

Funny Girl Study Guide

Funny Girl by Nick Hornby

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Plot Summary

Funny Girl, by Nick Hornby, chronicles the fictional tale of a young, rags to riches, girl, who longs to become the next Lucille Ball during the 1960s in London. As the story opens, Barbara Parker is a small town beauty queen. She's just become the reigning pageant winner of Blackpool England. As she watches the Mayor and his wife, a former beauty pageant winner, herself, Barbara feels as if she's looking at a possible - and terrible - future if she remains in Blackpool. All along she's been enthralled with Hollywood, the movies, and television stars. She wants to be the next Lucille Ball. She leaves for London.

Barbara arrives in London and works at a department store selling cosmetics with a girl named Marjorie. They end up rooming together in a flat in a poor section of town. They have no TV, no money to see movies, and Barbara begins to become depressed. She becomes even more depressed when Marjorie suggests that she find a boyfriend who can take her to movies, or might invite her over to watch his television. Barbara finds this outlook barbaric. However, she gives in to it when she becomes desperate to just go to a movie. She agrees to dinner and a movie with a man much older than her, Valentine Laws. This dinner date goes horribly wrong when the man's wife shows up at the restaurant. As she's leaving, she runs, literally, into a man named, Brian Debenham, who is a local talent scout and agent.

Brian sees her star quality and tells her that he wants to make her into the next top model for calendars. Barbara despises this idea since posing as a calendar girl for men to ogle isn't much better than being a beauty queen. She refuses, so Brian sends her on a series of horrible auditions for parts she is not a good fit for, but she goes anyway. At Brian's suggestion, she changes her name to Sophie Straw.

He sends her on an audition for a comedy, to a most unlikely studio, but as it turns out, she's a natural. The writers and the producer love her instantly. The reader learns that the writers of the show didn't even want to create the show because it is about traditional marriage and life, something that neither man can relate to (as they are both gay). Still, they like Sophie's candor, and they work in some of the suggestions that she's made. They offer her the part, and she takes it. She meets her co-star, Clive Richardson.

The cast and crew are assembled. Dennis will be the director. He is married to Edith, a very cold woman who uses Dennis for social status, but is cheating on him. Tony and Bill, the writers, have been gone from show business for a while because they had been incarcerated for being gay. Sophie learns on the first day of filming that her father has had a massive heart attack. Instead of leaving immediately to go to his side, and miss the taping, she stays and finishes the filming, first. Then leaves. Her father understands, but her Aunt Marie does not.

Meanwhile, the show is a hit. Clive becomes upset because he realizes that he is not the star of the show, only the secondary character, with Sophie being the main focus of



the show. Everyone badgers him until he agrees to stay through the first season. He is afraid of what it will do to his macho image with the women.

Sophie meets a woman named Diane, who conducts Sophie's first media interview. They become instant friends, and Diane is her best friend throughout the entire novel. Tony decides that he should try and give the appearance of being straight, so he talks a woman, named June, into marrying him to make the sponsors of the show happy. She agrees. Bill gives Tony grief over 'selling out' and pretending to be straight.

At the end of the first season, Clive and Sophie are seen together often, adding fuel to the gossip mill that they are dating and might be getting married. Both of them don't do anything to dissuade the press, but Sophie realizes that Clive will never be a one woman man. She decides that she might have to be brave about it.

The second season starts, and in one particularly poignant and precognitive scene there is an older couple who are married and are arguing. They were starlets during their decade, but now, no one knows them. It is written as a comedy, but the irony is not lost on Sophie, who realizes that in the end, fame is like a Ferris Wheel, and while it is fun riding it to the top, there is always a downward motion.

Sophie's father and aunt come to London to visit her. He is completely recovered from his earlier ailments. Her family's country ways embarrass Sophie. They go out to eat and, while there, Sophie meets a comedy magician, named Maurice. She begins dating Maurice, but eventually realizes that he is as shallow as Clive, and more conniving. She thinks that Dennis would never treat a woman like this. This though shocks her because, while she's tremendous friends with Dennis, she's never viewed him romantically before. He has since divorced his wife for cheating on him, and has been working as the show's director for many years.

June comes to the studios to tell Tony that she is pregnant. It is at this moment that Tony realizes that he does actually love June. He makes up his mind to chalk up his homosexual encounters as just young impulsive actions, and dedicates himself full time to being a husband, and eventually a father. This angers Bill enough that he begins to finish a novel about growing up gay.

Meanwhile, the show is still doing very well. They push the envelope with the types of topics they tackle, including male impotence, women doing household repair jobs, and divorce. The household plumbing job scene is such a hit that it brings the comparison of Sophie to her idol, Lucille Ball. She feels that she has truly arrived, now.

Bill's book comes out and it is only popular to a small demographic, as he figured it would be. Still, he's very proud of it and invites Tony to the launch party. Tony realizes that he no longer fits in with this circle of friends, and feels very much the outsider. The writers bring a new cast member onto the show. Nancy is to play the femme fatale in the upcoming season, the one where Barbara and Jim get divorced. In real life, Nancy is creating a wedge between Clive and Sophie, who are now engaged. In only a few short months, Clive is sleeping with Nancy, and Sophie calls off their engagement.



Dennis decides that he has waited in the shadows long enough to approach Sophie with his feelings. While he's figuring out a way to approach her, Sophie has a shock while she is on set one day. Her estranged mother, Gloria, who ran away when Sophie was two, shows up to see her. At first Sophie is irate that the woman would have the gall to show up. Later, she agrees to see her because she wants some answers to her questions. She learns that Gloria was feeling as stifled as Sophie had been. They part with a better understanding of one another, though Sophie believes that her mother had hoped for a handout.

June and Tony's child is born and Tony devotes himself to any writing job that comes along. It is becoming clear that the new show idea, Just Barbara, isn't going to fly. The network execs want to go ahead and make a pilot, which makes Sophie and Dennis happy. Dennis finally makes his move and Sophie agrees to go out with him. She finds that she is attracted to how NOT like Clive he is, though she's not sure that she really has deep feelings for him yet. They date for a few months, and eventually she comes to deeply care for him.

The new show is a flop. No one wants to watch a divorced single mother struggle in the city. Those used to seeing Sophie in a certain role are not accepting of her in this new one. Sophie learns that she's carrying Dennis's baby. Her agent suggests she get a quiet abortion, but she is appalled. She tells Dennis who is ecstatic. They are married, and Sophie leaves London's media scene behind.

The novel leaps forward twenty years. There is a reunion show being planned and all of the old cast and crew are gathered together, just like old times. Sophie sees that of all of them, only she, Dennis, and Tony/June, have lived happy and fulfilling lives. Everyone else are miserable and hollow inside. She feels very sorry for them all. The novel ends with the shooting of the reunion show, and Sophie realizing that she has missed these people, but more importantly, she has missed the work. She is grateful that she has been able during her lifetime to achieve all that she ever wanted.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Chapter 1

Funny Girl by Nick Hornby, is a work of fiction, although the book is decorated throughout with fake pictures of cast members to make the book feel that it is an authentic artifact chronicling the lives of famous actors on a famous television show. The action takes place in 1960s throughout Great Britain, mostly in London.

In the first chapter, the main character, Barbara Parker, is introduced. She's a beautiful young woman who is sick of being judged for her looks. She has a sharp wit that she uses to cut down people who think she's all beauty and no brains. In fact, her dream is to emulate Lucille Ball. She idolizes her intelligence and ability to look silly while being confident.

Barbara's family talks her into a beauty pageant in her home town of Blackpool, England, a town so small the local newspaper photographer is a celebrity. She wins easily, becoming Miss Blackpool, a minor beauty queen. Seeing absolutely no future in her small town, she abdicates her throne immediately to head to the big city, in this case, London. Her father, George, and her Auntie Marie don't want her to leave, but are helpless to stop her. She knows leaving her father will break his heart, but she has to follow her dream.

Chapter 2

Barbara takes a job at the cosmetics counter at a store called Derry and Toms in London. She also shares a room with a co-worker, Marjorie. Marjorie is sad, lonely, and focuses a lot on being sad and lonely.

London isn't exactly full of opportunities. Rather, it is full of people like her hoping to find opportunities. The only jobs in entertainment are for showgirls or escorts. Living in the small flat with Marjorie makes her miss home, but mostly she misses the television show, Lucy. She has no TV, and doesn't know anyone else who has one. Without her weekly fix of her comedy idol, she is starting to lose hope. Marjorie suggests she find a "gentleman friend," a man of means who needs someone pretty on his arm when he goes out. She swaps shifts with a friend at the perfume counter – because that is where these men shop – and found a man, named Valentine Laws, right away. He is a man at least 15 years her senior who invites her out to dinner and a show with a friend.

As it turns out, Laws and the friend got their signals crossed. Laws brings Barbara. The friend brings his wife. As the two men hustle away privately to figure out how to solve the problem, Barbara invents a story on the spot that she is Mrs. Laws and that the real Mrs. Laws is the mistress. She keeps the yarn spinning, and the friend's wife's head spinning, until the two men return. She leaves the men and the wife in the restaurant.



At this point, she is about to give up her dream, go home to Blackpool, get married and pop out kids and let the dreams just be dreams. Then, she quite literally bumps into Brian Debenham, and his wife, Patsy. Brian is a talent scout.

Analysis

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces one of the central themes of the book: You Must Follow Your Dreams. Barbara wants to be famous so badly, and to make people laugh, that she feels that she has to leave her childhood town behind. The town is too small to hold her big dreams.

The beauty pageant is a symbol of how everyone judges her based on looks and looks alone. The mayor, who awards the prize, is disgusting and lascivious. He puts down his own wife because she's not pretty. As it turns out, the wife used to be beautiful, but beauty fades.

Barbara sees how this is going and doesn't want to be pigeonholed into just being a beauty contestant. A beauty pageant winner is better than a contestant, she rationalizes; however, it still speaks volumes that she doesn't want to be part of this world.

Chapter 2

This chapter highlights another theme prevalent in the story: Gender Bias. This is the 1960s, and the older conservative people who run the country don't want to give up that control. Power rests in white, privileged men, and whoever plays by their rules.

For most of her life, Barbara resisted using her beauty for anything. She didn't want to be defined by her looks or her gender. Now, she finds that this is the only way to get noticed. In a big city full of people trying to be famous, she believes that's her only way of making her dreams come true is to get close to a man. She resists Debenham's first questions, thinking that all he wants from her is female company. It's not until later that she learns that his interests are purely financial.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Gender Bias that Barbara discovers.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Following One's Dreams.



Discussion Question 3

What does Barbara soon realize when she leaves home and begins working in London?

Vocabulary

burgeon, lethargic, postulate, robust, burnish, levity, tranquil, rotund, iconoclast, deliberate, allay



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3

Brian Debenham wants to make Barbara into the next top model of London. All she has to do is show up and smile, and she'll be on calendars and catalogs. But that isn't enough for her. She wants to be funny. She wants to act. She wants respect.

Brian sends her on terrible auditions for terrible shows to punish her and get that idea out of her head. He wants to break her down so that she'll just smile for the camera and be someone's brainless calendar girl.

On one audition, the director notes her accent and wants it scrubbed off of her. His name is Julian Squires, and they meet as her career is heading up and his is heading down. She figures, if acting is not being yourself, surely she can drop her accent and be someone else in auditions, too. She even agrees to Brian's suggestion to change her stage name to Sophie Straw.

Finally, he sends her to something that isn't right for her, but was created by her idols: some radio comedy professionals. Tony Holmes and Bill Gardner, writers, and Dennis Maxwell-Bishop, producer, have been asked to create a show about marriage and they have hated every minute of it. It just isn't what they want to do, and it shows. Miserable about the show, they ask Barbara/Sophie what she thinks of it. She doesn't like it, and she is honest with them. They grab on to that bit of honesty from her and from then on, she is in with them. She is also in with handsome leading man Clive Richardson.

Chapter 4

This chapter delves a little deeper into the minds of the men in the business. It turns out that Tony and Bill met in prison and hit it off with their mutual interests in comedy. They were in jail for being homosexuals. So, even though one of them (Tony) is now married, they don't really have their hearts in a show that lampoons traditional marriages. However, they want to be on television.

As the four men and one woman deconstruct their terrible TV pilot, something starts being created out of the pieces. They love Sophie Straw: her candor, her charm, her sass, and even her Blackpool accent. In fact, they throw out the infantile wife character she was auditioning for and create a brand new character for her to play. She comes from Blackpool. Her name is Barbara.

Even Clive gets in on the act. Although he'd rather be playing serious roles, he gets a chance to play with some aspects of his character as well. It becomes a romantic comedy Odd Couple.



Now that they are finally happy with the product, they have to pitch it to Tom Sloan, the Head of Light Entertainment at the British Broadcasting Company. Dennis brings Sophie to meet him. Sloan doesn't want an unknown in the part. Barbara plays him, hinting that they'll take the show to another network. Sloan falls for it, and approves the show.

Analysis

Chapter 3

This chapter has Barbara meeting the first of many characters that show her that fame is fleeting, which is one of the main themes of the novel. Julian Squires is spiraling, career-wise. And she's rising; she can't think about anything else right now.

It could be foreshadowing for her to meet Julian Squires at this point of her career. It would not be surprising if she should run into him again, when she is famous and he is forgotten.

From this chapter on, Barbara Parker is referred to almost exclusively by the narrator as Sophie Straw. She is transforming herself into a star. She is even seen as an equal, more or less, by the people she respects. Tony, Bill and Dennis were the creators of her favorite radio show, and Clive was the star.

Sophie is changing and evolving in every chapter. First, she changed her location to London. Then, she changed her way of dealing with men, to get the attention of one and be a kind of kept woman. Now, she's even changed her name. She's an actress, she surmises, so she might as well act. Creating a persona should be easy. She doesn't realize that she's going to have to live in this persona permanently. It's not a character, per se, it's an outward-facing set of socially accepted personality traits. As of yet, these changes really haven't hurt her much. She really looks forward to being Sophie Straw.

Chapter 4

Here, Sophie is given the chance to subvert the system. Even in television, it's a man's world. However, this group of intelligent, creative professionals not only value her opinion, but urge her to share it. And she uses her intelligence and quick-thinking to overpower the man in charge to land the job.

It's not just a man's world. It's a heterosexual man's world. Bill and Tony are still confined by what is considered "Normal." Thus, the theme of Gender Bias is shown to extend to the Gay community, too. They have to act 'normal'. They have to be 'normal' for all intents and purposes. They have to write a show that shows 'normal' people doing 'normal' things.

However, safe stories are never remembered. People like to see something off-color and challenging. And this group of relatively young, untried professionals want to be edgier, even if they have to take a very large leap of faith.



Discussion Question 1

How is the theme of Gender Bias expanded upon in these chapters?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Barbara feel that she needs to change her name?

Discussion Question 3

How does Barbara's agent try to manipulate her, and how does she manage to do what she wants anyway?

Vocabulary

ignominious, pragmatic, ruse, transgress, ruminate, lithe, transient, burdensome, onerous, aloof, deplete



Chapters 5-6

Summary

Chapter 5

This chapter delves into private lives of the men in the story. Dennis is married to Edith, a beautiful, intelligent, and cold woman who is having an affair. He knows about it, but isn't ready to say anything yet. He just sadly mulls about his home and wonders how life wound up the way it has. But it makes him think of Sophie, who is vibrant, warm, and hilarious.

In the final days before the live taping of their show, Sophie learns that her father's had a massive heart attack and he's unconscious. Auntie Marie says she needs to come home right away. She chooses not to, instead preferring to stay in London and tape the show before heading home.

Chapter 6

The performance goes off without a hitch for Sophie. Clive is overwhelmed by her performance, after a career of ridiculing comedies that he thought were beneath him. The audience loves Sophie and she loves the audience.

She's able to return to Blackpool, where her father has since awakened. When she tells him and Auntie Marie that she's going to be on a show, they are a little starstruck. Although she can't forgive herself for not dropping everything to go see her father, he has already forgiven her.

Analysis

Chapter 5

The name of the show, Barbara (and Jim), is revolutionary for the 1960s. The man taking a backseat to the woman in the relationship is scandalous to conservative, older people. It's rebellious, and they are making the BBC very nervous. The creative team of the show, and its two stars, are all working feverishly on it and loving their work. This is a recipe for success. It is in this creative collaboration that the theme of Belonging is demonstrated. With this group Sophie has found a group of people that she fits in with and she is completely in her element.

Her decision not to visit her father is painful for her, and Auntie Marie judges her harshly. However, she's given up a lot already in the hopes to become a star, and this is just one more sacrifice. This demonstrates the theme of Following Your Dreams.

Chapter 6



Everything is forgivable if you're famous, Sophie learns. Famous people are held to a different standard than “regular” people. This, apparently, even applies to people are not quite famous yet. The demonstrates the theme of 'What is Normal ? For Sophie there is a new normal.

Clive, for all his youthful vigor, might still be part of the old guard, who want women to know their places. He loves women, but it's not clear if he considers them equals. He can't handle being second fiddle. Is this him being sexist or just selfish? It's hard to tell this early, since many actors tend to be hungry for the limelight. Gender Bias is touched upon.

Discussion Question 1

Why is the Barbara (and Jim) show considered rebellious and cutting edge?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Belonging.

Discussion Question 3

How is the Entertainment industry portrayed thus far in the novel?

Vocabulary

altruism, deplore, precarious, trepidation, amass, callow, execrable, immodest, sage, trinket, immutable, trite



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Chapters 7

The changes are a real blow to Clive's ego. He didn't know that his character's name was in parentheses. He doesn't want to be the second character. Clive, as it's revealed, despite all his serious bravado, only became an actor to get girls. He tells his agent, Monty, to turn down the role when he hears about his character's name in parentheses. It's not until a Sunday brunch with his parents and ex-fiance that he decides he can't give up this chance. They all badger him into going along with it and taking a chance.

Meanwhile, Sophie is interviewed by a reporter from a terrible teen magazine called Crush. It's her first interview, and she struggles for what to say. She isn't famous yet but she's being asked about things that famous people are asked about. The interviewer is a woman named Diane, who wants to write comedy like Bill and Tony do.

Bill and Tony, meanwhile, are trying to figure out what to write about now that the show has been given 16 episodes. It was fun when the ideas were flowing those first days. But now the enormity of their job is weighing heavily on them. They start to write about marital troubles, but only one of them is married: Tony, a man who questions his sexuality. At home that night, Tony's wife June wants to read his work. He's afraid to let her, because it's all too close to their own situation. Tony and June's sex life has been a series of failures that have dulled into just sleeping in the same bed together. They both want to work it out, however. The writers have decided to give Jim impotence, as one of the main problems of the first episode, which ends with them consummating their marriage.

Chapter 8

People have to agree to the unusual ideas of this first show. Impotence, even though it's hinted at and not overtly said, is not a proper subject for the BBC and viewing audiences. Clive gives in, knowing he'll regret being seen as an impotent virgin. The director, a frumpy, middle-aged grump named Bert, is replaced when he can't get on board with the group's new ideas. Dennis takes the reigns. The critics love it. The audience loves it. The friends and family of the creators have a mixed reaction: mostly pride of creating something good that the world can see, even if they don't get it.

Analysis

Chapter 7

When Sophie is asked by Diane about her dating life, and furniture, it speaks of an undercurrent that runs throughout the book. Women in 1960s England are still not

allowed to be anything but homemakers and dating targets. The theme of Gender Bias is demonstrated here, and ironically, it is perpetuated by a female.

Even Diane knows that the magazine is ridiculous. She aspires to something greater as well. It would seem this chapter foreshadows Diane writing something for Sophie to star in later on in their careers.

Bill and Tony continue to struggle with normalcy. Whereas Bill looks down his nose at traditional marriages, Tony wants to work it out. This demonstrates the theme that has occurred a few times before, which is that of 'normalcy'. What is normal? Should those who don't fall into the exact parameters feel as if they are failing or somehow wrong?

Even if the physical side of Tony and June's marriage is failing, the intellectual side is flourishing. They are a good pair, and could be considered to be good friends. The fact that they are married begs a question: Does a marriage have to have passion? Can it be about two life partners who share many common interests, a way of life, a way of looking at the world, and who deeply care for each other? How much of a marriage is physical and how much is mental?

Chapter 8

Although the main characters – Sophie, Clive, Dennis, Bill and Tony – vary slightly in age, they are all acting a bit like children in this chapter. They are seeking the approval of their parents, represented literally in Sophie's case and metaphorically in the case of getting the show approved by their fathers at the BBC and the families watching at home. And, like children, they are pushing boundaries just to see how far they can go.

Clive doesn't want to be seen as an impotent virgin outside of the show. It's not about typecasting. He's afraid people will assume he's that way in real life. People aren't very bright, and they jump to conclusions a lot. This could really hurt his chances with girls. On a deeper level Clive is 'impotent' as a person. He is shallow and unable to connect with anyone on a deep level.

The interesting thing is that Sophie doesn't think about this at all. She just takes on the role, because in her real life, she's taken on the role as Sophie Straw. She is never referred to as Barbara Parker anymore. She's living the same life on screen as off. In many respects, she's also impotent. This directly speaks to the theme of the Entertainment Industry and how it often dehumanizes and objectifies the ones that are in the limelight, until many of them lose who they are entirely.

Discussion Question 1

What were women's roles defined as in this time period?



Discussion Question 2

Compare Clive to Sophie.

Discussion Question 3

Why is the topic of impotence important to these chapters?

Vocabulary

ambiguous, impartial, ordain, sallow, trivial, deride, candor, salacious, depreciate, candid, ambiguity



Chapter 9-10

Summary

Chapter 9

This chapter takes readers through to the end of the first season of Barbara (and Jim). There are break ups and attachments. Clive and Sophie are seen in public on a date. They enjoy each other's company enough to fake it for the people whispering about them in public. However, the romance continues out of the public eye.

Dennis invites the cast and creators over to a snobbish party held by his snobbish wife. They make Sophie feel provincial and uneducated. That night, Dennis reveals that he knows his wife is having an affair with one of the guests and kicks his wife out.

Sophie has created a place for herself in this world. She rents a place of her own, and makes it nothing like her dreary home back in Blackpool. Marjorie wants to cling to her coat tails, but Sophie shakes her off.

Chapter 10

Sophie, Clive, Bill, Tony and Dennis are all trying to get adjusted to their fame, but it's not going well. Sophie is offered a role in a terrible movie, and she takes it. She also takes up with the French pop star who is playing opposite her in the movie. This upsets Clive, but he doesn't deny sleeping around when she had been off filming.

Tony celebrates his wedding anniversary with June. During the dinner at a restaurant where famous people go, she admits that she always assumed that he might have been a homosexual. With that weight lifted, he admits to her that he doesn't know who or what he is. June lovingly says she will help him find out. That night, on their second wedding anniversary, they finally consummate their marriage.

The future is quickly catching up to them all. Another show has a debut that seems to be taking a cue from them, and then takes it one step further. This show is chomping on their heels.

In one episode of this, their second season, there's an elderly couple playing a bickering married couple in one scene. The elderly couple were clearly famous back in their day, but none of the cast or crew know who they were. Sophie and Clive see their future in that elderly post-famous couple.

Analysis

Chapter 9



Continuing the Belonging theme, the characters are starting to find their place in the world. Some of this includes knowing where they don't belong: at dinner parties with people trying too hard to be intellectual snobs. This scene is particularly telling where Sophie is concerned. For all of her success, there are those that are only too willing to remind her of her humble beginnings.

Sophie and Clive's relationship lacks passion. It seems like a relationship of convenience. They spend a lot of time together. They do enjoy each other's company. They even enjoy their bickering. It should be interesting to see if it lasts.

Marjorie had assumed that she would always be Sophie's sidekick. They don't part on very good terms. Marjorie had provided a place for Sophie to live, and thought Sophie owed her. Sophie countered that without her rent, Marjorie wouldn't have been able to live there, anyway. Not for the first time, the reader sees Barbara truly becoming the Sophie persona that she has created. She is losing herself.

Chapter 10

A lot is going on in these transition days for the main characters.

There is always a divide between “us” and “them.” Here, “us” is regular people, and “them” is famous people. The five main characters find themselves straddling those two worlds, and are not quite comfortable in either of them. They are constantly pressed into Normal molds, whether they want to be or not. This demonstrates not only the theme of 'What is Normal?' but also that of Fame Is Fleeting.

The success of the show exacerbates both of these themes. There are millions of people watching. It is becoming one of the most popular shows on television. They are being held accountable for millions of people's tastes. Some are used to Normal and want it all the time. It's easier to appeal to broad tastes, much to Bill's dismay.

In this chapter, there is one of the many foreshadows of what happens after someone becomes famous. The elderly couple good-naturedly lament that no one recognizes them by face or by name, and that they've been reduced to side characters in one episode of a television show. The fact that none of the characters the reader knows recognize them drives home the point. Sophie and Clive see their future in these two people's faces.

The other TV show that is becoming popular is another symbol of this. This show is slowly stealing viewers. The cast and crew are learning that they can't stay on top forever, and thus, Fame is Fleeting.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Fame is Fleeting.



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of What is Normal.

Discussion Question 3

What is making most of the main characters unhappy with their lives?

Vocabulary

ambiguous, ordain, trivial, deride, inebriation, diorama, profound, servitude, usurp, dirge, skeptical



Chapters 11-12

Summary

Chapter 11

This chapter solely revolves around Dennis, and his appearance on a haughty late night roundtable discussion show called Pipe Smoke, where distinguished men speak about the pressing issues of the day. The issue at hand: Barbara (and Jim), and the dumbing-down of television.

The main speaker is Vernon Whitfield, who represents the aristocracy and the old guard in the book. He also happens to be the man who stole Dennis' wife. He is an intellectual blowhard. The two men have an awkward conversation in the green room before going on air. Just before they sit down, Dennis whispers "I do wish you hadn't been sleeping with Edith." After that, Whitfield's concentration is shattered. He can't argue cohesively. He loses words, which always had been his main weapon. It ends with him saying a four letter word live on the air, and he's never on TV again.

Chapter 12

Sophie's Auntie Marie and father finally come up to visit her in London. They choose to ride coach and staying in a small hotel rather than the big, fancy one Sophie booked for them. They want to meet her famous friends, and she's too embarrassed of her family to do that. Still, Clive decides to take them all out to dinner at an expensive restaurant. Auntie Marie keeps asking Clive if he's courting Sophie. The young sort-of couple keep avoiding the conversation.

In the middle of dinner, a magician/comedian Maurice "Mr. Magic" Beck sits at the next table. Sophie's father is awestruck, and doubly so when this A-lister recognizes his daughter. As the tables are brought together, Maurice begins wooing Sophie's family, and by extension, Sophie. She has a sudden revelation about Clive: "Clive was never going to make it, not in the way he wanted to. He was a leading man or he was nothing, and he wasn't a leading man." After dinner, Clive slinks off into the night, unnoticed by the rest of them.

The Magician calls Sophie and asks her out while she's being interviewed again by Diane from Crush. Sophie agrees, and Diane wants to know all about it. Not for print, but because she genuinely seems to care. Of all the things Sophie has acquired since coming to London, Diane's her first friend.

The Magician takes her to a trendy club called the Scotch of St. James, where she's also hit on by Keith Relf, the lead singer of the Yardbirds. (Jimmy Page, one of their guitarists, had been mentioned earlier in the book.)



After a few very short dates, that really weren't very pleasant for Sophie, Maurice magically makes a ring appear in a glass of champagne, and proposes. His insincerity, his false smiles, and his fake persona turn Sophie off and she attempts to let him down easy. Rejecting him kindly doesn't work. And so it becomes awkward, and painful, and finally she just has to say goodbye. At the end, she thinks that this never would happen with someone clever like Dennis.

Analysis

Chapter 11

This short chapter shows that, try as they might, the main characters will never be seen as being important because they are producing popular culture for the television. The Entertainment Industry is a recurring theme in this book, and some characters feel it more than others.

The confrontation between Dennis and Vernon is important for Dennis, because he finally gets his revenge on the man who ruined his marriage, even though the marriage wasn't a happy one to begin with. On a greater scale, it's a thumb up the nose to intellectuals who look down on people just because they're making something fun. There's a value in fun, and making people laugh is a good career to have. It doesn't matter that it's not considered 'high' art.

Chapter 12

Everyone wants something from famous people, Sophie learns. Even, as it turns out, other famous people. Whether they be TV magicians or singers, they all see her as a means to an end. For Clive, he wants someone on his arm. It's even better if it's someone famous. Unfortunately, he brings nothing to the relationship for Sophie, so it's easy for her to look elsewhere.

When Maurice, the Magician, calls to ask her out, she happens to have Diane over. Diane is interviewing her, yet again, for something inconsequential. Sophie has to hide who she is talking to. She tells Diane privately, which shows that she's more than just a business acquaintance. She's a friend. This is one thing that's been hard for Sophie to find.

Sophie is embarrassed of her father and aunt, and their country yokel ways. She didn't realize until now how far away she's drifted from who she once was. She was always pulling in the direction of wanting to be worldly. Now, she is and the divide is almost a physical presence in the room. Her father, with his antiquated world view, is somewhat ignorant, and not very accepting of people who are different. Marie is even worse. Sophie can't believe this is where she came from, and doesn't want anyone else to know that. The theme of Belonging is offered to the reader in a different light in this scene.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Sophie reject all of the men in her life?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of the Entertainment Industry. How does it make it difficult for them to live 'normal' lives?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the visit with Sophie, her father, and her aunt. What does this tell the reader about Sophie?

Vocabulary

courting, discotheque, gist, deja vu



Chapters 13-14

Summary

Chapter 13

Tony's wife June comes to Tony and Bill's office to announce to Tony that she is pregnant.

Over the course of Tony and Bill's creative partnership, they have changed. Where Tony and Bill once shared a brain, they now start to want different things. Tony is content with the idea that his former arrest for an attempt at a homosexual liaison was just a thing that happened, a phase, while Bill is firm in knowing who he is. Bill thinks Tony's marriage is a bit of a sham, and accuses him of wanting to conform. They have different ideas for the show, too. They start having small fights over parts of the show and the direction it should take. Bill's creativity is starting to be influenced more and more by underground writers and playwrights.

Dennis speaks with Tom Sloan about the upcoming series finale. Dennis' idea includes Sophie's character trying to make a name for herself as a singer instead of just a housewife. Sloan doesn't like that idea. It's "too political." Dennis doesn't see how a woman making her own way is political. So, naturally, what else is there for a woman to do but get pregnant? So, the season finale has Sophie announcing her pregnancy. Sophie and Clive adjust to the idea, while in bed with each other in their shared apartment.

Chapter 14

This short chapter begins with Tony and Bill taking some time off between seasons to go on vacations. Bill goes with a male actor friend, and Tony takes his wife on their last vacation as a twosome. A TV version of *The Awkward Squad* is made, but never makes it past the pilot. They are relieved by that.

The first episode of the new season follows reality. Tony, in expectation of his baby, tries to fix his sink after watching a home repair show. Thus, Jim does the exact same. It's not very good, and both of them know it. They contemplate taking Bill's name off it, but don't. In the future, they might just take turns writing an entire episode by themselves. It would certainly cut down on the conflicts between them.

They hastily rewrite the script so that it's Barbara who is doing the home improvement, which as it turns out, is much funnier. Finally, Sophie is compared favorably to Lucille Ball in the papers with this episode.



Analysis

Chapter 13

Throughout their marriage, Tony and June have been best friends, even if they weren't intimate with one another. However, now they are becoming a family. It's going to be an adjustment for Tony, and a bigger one for Bill. He and Bill have an argument that has nothing to do with work. Bill accuses Tony of selling out and trying to 'be respectable'.

Bill feels insulted that Tony sees his way of life as a kink and something that needs fixing. Tony really doesn't. He doesn't care what Bill does in his personal life. But Tony has decided that that direction is not what he wants or needs.

Sloan is fine with the idea of a woman being the main character in the show, just as long as that woman doesn't do something so uppity as being independent. A woman wanting to be anything more than being a wife or mother is politically charged, according to Sloan. Sloan is one of the old guard in England, staunchly conservative, and is one of the people who are always trying to hold the other characters back. To him, it's not natural for the woman to have a career, but it is natural for her to just have a baby and support her man. This all demonstrates the theme of Gender Bias, something that all of the women in the book (and even Tony and Bill) have to deal with.

Chapter 14

Tony and Bill have grown since their Awkward Squad days. The jokes seem dated and stale to them. The fact that their jokes seem old just shows how old they really feel. The fact that they want to take turns writing episodes instead of writing them together foreshadows their growing divide. This demonstrates the theme of Being Forgotten. Both of them are letting go of their past together. Tony has moved on to recreate his life, while Bill is holding on to his. The name of their show, The Awkward Squad, which was something they had written together prior to the Sophie show, is now obsolete. They had hopes of reviving it, but now, they are too different from the writing partnership that created it. The Awkward Squad, then becomes a symbol of their past partnership, and how it, too, was an awkward partnership given the climate and time in which they live.

The idea of a woman trying to do plumbing work is just one of the envelopes they have been trying to push. She makes a mess of it, because it's comedy, but not because she's a woman. Even if the rest of the world is content with keeping a woman in her place, the people creating the show aren't. This demonstrates the theme of Gender Bias as it shows that during the era in which this story is set, women were still not experiencing equality in any place in society, and certainly not in the workplace.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Gender Bias as it shows up in both chapters.



Discussion Question 2

How is the Awkward Squad a symbol for Tony and Bill?

Discussion Question 3

How is Sophie different now compared to who she was at the beginning of the novel?

Vocabulary

vigor, oik, yoked, scupper, besotted, scamper, segmentation, bias, flummoxed, deleterious



Chapters 15-16

Summary

Chapter 15

Dennis has been on the dating scene, but hasn't really found his right match, because his right match – in his eyes – is Sophie. Only, he can't say it. Clive can, though, and he proposes and Sophie accepts. Dennis becomes despondent.

Later, discussing the engagement with Diane, Sophie dodges a question about whether she loves Clive. She feels that she should love him, and should be married and having a kid, just like her namesake on the show. But it is evident that she's not convinced that she is actually 'in love' with Clive. She says to herself that love means being brave. This indicates that she believes that she's being courageous in marrying him.

A new, minor character is introduced, who mostly goes by Sandra the midwife, since that's who she is hired to play on the show. She's nasty and keeps inserting herself into Sophie and Clive's lives, trying to make her role bigger than it is, both onscreen and off.

Sophie and Clive are invited to meet the Prime Minister, who apparently is a fan of the series. Sophie's father doesn't want her to go because he doesn't like the PM's politics. When she shares her father's politics with the PM on camera, the rest of the Londoners are aghast.

Bill is becoming disgusted with the series. It's popular, but not with the right people - his people: the artists and the intellectuals. He's been working on a novel, *Diary of a SoHo Boy*, about a young homosexual man making his way in London. He truly hopes that someone will take a chance on it.

Chapter 16

Diane lets Sophie know about an opportunity to meet her idol, Lucille Ball. Sophie's meeting famous people constantly now, because she's in the right circles. But this is the first time she'll get a chance at meeting someone who means that much to her. She blunders the meeting, but not in a fun Lucy-style way. She asks Lucy for validation, for her opinion on her show. Lucy hasn't seen it, and then Lucille is led away. Sophie is left with a feeling of shame and disgust at herself for wanting her idol to love her instead of taking the opportunity to express her admiration for her idol.

Shortly thereafter, the main creative force of the show – Sophie, Clive, Dennis, Bill and Tony - meet with Prime Minister Wilson and Marcia Williams. They want them to film an episode in Number 10, the seat of government, since Jim supposedly works there anyway. Sophie agrees before the rest of her coworkers can vocalize a decent argument against it.



Part of their concern is that the Prime Minister has never watched a show, and that they'd be used as a public relations stunt before the election. To Sophie, it means that they matter officially, on a political and country-wide scale. As it turns out, they don't end up filming there, because the BBC won't allow it.

Meanwhile, they work on another show, *Reds Under the Bed*, and the creators are starting to fall apart in a big way. The show features communism, capitalizing on the 'red scare' that was beginning to emerge.

Analysis

Chapter 15

Sophie feels that she should want certain things, because her adoring public wants them, so she gives in. In other words, she does what she feels others would want her to do instead of stopping to think what would make her happy.

Her father's old fashioned politics, thinly-veiled racism is another part of the old world that she is trying to leave behind for a more modern world. This brings in the theme of *Escape*, which hasn't been in the forefront since Barbara left Blackpool all those years (and chapters) ago.

Dennis has been pining for Sophie for a few years, now. It seems it will only be a matter of time before he's honest with her. Either they will get along great or he will get his heart broken. He has this choice taken from him when he learns that Sophie has agreed to marry Clive.

Bill and Tony have always been struggling with "Write what you know," since neither of them had been in a traditional relationship, until Tony married June as his cover. Bill is finally giving himself an outlet by writing about a character very much like himself, though given the day and age in which this novel is set, it is certain that it will not be received well.

Again, the popularity of the show with the general public is paying the cast's bills very well, but for some, it's not enough. Bill wants to write something that will resonate with people, even if it's only a small amount of people. Tony is happy making other people happy, though it's obvious that he's as bad as Sophie in denying his own desires or dreams.

Chapter 16

The theme of *Fame is Fleeting*, is prominent in this chapter. Diane remarks that Sophie is the current 'Lucille' and the actual 'Lucille' is the ghost of the past. Later, this makes Sophie pause to think about the entertainment industry as a whole (demonstrating that theme). She thinks that being in the industry is much like being on *Ferris Wheel*, that being at the top and on the way up are great, but the downward spiral, that must inevitably happen, is terrifying. It is terrifying because there is literally no choice.



To prove that they are very mainstream, the cast and crew are invited to meet the prime minister. It turns out that he isn't really a fan of the show, and has no idea who these people are. It is all a photo op, and they fall for it. Still, they think it is very prestigious to meet the head of the country. It shows that, in this instance, they went for the mainstream appeal rather than being edgy and rebellious. A rebellious group would have balked at going to meet a politician. This shows how far removed they are from who they were when they began the show.

Discussion Question 1

Compare Sophie to Tony.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Escape.

Discussion Question 3

What does Sophie realize as a result of her meeting with Lucille Ball?

Vocabulary

rugger, deranged, prop, ponderous, pretentious, moody, busbies, presumptuous, lacquered, pep



Chapters 17-18

Summary

Chapter 17

Tony and June's son, Roger, is born. Tony keeps trotting on in domestic quietude, while Bill is enjoying writing a novel and living a more dangerous life. They take a step back, sitting in the office across from each other, and really address their differences. They don't talk as enemies, but as friends, watching themselves grow apart. Suddenly, they realize they need to introduce some marital strife into their leading characters' lives.

They bring on Nancy Lawson to play Marguerite the marriage counselor. She's a vamp descended from a line of nobility, and she sets off little shockwaves throughout the group. The critics and the audience love the new direction. It isn't long until Clive is sleeping with the actress.

Chapter 18

Dennis is trying to find a way to tell Sophie how he feels, watching from the front row as her engagement to Clive is unraveled by Nancy's flirtation. The only alone time he gets with Sophie is when she can't bear to be around Clive when he is flirting with Nancy. It's during one of these times, as a show is being wrapped, that Denis sees Sophie talking to her mother, Gloria. He finds this surprising since Gloria had left when Sophie was small. The reader learns that now she's coming back into the life of her famous daughter. Sophie wants no part of her and storms off. Dennis takes the time to get Gloria's contact information in case Sophie changes her mind.

A few days later, full of questions, Sophie decides that she does want to see her mother, and they have a heart-to-heart, but it doesn't heal the damage and Sophie does not receive the closure she had hoped for. Sophie is still angry and frustrated about being abandoned as a child. She sees her mother as something that belonged to her past.

Analysis

Chapter 17

Tony compares Roger to Barbara (and Jim), in that it's a beautiful product of unlikely partners. The five of them are unlikely partners. Even though some of them are very much alike, they come from different backgrounds and, ultimately, they have different goals. They all have a different idea of where they want their professional and personal lives to lead.



Again, everything that happens in the show is a reflection of their personal lives. Even the infidelity behind the scenes plays out in the conflict on screen. The conflicts are starting to build up, and it would not be surprising if the entire show imploded.

From the second she's introduced, it's clear that Nancy Lawson will drive a wedge between Clive and Sophie. Sophie plays along, and smiles, but just Nancy's presence makes her tense. Clive already has a demonstrated history of womanizing, so his actions come as no surprise to anyone, even Sophie. It is during one of these episodes that Sophie recalls that her name used to be Barbara, and for a little while she is very much in touch with her dreams and what she wants for her life.

Chapter 18

Sophie is still trying to separate herself from her past. The simple Blackpool life she left behind keeps coming back. In this instance, it's easy to create some distance. After all, Gloria left Sophie first. It's easy to burn the bridge that Gloria is trying to build. Blackpool, itself, as a place, and by its very name, suggests a place that is very dark, into whose depths things disappear and don't return. Like a dark 'smudge' on her soul, Sophie resists anything that comes from there, including her estranged mother. She's afraid that Blackpool will drag her away from her beautiful life.

Her mother looks enough like Sophie that she could be seen as a version of what Sophie might have been if she had chosen to stay in Blackpool, rather than become a TV star. Her mother, ironically, hadn't stayed in Blackpool, either. Her relationship with the man she left Sophie's father for was uneventful. She is another mirror, like Lucille Ball, or the mayor's wife, or the elderly couple who no one remembers: This is what you will be. A cautionary tale. It is one that Sophie hears loud and clear. Gloria claims not to want money, and she never asks, but that's the unstated undercurrent running through the meeting, and Sophie is very aware of it. The theme of Belonging emerges in this chapter as Sophie realizes that she doesn't belong with her own blood relatives, but rather, with the cast and crew of the television show. They are her family now.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Belonging.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss how Nancy's inclusion on the set and in the storyline have affected Sophie on and off camera.

Discussion Question 3

How does speaking with her mother impact Sophie?

Vocabulary

spasmodic, pram, rusk, reins, besmirched, perusals, self-justification, sacrosanct, penitent, rapt



Chapters 19-20

Summary

Chapter 19

Bill has finally finished his novel, *Diary of a Soho Boy*. Tony volunteers to read it, and can't put it down. As June, who reads scripts for a living, explains, he has a true narrative voice, which is more than many writers out there.

Their secretary, Hazel, has also become their agent over the time she's been with them. She suggests Bill give the book to Michael Braun of Braun and Braun. She has some connections to the literary world, even if she can't bring herself to read the entire book.

Braun loves it and agrees to publish it. He wants to find books that will offend readers and make them talk. Bill really is just attempting to write something real, not offend people outright, but it's a publishing contract.

Since Braun wants to publish the book right away, Bill needs to have a "little chat" with a few people, and admit to being homosexual. The first of these people is Sophie. He figures that she would have figured it out by now, but she hasn't. In fact, she had been trying to set him up on a date with Diane, her best friend. She is truly shocked.

Chapter 20

Tony and Bill are having a drink in a bar when the idea is suggested that Barbara and Jim should divorce, and maybe the show should end. Their 18 million viewers are down to 13 million. The show is still popular, but they feel old and tired.

Nancy mentions during a script meeting how she's been having an affair with Clive, as if everyone knows, even Sophie. The tension in the room is palpable. Sophie leaves. They film the final episode, a bittersweet goodbye to one of the best times in all of their lives. Sophie realizes that she'd never really been in love with Clive. It had always been the show that she'd been in love with.

Analysis

Chapter 19

There's a difference between being shocking because you are being yourself, and shocking for the sake of being gratuitous. Bill isn't going out of his way to shock people, he is just trying to write something real. And although a sitcom about a man-woman-baby might be real to some, it isn't real to him or anyone he associates with.



There is also a difference between television and radio, and television and books. When Bill was writing for the radio, it was a small audience. He wants to grow into a television writer because that is where the big audiences are. At its height, Barbara (and Jim) claimed 18 million viewers in a country of roughly 50 million. Braun tells him how the best book published last year sold just over 7,000 copies. As much as Bill wants to write for people who understand him, he had been hoping that that number would have been greater.

The theme of Following One's Dreams is most noticeable in this chapter as Bill finally steps forward, not only with his book, but with his decision to let others know of his sexual orientation. This potentially touches upon the theme of Gender Bias, but is more fully discussed in later chapters.

Chapter 20

Tony and Bill's relationship is probably more in depth than Tony and June's, or Sophie and Clive. This is the real marriage in the book, and they're headed for a divorce. Again, it's reflected in the show. They're tired of working hard to make the show work. They're tired of the give and take and compromises. They're just tired and want to move on. They don't want to fight uphill to make the show number one again.

Sophie seems to be the only one really broken up over the end of the show. For her, this was her first step into acting and the world of entertainment. This meant a lot more to her than to others. To others, it was just a job. A good-paying job that led to other opportunities, but a job nonetheless. The men in the group seem like they just want to move on. Sophie grieves in many respects because with this group of people she felt as if she belonged, that they were a family. This touches upon the theme of Belonging, as well as the theme of Fame is Fleeting. In a moment of self-reflection, she realizes that what she truly loved were the group and the show. When Nancy admits to her affair with Clive, no one is shocked, but Sophie is offended and leaves. She realizes that she was not upset with the news (she already suspected), but with the realization that she never really loved Clive, and that she has wasted so many years of her life playing the role of doting girlfriend.

Discussion Question 1

How is the theme of Belonging expanded upon in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Sophie upset with Nancy's declaration of her affair with Clive?

Discussion Question 3

Why is the end of the show hurting Sophie more than the rest of the cast?



Vocabulary

picaresque, bolshie, self-flagellatory, succes de scandale, piecemeal, corrosive, squeamish, mackintoshes, staid, swan song



Chapters 21-22

Summary

Chapter 21

Dennis and Sophie call Bill and Tony into Dennis' office. Dennis has called them there to pitch a new series, *Just Barbara*. The writers don't know what to make of it. All Dennis has is a name and a star. He assumes they'll work their magic and make something wonderful.

Bill flatly turns it down. Tony is angry with Bill's flat refusal. He sees his job as cranking out whatever stories his bosses toss his way, because this is how he is able to provide for his family. As Tony sees it, you can say anything you want on the television, as long as you tell it in between gags. Bill disagrees.

Tony returns to Dennis' office and says he'll do the job, but Bill is definitely not going to do any of the writing. Tony wants to do it on his own, but sees Dennis's hesitation. He obviously doubts whether Tony can do it on his own. Tony offers to find another writing partner, but Dennis says Sophie has someone in mind, her friend Diane.

The show is supposed to chronicle newly-single Barbara as she navigates the trendy spots in London as a divorcee. Diane is well versed on trendy spots in London, but she doesn't have experience writing. Tony has experience writing, and knows everything about Barbara and babies. However, they soon realize that the premise won't work. It is too difficult for a single mom to be hitting the trendy spots of London. So, they give up the idea completely and decide to write a new show. Tony feels, for the first time in a long time, that creative tingle when something great is about to be written.

Chapter 22

Bill's novel becomes a hit in small, artistic circles. At the release party, Tony feels like an outcast among the outcasts. Bill's friends and hangers-on are all avant-garde artists. Tony feels boring by comparison.

Sophie finds herself in possession of two tickets to see *Hair*, which is a new and exciting - and definitely risqué - musical. She asks Dennis if he'd like to go with her. The cast breaks the fourth wall by interacting with the audience, which makes Dennis nervous. Some of the actors recognize Sophie, of course. After, she takes Dennis back to his apartment, they finally confess that they've had feelings for each other for some time.

Dennis is nothing like Clive, Sophie observes. Sophie is nothing like Edith, Dennis observes. They both fill a vacancy that they have been seeking for a while: someone who understands them.



Analysis

Chapter 21

The show Barbara (and Jim) has been a metaphor for the actions in the lives of the main characters throughout this book. Just as Barbara and Jim are getting divorced after having a baby, Tony and Bill finally split after their baby, Barbara (and Jim), is out in the world.

Diane's future as a scriptwriter was foreshadowed in her first appearance back in Chapter 7. She always wanted to be a television writer. She didn't have a way in, being a woman with no connections. She needed Sophie to bring her into the fold.

This is a quickly-made opportunity to cash in on the recent success of Barbara (and Jim). That show is still in the public's mind, and therefore there's already a built-in audience for it - at least, that's the argument.

Tony's point, that you can say anything you want on television as long as it's entertaining, has some resonance to it. This touches upon the theme of the Entertainment Industry. As Bill has been striving to find work that is meaningful, Tony has been writing this series because he's been finding meaning in it. There's still truth there, even if it's surrounded by set pieces and prat falls.

Chapter 22

Again, readers see the divide between being artistically successful versus commercially successful. Bill now has the respect of his peers. Tony has the money from the masses. This speaks to the theme of the Entertainment Industry, in that it is different things to different people, depending on their perspective and life experiences. For many it is an escape, and for others it is a means to an end. Still, for others, it is a means of artistic expression. No matter what, there is always an inner circle of financially successful people who make money by doing what people love, and there's a group on the outside doing what they love for no money.

Dennis feels like an outsider at Bill's party, which is made up entirely of fringe elements. It's a reverse view of the theme of Normalcy that has been prancing throughout the book. In this case, the artists and the bohemians at Bill's party are the norm, and white bread Dennis is the odd man out. Sophie is accepted everywhere, because she's beautiful and famous.

Dennis and Sophie finally admit their feelings for one another and the romantic culmination has been hinted at for several chapters. While it isn't a romance that is necessarily full of passion, it is a decided and deeply caring relationship, where each partner understands the other. This offers an amount of comfort to them both. The theme of Belonging is offered, here, in another context as they are drawn to one another out of their mutual need for connection and understanding.



Discussion Question 1

How has the show, Barbara (and Jim), been a metaphor throughout the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Tony to Bill at this point in the novel.

Discussion Question 3

What are the different ways in which those working in the industry view the Entertainment field?

Vocabulary

fervor, feeble, keen, agog, obscene, kaftan, bohemian, iniquity



Chapters 23-24

Summary

Chapter 23

The new show *Everybody Loves Sophie* is having trouble before it even starts. The character Sophie Simmonds is a reporter for a gossip rag, and is very easily a stand-in for Diane, in real life. Tony can't wrap his head around it. It's too young for him, he imagines. Too contemporary.

Meanwhile, the real Sophie finds herself pregnant with Dennis' child. She asks him "What if Sophie Simmonds was pregnant?" Dennis has a laugh at this before she tells him the reason. They are overjoyed at the idea of making a family, even if it means killing a TV show. They just can't have an unwed mother as the main character, hitting the hotspots of London, while the baby is seldom seen or heard. Additionally, making her a wife and mother then has her fall into the same trap as every other sitcom.

Sophie's pregnancy causes her to visit her mother again. They have a heart-to-heart about why her mother felt she had to leave Blackpool versus why Sophie felt that she also needed to leave Blackpool. Both of them felt constricted. They had to get out. Her mother didn't get very far. Sophie did.

Brian, Sophie's agent, goes so far as to suggest a discreet doctor who can perform an abortion for her. She refuses. To her, creating a life is more important than furthering her career. *Everybody Loves Sophie* then becomes *Everybody Loves Jackie*, starring a different up-and-coming beautiful woman instead.

Chapter 24

Between Chapters 23 and 24 there are four biographies of main characters, taken from a BAFTA tribute in 2014. It is written as a retrospective. In it, Sophie is revealed to have had a long career in TV and occasionally on stage, in various productions of Dennis's. She has had two children, and one of them is now an acclaimed actress, herself. Dennis produced many series before his death in 2011. Bill wrote a few more novels. Tony wrote more than 20 television and radio series during his long career. Clive is shown to be on wife number three, living in Hollywood, and starring in an American TV show.

This chapter flashes forward to 2014, from the 1960s, where the four surviving members of the team are gathered for an interview.

Sophie feels shocked to see herself on screen so young. She feels like she's been old so long. People ask the team a lot of questions, but she can't see why anyone would want to know the answers to "What's your favorite episode?" When modern comediennes tell her how much of an inspiration she has been to them, she can't draw



the line between her performance and the really off-color humor that is on modern television and movies. She feels, now, that she's one of the old guard, and all the up-and-comers are speaking another language. She feels left behind.

After the show, a young producer named Max corners them and offers them all a job, putting on a play with all the originals in place: Sophie and Clive on stage, Bill and Tony behind the scenes. They seem interested in Max's proposal, mostly because none of them have anything better to do, or any more money coming in.

Analysis

Chapter 23

Diane admits to Sophie that no one she knew watched Barbara (and Jim). It is shocking to Tony because he thought that he was making something for the new generation. With Diane's statement, he learns that he is neither part of the old generation, or the new, but somewhere in between. This demonstrates the theme of Fame is Fleeting.

Back in the 1960s it can be seen that there is no place for ambitious women, but in the home as a matriarch, it seems. Nowadays, a 20-something juggling single parenthood while trying to date and have a career would not be such a shock on television. Then, it would have been blasphemous. It's analogous to how people of the times thought women should be, as well: filling the role of wives and mothers, but nothing more. Art was simply reflecting life, in this instance. This also underscores the theme of Gender Bias.

As famous and as beloved as Sophie Straw is, and was, she was very easily replaced. It didn't take long at all to fill her role and to rework the entire new show around a different lead actress. In a way, Brian the agent, was right: The women whom he got work for were just a parade of attractive women, no more, no less.

Sophie's pregnancy sets her further down the path of being one of the mirrors that has been throughout the book: Lucy, Gloria, the old couple whom no one recognized. It was a step toward motherhood, and growing older, in an industry that only cares about actors and actresses if they are young and beautiful and can make money.

Chapter 24

Just as it was foreshadowed, the young, vibrant team at the center of Barbara (and Jim) have grown old and past their prime. They are no longer in demand. They have work, generally speaking, but they peaked early, with their first television show. Everything else after that has been steadily heading downstream.

They are remembered, though, in certain circles. Modern people study pop culture, and have a reverence for the past that they didn't expect back in the 1960s. People in the industry have a respect for them, even if it might be lip service. This demonstrates the theme of the Entertainment Industry, and its fickle nature, that tends to dehumanize the



people who are in it, and pressures newcomers to throw caution and good sense to the wind in order to maybe make it big.

Max represents both sides of things. He loves the classics, and is up to date on current trends. He is a pop culture aficionado who owns the original reels of some of the old episodes. They weren't saved back then. Many of them have been lost. In fact, Bill is angry that Max has been holding on to them, since releasing them on DVD would have been a paycheck for the writers.

Discussion Question 1

How have all of the cast and crew survived and weathered the years?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of the Entertainment Industry, especially in regards to how business is conducted and how actresses and actors are viewed by the studios.

Discussion Question 3

What does Sophie learn about herself and her mother?

Vocabulary

speccy, erroneous, daft, quell, calamity, bask, ostentatiously, compere, skint, malarkey



Chapters 25-26

Summary

Chapter 25

Bill and Tony meet in a coffee shop, many years later, to see if they can still write together. Max is paying for a screenplay that would bring them all together, and they're trying to get the old gears in their minds working together again.

It's difficult, since they haven't had that magic in years. Bill's fallen on hard times. His bohemian path didn't work out financially. He knew it wouldn't when he made that choice. However, more of it had to do with too much alcohol and not enough writing. Tony is a workhorse, willing and able to find the diamond in the rough even if he's not particularly passionate about it.

Sophie and Clive also meet, in a restaurant. Clive is genuinely remorseful for his actions, not only in relation to Sophie, but for the rest of his life. He admits that he is bad at relationships. His relationships with his three wives and his children have been poor. He has been in L.A. Perhaps it's because his wife has moved out on him that he wants to come back and rekindle old connections. He had married his ex-fiance almost immediately after Sophie had broken up with him back in the day.

Sophie isn't so willing to share her life with Clive now. It's not that she's still hurt, she just has learned not to trust him. While everyone else is lamenting the paths their lives took, she isn't. She just got paid to write her memoirs, *Barbara (and Me)*, even though the book was written by Diane. She's had a career full of highs and lows like anyone else, but she feels blessed by opportunity. She still can't believe she's become the person she is now: a grand dame of television, and old, and a widow, and out of touch with young people and young tastes. She laments the passing of time rather than her career, because unlike some of the other characters, she feels she made the right decisions. She feels that she's lived a full life, and hasn't had to sacrifice anything in order to do it.

Chapter 26

Max has provided the writers with his own idea of what the play should be about: Barbara and Jim's son, Timmy, is now full grown and is getting married. When Barbara and Jim get together at the rehearsal, they start talking and rekindle their romance, which leads to them being remarried. Once the writers realize that baby Timmy will be around 50 years old, they decide it's not realistic for him to be marrying for the first time...unless he's homosexual, since gay marriage has just been legalized. Both of the writers look at each other, and that creative spark is back.

Clive doesn't want to have a gay son, because he's still feeling like he's an extension of his character. Tony's plodding on without inspiration. Bill is cranky. The new producer is panicking and putting out fires, just like Dennis would have. As Sophie looks around at



the mess, she's happy about it. All she ever wanted to do was work, and entertain people, and be surrounded by people who understand her and who she understands. This is the chaos that she remembers, and she smiles. She's home, again.

Analysis

Chapter 25

There's a difference between the old and the new again. Bill's novel, that was so cutting edge at the time, is barely in print, and no one really wants to read it unless they are studying the gay rights movement. People don't get arrested anymore for their sexuality. It dates him and it dates his work. And he hasn't received much more work.

Tony is a dinosaur in the industry, but dependable as they come, still churning out work even if it's not particularly inspired. He's become a member of the old guard in a way, too. The foreshadowing of older entertainers has finally come full circle. As Clive looks with jealousy at his contemporaries who are movie stars, like Ben Kingsley, he feels like his whole career will have been a waste if it doesn't end up in overwhelming fame. This underscores the theme of Fame is Fleeting.

Sophie has the overwhelming fame part, but has been smart enough to have a scandal-free life and the love of her children. She's grown old gracefully, although she'd probably argue that point. However, when she's out with Clive, he is recognized by a couple who like his American TV show, but Sophie is not. Ironically, this is a direct reference to the earlier chapters when they didn't recognize the old couple who made an appearance on their show 50 years ago.

Chapter 26

In a way, Clive is right. People see famous actors and immediately associate them with the character they play. Even if they know, logically, they are not the same person, they can't help but draw connections. Thus, famous people are never quite separate from the art they created, no matter how much they may strive to be. This directly demonstrates the theme of the Entertainment Industry.

In this last chapter, the reader sees that, of all the cast and crew, Sophie is happy and fulfilled. She rose to fame, then retired before her flame burned out. She never had to suffer the decline and the removal that Clive and the others have felt. This is because Sophie replaced her fame for motherhood and family, something that she found equally as fulfilling. In the end, she could have remained in Hollywood, indefinitely, but it was her choice, and her choice alone, to remove herself from it. However, when she returns for the reunion episodes, she realizes that she has missed it - her second family. The theme of Belonging surfaces again, and the reader understands that Barbara recalls Sophie, and Sophie has become Barbara. As a result, she is happy.



Discussion Question 1

How have the years treated Barbara/Sophie?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of the Entertainment Industry where aging actors are concerned.

Discussion Question 3

Compare Sophie to Clive in these chapters.

Vocabulary

consolation, ghastly, marginal, overfeted, rickets, banal, modicum, reverie, berk, capitulation



Characters

Barbara Parker/Sophie Straw

Sophie is billed as the main character, although a lot of the action pulls away from her toward the male characters about halfway through the book. She's smart, funny, and quick with a put-down. She's beautiful, but she can't do anything about that, and it's a blessing and a curse. It gets her work, but makes people judge her on her beauty and not on her brains.

Initially, the reader meets Barbara Parker while she's still living in Blackpool. She's just won another beauty pageant but it leaves her feeling unfulfilled. She doesn't want to be viewed only as a pretty face, whose future mimics the Mayor's wife (a previous beauty queen), whose life is obviously miserable. Barbara leaves that week for London.

While in London she must face the harsh reality of coming from a small, impoverished background and trying to make her way in the big city. She befriends someone from the department store where she works, finds a place to live, and in short order, and with some advice from the friend, latches on to various men who are able to further her career. She eventually lands an agent, then a lucky break which propels her to stardom in a few short years.

Unlike most of the characters in the novel, Barbara, who changes her name to Sophie Straw, is able to see the London film industry for what it is and gets out while she is still on top. She marries the love of her life, instead of Clive, whom she was with a majority of her early years, and retires to live in the country and raise her children. She returns for a reunion show at the end of her life and reflects on how grateful she is to have had the life she's had.

Clive Richardson

Clive is the leading man of Barbara (and Jim), even though he's not the main character. He's constantly struggling for fame and self-respect. He wants everything, even other women when he's engaged. In short, Clive is afraid of being still because to be still would mean he has to listen to himself, and the self recrimination that would be sure to follow would be too much. He knows this. So, he tries to drown out any voice of reason in himself with fast cars, fast women, and a long term love affair with alcohol and drugs.

Clive immediately latches on to Sophie and both realize that it is a relationship of mutual benefit. They act on screen and off. When Sophie's best friend, Diane, asks her about Clive, it is only then that Barbara/Sophie realizes that they don't have a real relationship, but at that point in her life, Sophie still believes that to love someone is to sacrifice something of oneself.



Clive is a static character in this novel, in that for the most part he never changes. Even in his later years, when he is well past his prime in the industry, he's still womanizing as much as he ever did, as evidenced by his three failed marriages and children that refuse to speak to him.

Dennis Maxwell-Bishop

Dennis is the producer of Barbara (and Jim), he runs interference between his cast and the powers that be at BBC so that they can create the show they want to create. He's sensitive to a lot of the problems of the cast, and has been slowly falling in love with Sophie.

Later, Sophie realizes that he has always been a constant in her life, and completely supportive and understanding. She finally finds in him the love she has been looking for. She willingly and eagerly ends the show, marries Dennis, and retires to the country to raise their family. At the end of the novel, the reader learns that they lived an idyllic life and were in love until the day he died.

Tony Holmes

One of the writers of the show, Tony holds the course and writes even when he's full of doubts. He's a workhorse, in that he plods on with writing, and even marriage, even if there is little passion in it. Initially, his marriage is simply a cover act, as he's been released from jail after serving time for engaging in a homosexual transaction. While in jail, Tony meets Bill, who is also a homosexual.

However, Tony instantly marries June, who is his friend from the beginning. She doesn't ask anything of him and is willing to act as his shield in order to hide his gayness. But, in the course of the novel, his feelings toward her shift, and he is willing to embrace the lifestyle that he has been faking for so many years. He and June finally consummate their relationship and have a child.

Bill Gardner

Bill is the yin to Tony's yang, Bill is all passion, and quick bursts of energy. He starts to resent the success of the show, although he loves the money coming in, because he'd rather be writing something that, to him, matters.

Bill, unlike Tony, refuses to give in to the establishment. He secretly begins writing a book about being gay and trying to live and find work within the movie and television industry in England during the 1960s. The notion of 'coming out of the closet' was only a mere notion during that day and age, so he knows that what he is writing will be considered subversive by many.



He works with Tony on the Barbara (and Jim) show for most of his peak writing years. Eventually, his book comes out and he invites everyone to the launch party. However, Tony, who is jealous of his fame, feels like an outsider, which only reinforces that he is no longer a part of that scene.

Diane

Although Sophie has many co-workers, Diane is her first friend. She's a writer for a teen magazine, who was hired to write about the small town girl made good. She wants to write for television. Later, she gets her wish and ends up working with Tony and Bill on a new play and a show.

Brian Debenham

Sophie's agent, Brian Denbenham, makes it abundantly clear that his only interest in her is money. He is in love with his wife and wants to keep it that way, even though he's around scores of beautiful women. Brian, initially, only sees Sophie like others see her...as a pinup girl, or a calendar girl, but not as a serious actress. In fact, it is his determination to quash her notions of acting that prompts him to send her on a series of what he considers to most likely be disastrous auditions. But, of course, this backfires on him as Sophie meets Bill and Tony, and the rest is history.

George

Sophie's father is supportive of her, but wishes she wouldn't leave. He's part of the old part of Blackpool, with its small-minded people with small goals. He never loses the wide-eyed enthusiasm of the famous life that Sophie gains.

It is very telling when he has his heart attack that Sophie waits until after the filming to come to visit him. While he is quite understanding and supportive of her decision, Aunt Marie is not. She scolds Sophie for forgetting her roots and where she came from.

But this is all that Sophie wants: to forget where she came from. This is made clear when her father and aunt come and visit her for the first time in London. Sophie is mortified that they insist on wearing outdated clothing, talking like country folk, and refusing to allow her to spoil them in luxury.

Gloria

Sophie's mother left when she was very young, and regrets it. She doesn't regret leaving George, she just regrets leaving a baby girl behind. When she returns, it is assumed that she wants money.



What is notable about Gloria, is that she is a cautionary tale to Sophie. She also was a beauty queen and left because she felt suffocated in Blackpool. Unlike Sophie, she never did make it big and has lived a terrible life.

Max

Max is a young producer full of ideas and forward motion, Max hires the surviving people from Barbara (and Jim) for a reunion. He is people-savvy and has his finger on the pulse of entertainment.

Maurice, the Magician

Maurice avidly pursues Sophie. Sophie enjoys going out with him, but doesn't actually enjoy him, his personality, or his ways. She considers him to be a phony, which is ironic. When he proposes to her, she flatly rejects him.

Marjorie

Marjorie was Sophie's roommate when she first arrived in London. Later, when Sophie becomes famous and moves out, Marjorie mistakenly assumes that she will be living with Sophie, something that Sophie puts the brakes on.

Marjorie is used by the author to show the change in Barbara, not only with the name change, but with the attitude change. She feels that Marjorie is beneath her and while she doesn't stop being friends with her, she is obviously unavailable for most outings. She also does not want to be seen with her. During this time in Sophie's life she is very focused on herself and doesn't consider the damage she causes to Marjorie.



Symbols and Symbolism

Mayor's Wife

The mayor's wife, early in the book, is a symbol of fleeting beauty. A former beauty queen, now she is just insulted by her husband, who married her for her looks. Sophie pays attention to this cautionary tale.

Blackpool

Blackpool could have been any small town in Britain, because it represents a small town with no real future.

I Love Lucy

Growing up, Sophie idolized Lucille Ball, not only in the shows, but outside of them. She longs to be just like Lucy. The show and Lucy's life are symbols for who she wants to become.

Changing her Name

When Barbara changes her name to Sophie Straw, it indicates her willingness to give up her own identity to be who the studio would like her to be. The word, Straw, is an interesting choice, since straw is dried up and brittle, not strong at all. OR, it could be more like a drinking straw, a vessel used to transport something from one place to another.

Marjorie's Apartment

The small flat that Sophie lives in with Marjorie represents the poor fortunes most people in her situation find themselves. She's going to London to make it big, but is stuck in a small apartment with a clingy roommate. Leaving that apartment is one of the first steps of recognizing that she's making it and leaving behind that way of life.

Pop Culture

Max, the producer introduced toward the end of the book, is indicative of modern youth's fascination with pop culture. He's well versed in Barbara (and Jim), even if it aired way before his time. But, the show belongs to the pop culture pantheon to which he is a devotee.



The Ferris Wheel

At one point, after Sophie's star has risen, she realizes that at some point, for every actress, there is the undeniable reality that eventually looks fade, popularity will wane, and then she will have to suffer the downward plummet like the downward movement of a Ferris Wheel.

The Awkward Squad

This is the name of a pilot that both Tony and Bill create long after Sophie's show. However, because of the era in which it is pitched, it never sees the light of day. This represents Bill and Tony's working relationship for the rest of the novel...awkward and unpleasant.

Barbara (and Jim) Show

The show, itself, is art imitating life, and in some cases, life imitating art. For the cast and crew, this is certainly true.

Men

In this book, as far as the female perspective goes, men are a means to an end in Hollywood. Marjorie tells Sophie this immediately, by telling her that if she wanted to go out and have fun she needed to find a boyfriend. This appalls Sophie and makes her more determined to make it in a men's world.



Settings

Blackpool

Blackpool, by its very name suggests a black hole where people are sucked in and are never seen again. This is exactly how Barbara (and Gloria, her mother) feels about living there.

London, Marjorie's Apartment

When Barbara first arrives in London, she meets Marjorie and they room together. They work together, but when Barbara makes it big with her show, she discards Marjorie.

The Set

The Set for the show is a large part of where the action takes place. This is where Barbara, now called Sophie, feels most at home.

Sophie's Apartment

Sophie does not allow a lot of people to come into her apartment, though it is lavish and beautiful. Diane, her best friend, visits there regularly. This is where Sophie lets down her hair and is honest about her life.

The Cafe

There are several scenes that take place at a small coffee shop and cafe near to the studio's lot. Various scenes have one or the other of the characters sitting and people watching, musing about their life, or making a decision regarding their next creative decision.



Themes and Motifs

The Entertainment Industry

The Entertainment industry is used by the author as both a backdrop for the entire action of the novel, but also as a vehicle for delivering some of his most poignant messages about life and love. Barbara, initially, has a skewed small town sentiment toward London starlets and thinks that she will be the next Lucille Ball, and that this is what it means to be successful and loved. But, like her assumptions, she finds that the London television scene is just as fake and her perceptions.

In this book, the author questions whether the Entertainment industry has the same value as true art. Bill would say no. Vernon Whitfield would say no. Sophie, by the end, is amazed that every young person's career goal is to be famous, rather than, say, cure cancer. Since their program is overseen by the division of "light entertainment" at the BBC, it generally doesn't get any respect. So, some of the characters question whether what they do has any value.

Tony certainly questions this, but feels trapped because of his circumstances. Clive continues to try and live up to an image that was created for him on the big screen; one that he is never able to quite be comfortable or truly happy with. In the end, Sophie being the exception, everyone who stayed in the industry long term was miserable and sacrificed themselves chasing something that, in the end, did not fulfill them.

This very much ties in with the theme of Fame being Fleeting, because most go into the industry for the wrong reasons: fame, fortune, attention. Many do attain this, but find, in the end, it does not fulfill them. Sophie's tale is different because her goal never was to have any of those things. She just wanted to make people laugh, to entertain others. That the fame and fortune, attention, fulfillment happened, were happy secondary results due to her focus being on something more worthwhile.

What is Normal?

Hornby asks "What is normal?" Is normal sitting at home and watching TV? None of the characters have the traditional relationships that they are writing about on television, and yet they all feel the need to conform, at least on the surface, in order to have a career.

As the show becomes more and more popular, the desire to be normal becomes more important. They are reaching a larger audience. They are becoming mainstream. They can't take as many risks. They can't really be themselves.

This was why it was so important for the characters to be true to themselves in their real lives. Bill was the posterboy for this, diving into the world of artists, novelists, and too much alcohol. But the other characters tried even harder to be themselves. Even Tony,



who Bill always thought of as living a lie with his wife, tried harder to be the breadwinner and good husband, and later, father.

Normal is challenged throughout the novel. Sophie assumes that London elite acted a certain way, that this was normal, but in the end, she realizes that it doesn't make her happy and that what makes her happy is HER normal. This is something that none of the other characters seem to be able to internalize, with the exception of Sophie's father and aunt, who were true to themselves, even if it embarrassed Sophie, initially.

Belonging

Throughout this novel, the notion of belonging is a common thread. All of the main cast and crew of the show, including the writers, producers, and directors, all share a common issue: they all lack an inner self confidence, and they are all looking for some place where they will be accepted for who they are.

This is particularly strong with Bill and Tony, who as the novel opens up, have only most recently been released from jail, where they were imprisoned for being homosexuals. Both men, upon their release, were forced to live a farce in which they presented a very heterosexual front to the world. Later, Tony accepts this new designation, while Bill staunchly and militantly declares his gayness in a novel.

It is shown throughout the novel that most of those who come into the entertainment industry are missing something that they believe can be met within the industry. Most of it can be distilled down to wanting to belong to something, to someone, to a group, to find their 'tribe'. Sophie feels as if she does that (something she reflects upon long after she's left the limelight).

Sophie realizes after her fame has faded and she's moved on to other loves and pursuits, that she had never been happier, aside from her children and husband, except when she'd been filming the show, Barbara (and Jim). This was due in large part to the feeling of camaraderie that she shared with everyone. And that everyone understood the other's interior landscape, mainly because it was similar.

Follow Your Dreams

Another theme represented throughout this book is that aspirations drive you farther from home. Sophie didn't want to be a beauty queen stuck in Blackpool for her life, let alone for a year. She had to leave home and what was comfortable, in order to grow. She didn't give much thought as to how she was going to follow her dreams, but only realized that she could not do it in Blackpool. The cautionary tale of the Mayor's wife was enough to motivate her to leave.

Her mother had attempted to do the same thing, in her own way. Even though she wasn't going on to live a glamorous life, Sophie always imagined that her mother had. In



actuality, Gloria hadn't moved too far away, and never married the man she left Sophie's father for.

Tony would have been happy writing the same thing every day, and coming home and eating dinner and then watching TV and then going to sleep. He was living his dream: writing things that make people laugh, even if it didn't always come easy.

Bill fled so far from this ideal that he created his own home among the artists and bohemians of his day. Although, he admits, in the final chapter, that he longed for a steady relationship that Tony had all along.

Fame is Fleeting

Since a great deal of the novel centers around the Entertainment Industry, the notion that Fame is Fleeting is almost always present. The cast and crew aren't always aware of this, but the reader is given some foreshadowing in the beginning of the book where an older couple, once big stars in their day, are not even recognized by the new starlets in the business.

Sophie begins to see that this is so when she contemplates a Ferris Wheel at the park one evening. She realizes that it is all fun and games rising to fame, but inevitably, like on a Ferris Wheel, there must always be a going down.

Sophie, among all of the characters, realizes this characteristic of the Entertainment Industry, and in the end, accepts Dennis's proposal, and leaves Hollywood's limelight. However, it is during the filming of the reunion show, that she sees how she might have turned out when she sees Clive for the first time.

Clive, has continued on in the same lifestyle as when Sophie first met him. He's been married to multiple women, has children who despise him, and he's miserable. He is also not as glamorous a star as he was, having 'sold out' to make American television shows.

Gender Bias and the Pain of Prejudice

There are several types of Gender Bias that occur in this novel. First, there is the prejudice against women, as Sophie realizes before she even changes her name. As the winner of a beauty pageant, she realizes that women as objects, instead of people, were doomed and relegated to lives already predetermined for them. She wants nothing to do with this and it is one of the key motivations for her departure from Blackpool.

When readers meet Bill and Tony, it is clear that they, too, have been discriminated against, as gay men in the Entertainment Industry. During the era in which this book is set, gay men are not accepted, and are often abused at the hands of the law, and the workplace.



Tony decides that he loves his job and does what he can to secure that future. Bill, on the other hand staunchly declares his homosexual lifestyle, and suffers for it. In many instances, though the shows are very good, the pilots are never made and the pitches never produce, simply because the studios know that Bill is gay.

Gender bias is rampant and is exposed in nearly every chapter. That women did the same jobs as men in the entertainment industry, but were paid less, almost never were given headliner status, and were expected to leave the business when they married or became pregnant, shocks contemporary readers. It is presented in this novel to further show what a tremendous accomplishment it was that Sophie rose to such heights on a show where she received top billing, and that they were able to tackle such contentious topics such as impotence, alcoholism, and women's rights.

Styles

Point of View

This novel is told from the primary perspective of Barbara Parker (aka Sophie Straw). However, the narrator also intervenes and interjects, breaking the fourth wall, to directly address the readers on numerous occasions. The entire book is supposed to give the feel of a biography about the cast and crew of this one television show set in London. The time period is the 1960s.

Language and Meaning

Set in 1960s London, England, there are a few very British terms that are used which might confuse readers who are not from there. Additionally, there are technologies and products, procedures and outlooks that were very common for the time period, but which may actually be quite foreign to readers now. In particular the notion that women's rights were still just a 'nice idea', but something that wasn't really in practice at the time.

Structure

The book is written in a linear fashion, with some flashbacks, and flashforwards, interjected. There are 'excerpts' from celebrity magazines, included, as well as black and white photographs supposedly depicting the actors and actresses.



Quotes

She began to fear that she would always be greedy, all the time. Nothing ever seemed to fill her up. Nothing ever seemed to touch the sides.”

-- Barbara/Narrator (chapter 1)

Importance: After winning the beauty pageant, Barbara knows that the town of Blackpool will suffocate her if she stays. This was her turning point, her decision to pursue a different life for herself.

Love meant being brave, otherwise you had already lost your own argument: the man who couldn't tell a woman he loved her was, by definition, not worthy of her.”

-- Sophie (chapter 15)

Importance: Sophie (Barbara) has decided to become engaged to Clive, though in her heart she knows that it is a mistake. At this point in the novel she is still conforming and playing a role, though she's not really aware of it, yet.

Being on top of your career was like being at the top of a Ferris wheel: you knew that you had to keep moving, and you knew which way you were going. You had no choice.”

-- Sophie (chapter 16)

Importance: This quote includes one of the more powerful symbols in the novel...that of a Ferris Wheel. She feels that control of her life has been handed over to someone else and that she is helpless to steer her own course. The downward spiral is inevitable, she fears.

You're Sophie Straw now. She's Lucille Ball then.”

-- Diane (chapter 16)

Importance: Diane is Sophie's best friend. With this quote she's suggesting the theme of Fame is Fleeting. She's trying to be gentle by telling her friend that even her idol, Lucille Ball, eventually had to give way to the next generation.

Clive was rapidly coming to the conclusion that being engaged to somebody meant that he spent an awful lot of time not doing things he wanted to do.”

-- Sophie (chapter 15)

Importance: It is soon after this realization by Clive that he begins cheating on Sophie.

I just want to write something about the real world.”

-- Bill (chapter 17)

Importance: This is a pivot point for Tony and Bill as he breaks from their partnership to write a very avant garde book about being a homosexual in the entertainment industry.



She'd never been in love with Clive, but she'd been in love with the show since the very first day.”

-- Sophie (chapter 19)

Importance: In this quote, Sophie realizes that the thing she had been most in love with hadn't been her co-star, but the cast and crew, the show, the entire experience of it.

We're writers,” Tony said. “We can do anything we want.”

-- Tony (chapter 21)

Importance: Bill and Tony are arguing about the new pilot series they want to pitch and they aren't sure how far they can go with the network.

Years later, Tony would discover that writers never felt they belonged anywhere. That was one of the reasons they became writers. It was strange, however, failing to belong even at a party full of outsiders.”

-- Tony/Narrator (chapter 22)

Importance: Tony realizes that he's on the outside of Bill's new circle of friends. When he stands there at the party he realizes that if he'd remained gay that this might be his life. But, he has chosen another path and now feels like an outsider to a group of people that he feels he should have gotten along with better.

He was kind, he was single, he was vulnerable, he made her laugh (not always intentionally, true, but often enough). Every time she saw him, he seemed to have become a little more handsome.”

-- Sophie/Narrator (chapter 22)

Importance: Sophie takes notice of Dennis in this chapter, and realizes that the man she's been looking for all along has been there under her nose for so many years.

He was disappointed that he'd never quite added up to as much as the results of his own calculations. The trouble was that he'd got his sums all wrong, but she didn't want to be the one to tell him that.

-- Sophie (chapter 25)

Importance: In this chapter everyone has had a show reunion. Each has gone their separate ways through the years, and now, being back together, Sophie realizes that she, among them all, has led an amazing and fulfilling life. She feels sorriest for Clive, who is just as miserable and hollow as he was when she knew him.

We wrote about whatever we wanted, and we ended up with eighteen million people watching us. That's the thing about television comedy, isn't it? It makes us all a part of something. That's what I love about it.”

-- Tony (chapter 26)

Importance: This sums up Sophie's feeling about the cast and crew, about the experience of creating something that had such a vast influence on so many.