

# **For One More Day Study Guide**

## **For One More Day by Mitch Albom**

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## Plot Summary

This novel, at times poetic and at times sentimental, tells the story of a day in the death of Chick Benetto, ex-pro baseball player, ex-husband, and ex-father. A near-death experience in which he encounters the spirit of his dead mother is the catalyst of a journey into his troubled past, the narrative of that journey exploring the theme of relationships between parents and children, as well as loyalty and human fallibility.

*For one more day* begins with an introduction, in which an anonymous narrator describes the story about to be told as that of Chick Benetto, an elderly man encountered seemingly by chance at a small town baseball field. The story, the narrator writes, is to be told in Chick's own voice and from Chick's own perspective and is, in spite of some apparent impossibilities, to be believed by the reader.

Chick's narrative begins with a description of his attempted suicide, triggered by the arrival in the mail of a photograph of his daughter's wedding - a wedding to which he wasn't invited. As Chick describes it, the photograph represents the latest in a long string of personal failings and disappointments, and was also the final straw, leading him to decide to end his life. He prepares to kill himself, and then sets off on one last journey to the small California town where he grew up. As he nears the town he rolls his car in an attempt to avoid collision with a transport truck, but survives. He walks into town, climbs the same water tower he climbed as a child, and jumps off in another attempt to kill himself. He survives the fall and awakens to see his long dead mother standing over him.

Chick walks into town, disbelieving what's happening but at the same time desperately hopeful that what he saw was somehow real. He arrives at his childhood home, discovers that his mother is there, and sits down to the breakfast she prepares, still disbelieving but grateful for "one more day" with his mother (Posey). At first everything seems incredibly normal: Posey is as chatty as she always was, busy with friends as she always was, warmly dictatorial about his behavior as she always was. She's also, however, mysterious and cagey about how it's possible that she's even there.

Chick's narration of a series of visits between Posey and some of her friends/clients (she runs a door-to-door beautician service) intertwines with his recollections of his past, which focus on his increasingly desperate attempts to engage his father in an affectionate, open relationship. These attempts are, in turn, focused on baseball, which Chick's father wants him to play professionally. At the same time, Chick recalls how his mother wanted him to succeed at school, how things were often tense between his parents, how his mother eventually threw his father out of the family home and how Chick continued, even into adulthood, pursuing his father's dreams for him.

Chick's experiences with his mother are occasionally interrupted by strange, insistent shouts from a male voice, which nobody hears but him. As the narrative progresses, as Chick's experiences with Posey become stranger and his memories of his father become more intense, the shouts become more frequent. Everything climaxes when



Posey takes Chick to visit his father's other wife, and Chick is brought back to the world of the living by a young ambulance attendant - the source of the voice heard throughout the novel. Chick, it seems, has been having a near death experience, through which he's learned some important truths about the relationships between parents and children - and specific truths about the relationship between his parents and him.

The novel concludes with an epilogue listing evidence that suggests Chick's story is true, that Chick died about five years after his near-death experience, and that the narrator is in fact Chick's long-estranged daughter Maria, whose narration seems to be an embodiment of one of the novel's key themes. The idea is that with love and compassion, any distant relationship between parent and child can be healthy.



# Introduction

## Introduction Summary

This novel, at times poetic and at times sentimental, tells the story of a day in the death of Chick Benetto, ex-pro baseball player, ex-husband, and ex-father. A near-death experience in which he encounters the spirit of his dead mother is the catalyst of a journey into his troubled past, with the narrative of that journey exploring themes of the relationship between parents and children, loyalty, and human fallibility.

A brief introduction describes how the narrator, as the result of a chance encounter at a baseball field, met and eventually interviewed Chick Benetto, who is described as having once played major league baseball, having once tried to kill himself, and having been raised by a "wild" mother, Posey. The narrator then describes how the book is a narrative of Chick's experiences, taken from both interviews and journal entries, and reveals that the story will be told in Chick's voice (first person). The introduction concludes with a speculation on how many readers have lost someone they care about, and would, if they could, go back and have one last conversation with them.

## Introduction Analysis

The introduction essentially serves the purpose to draw the reader into the story. Aside from generating interest with sensational tidbits like the reference to suicide and the wild Posey, the narrator also invokes what, in all likelihood, is a universal experience - the longing for just one more chance to talk with a lost beloved. As a result, the narrator defines the story as having a universal theme, albeit with specific, personal resonances unique to the experience of Chuck Benetto.

It's essential to note here that the book seems to present itself as a work of non-fiction. It's only later in the narrative's very last moments that the story is revealed to be complete fiction.



# Section 1

## Section 1 Summary

Section 1 is entitled "Midnight."

"Chick's Story" Chick describes how his life deteriorated after his mother's death (see "Quotes," p 4); essentially, how he came to lose faith in himself. He describes how he became increasingly dependent on alcohol, lost money on seductive investment schemes, got fired from a series of jobs, and became estranged from his wife and family. He says the turning point to the desire to kill himself (see "Quotes," p. 3) was the moment at which he received a photograph of his daughter's wedding to which he hadn't been invited. At that point, the narrative interjects a quotation from a poem, described as having been found among Chick's notebooks. In the quote, a dying soul is described as "blundering back to God."

"Chick Tries to End It All" Chick describes his activities in the days leading up to his suicide attempt—the drunken weekend after the photo arrives, his lateness for work and early departure (both unnoticed), and an irate phone call to his ex wife, in which he comes across as unreasonable and she comes across as patiently struggling to make him understand. At the conclusion of the conversation he tells her he's "leaving," but hangs up as she's asking what exactly he means. He describes going for what he believed would be his last drink, deciding to return to the town where he grew up, Pepperville Beach, and puts a gun into the glove compartment of his car. He concludes this section by referring to the poem quoted earlier, saying the phrase "blundering back to God," describes him perfectly. At this point, the narrative interjects a copy of Chick's birth announcement, which a note describes as having been found in Chick's papers.

Chick describes how, en route to his old hometown, he picked up a six-pack of beer and drank two cans of it while driving. He then describes missing his turnoff, turning around and driving the wrong way down a one-way highway to take the turn off, and having to violently swerve to avoid a collision with an oncoming truck. Chick's car goes off the road, flips over, and crashes into a billboard. The truck, meanwhile, crashes. Chick gets out of his car, unhurt, and instead of checking on the driver of the truck, heads for Pepperville Beach on foot, leaving the gun and everything else behind.

Chick walks for an unknown amount of time and reaches the outskirts of town. The first thing he sees is the old water tower that he and his youthful buddies used to climb and spray paint with graffiti. He climbs the tower, and when he reaches the top, looks out over the baseball field where, as he recalls, his father taught him to play. He has a flash of memory of his newborn daughter, followed by a flash of fantasy - breaking into his daughter's wedding (her name, Maria, is revealed here). He has the thought that he won't be missed, and jumps over the railing at the top of the tower. There's a bumping, scraping fall to the ground, a period of unconsciousness, and then when he wakes, the sight of his mother who has been dead for two years.



## Section 1 Analysis

This section, as described in the "Structure" section of this analysis, defines a metaphorical moment of "midnight" in Chick's soul (for further consideration of this idea, see "Questions"). A second interesting metaphor to note here is Chick's wrong turn, which can be seen as a representation of his entire life. His major wrong turn was devoting so much time, attention and energy to winning his father's love and approval - a wrong turn not specifically mentioned in this section, but which is examined in detail throughout the remainder of the book. Other wrong turns that he acknowledges in this section include bad investment deals, turning to alcohol as a means of escape from himself, and turning away from his family. The accident that serves as the climax to this section can therefore be seen as the inevitable end of so many wrong turns behind the steering wheel of his life, not just a wrong turn behind the steering wheel of his car.

At the same time, and on a more technical level, this section foreshadows several key elements that recur throughout the novel - the references to his ex-wife and daughter, the way the past flashes into the present, and in particular the unexpected and unexplained appearance of his mother, dead for several years. Her appearance at the very end of this section is a highly effective way of ensuring the reader turns the page and continues reading into the following section(s).



## Section 2: Part 1

### Section 2: Part 1 Summary

This section is entitled "Morning"

"Chick's Mom" Chick describes his childhood as a so-called "daddy's boy" - in particular, his devotion to baseball, his father's favorite pastime. After referring in passing to his sister Roberta, Chick goes on to talk about the day he became a "mama's boy" - the day he discovered his mother, deeply upset in the kitchen, who told him that she'd take him to his baseball game that day because his father was gone.

At that point, the narrative switches back to Chick's post-suicide attempt vision of his mother. Even though he suggests it will appear to the reader as a manifestation of his drunkenness or his suicidal state, or both he swears that it was real, commenting on how he was fully aware of how he'd twice come close to succeeding at killing himself, and writing that he headed for his childhood home, determined to finish the job.

The narrative then inserts a note from Chick's mother, urging him to have a good day at school. Chick then writes that his mother was always writing him little notes, with the first one standing out particularly in his memory - a note she wrote him on the first day of school, which he points out was useless since he didn't yet know how to read. He then recalls the story of how his parents met (at a swimming hole one summer), how they quickly got married, how his father went off to war in Italy soon afterwards, how the war ended soon after he got there, and how he came home. This, Chick suggests, profoundly affected his home and family life (see "Quotes," p.29), which was, by his accounts, filled with conflict over food, music, religion, and even baseball (which his father loved and his mother didn't). He says that he knew his well-made up, well-groomed mother loved him deeply, even though she scolded him and instructed him and exerted a lot of control over him; but he adds that he was never sure of his father's love, and presents a theory about what that meant (see "Quotes," p. 33). He tells how he once made parallel lists, *Times My Mother Stood Up For Me* and *Times I Did NOT Stand Up For My Mother*. The narrative then includes an item from the first list, a story of how his mother defended him against a German shepherd.

"Chick Returns to his Old House" The narrative returns to Chick's journey to his old house. Chick describes how Pepperville Beach got its name (from an eager but foolish entrepreneur who thought a town with the word "beach" in it would attract more tourists), and how didn't have the stomach to sell the family home after his mother's death. He describes climbing the front steps, using his key to unlock the long-unused front door, going in, and discovering signs that someone's been living there (food in the fridge, clean carpets, soapy water in the sink). He then hears his mother calling to him from upstairs, and runs out of the house, terrified.





At that point, the narrative interjects an item from the *Times I Did NOT Stand Up For My Mother* list: the Halloween when, instead of buying him a costume, his mother decided to make him a mummy costume out of toilet paper. He describes how the costume fell apart, and how at the end of the day when he went to meet her in the school yard in front of all the other students and parents he yelled that she had ruined his life.

The narrative returns to Chick having just run out of the house after hearing his mother's voice. He stands, panting nervously, on the back porch, aware that she's come out the door and is looking anxiously at him. He describes this moment of decision making, that moment of deciding that he really can believe what he's seeing, and then runs into his mother's arms. At that point, the narrative interjects another item from the first list, an incident in which she helped young Chick (referred to as Charlie), against his father's wishes, learn what an echo is - "the persistence of sound after the source has stopped."

## Section 2: Part 1 Analysis

This section introduces and defines the key source of conflict chronicled by Chick in this journal of his life, the conflict between (as he himself describes) being "a mama's boy" or "a daddy's boy." This conflict is grounded in his parents' very different definitions of success as they strive in very different ways to get Chick to be the best man he can be. For Chick's father, success is defined by success in baseball, but for his mother success means a good education and a worthwhile application of that education. As Chick himself repeats throughout the novel, however, because his mother's love was both more apparent and more present, he felt less need to do what she wanted. His father's love, on the other hand, always seemed unavailable to him, and therefore he strove to do what his father wanted in order to earn that love. In short, the conflict as defined in this section foreshadows similar, ongoing conflicts over the same issue throughout the book.

On a technical level, this section introduces the irregular pattern of narrative shifting that characterizes the entire book. Past intertwines with present, flashes of what was intercut with flashes of what seems to be, and every once in a while it all gets interrupted by an (apparently edited) interjection from an item in Chick's papers. While it's all grounded in a pair of parallel linear progressions (Chick's movement through his life and Chick's movement through his encounter with his mother), there is also a very clear sense of chaos in this structure. Chick narrates his story with sudden, at times poetic, flashes of insight, sudden revelations of meaning are made apparent by outside elements (i.e., the list entries) and shifts and juxtapositions between past and present tense all combine to give a sense of randomness and spontaneity. When all's said and done it's a bit like life: a series of apparently disconnected events and circumstances given shape by hindsight. In the case of *For One More Day*, hindsight comes from two sources - Chick's own hindsight, as he reconsiders his life, and the hindsight of the narrator/editor, who (the reader is told) shaped Chick's story and helped define it by adding the interjections. It must be remembered, however, that all of it - the randomness, the shaping, the so-called editing - is ultimately the work of the author, who has shaped his story in this way for a particular reason: to create the aforementioned sense of order and perspective

emerging from chaos as the result of hindsight. In other words, Chick's entire life has led to the experience described by the novel.

Finally, a particularly effective motif repeated throughout the novel is introduced here: the content of one of the interjections (in this case, one of Posey's notes) illuminating the main story. In this case, the conclusion of the story about the mummy costume (Chick's crying out that Posey has ruined his life) can be seen as an illumination of his general feelings about her. The suggestion here is that doesn't just feel this way just because of the mummy costume - he feels this way because she sent his father away. Meanwhile, a key element of foreshadowing occurs in the interjection at the conclusion of this section, the item from the *Times My Mother Stood Up* list. Specifically, the reference to echoes foreshadows Chick's realization in Section 4 Part 3 that his near-death encounter with his mother is, in fact, an echo of her presence in his life.



## Section 2: Part 2

### Section 2: Part 2 Summary

"The Melody Changes" Chick describes his mother's favorite record album, how the promise of fun in both the music and lyrics of the song seemed to bring her to life and how, after his father left, the record was never played again.

"The Encounter inside The House" Chick describes how he and his sister got caught by their mother carving their names into an antique table, how they eventually came to laugh about it, and how he sat looking at the carving as his mother treated his scrapes and cuts, gained in the fall from the water tower. He asks himself how he managed to accept what seemed impossible, and then answers himself (see "Quotes," p. 49). The narrative then adds another entry from the *Times My Mother Stood Up* list, telling how his mother angrily stood up to a librarian who had told Chick (or Charley as he was called then) that a book was too hard for him. At that point the narrative adds an entry from the *Times My Mother Did NOT Stand Up*, telling how Chick, without really knowing what was going on, sided with his father (who, as always, was complaining about his mother's cooking) against his mother.

"A Fresh Start" In the present, Chick watches as his mother prepares scrambled eggs, chatting about her hope that he'll be able to stay for the day. Finally, as she's bringing the eggs to the table, he gathers up his courage and says, "This is impossible." In response, his mother simply puts eggs on his plate.

Chick recalls the circumstances of his parents' divorce, how one day his father was gone and another day there was more room in the house because his things were gone. This leads him to recall how often his parents fought, and how they were occasionally happy, especially when they were dancing together. Finally, he recalls how, in the fall after the divorce became official, his mother asked him what he wanted to do for after school activities. Chick announced that he wanted to play baseball.

"A Meal Together" Chick describes how quickly and hungrily he ate, and how his mother (as she had often done in the past) told him to slow down (see "Quotes," p. 60). When he's finished she clears the dishes, and as she's rinsing them he says thank you. She seems surprised, but smiles gratefully. When he says again that his experience can't be happening, she merely says, "You're welcome" and tells him to get his coat on for they'll be late. At this point, the narrative interjects one of her notes, this one evidently written on the day he was having his tonsils out and urging him to be strong.

### Section 2: Part 2 Analysis

There are several key points to note in this segment. The first is the reference to Posey's favorite record album, a foreshadowing of the point later in the novel (Section 3 Part 2) where Chick reveals that he became involved with Catherine as the result of



comically performing in time to Posey's favorite album. The fact that his mother and father eventually split up (not necessarily as a direct result of their differing feelings about the album) can be seen as foreshadowing of the eventual split between Chick and his wife.

A second key point about this section is the way it continues to dramatize Chick's ongoing conflict between being "a mama's boy" and "a daddy's boy." In this segment, that conflict is dramatized through Chick's determination to continue to play baseball even though his father is no longer around. This emphasizes his commitment to winning his father's love, to being "a daddy's boy," perhaps suggesting that that determination became even more obstinate, and more desperate, when Chick's father left.

A technical element worthy of note here is the way the author withholds confrontation between Chick and his mother about the genuine circumstances of Chick's near death experience. In other words, the author creates a powerfully evocative sense of mystery by having Posey be so silent and mysterious - is she real? Is she fantasy? Is she an angel? Is Chick dead, hallucinating, or traumatized? This technique effectively draws the reader into a close identification with Chick's experience as he struggles to figure out not only whether this encounter with his mother is possible, but also what the encounter is going to reveal.

Finally, the motif of relationship between interjections and main story is repeated at the close of this segment. Here, Posey's urging of the young Chick to be strong can be seen as a manifestation of something she doesn't say in the present, where she's taking him on a journey for which he'll have to be as strong now as he was then.



## Section 2: Part 3

### Section 2: Part 3 Summary

"Chick's Family after the Divorce" Chick describes how he and his family were all looked at and treated differently after their father left, how he and his sister were treated with extra generosity and compassion while their mother (who was, as Chick says, still young and pretty) was viewed as an opportunity by men and as a threat by women. He describes how a gift of food from some well meaning nuns was shoved down the garbage disposal by his mother in a powerful rejection of what she saw as charity. He also describes how he furiously attacked a couple of bigger boys who were spying on her, whom they tauntingly called "the divorcee." In this section the narrative reveals that Posey was a nurse.

"Walking" As Chick and his mother walk by the lake, Posey reminisces about how desperately she wanted to have a baby, showing Chick the tree into which she carved her prayer for a child. She tells him that adult children often forget how much they've been wanted and desired. This leaves Chick tearful and grateful, and he reaches out to embrace her, half imagining that his hand will pass right through her. When he doesn't, his surprise leads him to blurt out "You died." Posey responds by telling him he makes too much of things. Chick then writes of how when she was married, the community thought of the vivacious, good-listener Posey as charming and fun, but as soon as she was on her own, all her invitations and outside activities dried up. He describes his surprise at learning about the ways families whose parents weren't ostracized spent events like Christmas and New Years, commenting on how his friends thought he was "stuck" with his mother, when it was in fact she who was stuck. At that point the narrative interjects another entry from the *Times I Did NOT Stand Up* list, an early Christmas in which Posey attempted to play Santa Claus and how Chick (who didn't believe in Santa) revealed the truth of her disguise to Roberta (who did). He describes how the incident resulted in his mother's fury, Roberta's disappointment and an increase in the intensity of the looming gloom of his father's absence.

### Section 2: Part 3 Analysis

This segment essentially serves to dramatize the novel's central theme - the power of love between parent and child. The incidents Chick describes here—his defense of his mother's reputation, her determination to avoid charity, her desperate effort to give Roberta the kind of Christmas she wants and needs—all define the intense and irresistible call of loyalty and connection between parent and child. By the same token, however, this section also dramatizes the dark side of that relationship - the resentment, from the child, of that intensity and that love.

All this intensity is simultaneously grounded in, and softened by, the undeniably sentimental observation offered by Posey about children being wanted and desired.



This is, perhaps, the most idealized statement about the relationship between parents and children in the entire book. Granted, Posey doesn't say *all* children are wanted or desired, but the implication is certainly there. In reality, of course, lots of children in lots of situations unfortunately *aren't* wanted - but all children *want* to be wanted, like Chick wants to be wanted by his father. The thematic suggestion in Posey's statement may ultimately be that adult children ought to recognize that they're wanted and desired, and loved, on the parents' terms, and in the parents' way, not necessarily in the way the child wants to be wanted. This can perhaps be seen as the core source of tension between Chick and both his parents. Chick strives to express love in his father's way in the hopes that he (his father) will love him in the way he (Chick) wants and needs, while at the same time angrily yearning for his mother to express her love in a less clingy, less obvious, less seemingly demanding way. This idea is developed throughout the novel in Chick's references to his youthful resentment of her letters, and her attentions to him as he moves into college.



## Section 2: Part 4

### Section 2: Part 4 Summary

"Rose" Chick accompanies Posey on her first client call of the day, describing how as she aged, she developed a small business of being a kind of door-to-door beautician for elderly women who couldn't get out. When they arrive at Rose's house, Chick isn't sure what he'll find (a real elderly woman or a ghost), and is surprised to not only see that Rose is real, but that she's heard on the radio about the accident he was involved in. Neither she nor Posey, of course, knows this was his accident. Chick then describes how his mother became a beautician - how she was fired from her job at the hospital because one of the male doctors attempted to take advantage of her new single status and attempted to molest her, but she refused. This leads into another entry from the *Times I Did NOT Stand Up* list, a confrontation between Chick, who is caught with a package of cigarettes in his room, and his mother, who smokes. At the height of their argument, during which Chick calls his mother a hypocrite, Posey slaps him repeatedly. He goes out to baseball practice, and when he returns hears his mother crying in her room. He goes to his own room, lights a cigarette, and cries himself.

"Embarrassed Children" Rose and Posey chat as Posey washes and trims Rose's hair. Chick listens as Rose talks about how Posey has always taken good care of her, and Posey talks about how Chick never let her cut his hair - he was, she suggests, embarrassed by her. As Posey and Rose joke about how children are always embarrassed by their parents, Chick recalls how his own daughter (Maria) was evidently so embarrassed by him that she banished him from the wedding. He eventually mutters as much to his mother, who then tells him that children embarrassed by their parents just aren't old enough yet. Later, as Posey trims Rose's hair, the phone rings. Rose asks Chick to pick it up, and when he does, he receives a shock. A man's voice urgently asks whether it's him, shouts that there's been an accident on the highway, and urges Chick to talk to him. At that point the narrative interjects from the *Times My Mother Stood Up* list, an incident in which Posey took Chick's baseball bat downstairs to look for the source of a strange sound heard by Roberta. Chick hears her voice and a man's voice, and is angrily disappointed when he hears the front door open and close. Posey comes back upstairs and urges her children into bed, and Chick writes that he would never forgive her for having chased their father away.

"Rose" continued. When Chick comes back after answering the phone, he tells Rose and Posey it was a wrong number and falls asleep. Then follows an entry from the *Times My Mother Stood Up* list, the story of how she taught him to shave in spite of both of them being uncomfortably aware it should be his father doing it, and then an entry from the *Times I Did NOT Stand Up* list. This is the story of another Halloween - Chick is too old to go trick-or-treating, but is old enough to accompany Roberta who, at one house, reveals that she's a Benetto. The woman who answered the door tells Roberta and Chick firmly to tell their mother to stay away from her husband, and then closes the door in their faces.





"Rose Says Good-Bye" As they're leaving Rose's home, Chick compliments her on how good she looks. Rose says she's going to see her husband, and then closes her door. As Chick and Posey are walking away, Posey invites her son to go to lunch with her. As he accepts, conversation reveals that Rose's husband is dead, that Posey knows Rose is going to die that night, and that she's been helping her get ready.

## Section 2: Part 4 Analysis

In this segment, the narrative introduces a new and intriguing element - the insistent male voice, which as the novel continues becomes even more of a mystery than the appearance of the apparently dead Posey. The technique applied here by the author is undeniably engaging, in that it evokes an even stronger sense of curiosity in the reader about what's happening to Chick. An astute reader might imagine, even at this point, that the mysterious voice is in fact the voice of, say, an ambulance attendant taking care of Chick at the scene of his near-fatal accident - which is, in fact, the actual source of the voice (as revealed in Section 4, Part 3). That same astute reader might also have caught on to the fact that Posey is some kind of angel of death, or at the very least is "living" an existence somewhere between the worlds of the living and the dying. In the cases of both narrative threads, the author is skillfully laying in hints, or clues, to the truth in such an engaging way that the reader can't help but want to turn the page.

This technique is, in its turn, an extremely effective way for the author to make the main thematic point he seems to really want to make - that the relationships between parents and children are far more multi-textured and multi-layered than most children, perhaps even most parents, are aware of. In this section, the point is made through the conversation between Rose and Posey about children's resentment of their parents. Both women, at a point in their lives (deaths?) when the past can be seen with clearer perspective than it can be by the young, speak with a wisdom that seems tailor made to tell Chick, and presumably the reader, what they need to hear, even though Chick and the reader don't necessarily know they need to hear it.

The third so-called "mystery" of the book, the truth about what happened between Chick's father and mother to cause them to divorce, is developed in a less overtly mysterious fashion. It is, however, still a lingering and engaging question, with reminders of its existence (as opposed to clues to its solution) appearing at equally strategic points throughout the novel. Such a point is the narrated confrontation between Posey and her ex-husband in this segment. It's interesting to note the irony in Posey's choice of weapon, Chick's baseball bat. In short, she's confronting the man whom the reader and Chick will come to think has ruined Chick's life, with the means by which that destruction was accomplished - baseball.





# Section 3: Part 1

## Section 3: Part 1 Summary

This section is entitled "Noon."

"Chick and College" Chick describes the day he leaves for college as the happiest of his mother's life; he was, after all, getting the kind of education she'd always dreamed of for him, even if he was going on a baseball scholarship. He describes his embarrassment at the colorful way she dressed for the occasion, and the formal way she made him dress, as well as her conversation and her determination for him to give her a kiss. He refuses to let her into his dorm room, but she nevertheless draws him into a tight embrace just before she leaves.

"The Middle of the Day" While preparing Chick's lunch, Posey asks about his wife (now ex-wife), Catherine. Chick confesses that they split up, adding that the fault was his. As he eats his sandwich, he manages to get out the thought that's been bothering him all day. "We buried you," he says. "You've been dead a long time ... everything's different now." Posey responds by patting his cheek and telling him "things can be fixed." At this point, the narrative includes a typewritten note from Posey, written in honor of her son's first day in college, giving him a well-meant list of ways to behave.

"When Ghosts Return" Chick describes how he spent his childhood and teen years fantasizing about his father returning to his life, particularly how he imagined his father's presence every time he played baseball. He then describes the day his father did in fact return for his first game at college. He tells how he (Chick) caught sight of his father while walking to the plate, willed himself to not cry, and then cracked a home run.

"Miss Thelma" As Posey is washing the lunch dishes, the front doorbell rings, and she sends Chick to answer it. Before he gets there, however, he again hears the shouting voice of the man who this time identifies himself as a police officer. The experience is brief, however, and unnoticed by anyone but Chick. He opens the front door to reveal Miss Thelma, an aged black woman who, as Chick describes, was once their family's maid and who, much to his father's disgust, gave Chick his nickname. Suddenly Chick and Posey are in Miss Thelma's car, driving through town. As they drive, Posey waves to each friendly face she sees. Just as suddenly, they arrive at Miss Thelma's home, and even more suddenly they are all in Miss Thelma's bedroom, and Miss Thelma is in bed. Chick attempts to ask his mother what's going on, but she hushes him and tends to Miss Thelma, who tells Posey she would sure appreciate her doing what she does now. Posey agrees. At this point the narrative interjects an entry from the *Times I Did Not* list, the brief story of how Chick didn't tell his mother he'd seen his father, how his father came to every game that summer and how Chick played well at every game, and how on one occasion Chick got a ride home with him.



Back in Miss Thelma's bedroom, Posey and Miss Thelma banter about whether Posey's beauty products can cure the cancer that evidently ails Miss Thelma. Later, as Posey applies moisturizer to Miss Thelma's wrinkled face, conversation reveals that Posey was Miss Thelma's partner in cleaning houses. "How do you think," Posey asks her shocked son, "I put you kids through college?" This leads Chick into recollections of how his father lied to get additional attention for him from a professional baseball scout, how his father showed pride in his baseball rather than in his athletic achievements, and how they began to go for beers together, "as men do."

Chick musters the courage to tell Posey about his father's presence in his life, and is surprised when all Posey does is tell him to not neglect his studies (see "Quotes," p. 124). Narrative switches back to Miss Thelma's bedroom where Chick asks Posey why she never told him about having to clean houses and they quickly get into an argument over whether Chick was too proud to accept the reality. Miss Thelma defuses the tension with a joke, and she and Posey end up giggling so much that Posey can't apply makeup properly. At that point, Chick recalls a tense conversation with Roberta about whether Posey should get married again. Roberta, Chick says, thought it was almost too late for Posey to marry, while Chick argues that she shouldn't have to. Roberta, he writes, "wanted my mother happy. I wanted her to stay the same." He concludes this section by commenting that in his Latin class, he learned that divorce came from the root word *divertere* meaning to divert, and says that that makes sense. "All divorce does," he writes, "is divert you, taking you away from everything you thought you knew and everything you thought you wanted and steering you into all kinds of other stuff ..."

### Section 3: Part 1 Analysis

The title of this section is evocative in several ways. Firstly, noon marks the midpoint of the day, meaning that in the structural overview of the novel, it marks the midpoint of Chick's ... *one more day* with his mother. For other considerations of the way in which this section heading is particularly effective, see the "Questions" section.

It's interesting to note the relationships between the two time lines in this segment, Chick's recollection of his past and his experience of the present. In the past, he recalls his father as being more involved than ever in his life, while at the same time he has moved away from his mother who is, in a geographical sense, much less involved in his life than ever before. The irony here is that the presence of Chick's father is shallow, while the involvement of Chick's mother is even deeper - she's working in a menial job to make sure that Chick lives a good, rounded, supported life, while Chick's father seems interested in Chick for only one thing. Yes, both parents are in their minds and intentions striving to do right by their son, but only Posey's work is truly effective and sustaining - and ultimately unconditional, as dramatized in her reaction to Chick's news about his father's reappearance in his life. Chick's father's work is, as mentioned, superficial, one-dimensional, and completely conditional - as long as Chick is involved in baseball, his father will be involved with him.



Also in this section, the twin threads of mystery are developed further, as Chick has another encounter with the insistent male voice, and his experience with his mother takes another important twist with her apparent ability to leap from place to place and situation to situation without actually traveling there. There is the sense here that Chick's journey, to whatever place of enlightenment he's going, is becoming more urgent; the male voice is more insistent that Chick respond to him, Posey (using whatever power she's drawing on) is more hurried, making the journey less easy for Chick to accept as being realistic. Can both these circumstances be taken as indications Chick is closer to death, and therefore must be brought closer to life by both the ambulance attendant (the male voice) and the visiting angel (Posey)? It's interesting to note here that Chick seems more accepting of what's going on with Posey; he expresses no real reaction to the way shifts keep taking place more and more quickly. It's also interesting to consider whether the insistent male voice has a metaphoric meaning. Is it possible that it represents Chick's own inner voice, the voice of the truth he'll come to learn by the end of the book (that he is loved, and lovable)? Is it possible he's hearing the voice not just of life, but of *his* life?

An interesting irony can be found in the relationship between Miss Thelma and Posey, in that their journey has moved from Miss Thelma taking care of Posey (as both a maid and as a friend offering her a job) to Posey now taking care of Miss Thelma. Aside from the hint of social commentary (the white woman gently and lovingly taking care of the black woman who had at first been her servant), there is the sense that theirs is almost an archetypal relationship, an embodiment of how those who care for others themselves become cared for at the end of their lives. It might not be going too far to suggest that this is evocative of the parent/child relationship: as the parent cared for the child, so the child comes to care for the parent. Not in Chick's case, though. He obviously neglected his mother, to his everlasting guilt (a guilt that no doubt contributes to his suicidal tendencies). The evolving relationship between Miss Thelma and Posey is, perhaps, suggestive to him and to the reader of the kind of relationship he and Posey should have had, and all children should have with their parents.



## Section 3: Part 2

### Section 3: Part 2 Summary

"Chick Makes His Choice" Chick describes the high and low points of his experience in college. The high point was when he met Catherine, his wife and ex-wife to be, on a night when he was a surprise hit at a frat party during a lip-syncing contest, in which he "performed" to one of his mother's favorite recordings. He tells how the next day he received good grades, called Posey at her beauty parlor, and heard her say how proud she was of him. He then says that within a year, he had dropped out; that, he writes, was the low point. The reason he dropped out, he writes, was that he was accepted onto a farm team for the Pittsburgh Pirates. He took the position at his father's urging, writing that he was seduced by the possibility of both a major league career and his father's approval. He writes that when he told Posey, she screamed at him that he shouldn't do it - and then, when he arrived at training camp and told her he could always go back to school, told him "Going back to something is harder than you think." Chick comments that he couldn't have broken his mother's heart more if he'd tried.

"The Work You Have to Do" Back in the present, Chick watches as Posey finishes applying makeup to the now dozing Miss Thelma. He and Posey argue over whether Posey did the right thing in accepting dismissal from the hospital and going into the beauty salon, and eventually into housecleaning. Miss Thelma and Posey agree that people do what they have to do in order to raise their children and give them a good life. This leads into conversation about Chick's family and his job - the family that fell apart, the job he left behind. Chick, who feels guilty that he had a good career of ten years but wanted more while his mother had spent most of her life menial work to support her children, says his unhappiness is rooted in not wanting to be ordinary, someone forgotten. Miss Thelma says the laughter of her grandchildren keeps her from being forgotten. Before Chick can argue his point any further, Posey gestures for him to be quiet. The narrative then includes a letter written from Posey to Chick on his wedding day. In the letter, she acknowledges how uncomfortable her notes make him, but they're the best way for her to express what she's feeling. She talks about how she cares for Catherine in a similar way to how she cares for Roberta, and urges him to love her as well. In fact, she urges him to love her, their children, and perhaps most importantly their marriage, which she says must be loved even at times when he and Catherine don't even like each other.

"Reaching the Top" Chick narrates his rapid, almost accidental rise to what he believed to be the top: catching for the Pittsburgh Pirates as they progressed to the World Series. He describes how he was put onto a baseball card in spite of not playing very much, and how he got two cases of cards, one of which he gave to his father. He then describes how the Pirates eventually lost the Series, how he and his teammates went out drinking all night to forget what happened, and how he never had a chance to play for the Pirates again. He describes how he traveled the country in pursuit of his dream of playing baseball long past the time he should have - well into his middle years, his



marriage, and the life of his child. He tells how he got a dead end job selling plastic bottles for pharmaceuticals, and how his father eventually drifted out of his life - their only link, Chick says, was baseball, and once that link was gone what tenuous relationship they had also disappeared. He says that his father never talked about what happened between him and Posey, saying only that things didn't work out - Chick comments, however, that when he asked his parents what happened, his father was the only one who didn't look him in the eye when he answered.

"The Second Visit Ends" Miss Thelma tells Posey she'd like to visit with her grandchildren. As they come in, Chick realizes that they can't see either him or his mother, and asks Posey what's going on. Posey tells him that Miss Thelma called to her and that she's like other old people who, when close to death, find it easier to communicate with old friends and family, people who've gone before. Chick suddenly understands that he himself is close to death, and asks how long he has to live. Posey tells him he's got a bit of time left, and at that moment Chick once again hears the booming male voice calling to him. At the same time the glass in Miss Thelma's house shatters, and swirls around Chick and Posey. Panic stricken, Chick asks his mother what he should do. Posey calmly tells him it's up to him.

### Section 3: Part 2 Analysis

Two of the novel's most important thematic statements appear in this section. The first is the way Posey and Miss Thelma tell Chick that a parent's job is to do what must be done, anything that can be done, in order to enable their child to live a good life. There are several key points to consider here. One is the fact that whether they intend it or not, they make Chick feel incredibly guilty for devoting so much time and energy to pursuing his baseball (and therefore his relationship with his father). A second point is Chick's belief, for much of his adult life, that that's exactly what his father was doing, a belief fueled by the desire that no matter what, his father loved him and was eager for love in return. Ultimately, this sustaining and sustained belief disappeared, in a process ruefully described by Chick here and in the following section. A third and related point, is that as his belief in his father disappeared, Chick's belief in his mother and her love did not increase to compensate. Instead, his desperation and frustration and guilt expanded to fill the void left behind by belief. This can be seen as a thematically relevant suggestion that when disappointment in one parent appears, awareness of (and gratitude for) the true love of another can, and ought to, fill the void.

The second key thematic point to emerge in this section can be found in Posey's comments about marriage - specifically, her point that a marriage must be loved. On one level, this may seem to be a rather contemporary thought coming from a woman whose definitions of marriage were ostensibly formed in the 1950s and '60s, periods in which the deeper means and meanings of marriage weren't considered all that much. It must be remembered, however, that this is a contemporary novel written from a contemporary perspective with a contemporary understanding of the layers and responsibilities and resonances of marriage as both an institution and a relationship. Perhaps most importantly, it must also be remembered that the dead Posey is portrayed



as coming from a place of spiritual enlightenment. She is an embodiment of transcendent wisdom and perspective, and as such has a broader view than she ever had when she was alive. The point is not made to suggest that that view was wrong - her perspective on parenting, when she was alive, is clearly to be interpreted as a kind of ideal. The point is made to suggest that once earthly desires and resentments are left behind, it's possible to see and react with deeper compassion, a thematically relevant point reinforced by Posey's reaction to the Italian woman in the following section.

On a technical level, the author ends this section with a clever and engaging climax, effectively drawing the reader into the following section that contains the book's emotional climax. It's interesting to note here how the shattered glass can be seen as a metaphor for the shattering of Chick's perspective on Posey, experienced in this section, and as an equally metaphoric foreshadowing of the shattering of his perspective on his father, narrated in the following section.



## Section 4: Part 1

### Section 4: Part 1 Summary

This section is entitled "Night."

"The Sunlight Fades" Chick wills the glass storm to pass, and he and Posey leave Miss Thelma's house. Chick asks whether he's going to die, and Posey tells him only God knows that. They then visit several elderly men, not so much traveling from place to place as popping in and out of their thoughts - going, as Posey suggests, where she's being thought of. During these visits, Chick asks Posey whether she ever dated any of the men (she says no), why she never married again (she doesn't answer that one), and whether she was ever lonely (she tells him she had him and Roberta, and then her friends, to keep her company). They return to the house, and Posey makes Chick some dinner, chattering in the way she used to about her various, and variously eccentric, family members. As Chick nervously eats, he's aware that there's something big coming - a decision, an event. As he finishes, Posey tells him they've got one last visit to make.

"The Day He Wanted Back" Chick describes the last time he saw his mother before she died - her seventy ninth birthday party, a celebration he, Catherine and Maria attended in the company of Roberta and her family as well as several of Posey's old friends (many of whom she'd beautified for the occasion). In the midst of the festivities, the phone rings. Chick answers it and is shocked to hear the voice of his father who has been hunting down Chick all day. His father says he's managed to get a place for Chick on a Pittsburgh Pirates Old Timers' team, and they need him for a game the next day. Chick tries to argue that he's past playing baseball and that he's committed to spending time with his family, but his father pressures him, saying there may be possibilities for a coaching, commentating, or writing contract. Eventually, Chick gives in (see "Quotes," p.155), and spends the rest of the party making secret arrangements to fly out to the game, lying to his family (who somehow seem to sense that he's not telling the truth), and taking a cab to the airport. As he's getting into the cab, he hears Posey calling out to him, but her final comment that she loves him is cut in half by the closing of the cab door. "And I never saw her again," he says.

At that point (for the first time in a relatively long time), the narrative interjects an item from *The Times My Mother Stood Up* list. Shortly after quitting baseball and the birth of Maria, Chick has an opportunity to invest in a sports bar. Catherine is reluctant, Chick has his own reasons for wanting to go ahead with it (see "Quotes," 162-163), and Posey casts the deciding vote, saying that sometimes people have to take a risk, and besides, Chick has three things going for him - belief, hard work, and love. The investment goes ahead, two years later the sports bar goes out of business, and Chick comments that at least in his world, a person needs more than those three things in order to be a success.





"The Game" The night before the Old Timers' game, Chick finds sleep difficult because of worries about how he's going to play. When he gets up in the morning he learns he has a message, goes down to the front desk to collect it, and discovers that sometime in the night his father left him his old baseball shoes - no note, but the shoes are there with, as Chick writes, "all their old scrapes" intact. Chick then describes the day of the game - how he was directed to the employee entrance (as opposed to being allowed the dignity of the players' entrance), and his discovery that the name on his uniform had been stitched over the pale shadow of another player's. He then describes how he noticed that all the other players on the team were old and out of shape like him and how he managed to hit the ball on his one turn at bat. For a moment he recalls how his mother used to comment on how there was always something interesting happening somewhere in the world, and then tells how his one hit resulted in an easy catch and his being called out, his mother was succumbing to a sudden, violent heart attack. Finally, he describes how he quickly left the dressing room at the end of the game rather than sticking around to talk with his teammates, and how he subsequently met his father in the parking lot. After he thanks his father for the cleats, his father comments with some anger on how he'll never get back into the game if he doesn't talk with people like the other men on the team, people with connections.

"Chick Finds Out His Mom is Gone" That night, Chick calls home to Catherine, and finds out about his mother's death -Catherine tells him that Maria discovered her. He drives home through the night, arriving at his mother's house first thing in the morning. "The sky was a rotted purple. [The] car smelled of beer." Chick realized he had "lost both parents on the same day, one to shame, one to shadow."

## Section 4: Part 1 Analysis

This segment begins the process of movement towards the novel's climax, the encounter with the Italian woman in the following section. The key component of this movement is the portrayal of Chick's growing disillusionment with himself. The failure of the sports bar, his succumbing to his father's temptations, his recognition of the flabbiness of both his body and his dreams, his discovery of the entirely conditional nature of his father's love, his guilt about Maria and, and most importantly, his rejection of his mother all contribute to the downward spiral that led to the suicide attempt. The question of which came first, Chick's disillusionment with himself or with his father, is a complicated one, but is almost irrelevant. Both forms of disillusionment are deeply powerful, deeply integrated into Chick's psyche, and deeply intertwined. Ultimately, however, the responsibility lies with Chick - as Posey says, only he can decide what's going to happen to him. Decide he does, eventually, in the climax in the following section (the climax to which the action of this section builds).

On a more technical level, this section resolves one of the key mysteries of the novel - the question of what, exactly, drove Chick to try to end his life. At this point, the reader has all the key pieces of that puzzle, and the picture is complete. The solution to the other key mystery (what Posey is up to) is not yet fully apparent, but here as throughout the novel the author plants careful, strongly hooked clues to draw the reader and Chick





inevitably, irresistibly, forward into the truth. That truth becomes apparent in the following section, as Posey and Chick visit the Italian woman. An interesting sidebar to this journey is Posey's comment that she's visiting people who are thinking about her, sort of a tourist of memory.

A minor mystery, never resolved, is one of storytelling logic - how did Chick's father get his cleats? The novel never offers an explanation.

The novel's three themes are each developed in a single exchange in this scene - the entry from the *Times My Mother Stood Up* list in which Posey supports Chick in his determination to build the sports bar. The first theme, relating to the relationship between parent and child, is clearly dramatized in that child clearly relies on parent, and parent is unconditionally supportive of child. This, in turn, is a development in the secondary theme relating to loyalty - Posey here is unquestioningly loyal and devoted to her son, in spite of evident (and realistic) reasons why his scheme has the potential for trouble. The third theme relating to fallibility is also dramatized here. Posey, in spite of her evident love and loyalty, is also quite evidently wrong—or at least she proves to be wrong. Was she wrong to support her son? No. Was she wrong about the issue to support him on? Yes. This is a dichotomy or ambiguity that runs throughout the novel. Was Chick wrong to want his father's love? No. Was he wrong to want it so much, so intently, and so obsessively? Yes. Was his father wrong to express his love in the only way he knew how? No. Was he wrong to attach so many conditions to that love? Yes.



## Section 4: Part 2

### Section 4: Part 2 Summary

"A Third and Final Visit" Posey leads Chick through an unfamiliar small town towards a large yellow brick building. As they walk, they talk about how they both wish they could have had this sort of time together when Posey was alive - but Chick, Posey says, was too busy. Suddenly Chick hears the shouting male voice, this time telling him to open his eyes. Chick starts to feel himself pulled away from Posey, but fights to stay in contact with her. "One more stop," she says. They go into the yellow building, and go into the bedroom of a thin, elderly, Italian-looking woman, quietly brushing her hair in front of a mirror. Posey tells Chick that the woman is his father's wife. At that point, the narrative interjects an entry from the *Times I Did NOT* list, this time recalling the day of Posey's funeral. Chick describes how Posey left an instruction in her will for Chick to put the first shovel-full of dirt into her grave. He thinks about how a good son would have stayed with her on the day of her birthday and perhaps done something to save her life, but the bad son did what he did: ran off and indulged his aged fantasies, all with the hope of winning the approval of a man unworthy of bestowing it. He tells how that son did as his mother asked, and shoveled the dirt and heard, in his mind, Posey saying "How could you?"

"Everything Explained" As she brushes the Italian Woman's hair, Posey explains that when Chick's father was in Italy during the war, he met and married this woman probably out of fear, although Posey can't say for sure. She tells how he eventually sent for his first wife and set her up in a house and a life in a nearby town, where he set up a second business. Posey then describes how she became suspicious, followed him on one of his out of town trips, and discovered the arrangement - realizing, at the same time, that when he criticized her cooking it was the other woman's that he really wanted. She then tells Chick that his father had another son, and when Chick asks whether this son played baseball, Posey tells him she doesn't know. She then goes on to tell how she waited for his father in the driveway the night he was to come home, how she sat in the car with the windows closed and screamed her temper and hurt out at him, how he confessed it all, and how that was the night before he left for good. She tells Chick she was doing what she could to defend her family, the one family a man is supposed to have, and Chick comments in his narration that of all the times his mother stood up for him, this heads the list.

Chick expresses the regret that Maria was the one to find Posey's body, saying if he could change one event in his life that would be it. He describes how different and strained his relationship with his daughter was ever since that moment, and expresses the belief that that was the beginning of the end of his relationship with his family. He describes the circumstances of his telling Catherine the truth of what happened that day, says she reacted with numbness, finally commenting that at that point, nothing matters.



As the Italian woman looks through some papers on her desk, Posey asks Chick why he wanted to die. At that moment all Chick's grief and guilt explodes out of him, and he collapses to the floor, sobbing, apologizing, explaining and grieving. Posey holds him, and he comments that he received more comfort from that embrace than he ever thought was possible, receiving even more when he realizes Posey knew all along why he was obsessed with baseball, and why he left the day of her birthday - he was desperate to please his father. At that moment the Italian woman gets to her feet and Posey shows Chick what the Italian woman had been looking for in her papers: a photo of a young man that Chick assumes was her (and his father's) son and a copy of Chick's baseball card. Chick comments that he's sure the Italian woman saw him as she mumbled a request for forgiveness and then, he writes, "everything around us disappeared."

## Section 4: Part 2 Analysis

This segment of the book contains the novel's climax, as Chick confronts the conflict-causing elements of his past. These include his blind devotion to his father, his father's distance (as symbolized by the Italian woman), his longing for his mother (dramatized in his feelings in response to her offering of comfort), and his distance from his family (represented by Catherine's comment that nothing matters). As discussed in relation to the previous segment (specifically in relation to his being surrounded by shattered glass), these confrontations shatter all his conceptions about himself and his life - that his father deserved Chick's devotion, that Chick didn't want or need or long for Posey, that he himself is unloved and unlovable. In other words, his father was unworthy, all along longing for and relying on Posey, and he was always and still is worthy of her love. This is the point to which Chick has been journeying throughout the novel, and perhaps throughout his life - in both cases, led there by the loving, patient, forgiving, wise Posey. It could be argued again that Posey's compassion and perspective here are unrealistic and sentimental. Again, however, the point must be made that one of the novel's key narrative points is that a parent's love for a child is, or at least should be, transcendent - that the child will only benefit from such love. That benefit is dramatized in the strongest way possible in the following segment, when Chick, as the direct result of his mother's love, chooses to live.

Other noteworthy elements in this section include the way Chick is led into an unfamiliar town to meet the unfamiliar Italian woman, both aspects of his experience symbolizing the way he's about to go into unfamiliar emotional and spiritual territory. Another important element is Chick's pathetic, lonely, needy question to his mother about whether his father's other son played baseball - even to the end, Chick is desperate to be special, in this one way, in his father's experience. It's telling that Posey doesn't know the answer - in a sense, she's telling her son that that part of his experience, and the relationship with his father that baseball represents, ultimately don't matter. A third key point is the juxtaposition between Chick's comment about Posey's ultimate expression of standing up for him (kicking out his father) and his further comment relating to his guilt about Maria. The juxtaposition suggests that Chick feels, on some level, that in

running away to play baseball on the day his mother died, he was not standing up for Maria.

The final key element of this section is the Italian woman showing Chick a copy of his baseball card, and uttering her plea for forgiveness. For consideration of this element, see the following section, and also "Questions."



## Section 4: Part 3

### Section 4: Part 3 Summary

"Chick Finishes his Story" Chick recalls his earliest childhood memory, his mother holding him tightly across his chest as she lifts him to a water fountain, and realizes he feels exactly the same way in the moments after he leaves the Italian woman's house. He sees the stars hurtling past him, is told by Posey that the Italian woman was telling him to forgive himself, and tells her in return that she was a good mother. She smiles happily, waves a tender farewell, and as Chick cries out for her to stay and as the shouting male voice calls to him again, she disappears. Chick becomes aware of flashing white lights, realizes they're flashlights, and also realizes he's being looked at and brought back to life by two young ambulance attendants, the voice of one them being the voice that's been calling to him throughout his visit to his mother.

"Chick's Final Thoughts" Chick writes in narration that the reader may not believe the story that's just been told but he does, commenting that just like his mother told him about echoes (Section 2, Part 1). Sound persists, she taught him, after the source has stopped. Chick believes that in the moment of his near death, he experienced an "echo" of his mother's presence in his life, and so returned to the world of the living. He describes himself as ashamed that he tried to kill himself, as having had a difficult time in the days after the accident, and as being relieved that things weren't worse - the trucker who Chick ran off the road, for example, didn't die. Finally, he comments on how parents always support and sustain and hold up their children, even though it may mean that the children don't know the truth of their parents' lives; but their lives, their stories, do exist (see "Quotes," p. 194). Having learned his mother's story, he describes himself as wanting to make things right with his family.

"Epilogue" The narrator writes that Chick died of a stroke a short while ago, five years after the attempted suicide and three years after their meeting at the baseball field (see Introduction). The funeral, the narrator says, was simple and small, although the Pittsburgh Pirates did send a condolence card, and his father (a thin, stooped, white-haired man) was there. The narrator describes how, after meeting him in the park and hearing his story, the narrator carefully checks the details of Chick's story. Women matching the descriptions of Rose and Miss Thelma did die shortly after the accident, there was a marriage license registered for Chick's father and an Italian woman shortly after Chick and Posey divorced, and the couple did have a son. Posey died when Chick said she did, from the cause Chick said she did. The narrator describes how Chick spent the last few years of his life developing a close relationship with his daughter, Maria, how he developed a civil relationship with his ex-wife, Catherine, and how he worked part time for the parks and recreation department, where his one rule for the games he supervised was that everyone gets to play. The narrator also describes that in his last days, Chick felt his time was getting short, and that his story really can be believed - it is possible to have one more day with those you love, because she (the narrator) had that day with Chick. It's only at that moment that it becomes clear that the



narrator is Maria, Chick's daughter, and that she's proud enough of having known her father to name her unborn son Charley in his honor.

## Section 4: Part 3 Analysis

This segment of the novel is essentially denouement, or falling action - the tying up of loose ends, the answering of any questions that remain. In the specific case of *...one more day*, the key loose end is the revelation of Posey's intent, and of Chick's explanation of his experience. It's interesting to consider whether Chick's awakened feelings for his mother and for his family are themselves echoes of feelings he experienced earlier, feelings drowned in alcohol and subverted by his desperate, wrong-headed devotion to his father and his father's goals for him. Another key loose end is more thematic than literal, and can be found in Chick's comment about parents' lives rarely being fully understood, or even fully known, by their children. This is an aspect of the novel's key thematic focus on the relationship between parents and children, and could perhaps be extended to include the idea that parent can't know everything about the lives of their children. In short, both are mysteries to the other, but not necessarily troubling ones - love, respect and care are, the novel suggests, more important and more valuable and more sustaining than mere knowledge.

Other important loose ends include the revelation of the identity of the insistent male voice (which, to perceptive readers, is probably not going to be much of a surprise), and the revelation of the narrator's identity - which, even to perceptive readers, probably is. There is the very clear sense here that the author has shaped his narrative and his purpose to make the key thematic point made throughout, and by, the novel. This is that parent/child relationships can ultimately transcend pain and suffering, if maintained and developed with love and compassion, and the experience that springs from the combination of the two, forgiveness - of both the other, and the self.



# Characters

## The Narrator / Maria

The narrator appears at only two points in the book, in its introduction and its epilogue. In the introduction, the narrator isn't given an identity; the narrative is written in first person past tense, but there is no sense of gender, age, relationship, nothing. Only in the epilogue, which maintains this neutrality until its very last lines, is it made clear that the narrator is in fact the central character's long estranged daughter, Maria.

Maria is referred to throughout the narrative, but always in her capacity as Chick's daughter - her perspective as narrator seems never to intrude upon Chick's narrative voice. Nevertheless, the introduction indicates that the narrative has been shaped by the narrator - in other words that the narrator is also an editor, someone who defines the narrative through addition, subtraction, juxtaposition, etc. Maria, therefore, as daughter, editor and narrator, clearly has a story to tell and a reason for telling it - her reawakened love for her father. This is a clear embodiment of one of the novel's key thematic points, that love and compassion and perspective can awaken (or re-awaken) the sense of connection between parent and child. It's interesting to note, meanwhile, that neither in the introduction when she outlines the story about to be told, nor in the epilogue when she reveals her identity does she refer to any sense of guilt or responsibility for Chick's decision to end his life. She was, after all, the trigger for his downward spiral into attempted suicide when she sends him a photograph of her wedding and he learns he wasn't invited.

As a character in the narrative, Maria is portrayed as watchful, wise, and sensitive, traumatized by having discovered Posey's body and by her father's abandonment. An interesting question is whether, as the editor of the narrative, she shaped it to portray herself in this way, as a victim caught in the fallout of Chick's self-destructiveness.

## Chick Benetto

Chick (Charles, Charley to his mother) is the narrative's central character - introduced by the narrator in the introduction, narrating the main body of the story, eulogized by the narrator in the epilogue. *For one more day* is the story of his life, during which he was repeatedly forced, as he says, to choose between being a mama's boy and a papa's boy. That story is told through two intertwined narrative threads, his recollections of his past and his near-death encounter with his already dead mother. In terms of his past, his desperation for his father's approval and affection define him, for the most part, as a papa's boy - he rejects his mother, in spite of her mostly obvious but sometimes hidden love for him, and her devotion to his well being. His near death experience, however, exposes him to the layers of truth behind his mother's actions and attitudes, revealing just how much she sacrificed for him, how much she loved him in spite of his frequent rejections, and how desperate she was—and perhaps is—for him to live a good, full,





happy life. In other words, as a result of his experience he learns just how much of a mama's boy he truly was.

Throughout much of the narrative, Chick is sunk in an emotional morass of guilt, self-recrimination, and remorse, almost to the point of coming across as self-pitying - although to be fair, there is plenty that he has to feel sorry for, and about. It's interesting to note, however, that there is no real narrative of how he lived his life after his near death experience - of what he realized as the result of that experience, and how he applied his realizations to his day to day existence. There are a few references in Maria's epilogue, but for the most part his new life remains a mystery. The point is not made to suggest that the narrative is incomplete, but rather that the point of the story is the realization - actually two realizations. These are that the lives of parents are never fully understood by their children, and that the love of a parent, whether misguided and sought like Chick's father's or genuine and self-sacrificing like Chick's mother's, is the most powerful influence in a child's life no matter how old that child is. These, it would seem, are the messages the author wants the reader to finish his book having heard and understood.

## **Posey Benetto**

Posey is Chick's mother, a strong willed, determined woman at times reticent with her truth but always open with her love and her opinions. She is fiercely devoted to the well-being of her children, a tireless defender of their right to a good, secure upbringing, and prepared to make that happen no matter the cost to her personally. She has eccentric little habits that drive her son to distraction (writing him little letters, always giving him advice on how to behave) and irritates him with her insistence upon getting an education when all he wants to do is play baseball. In essence, she dedicates her entire life to her children, sacrificing her happiness and fulfillment in the name of giving them what she profoundly believes they need.

## **Chick's Father (Leonard, or Len)**

Chick's father is portrayed throughout the book, as being distant, self-absorbed, and ultimately irresponsible. He introduces Chick to the one passion in his life, baseball, and uses this passion as a medium through which they communicate. As Chick himself points out (see "Quotes," p. 33), he spent his entire life living for baseball in an endlessly fruitless attempt to gain his father's attention and affection. It's important to note that Chick's father is never portrayed in the depth with which Posey is defined - he remains as shadowy and elusive to the reader as he does to the central character.

## **Roberta (Chick's Sister)**

Roberta is referred to mostly in passing throughout the novel - there is the sense that Chick doesn't know her that well, doesn't particularly want to, and thinks of her solely as being along for his family's ride. Their one conversation recounted at length suggests





that she is far more sensitive to their mother's feelings and needs than he is, but again her perspectives are ultimately dismissed by the self-absorbed, self-pitying Chick.

## Catherine

Catherine is Chick's ex-wife, and like his sister Roberta, is portrayed by Chick in his narration in a somewhat shallow fashion, as caught in the fallout of his self-destructive behavior. It's interesting to consider whether there's a thematic point made in the portrayals of Roberta and Catherine - and even, albeit to a lesser extent, of Maria. Do these relatively two-dimensional portrayals, when juxtaposed with the three dimensional portrayal of Posey, suggest that the only true, deep relationship a man can and/or should have in his life is with his mother? Or are they merely functions of Chick being self-absorbed, self-pitying, and self-harming?

## Rose

Rose is the first of three elderly women visited by Posey and Chick as part of Chick's near-death experience. Her difficult experiences with her children echo Posey's, but their mutual, humorous tolerance of their children's resentment suggests that their love for their offspring can make just about anything bearable.

## Miss Thelma

Miss Thelma is the second of the three elderly women encountered by Chick and Posey. Miss Thelma is African-American, and the Benetto's former maid. Chick is astonished to learn that for a while Miss Thelma and Posey cleaned houses together - it's a result of this encounter that Chick learns the extremes to which Posey went in order to give him and Roberta a good life. Like Rose, Miss Thelma is dying, and has called on Posey in her final hours to make that dying a little easier. Both Rose and Miss Thelma are manifestations of the novel's key thematic message - that the depth of a mother's love is the most powerful, and perhaps the most hidden, influence on a child's life.

## The Italian Woman

The Italian woman is the third woman visited by Posey and Chick during Chick's near-death experience. Their visit is the catalyst for the ultimate, climactic revelation of the truth of Posey's life: that she threw Chick's father out of the family for having married and had a family with the Italian woman. The Italian woman, unlike Rose or Miss Thelma, seems unaware of Chick and Posey when they visit her; but then, as their visit ends, with apparent deliberation she shows Chick a copy of his baseball card, and utters a plea for forgiveness. Posey tells him she is telling him to forgive himself. It's this lesson, from a mother other than his own, that perhaps plays the most important role in Chick's decision to live.

## The Shouting Man

As Chick travels further into his near-death experience, he hears the voice of a man shouting his name. The first few times it's simply a strange, frightening addition to a circumstance that's already strange and frightening enough. Late in the novel, however, it's revealed that the voice belongs to an emergency rescue operative, called to the scene of the accident that brings Chick near death.



# Objects/Places

## The Baseball Field (Introduction)

In the Introduction, a baseball field is the setting for the scene that sets the stage for the action of the novel to come. At first glance, the action here (the meeting between Chick and the narrator introducing his story) is an encounter between strangers, and in a way, it is: at the conclusion of the novel, it's revealed that the narrator is Chick's daughter Maria, from whom he has been estranged for years. It's important to note that baseball fields are important settings throughout the novel. First, for other encounters between estranged parents and children, in particular between Chick and his father. Second, baseball fields are also the setting for encounters between Chick and the truth about himself. Such fields are the places where he both achieves his dreams and fails in maintaining them, and also when he discovers the truth about his relationships with his parents. This, in turn, is similar to Chick's encounter with the truth in the introduction about his relationship with his daughter - that they're strangers. In short, the scene in the baseball field in the introduction foreshadows other, similar scenes throughout the novel.

## The Wedding Photograph

The arrival of the photograph of Maria on her wedding day is the catalyst for Chick's downward spiral into attempted suicide - when he learns that Maria got married and didn't invite him. The photograph is, for Chick, the ultimate evidence of his failure as a man, as a father, and as a human being.

## Pepperville Beach

This is Chick's hometown in California. It's the setting for Chick's recollections of his childhood, and also the setting for his near death encounter with his mother.

## The Water Tower

As Chick walks into Pepperville Beach following his near-fatal accident, the water tower is the first important landmark he encounters. As he describes it, it's a symbol of his youthful enthusiasm for life - and as such, chooses it as the setting for his attempt to end his life altogether. He jumps off it, but his suicide attempt ultimately fails.

## The Family House

The home where Chick grew up, and the home in which Posey continued to live after Chick and his sister Roberta moved away. At the beginning of Chick's near-death



encounter with his mother, Posey takes him back to the house and begins the process of awakening him to the truths of both their lives.

## Baseball

Baseball is Chick's obsession, and the medium through which he reaches out in an ever-deepening attempt to gain contact, respect and affection from his father.

## The Pittsburgh Pirates / the Old Timers' Team

Early in his life, Chick is invited to join the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team. He plays a few games with them and joins them in the World Series. It's the high point of his life, the experience against which he measures all subsequent experiences and finds them lacking. Late in life, he's invited to join a team of retired Pirates players for a fundraising exhibition game, and finds that all the other players have, like him, gone to seed and, for the most part, ended up in jobs that have little or nothing to do with their glory days in baseball. In other words, the Pirates of his youth are the stuff of fantasy, while the Pirates of his adulthood are a cold slap in the face from reality. It's interesting to note here that on both occasions, Chick's involvement with the Pirates is simultaneously the result of his father's intervention and what draws him further away from Posey.

## Chick's Two Lists

Chick made these lists when he was younger and, according to notes from the narrator/editor, Maria), found among his papers after his death. The first is *Times My Mother Stood Up for Me*, the second is *Times I Did NOT Stand Up for my Mother*. Entries from both lists, written in first person present tense, are interjected throughout the novel as commentary on illustrations of experiences Chick describes in his narration.

## Chick's Baseball Card

Once upon a time, every professional baseball player in the American professional baseball leagues had a baseball card. The front featured the player's picture while the back listed the player's statistics. Chick's card is printed at the end of one short season playing professionally with the Pittsburgh Pirates. It represents the peak of his success, and also the depths of his failure.

## Chick's Shoes

Chick's baseball shoes, presented to him by his father on the eve of Chick's participation in the Old Timers' game, represent his old dreams of baseball success and his old dreams of reconciliation with his father. The particular detail of the scratches on

the shoes, meanwhile, represents the damage done to those dreams over the years. There is no mention, however, of how Chick's father obtained the shoes.



# Themes

## Love between Parents and Children

There are several manifestations of this theme in *For one more day*. Throughout the novel love between parents and children is sought, rejected, offered, withheld, surrendered to, reviled and revered, lost and rediscovered. As such, it's portrayed as one of the most, if not *the* most, important source of emotional motivation in a person's life. Chick's father feels it, but expresses it in a limited way, and wants Chick to express his love in similar limited fashion. Chick struggles desperately to live within these terms, but finds he's simply unable to do so, either to his own satisfaction or his father's. As a parent himself, Chick feels love for his daughter and makes a degree of effort to do better by her, but finds himself handicapped by his crippling determination to please and win affection from his father, even on his father's limited terms.

By far the most important exploration of this theme is developed through the relationship between Chick and his mother. Posey experiences the love between herself and her son it deeply and passionately and pervasively, expresses it in fierce determination, unquestioning devotion, and complete willingness to do whatever's necessary to make her children's lives better. She even goes so far as to return from the world of death to show her son how to live. For his part, Chick spends much of his life rejecting both the terms and manifestations of her love, only to come to realize in what almost become the final moments of that life that in fact her love has protected him, sustained him, defined him, and forgiven him.

## Human Fallibility and Frailty

It's important to note that while motherhood in general and Posey's motherhood in particular are portrayed in a somewhat idealized fashion, the novel stops short of suggesting that mothers and motherhood, while worthy of respect, can nevertheless be imperfect - as, in fact, can fathers and fatherhood, children and childhood. Posey, Chick's father, and Chick all do their best, but they also all make mistakes - they have failings and weaknesses at the same time as they have successes and strengths. The novel's thematic point is that to achieve true success and fulfillment, individuals must strive against failure and feelings of weakness. Chick's father does what he thinks is his best: he strives to give his son as much encouragement and motivation as he can in the only way he knows how, but ultimately seems unaware that his terms of reference and capacity for feeling are profoundly limited. He essentially remains trapped by his frailties and as a result lives a life of shallowness and ultimate smallness.

For her part, Posey strives against limitations imposed by her husband, by society, and by her position as a divorcee. Yes, she has feelings of despair resulting from the failure of her marriage, but in a huge effort of will and action she transcends them, ending up a strong, determined, capable, responsible mother. She lives a fulfilled, if at times flawed



and limited, life. Chick, by contrast, gives in to feelings of despair resulting from his failed relationships with his father and with baseball, and as a result comes close to ending his life. His life remains essentially unfulfilled - until, that is, his near death experience reminds him of the most influential source of strength and inspiration in his life - Posey's example of doing exactly what he needs to do. In short, all three of the novel's central characters are ultimately and purely human beings, capable of both great strength and frailty, living lives defined by uneven mixtures of both.

## Loyalty

Several manifestations of loyalty are explored in *For one more day*. First, and perhaps most important, is the fierce, positive, loving loyalty displayed by Posey towards her children, and in particular to Chick. She knows both her son's flaws and his strengths, but loves him for both - perhaps in spite of both. This maternal loyalty is held up by Chick, and therefore by the book as a whole, as a profound and essential ideal. Chick displays a second kind of loyalty toward his father - a desperate, hungry kind of loyalty that is more about seeking than being. In other words, Chick is unfailingly loyal to his father because he thinks it's the only way that he can earn and/or receive love, affection and attention from him. The question is whether that's true loyalty or simply longing. It's important to note here that both Posey's and Chick's loyalties are unconditional. No matter what Chick does, Posey is loyal; no matter what his father does, Chick is loyal.

The irony, of course, is that no matter what Posey does, Chick is DIS-loyal. His blind loyalty to his father makes it impossible to see the truth about Posey and how truly, one hundred percent behind him she is. His father, by contrast, is always ahead of him, someone to be reached for and sought - his father, ultimately, is loyal to no one—not to Posey, not to his other wife (the Italian woman), not to any of his children. It could be argued that his only loyalty is to himself, but even then there's some question of whether this is actually true. How can someone be truly loyal to themselves, in the same way as Posey is loyal to her maternal truth, if he knows that that self is ultimately based in a lie? Ultimately, Chick ultimately poses this question to himself about in relation to his father, and his ultimate answer leads him to recognize that his own loyalty to himself is grounded in the one truth he knows for sure, his mother's unswerving devotion—her loyalty.



# Style

## Point of View

The entire novel is written in the first person past tense. The Introduction and Epilogue are written from the point of view of Maria, the once-estranged daughter of the central character. It's important to note that the Introduction and most of the Epilogue are written in such a way as to keep her identity secret. This point of view serves to create an intriguing sense of mystery, the sole purpose of which seems to be to make the ultimate revelation of Maria's identity, and more particularly her relationship with the central character, a moving and surprising conclusion. Meanwhile, the main body of the text is written from the autobiographical, self-revelatory point of view of Chick Benetto. It's presented essentially as a diary or journal, chronicling his thoughts and experiences and reflections as much as it does particular incidents - there is a real, engaging sense of intimacy about the way this point of view is used. That being said, there are interjections in the main body of the text written in the first person present tense. These are the excerpts from Chick's two lists, *Times My Mother Stood Up for Me* and *Times I Did NOT Stand Up for my Mother*. The shift in tense gives the entries from the list a sense of immediacy, of visceral emotion that is, at times, softened in the first person past tense narration. The feelings and experiences evoked in these entries are, as the result of this shift in tense, emotionally jagged and sharp. They are, to use a baseball metaphor apropos to the context of the novel, a sudden swift double play in the middle of a series of easy-out pop flies.

## Setting

The broad-stroked physical setting for the novel is America, with much of its action taking place in Chick's hometown, a mid-sized community in California. There are occasional journeys into other parts of the country, in particular when Chick recounts his adventures in baseball, but for the most part the action is centered in the town where Chick grew up, Pepperville Beach. That observation aside, there is perhaps a less straightforward and more important component of the novel's setting - the fact that much of its action occurs in what might be most easily described as Chick's mind. In the moments after his near-fatal car accident, when he lingers in the unconscious, mysterious gray area between life and death, Chick's imagination takes him on two journeys: into the past, and into a netherworld of the present in which his mother, whom some might see as an angel, takes him on a life and perspective altering journey. It's important to note that as Chick narrates this journey, the sensations he experiences are all described as though they are completely real. However, when he starts to hear voices coming from an experience outside of what he seems to be living, his whispered doubts and uncertainties become more insistent - and, simultaneously, the setting for what's going on becomes, for both Chick and the reader, less realistic and more mystifying, albeit just slightly predictable.





## Language and Meaning

There is an engaging sense of poeticism about much of the language used in the novel that, in spite of its undeniable evocativeness and sentimentality, seems at odds with the sort of person Chick is apparently supposed to be - a minimally educated, essentially uncommunicative, male product of an era in which men were taught to keep their feelings to themselves. It's important to note, however, that Chick's experiences are all viewed and described from the perspective of having had a near-death experience. In other words, he's been enlightened, to a point, and uses post-enlightenment language to describe his pre-enlightenment self. The reader, therefore, can never really get a true idea of who Chick was and therefore can't truly judge whether the language he uses are reflective of that identity. All that said, the language used by the novel ultimately serves what appears to be its purpose: to create an awareness, tinged with sentimentality, either newly awakened or renewed, of the importance of mothers and motherhood in the life of each individual, particularly male individuals.

## Structure

The novel's overall structure is evocative of its title, using as its section headings the components of Chick's ... *one more day* with his mother. The headings of *Midnight, Morning, Noon, Night*, in turn, effectively evoke to the emotional/spiritual stages of Chick's near-death experience (for further consideration of this element see "Questions").

Within the context of those headings and experiences, the narrative is broken up into short sections, more vignettes than chapters, each focusing on a particular aspect of Chick's experience either in the "present" with his mother or in his childhood, youth, and/or adulthood. This sense of vignettes, of short colorful snapshots of a life, combine with interjections from Chick's two lists and inclusion of Posey's letters to give the book a scrapbook-like quality. Here's a memory; there's a memory; here's a copy of Chick's baseball card; there's a picture of him with his cleats; here's a picture of Posey; there's a picture of Roberta in her ballet shoes; but where are the pictures of your father, Chick? The difference, of course, between a scrapbook and a novel is that novels, for the most part, have a point, a story to be told. This novel is no exception - here the scrapbook has a purpose, to explore and define a truth beyond glimpses of memory and feeling—by Chick's daughter, for Chick himself, about Chick's mother.



## Quotes

"Have you ever lost someone you love and wanted one more conversation, one more chance to make up for the time when you thought hey would be here forever? If so, then you know you can go your whole life collecting days, and none will outweigh the one you wish you had back." Introduction, p. 3.

"It's like this line is drawn somewhere in the world and if you never cross it, you'll never consider throwing yourself off a building or swallowing a bottle of pills - but if you do, you might." p. 3

"Mothers support certain illusions about their children, and one of my illusions was that I liked who I was, because she did." p. 4

"My theory was [my father] never got enough war for his liking. So he made his own with us." p. 29.

"Parents slot into postures in a child's mind, and my mother's posture was a lipsticked woman leaning over, wagging a finger, imploring me to be better than I was. My father's posture was a man in repose, shoulders pressed against a wall, holding a cigarette, watching me sink or swim." p. 30.

"Kids chase the love that eludes them, and for me, that was my father's love. He kept it tucked away, like papers in a briefcase. And I kept trying to get in there." p. 33.

"It had been a long time since anyone wanted to be that close to me, to show the tenderness it took to roll up a shirtsleeve ... when I lacked even the self-respect to keep myself alive, she dabbed my cuts and I fell back into being a son; I fell as easily as you fall into your pillow at night. And I didn't want it to end." p. 49.

"I was eating a past-tense breakfast at a past-tense table with my past-tense mother." p. 61.

"So," [Posey] said, moving away, "now you know how badly someone wanted you, Charley. Children forget that sometimes. They think of themselves as a burden instead of a wish granted." p. 73.

"[My father] is respecting the authority of my coach, I am respecting the authority of my father, and this is how the world makes sense, all of us behaving like men." p. 119.

"... my mother never spoke about the reason my father left. She never once took the bait Roberta and I dangled before her, looking for hate or bitterness. All she did was swallow. She swallowed the words, she swallowed the conversation. Whatever had happened between them, she swallowed that too." p. 124.

"It's such a shame to waste time. We always think we have so much of it." Posey to Chick, p. 152.



"...after I fell out of her life, [Maria] wrote about sports for her college newspaper. And in that mixing of words and athletics, I realized how y our mother and father pass through you to your children, like it or not." p. 155.

"[My father] had dismissed my current existence as swiftly as I wished I could. It made me recoil, and in recoiling, of course, a fight is lost." p. 159.

"When you play sports, you train yourself not to think to much about anything else. I can't imagine myself behind a desk. This is a bar. I know about bars. I have already begun a reliance on alcohol as part of my daily existence and secretly there is appeal in having it so handy. Plus, the place has the word 'sports' in it." p. 162-163.

"...we walked back down the tunnel, passing the current players ... I nodded at a muscular guy carrying a catcher's mask. It was like watching myself going out as I was coming in." p. 171.

"You expect a lot of things in a marriage, Charley, but who could see themselves *replaced* like that?" Posey to Chick, p. 183.

"...there's a story behind everything. How a picture got on a wall. How a scar got on your face. Sometimes the stories are simple, and sometimes they are hard and heartbreaking. But behind all your stories is always your mother's story, because hers is where yours begins." p. 194.



## Topics for Discussion

Consider a person in your life who you would connect with "for one more day" if you could. Explain why, what you might ask that person, what you might do with that person. Discuss the repeated references in the latter half of the book to Chick's doing things "like a man." Are the comments ironic or genuine? Does he admire his father for teaching him how to do things this way, or himself for going along with them - or does he resent them? Where does his having been taught by Posey to shave, something he says he should have learned to do from his father, fit into this picture?

Discuss the portrayal of motherhood defined by the character of Posey - a woman who essentially sacrifices her life in order to make good lives for her children. Is this portrayal a throwback to so-called "traditional" values? Might her characterization be considered by some elements of contemporary society to be a portrayal of a woman less than fulfilled? Is Posey a stereotype (a reductive, negative portrayal of motherhood suggesting that a woman's sole purpose in life is to raise her children) or an archetype (a positively presented embodiment of a universal human experience - that is, a mother's love for her children)?

Discuss the various possible symbolic meanings of the Italian woman showing Chick his baseball card at the same moment she suggests he should pardon himself. What is she saying to him? Why does she have the card at all, and why does it have any meaning for her (as it evidently does)? What is the ultimate message Chick takes away from the encounter?

Discuss the ways in which secondary relationships (in particular, those involving Rose, Miss Thelma and the Italian woman) dramatize the novel's main theme exploring the love relationship between parents and children. In what ways do they illuminate, for Chick, the point Posey is striving to make?

Examine the actions and feelings of those who have played important maternal / paternal roles in your life. How have they manifested such feelings and attitudes? How have you reacted? In what ways have important figures in your life been similar to Posey and/or Chick's father? In what ways have they been different?

Consider the four section headings, "Midnight," "Morning," "Noon" and "Night." In what ways are they evocative of Chick's emotional and spiritual journey?

What is the metaphoric value of Posey's working as a beautician - specifically, her beautifying Rose, Miss Thelma and the Italian woman at the same time as she's having her conversation with Chick?