ulysses escape from Mrs. Buckman? Why does he go to Dr. Meescham?

Discussion Question 3

What does Ulysses' final poem say? Why does it touch Mrs. Buckman so deeply? How does this bring the family back together again?

Vocabulary

Expanding, horizon, visited, wonderful, answered, written, normal, illusion, kidnapped, certainly, mastered, fray, astonished, crumbled, violence, terrified, seriously, yowl, happened, doubt, loveliness, particularly, acquaintance, personal, information, raising, emitted, delight, escape, refuse, inanimate, louder.



Characters

Flora Belle Buckman

Flora Belle Buckman is a ten year old girl who describes herself as a cynic. Just this description tells the reader that Flora is not an ordinary girl, but a very intelligent young woman. Flora's parents have recently divorced and Flora blames her mother for the break. For this reason, Flora does not get along with her mother. Flora and her mother are often at odds with one another. Therefore, it is no surprise when Flora, who has discovered a special squirrel she believes might be a superhero, thinks her mother is the squirrel's arch-nemesis.

Flora spends much of the novel befriending and attempting to protect her squirrel Ulysses. By doing this, Flora places her mother in the position of being her enemy. This is a difficult position for Flora's mother despite the fact that she plays right into Flora's game by trying to manipulate the situation in a way that Mrs. Buckman thinks will help Flora, but really only seems to reinforce Flora's belief that her mother does not care about her. In the end, Flora comes to realize that her mother loves her and will not stop loving her, no matter what happens. This helps Flora and her mother to build a new relationship, thanks in large part to her superhero squirrel Ulysses.

Mr. George Buckman

Mr. Buckman is Flora's father. Mr. Buckman is an accountant, a man whom Flora describes as the loneliest man in the world. Mr. Buckman spends Saturday afternoon with Flora, which also includes Ulysses. Flora worries that Mr. Buckman might kill Ulysses as he has been asked to do by his former wife. However, after a chaotic scene at a diner where they stopped to eat, Mr. Buckman appears too amused by Ulysses to hurt him. Later, when Ulysses saves Mr. Buckman from the crazy cat, Mr. Klaus, Mr. Buckman seems convinced that Ulysses should remain alive.

Mr. Buckman is clearly a kind man who still loves his wife despite their differences. Mr. Buckman is the type of man who is constantly attempting to make peace between the people he loves, which explains why he makes Flora remain with her mother even after Flora has expressed a desire to move in with her father and her mother has reacted with harsh words. In the end, Flora and her mother do make amends. Mr. Buckman's actions lead to the circumstances that repair the relationship.

Mrs. Phyllis Buckman

Mrs. Buckman is Flora's mother. Mrs. Buckman is a romance novelist who has recently become quite successful at her craft. With her first paycheck, Mrs. Buckman purchased a lamp that is designed to look like a statue of a shepherdess with a single lamb that



Mrs. Buckman has named Mary Ann. Flora believes her mother loves this lamp more than she loves Flora.

Mrs. Buckman has recently divorced her husband. This has caused some difficulty between her and Flora. At the same time, Mrs. Buckman is constantly working under deadline, taking away the time she might have otherwise spent with Flora. This only serves to increase Flora's conviction that her mother no longer loves her. Then, when Flora brings Ulysses home and her mother plots to have the animal killed, Flora becomes convinced that her mother is her arch-nemesis.

Mrs. Buckman kidnaps Ulysses with the intentions of killing him to protect Flora from being different and not having any friends among her peers. In the end, however, a poem Ulysses wrote convinces Mrs. Buckman that she has made a mistake and shows her the words she should have said to Flora herself.

Mrs. Tootie Tickham

Mrs. Tickham is Flora's neighbor. As Flora watches, Mrs. Tickham takes a vacuum into the backyard and sucks up a squirrel. Mrs. Tickham is upset by these events and she is grateful when Flora comes to her rescue. Mrs. Tickham then believes she is hallucinating or has a brain tumor when she sees the squirrel lift the heavy vacuum from the ground.

Mrs. Tickham becomes Flora's confidant in regards to the squirrel because she has witnessed much of the squirrel's odd behavior and cannot help but be a part of it. Mrs. Tickham proves to be a good friend to Flora, especially when Mrs. Buckman kidnaps Ulysses and tries to kill him. Mrs. Tickham gets out of bed in the middle of the night and helps Flora and William Spiver, her great nephew, search for Ulysses.

Mr. Tickham

Mr. Tickham is married to Flora's neighbor, Mrs. Tickham. Mr. Tickham buys his wife a new vacuum cleaner for her birthday. This vacuum is so powerful that it causes Mrs. Tickham to lose control of it and to go flying out into the backyard. It is here that Mrs. Tickham accidentally vacuums up the squirrel, Ulysses.

William Spiver

William Spiver is Mrs. Tickham's great nephew. William Spiver's father, also named William, died some time before the beginning of the novel. William Spiver's mother has remarried. His new stepfather insists on calling him Billy, even though William wants to be called William Spiver. In a fit of anger toward his stepfather, William pushes the stepfather's truck into a lake. As a result, William Spiver's mother sends him away, clearly choosing her husband over her own son. This trauma causes William Spiver to go temporarily blind.



William Spiver is a very bright young man who tries to share his logic with those around him, but he is often ignored. William Spiver seems like the enemy when he first questions Ulysses' abilities. However, Flora later comes to see him as the only person, next to her dad, that she trusts. For this reason, Flora turns to William Spiver when she needs help saving Ulysses from her own mother.

Dr. Meescham

Dr. Meescham is a lonely, old woman who lives across the hall from Mr. Buckman at the Blixen Arms. Dr. Meescham befriends Flora when she knocks on the Meescham's door in hopes of finding a medical doctor to help Ulysses. Though Dr. Meescham's husband is a medical doctor, she is not. However, she is willing to help just the same. Dr. Meescham tells Flora stories about her own childhood and teaches Flora about loneliness and optimism, helping to cure Flora of her cynicism. Dr. Meescham proves to be a good friend.

Ulysses

Ulysses is a squirrel. Ulysses is accidentally sucked up by a vacuum cleaner Mrs. Tickham got for her birthday. Flora rescues Ulysses from the vacuum and gives him CPR to help him breathe again. When Ulysses is revived, he appears to have some powers he did not have before. Ulysses has great strength now and he is able to understand Flora when she speaks to him. Ulysses also discovers that he can write with the help of Mrs. Buckman's typewriter.

Flora believes that Ulysses is a superhero. For this reason, she begins to teach him what it means to be a superhero. Flora even identifies Ulysses' arch-nemesis. It is her own mother. Flora fights to protect Ulysses from her mother, but her mother eventually manages to kidnap Ulysses with the intention of killing him. Ulysses manages to escape. In the end, Ulysses does prove himself to be a hero. Ulysses saves both Mr. and Mrs. Buckman from the crazy cat, Mr. Klaus. Ulysses also shows Mrs. Buckman the mistakes she has made in her treatment of Flora, bringing the family back together again.

Waitress

The waitress from the Giant Do-Nut is a nosey woman who causes trouble when she insists on seeing what Flora has inside of her shoebox. When the woman sticks her nose too close to the box, she screams because she did not expect to see a squirrel. This frightens Ulysses, causing him to scream and jump from the box. Ulysses gets trapped in the woman's outrageous hairdo, which only causes a bigger commotion. Eventually, however, Ulysses hears Flora reminding him to be who he is, a superhero. Ulysses jumps from the woman's hair and flies toward the door only to run into the glass and hurt his head.



Cook

The cook from the Giant Do-Nut is a brave man who comes out of the kitchen to save the waitress when he thinks she is being attacked by Ulysses. The cook comes at the waitress with a knife, frightening Ulysses. For this reason, Flora trips the cook before he can hurt Ulysses.



Symbols and Symbolism

Typewriter

Mrs. Buckman writes romance novels on an old typewriter. Ulysses uses this typewriter to write out his thoughts, beginning with the simple statement of his name and later he writes loving poems to Flora.

Vacuum Cleaner

Mr. Tickham gives his wife a super powerful vacuum cleaner for her birthday. This vacuum is so powerful that Mrs. Tickman ends up in the backyard where she accidentally sucks up a squirrel. It is this accident that causes Ulysses develop special powers and become Flora's superhero.

Shovel and Sack

Mrs. Buckman gives her former husband a shovel and a sack in the hopes that he will kill the squirrel and get rid of it. However, Flora manages to convince her father that Ulysses is not ill. He is a squirrel with special powers.

Mary Ann

Mary Ann is a lamp that consists of a statue of a shepherdess and one of her lambs. Mrs. Buckman bought Mary Ann with her paycheck from her first published novel. Flora has the opinion that her mother loves Mary Ann more than her.

William Spiver's Glasses

William Spiver believes himself to be temporarily blind. For this reason, William Spiver wears dark glasses that he refuses to remove for anyone, including Flora. When these glasses fall off and are crushed, William Spiver suddenly regains his sight.

Shoebox

Mrs. Buckman gives Flora a shoebox to carry Ulysses in when she goes for her afternoon with her father. Flora insists on taking Ulysses into a diner where she and her father stop for breakfast. A curious waitress sees the shoebox and becomes nosy, causing Ulysses to jump into her hair after she frightens him, causing a chaotic scene.



Dunking Donut

Outside the diner, the Giant Do-Nut, there is a mechanical donut that is continuously dunked into a cup of coffee. Flora finds this odd because there is no one dunking the donut. Ulysses uses it as a landmark in his search for Flora after Mrs. Buckman kidnaps him.

Poems

Ulysses writes two poems in the course of the novel, both about his love for Flora.

Squid Painting

Flora notices a painting that hangs in Dr. Meescham's living room that features a squid attacking a lone boat. Flora finds the painting sad because the squid is killing the people on the boat, but Dr. Meescham tells her it is sad because of the overwhelming loneliness of the giant squid.

Horsehair Couch

Dr. Meescham has a horsehair couch. Flora finds it difficult to sit on because its surface is slick. Dr. Meescham tells Flora that many people have made confessions on and shared their feelings while sitting on the couch.

Settings

Blixen Arms

The Blixen Arms is the apartment building where Mr. Buckman moves after his divorce. The apartment building is managed by a man who has a mean cat named Mr. Klaus. The cat likes to attack unsuspecting people as they walk down the hall. This presents a dangerous situation for Mr. Buckman who has been attacked by the cat multiple times. When Ulysses visits the Blixen Arms with Flora, he saves Mr. Buckman from the cat. Later, on another visit to the Blixen Arms, Ulysses saves Mrs. Buckman from the cat as well. Dr. Meescham also lives in the Blixen Arms.

Buckman Home

Flora and her mother live in the house that they once shared with Mr. Buckman. Flora no longer wants to live in this house because she believes her mother no longer loves her. Flora's mother is so involved in writing her romance novels that she rarely spends time with Flora, let alone expresses her feelings for her. However, Mrs. Buckman does have time to share her feelings for the lamp that she bought with her paycheck from her first novel.

Tickham Home

The Tickhams live next door to Flora and her mother. From her bedroom window, Flora can see into the Tickmans' backyard. Flora sees Mrs. Tickham accidentally vacuum up a squirrel in her backyard. Flora rushes out to save this squirrel. The squirrel then begins to show special powers, leaving Flora to think he is a superhero.



Themes and Motifs

Parent/Child Relationship

This novel centers around Flora Belle Buckman, a young girl whose parents have recently divorced. Flora idolizes her father, the one parent who spent the most time with her and shared with her a love of comic books. Unfortunately, Flora has been forced to remain with her mother. Flora feels that her mother is more interested in her new career as a romance novel author than in her own daughter. This leaves Flora feeling resentment toward her mother.

As the novel advances, the reader learns that Flora believes her mother does not love her, but instead loves a lamp shaped like a shepherdess. For this reason, it is easy for Flora to imagine that her mother is her enemy. When Flora hears that her mother wants the squirrel she has recently befriended killed, Flora sees this as an irrational act of an arch-nemesis. Flora sets out to stop her mother as best as she can.

When Flora finally decides she cannot live with her mother anymore and asks to move in with her father, Mrs. Buckman announces that her life would be easier without Flora. This hurts Flora deeply, only reinforcing her conviction that her mother no longer loves her. When Mrs. Buckman kidnaps Ulysses in the middle of the night, Flora is just more convinced of her mother's enemy status. In the end, however, Flora learns that her mother loves her and that Flora is the one whom her mother worries most of the time, she simply cannot express her emotions properly.

At the same time Flora struggles with her mother, the reader meets William Spiver. William Spiver is a highly intelligent young man who is so logical that he often causes people to dislike him. William Spiver's father has died and his mother has remarried. William Spiver is unhappy that his new stepfather calls him Billy instead of William, the name William Spiver shares with his father. For this reason, William Spiver acts out. Rather than see William Spiver's side of things, his mother chooses her new husband's side and sends William Spiver away. Unlike Flora and her mother, William Spiver's mother seems incapable of seeing how important William Spiver is to her life.

Superheroes

Flora is a fan of comic books, particularly the comics 'The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incandesto!' For this reason, Flora knows a great deal about superheroes and is quick to recognize Ulysses as one when he is revived from being sucked up by the vacuum cleaner. Flora takes Ulysses under her wing and prepares to teach him how to be a superhero.

Ulysses is a squirrel who has gained the ability to understand humans to write with the use of a typewriter or computer. Ulysses is still an animal, however, and most of his thoughts revolve around his next meal. At first, it appears that Ulysses will never do



anything heroic. However, when Ulysses makes Mr. Buckman laugh, it is clear that he has some sort of special talent because Mr. Buckman has not laughed so freely since his divorce.

As the novel continues, Ulysses acts even more heroic when he saves Mr. Buckman from the cat, Mr. Klaus. He does this again for Mrs. Buckman, even after she tries to kill him. However, Ulysses' greatest act of heroism is not in the form of super powers or an ability to fight off evil. It is when he writes a poem that forces Mrs. Buckman to see her mistakes in her relationship with Flora and help her make amends.

Loneliness

Dr. Meescham has a painting in her apartment done by her husband that shows a squid attacking a ship. Dr. Meescham claims this painting is about profound loneliness because of the loneliness of the giant squid. As Dr. Meescham discusses this painting to Flora, the reader can see how loneliness also impacts several of the characters in this novel.

Flora is obviously lonely. She calls herself a cynic, which in its simple intelligence for such a young girl sets her apart from other children her own age. Flora has no friends and spends much of her time reading comic books. This showcases Flora's loneliness, particularly since her father moved out and left her to read the books alone.

William Spiver is also clearly lonely. Like Flora, William Spiver is much more intelligent than other children his own age. William Spiver is also a little odd, a fact that separates him from others. However, he reaches out to Flora and she returns his affection, helping to end the loneliness for these characters.

Dr. Meescham is also a lonely woman. Dr. Meescham's husband died and left her alone. However, Dr. Meescham has opened her home to Mr. Buckman and his family, assuring she will never be alone again.

Mr. Buckman is also a lonely man, pushed out of his own home after his wife decided he wanted a divorce. However, when Ulysses comes into their lives and begins his acts of heroism, he gives Mr. Buckman a reason to laugh again. Not only that, but it appears at the end of the novel that a shared fright might bring the Buckmans together again, at least as friends.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The narrator fluctuates between Flora, the ten year old cynic, and her superhero squirrel named Ulysses. As these narrators tell their story, they tell it in such a way that the reader can feel close to them.

The point of view of this novel works well with the plot because it allows the reader to see what is going on inside the minds of the two main characters while keeping the reader separate enough to be able to understand that some parts of the narration are unreliable. Flora is very young, therefore she could not possibly understand everything that is going on in the adult world around her. Ulysses is not a human and does not understand the human world at all. Therefore, much of his narration is also unreliable.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is a little more formal than most writing intended for such a young audience. This use of a more sophisticated language shows the reader that Flora is a highly intelligent young woman who is different from other children her own age. This is also reflected in the language used by the adults around Flora and her new friend William Spiver who is also quite intelligent.

The language of this novel works with the novel because it is authentic to the characters. The novel is intended for younger readers, but the language assumes a certain intelligence in both the readers and the characters. The author does not talk down to her young readers, giving them credit for being able to understand her sophisticated writing while still taking on such a fantastic situation with classic themes. It is a novel full of contrasts, just like the main characters. Therefore, the language is appropriate to the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into sixty-eight short chapters and an epilogue. The novel also includes multiple comic strip-type drawings and pictures that depict much of the vents of the novel. The novel includes these comic book style drawings in order to connect the story to the comic books the main character enjoys so much.

The novel includes one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Flora and Ulysses as Flora attempts to protect Ulysses from his arch-nemesis while helping him develop his superhero abilities. One subplot follows the relationship that develops between Flora and her new friend, William Spiver. Another subplot follows the relationships between Flora and her parents. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

She imagined them floating above her in a comic-strip bubble; it was a comforting thing to have words hanging over her head. Especially negative words about romance.

-- Flora (chapter 1 paragraph 11)

Importance: This quote serves two purposes. It first shows Flora unhappiness with her mother's chosen career, a romance writer. Second, it shows Flora's fascination with comic books.

Not much goes on in the mind of a squirrel.

-- Ulysses (chapter 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote introduces the reader to the narrator, Ulysses. It also sets a precedence to give a contrast to Ulysses' mind before and after the accident.

One of Flora's very favorite bonus comics was entitled Terrible Things Can Happen to You! As a cynic, Flora found it wise to be prepared.

-- Flora (chapter 4 paragraph 12)

Importance: This quote describes the comic where Flora learned about things like CPR and concussions. This quote also shows how deeply Flora's cynicism goes.

His brain felt larger, roomier. It was as if several doors in the dark room of his self (doors he hadn't even known existed) had suddenly been flung wide.

-- Ulysses (chapter 7 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote shows the reader how Ulysses feels after the accident. It also helps explain some of his new talents.

Her father had always been a sad, quiet man, but since the divorce, he had become even sadder and quieter. Which was fine with Flora. Really. Cynics don't like a lot of chatter.

-- Flora (chapter 12 paragraph 10)

Importance: Flora makes an observation here that shows how much she has noticed about her father's state of mind since the divorce. Flora tries to brush it off because of her view of herself as a cynic, but it is clear that she worries about her father.

I need you to put the squirrel out of its misery,' said Flora's mother.

-- Mrs. Buckman (chapter 23 paragraph 10)

Importance: This quote shows Mrs. Buckman ordering her husband to kill Ulysses, something that leaves Flora convinced her mother is Ulysses' arch-nemesis, therefore her enemy.



He was Ulysses, and he must act.
-- Ulysses (chapter 30 paragraph 33)

Importance: This quote is part of Ulysses' thought process as he begins to calm in the panic of the fiasco with the waitress and listen to Flora's words. Flora tells Ulysses to remember who he is and act. That is what he does.

Mr. Klaus was also notorious for hiding in the green gloom of the hallways and waiting until some unlucky person stepped out of the door of his or her apartment (or into the main entrance of the Blixen Arms or down into the basement laundry room) and then pouncing on the person's ankles, biting and scratching and growling - and sometimes (weirdly enough) purring.
-- Flora (chapter 35 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote describes the strange cat in Mr. Buckman's apartment building that likes to attack people. Ulysses is forced to stop this cat from hurting both Mr. and Mrs. Buckman at different points in the story.

We said: I promise to always turn back to you.
-- Dr. Meescham (chapter 41 paragraph 10)

Importance: Dr. Meescham tells Flora this as she leaves her apartment the first day. Dr. Meescham apparently lived in a dangerous place where people often did not return whenever they left home. For this reason, people would say these words as they left.

He loved the world, this world; he didn't want to leave.
-- Ulysses (chapter 54 paragraph 12)

Importance: This is Ulysses' thoughts when he realizes that Mrs. Buckman is going to kidnap him and kill him.

Ulysses' heart rejoiced, too. He wasn't lost anymore.
-- Ulysses (chapter 63 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote shows Ulysses' gratitude to have found Dr. Meescham after running away from Mrs. Buckham.

He would write and write. He would make wonderful things happen. Some of it would be true. All of it would be true.
-- Ulysses (chapter 68 paragraph 6)

Importance: This is one of the final lines of the book. Ulysses has decided that he will continue to write so that he can use his poems to make people happy, like he did with Flora and her mother.