

The First Bad Man Study Guide

The First Bad Man by Miranda July

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Plot Summary

The First Bad Man by Miranda July begins with a look at the mindset and perspective of Cheryl Glickman, a woman past the middle of her life but certainly not near death. Cheryl narrates the story of how she came to have her son.

She was involved heavily with a self-defense course taught through her town, and managed to keep her time filled through her work with that organization. She was remarkably efficient - if a little awkward - in social settings. As the reader gets a look into her home life it becomes clear that Cheryl had a need for control, as she only used certain plates and dishes for food, organized her clothing and the like. She was constantly thinking about how her actions and choices were viewed by others, especially Phillip, a similarly-aged single man with whom she was more or less obsessed. Unfortunately, he was entirely uninterested in women in her age bracket, preferring those underage. Cheryl found herself in a strange position of power regarding Phillip's relationship with the 16-year-old Kirsten, one in which she equally reveled and found disgust.

The reader discovers that Cheryl suffered from Globus Hystericus, a type of strong anxiety, when she visited a psychiatrist to discuss her issues and the lump in her throat that she perceived to be associated with her anxiety. It was here that she first learned of the "adult" (sexual) games that this therapist played in order to gain some sort of self-fulfillment, games that she attempted to understand and emulated with her own home relationship. She had taken on a house-guest, although not exactly willingly as this guest was not very pleasant. Clee was the abandoned daughter of her coworker and acquaintance, a young woman who emulated the very opposite of the order that Cheryl had worked so hard to achieve in her own life. Clee was sloppy, vulgar and incredibly lazy. The two began a strange hate-filled relationship filled with uncontrollable violence between the two parties. Cheryl was able to reign in this violence under the pretense of an adult game where the two were re-enacting videos from the self-defense course, Cheryl as the assaulter and Clee as the assaultee. Clee was impregnated by an unknown male, and Cheryl agreed to help her raise the child.

The two were able to escalate their physical relationship to a sexual one, and leading up to the birth of the child and for some time after that the two were romantically engaged, much to the horror of Clee's parents who never expected nor desired this end result. Cheryl was able to let go of her control on her own life through this process, even after Clee stopped having sex with her and eventually left her with the child. She achieved a certain level of peace and serenity when pondering the nature of love and the innocence of the child.

The epilogue, taking place many years later, shows the joy and love between Cheryl and her son, how he refers to her and not Clee as his mother and what that means for her mindset.



Chapter One: Cheryl's Globus - Chapter Three: Phillip's Confession

Summary

The novel begins with Cheryl narrating her arrival at Dr. Jens Broyard's office on the recommendation of her friend Phillip Bettelheim, one of her coworkers at the self-defense charity that she worked at. She had a crush on Philip, and often imagined the two of them together. Cheryl talked with him previously about her Globus Hystericus and how she had never really tried to treat it, even though she had had it for more than 30 years. Throughout the meeting with the doctor, Cheryl thought about Phillip and how she wished for them to be a couple. She remembered talking with her boss Suzanne about making a move on Phillip, how to dress, and how to think about her figure. The meeting with the doctor ended without much success. Cheryl wanted to set up a surgery but Dr. Broyard was unable to perform one on her purely mental issue.

Cheryl decided to call Phillip but was unable to maintain a long conversation. This triggered a reaction of her Globus, targeting her throat. While Cheryl was sitting in her car waiting to go home from the appointment she was startled by a woman with a baby and checked to see if he was one of the babies that seemed oddly familiar to her, the ones she called Kubelko Bondy. She described the source of "Kubelko Bondy," which referred to the son of her parent's friends. She had felt some kind of connection with the child, and felt torn away when she had to leave his side. She saw him over and over again in the faces of other babies, but not the one that startled her.

Cheryl woke up the next morning to the sound of her gardener Rick, a homeless man who gardened and took care of her house (not by her choice, he just did it). He came with the house more or less, having gardened there for the previous owner and for the one before that. He was a shy individual, not really looking for communication or friendship, just for gardening. He arrived in dirty clothes and so Cheryl believed he was without a home. At work she met another Kubelko, who was really Sarah the intern's baby. She explained what Open Palm was, a re-purposed tae kwon do dojo. They had changed their style a little bit, focusing more on DVD sales and less on actual defense. Suzanne, one of her coworkers asked if anyone could volunteer to take her daughter Clee in for a couple of weeks, Michelle the new hire volunteered.

Later that night, Phillip called Cheryl on her personal phone talking a confession but was unable to muster the courage to tell her yet. He told her he would call her the next night. Cheryl immediately thought that the confession had to have romantic qualities. This caused her globus to act up and she voided her bowels.

At work Jim, Suzanne's husband, asked Cheryl if she could take on Clee, as Michelle wanted her out of her house. Cheryl tried to get out of it but her excuses were not enough and she got stuck with Clee. She set up her house for her new guest, fruit in a



ceramic bowl and all. She explains to the reader her "system" of only using a certain number of dishes and limiting the amount of effort spent overall in moving things around the house.

Clee arrived and immediately broke the no shoes rule that Cheryl presented to her. Clee was not very friendly and dressed poorly in Cheryl's perspective. She invited Clee to eat with her but Clee had brought her own food. Cheryl tried to explain her dishes system but by the next night the sink was full of dirty dishes. Clee had settled into the couch and started to create her own world, buying a cable package and accumulating body odor in the process. The dynamic between the two was bad, bordering on antagonistic.

Cheryl called Phillip and he started to tell her his confession, talking about the difference of age and years in time. Cheryl went to the supermarket with Clee, hoping to run into Phillip (something in the call had given her the false impression that he would be there). She attempted conversation with Clee but was brushed off. Rick called Cheryl the next morning; he had been startled by Clee and she reassured him that Clee would be leaving soon.

The house had been split into two zones, Clee's and Cheryl's. Their tension had grown into verbal abuse with Clee calling Cheryl a sad woman. Cheryl called Suzanne and Carl to ask to let Clee leave. This had no effect, and she ended up missing three of Phillip's calls. She called him back and he broke down in tears, still thinking about his confession. This triggered Cheryl to fantasize about sexual intercourse with Phillip, going into deep and unnecessary details regarding the setup and foreplay. She needed the fantastical Phillip to give her permission to climax, although she did not seem to understand exactly what had happened. Phillip finished crying, bringing Cheryl back to the real world. He explained some strange feeling he had that the two of them had been together in previous lifetimes, something that made Cheryl feel wonderful.

Phillip had invited her to dinner and he arrived to pick her up, but not to dinner but to his house. He noticed her shirt, the one that she had worn to make him attracted to her but only in the sense that she looked just like him. He finally mustered up the courage to tell her his secret: he had fallen in love with a 16-year-old girl named Kirsten. He then asked for her approval regarding their consummation (sexual intercourse). Cheryl left without giving an answer but said she would think about it. She returned home and Clee informed her that she had gotten a job at the local supermarket. After this Clee attacked her and shoved her against the couch.

The next morning Phillip called Cheryl and asked if she had decided, but of course she had not. In a slight panic she went to Dr. Tibbets' office for a lunch meeting, the only time that she had available. While in the meeting Cheryl realized that Dr. Tibbets was also Dr. Broyard's receptionist from the other day and quickly ran out of the room feeling relatively betrayed. She still had trouble swallowing and was bothered by Clee chewing ice. She attempted to look intimidating but Clee only laughed.



Analysis

The revelation of the idea of Kubelko Bondy and what he represents for Cheryl is a striking admission of her need for a child. The source of her desire for a child is that she likes to feel needed and desired. The babies that she sees everywhere are reaching out to her in her mind. She believes they need her, and that they want to be connected to her, but there is a clear slant to her side of the table in terms of the need.

The assumption Cheryl makes regarding Rick is interesting, as she makes no real attempt to talk to him or understand why he is gardening her house. She lets him use the bathroom, but she seemingly is not interested in who he is or what his story is. The fact that she assumes he is homeless is even stranger, as there seems to be no basis for this assumption besides the fact that she hadn't seen him go to his home. The judgment that Cheryl feels for Rick is an aspect of her character that seems to be present in her opinions of all people, reaching a very quick - and often negative - judgment, something that she does with her therapist as well as Clee later on.

This need is similarly made manifest in Cheryl's initial relationship with Phil. She has such a real and visceral need to be with him in a way that he can rely on her and be with her that it triggers her anxiety, something that she had been dealing with for quite some time. He clearly has a need for her as a friend and she very much wants to strengthen and fortify this idea. She also is slightly confused about the nature of his need for her, thinking that it also comes with a sexual correlation when it clearly does not. She is built up so much by his inability to share with her a great secret, his crying validates her and gives her even more power in the situation. While he cries she takes advantage of the gap in conversation to sexually fantasize about him, something that seems odd to a reader but simply represents her understanding of her power in the situation and the fact that she very much enjoys control. Cheryl is taken out of control when Phil's confession is not about her at all but another woman, one much younger than her. However, Phil leaves Cheryl in a position of control and decision in his relationship, which Cheryl latches onto this and holds onto it as the last aspect of their relationship that she held power over. She wants to hold onto this for as long as possible in order to continue to feel needed and desired, even if it's non-sexual. Thematically, relationship and control are strongly represented here primarily in a negative sense as none of the represented relationships that Cheryl displays seem healthy.

When Clee enters Cheryl's house, a battle begins. Controlling versus lazy, clean versus dirty, concern versus apathy. Where Cheryl is organized and controlling to an extreme, placing unnecessary limits on herself and the house, Clee is sloppy and uncaring to the opposite extreme. Clee is clearly a type of foil to Cheryl's lifestyle and ways. This is an opportunity for someone like Cheryl to adapt and grow, as an opposite perspective and new way of living being forced upon her is guaranteed to have a positive result on her life, especially since she had been living alone without anyone else's opinion mattering for so long. While she struggles with this situation for some time, it eventually does yield positive results for both characters. This is problematic, and Cheryl is left confused as to



how to deal with the situation, lacking the confidence and strength to kick Clee out of her house but also lacking the real authority to change Clee's behavior within the house. Cheryl is unwilling to adapt to Clee's worldview, and this creates division in the house. Cheryl leaves Clee alone on the couch in the living room and Clee decides to really not move anywhere else in the house besides there. She eats, sleeps and essentially lives in one spot.

Discussion Question 1

What does Cheryl seeing Kubelko Bondy in every baby represent?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Cheryl need to rely so strongly on planning and her "system"?

Discussion Question 3

How does Cheryl react to Phillip's confession? What does this tell readers about Cheryl?

Vocabulary

cashmere, willowy, judgmental, psychotherapy, skepticism, chromotherapy, phenomenal, belligerent, globus hystericus, maneuvering, milliliters, counterbalances, preemptively, insistent, feminism, paranoid, container, fertile, hyperipheral, hybrid, intimacy, involuntary, managerial, noxious, coagulate, guffaw, plausible, quibble, blasphemous, resonance, diversity, reproductive, grinding, inaudible, monitoring, equivalent, stifle, gratitude, reincarnation, entitlement, baffled, entwined, transcends, misshapen, uncontrollably, wretchedness, moistening, arrhythmically, anguish, sternothyroid, masquerading, mildewed, aggravate, quadrupled, regurgitated



Chapter Four-Six: Violence at Home - the Open Palm Fundraiser

Summary

Cheryl decided to write a letter to Clee expressing her desire for a clean and organized house in an attempt to broach her issues in a respectful manner. Clee either did not read the letter or decided to ignore it. When this did not work, Cheryl made up that she had a guest coming in an attempt to get Clee to move out. Clee attacked Cheryl again, and Cheryl was able to escape into her bedroom. Cheryl set up another appointment with Dr. Tibbets.

Upon Cheryl's arrival the following Tuesday, Dr. Ruth-Anne Tibbets explained that she acted as receptionist for Dr. Broyard three times a year to get a break from her work. Cheryl pressed with more questions and Dr. Tibbets revealed that Dr. Broyard was married but they played an adult sexual game together. She explained the terms of the contract they had signed, agreeing not to fall in love and not to actually have sex in order to differentiate the experience from his relationship with his wife. Cheryl did not get much out of this meeting and drove to work. She talked with Michelle and found out that Clee wanted to live with her - not Michelle - and had left willingly. This changed Cheryl's perspective and she was filled with a new purpose with her realization that Clee had chosen her.

Cheryl ran to the supermarket where Clee worked and informed her of this new knowledge. That night when Clee engaged her Cheryl fought back, thinking of it now as an adult game like that of Ruth-Anne, her psychiatrist. She went back to Dr. Tibbets, receiving a text from Phillip on the way asking again for her permission regarding Kirsten. Cheryl brought with her a candle as a gift to Dr. Tibbets, who directed her to give it instead to Clee. Cheryl did so, to lackluster reaction. Clee offered to stop the adult game, acknowledging that she was not a lesbian to which Cheryl agreed. The two decided to continue the game nonetheless, despite Clee's admission that she did not have strong sexual feelings for Cheryl. Cheryl mentioned the idea of a contract for their game but Clee rejected this as well.

The next morning they fought again, this time Clee opening with an insult to Cheryl's physical features first. Cheryl felt great when she entered work that morning as a result of the physical activity. She got another text from Phillip but continued to ignore him. Rick had seen her fighting with Clee and expressed his knowledge of this. She took home some DVDs of the training scenarios to help her and Clee's brawls, giving them new passion as well as with Clee playing the part of the aggressive male attacker. This worked quite well as there seemed to be a different energy surrounding Clee. Cheryl rehearsed the scenarios while Clee was at work and was ready when she returned. One day when Cheryl returned from work Clee was there and ready for her with a rehearsed



scenario of her own. Cheryl told all of this to Dr. Tibbets, describing the fact that Clee seemed to view the exercises as real, something that scared Cheryl.

At the Open Palm Fundraiser Cheryl viewed Clee in a new way around her parents. Clee and Cheryl danced together for a bit. Cheryl tried to get a rise out of Phillip by texting him that she was close to a decision but he did not respond. In the bathroom of the Open Palm Clee revealed what she had brought, a bunch of full-body pads, and they did a brief scene in the bathroom. The next day Clee's friend Kate arrived and they held a party that night which quickly turned into a long and aggressively loud affair. Cheryl called Phillip during the party (perhaps a little drunk) and gave him permission to have sex with Kirsten. She went into the bathroom and had a sexual fantasy about Clee, herself in the role of Phillip.

The next morning Cheryl did the party cleanup herself. She called Dr. Broyard's office looking for Dr. Tibbets and considered telling the doctor that her globus had been healed by Dr. Tibbets' adult game.

Analysis

The primary theme of this chapter is one of acceptance and choice. Moreover, how the knowledge and desire to be wanted is something that can drive and change a relationship. Cheryl's realization that Clee had chosen her to live with enacts a change in Cheryl's view of Clee and a change in their relationship through this admission. There is a big difference between someone having to spend time with you and someone who has requested your presence, and Cheryl's desire to feel needed and wanted is certainly supported by this change. The combination of that and the adult sexual game that she begins playing with Clee is enough to reduce significantly her Globus. It is reduced to the point that she feels the desire to inform Dr. Broyard in an attempt to increase Dr. Tibbets' value in his eyes, by showing that her method had success in Cheryl's life.

Cheryl's need to feel desired and needed, and the positive impacts of that is also supported by Phil's need for her to be in the driver's seat of his strange relationship with the 16-year-old Kirsten. Pedophilia aside, this is a strange situation that Cheryl finds herself in, a position of immense power in someone else's relationship. Initially, she is willing and even eager to do this, feeling a level of intimacy with Phil at first and a desire to involve herself in any aspect of his life in order to give herself increased value. However, she shows a serious level of growth when she decides to relinquish her ability to choose by making a choice, ending the game and ending her usefulness to Phil and perhaps even their relationship as a whole.

Dr. Tibbets' straightforward admission of the adult game that she plays with Dr. Broyard gives her much more power and control in the game than is actually true, as the reader finds out later on. This is a rather strange doctor/patient relationship that the two share, as there usually isn't this level of personal detail sharing in the typical doctor's visit, especially not to the extent that Dr. Broyard shares here. The contract that she



discusses seems like the very representation of equality in a relationship, and the pragmatic nature of the affair appeals greatly to Cheryl who enjoys control and structure in her life, even to the degree of a contracted sexual experience. Looking at Dr. Tibbets' contract in a greater sense in the whole novel, it can be viewed as a desperate attempt to make sure that Dr. Broyard sticks around even after he has lost interest. It is the contract of their relationship that keeps him in her life long after the initial interest had faded.

Clee shows a level of initiative as well as willingness to be with Cheryl at the dance, especially around her parents. She dances with Cheryl, someone that she had hated not a long time ago (although this hatred is perhaps fueled more by a lack of fulfillment or a desire for her in her life) as well as putting in a large amount of time into the relationship by purchasing and bringing with her the full-body pads. This is an attempt to show both her commitment to as well as desire for Cheryl. Her actions at the party that she hosts also represent that she is still young, still unsure of herself as well as unable to fully commit to anything serious with Cheryl. She still has a strong need for these other individuals in her life. She also does not participate at all in the responsibilities associated with a party, leaving all of the aftermath to Cheryl much as a child does to her mother. The shift in Clee's attitude humanize her in the reader's eyes and in Cheryl's eyes as it is clear that after the dance Cheryl views her in a different light, less of an irritation that is unwilling to conform and more like an actual human being.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Dr. Tibbets' legitimacy matter so much to Cheryl?

Discussion Question 2

What about the scenarios makes Cheryl and Clee's fighting more real?

Discussion Question 3

What does Cheryl's fantasizing about her role in the roleplaying with Clee say about her sexuality?

Vocabulary

climax, tatters, disorienting, catapulted, barreled, exquisite, castanets, confidentiality, rebirthing, unsanitary, burrowing, predated, anticipated, grotesqueness, condiments, guttural, kaleidoscopically, reconstituted, abandonment, protruded, bereavement, abundant, dinghy, perverse, hostility, revved, nuanced, succinctly, contorting, persimmon, retribution, concoct, euphoric, fabricate, ridicule, misogynist, complying, managerial



Chapter Seven-Nine: Cheryl's Fantasies - Birth Class

Summary

Cheryl talked about her feelings with Dr. Tibbets, how she felt things as Phillip when fighting with Cleo and was advised to continue them, as Dr. Tibbets did not see them as problematic. During the next two weeks Cheryl took these fantasies to all-new levels, trying new positions and locations, always as Phillip having sex with Cleo, going into great detail in order to reach climax. She attempted to bring Dr. Tibbets into the fantasy but when she told her about this, Dr. Tibbets would not let her and told her to stop. This did not stop Cheryl from escalating the fantasy to the point that every single man she had ever met was now having sex with Cleo in her mind. In the next session with Dr. Tibbets, Cheryl was encouraged to try to sing to overcome the globus, something that worked at first but took much more emotional effort than her sexual fights with Cleo.

At dinner that night Carl added Cheryl to the board of the Open Palm, Phil had stepped down. When Cheryl returned from dinner she and Cleo fought again, this time Cleo seeing through to Cheryl's real fantasy, disgusted and feeling used.

During the month of July nothing happened between Cleo and Cheryl, physical or otherwise. Cheryl found out that Cleo was pregnant during a phone call from Suzanne. She wondered about parenthood of the child. Cheryl felt a sense of betrayal but was not sure where it came from. Suzanne arrived at the house to talk to Cleo and Cheryl only let her in to use the bathroom, not allowing her to talk to Cleo. Cleo stated that she would put the baby up for adoption. Cheryl took Cleo to a doctor to get an ultrasound, and the doctor assumed she was the grandmother of the child. Cheryl asked Cleo who the father was, and, while she got some information, she was not offered the name. Cleo wrote it on a piece of paper and put it in an envelope, which Cheryl left with Dr. Tibbets for safekeeping. Cheryl went back to therapy where Dr. Tibbets suggested a re-birthing procedure. Dr. Broyard would represent the sperm and Dr. Tibbets the ovum. Cheryl agreed to this and they set it up for the following Sunday.

Cheryl arrived early to the session to hear a conversation between Dr. Tibbets and Dr. Broyard where he accused Dr. Tibbets of setting this up as an excuse to see him and have sex with him, as she had become gradually lower and lower than him. They talked about their relationship and decided to end her role as his secretary. Cheryl witnessed Dr. Tibbets sink to the floor and start sobbing before she left. She set up an emergency session and admitted what she had seen. Dr. Tibbets reacted negatively to this admission and talked about breaking patient confidentiality agreements. Cheryl thought to herself about abandonment and how this lesson that she had learned through witnessing this event might be the best thing Dr. Tibbets had done for her.



Clee and Cheryl went to her birthing class together as a couple. They talked about bonding with the child, but Clee did not express much interest in this. The next day Clee was feeling contractions but Clee was waiting for her midwife, who happened to be driving back from Idaho. Cheryl was able to convince Clee to go to a hospital, but there was not enough time as her contractions worsened. Rick, the gardener burst into the room and delivered the baby, who seemed pale and blue. They called an EMT who took them all to the hospital.

Analysis

This chapter focuses on Cheryl's fantasies coming into contact with her reality. She has been essentially using people in her sexual games as well as her own sexual fantasies in her own head without ever really thinking about how they would feel. She uses people for her own satisfaction and only realizes this with the addition of Clee to her life. She is apparently also very transparent about her fantasies, as these individuals were able to see it in her face, able to read how they were being used and mentally abused by Cheryl's fantasy. Dr. Tibbets rejects the premise of Cheryl using her as a source of sexual pleasure and Clee is utterly disgusted when she realizes that Cheryl is thinking of her in that way, as there is certainly an element of power and control in Cheryl's fantasies regarding these two individuals. The most interesting aspect of her fantasizing is that she makes herself a man when she wants to place herself in a position of power and sexual control, something that her fantasy subjects Clee and Ruth-Anne are not happy with even if they did not know exactly what she was doing.

Cheryl is forced to view Clee as more of a real person and less of a sexual object when Clee reveals that she is pregnant and calls on Cheryl for help deflecting and defusing the situation with her mother. Clee is curious about the father of the child, but does not object when Clee is un-willing to tell her. Cheryl still defends Clee from her mother who wishes Clee to have an abortion. There is an increased commitment from Cheryl as a friend and support system for Clee even though they are no longer having their pseudosexual play-fights. This connection is most obvious in their attendance of birthing classes. Cheryl takes a more active role in Clee's pregnancy than Clee herself, acting as her mother by supporting and giving her information throughout the entire process. She even allows Clee to give birth in her own house, something that the ordered and controlling Cheryl would never have allowed at the beginning of the novel.

The re-birthing is a very interesting parallel to Clee's own pregnancy, as at the same time that Clee is bringing a new life into the world Cheryl wishes to re-create herself. Her re-birth coincides with Clee's pregnancy as Cheryl had been pregnant with her Globus, simply unable to release it. What actually happens was her witnessing the death of an individual, the death of the pride and individuality of Dr. Tibbets. While Dr. Tibbets criticizes Cheryl for using her in a sexual fantasy, she herself is very much reduced to the sexual fantasy of a man who simply does not want her anymore. Cheryl arrives to be re-born and instead witnesses Dr. Tibbets' collapse at the hands of Dr. Broyard. Cheryl's admission that this experience has done the most for her of anything that Dr. Tibbets had ever done for her is striking and informative as Cheryl is able to



learn more from watching the collapse of another human, and in a way is reborn through that experience. The idea of a rebirth is one of the more obvious choices made by the author as the shift in Cheryl's self-awareness and attitude prior to and after this event are very clear and obvious.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Dr. Tibbets suggest an alternative solution to Cheryl's Globus?

Discussion Question 2

What does the re-birthing process suggest psychologically?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Clee's baby born by an unlikely savior?

Vocabulary

orgasm, astute, initiative, ejaculating, menstrual, synchronized, instinctual, outweighed, serrated, nausea, asexually, self-replicating, compassionately, disparage, unceasingly, formidable, proportional, bludgeoned, exertion, conspiratorially, magnanimity, harebrained, linoleum, non-consensual, strewn, notarized, blastula, fertilization, embryogenesis, zygote, ovum, exhilarating, ritualistically, obstetricians, relaxation, hematopoietic, immeasurable, contraction, visualization, malpractice, destitution, deranged, umbilical, sanitized, gizzards, placenta



Chapter Ten-Twelve: Lonely Baby - Purple Chalk

Summary

Clee and the baby were separated upon their arrival at the hospital, Cheryl staying with Clee to support her although she was overwhelmed herself. The baby had been stabilized but was still not entirely healthy. Clee worried about the possible long-term effects of this lack of health, and then called her mother only to be yelled at aggressively. Cheryl expressed sorrow at encouraging her to call her mother, and the two kissed for the first time. The next morning the adoptive parents arrived, but were willing to give Clee some time in order to separate from the child. Clee wanted to spend time with him as he moved towards full recovery. Cheryl left her side briefly to make a phone call that afternoon, first saying goodbye to her Kubelko Bondy. She returned to find Clee crying, she had missed Cheryl and had been looking for her. The two kissed again, this time moving into the bed. The next morning Cheryl reunited with the baby, her Kubelko and Clee and Cheryl kissed in front of him, revealing their new relationship. The two discussed the possibility of his name, first Little Fatty and then Jack. Cheryl accepted this name but in her own mind the name of the baby was still Kubelko Bondy. Clee changed her mind about the adoption after naming the child, deciding instead to take him home with her when he was healthy enough.

Clee was having issues pumping milk in the hospital, but was still discharged the next day. Jack was unable to leave due to digestion issues, and they were told he would be kept for about two weeks. Upon arrival to the house the two discussed the fact that Clee needed eight weeks before having sex, and they agreed that they could both wait. During their conversation a gregorian chant played on the radio, becoming their song. The two grew in their public displays of affection, going to the supermarket together and buying lingerie. When they visited Jack in the hospital they were given the advice to try going skin-to-skin with him in between their naked bodies in order to increase their bond. They tried going skin-to-skin with Jack in the hospital, and while Cheryl certainly felt permanence she wondered if Clee felt the same.

Their relationship had altered drastically in the house, they ate together and Clee even made efforts to clean up around the house. They added a chalkboard for writing phone messages and Clee made a mark with purple chalk that represented her love for Cheryl. After they formulated and sent out a birth announcement with the hyphenation of both of their last names,

Cheryl thought about Kirsten and decided that she had never existed, the texts had been a part of a game played by Phillip in order to get her attention. At work, Suzanne attempted to talk to Cheryl about her inappropriate relationship with her daughter, but Cheryl responded confidently, unconcerned with Suzanne's opinion.



Cheryl and Clee picked Jack up from the hospital two weeks later, having fallen into a relative rhythm at home without him. They had one milestone to achieve with Jack, that he smile by the fourth of July. The two practiced infant CPR before taking Jack home and Clee expressed doubt not only in the activity but also in her ability as a mother.

Analysis

The first part of this chapter has two important elements: first the full transfer of support from Suzanne to Cheryl in Clee's mind, and second the growth of the connection between Cheryl and Clee's baby. This section shows the increase in support and trust that Clee desires from Cheryl, as well as the same love that Cheryl is beginning to feel towards Jack. She has mentally associated him with her idea of Kubelko Bondy but in a new way, one that seems much more final and unique. It is different than the numerous other examples of her connection felt towards random babies. This is supported by her thinking of him as Kubelko in the moment. This is still an element of her past life that is holding onto her, part of her delusional and fantastical past that she is just then starting to move on from. This is also the first time that Cheryl and Clee recognize a familial aspect to their relationship, the idea that the two of them with a baby creates some sort of family. It is a new sort of bond and union between the two friends and budding lovers. Their relationship experiences it's first tender moments, from going skin-to-skin with Jack as well as numerous public displays of affection between the two individuals. Cheryl feels this is a more real way, but Clee also is at a similar level as the purple chalk mark supports. This addresses the theme of relationships again, this time one that is decidedly more normal and natural. Cheryl is feeling emotions that are based soundly in reality and no longer based on her fantasies.

There is a definitive shift in Clee's mind as she turns to Cheryl for protection and support during this period of change in her own life. The decision to take Jack home is not an easy one, as it disrupts their home life in a way they had not expected. Clee shows love for Cheryl with the chalkboard, something that Cheryl does not expect and takes her off guard in a good way. Clee's love is represented the most in her adapting to Cheryl's way of life, cleaning the house as well as making an effort to spend time with her outside of their violent play fighting. Unfortunately for Clee, it is very clear that as soon as Jack returns from the hospital she is unable to fully trust herself around her child, lacking the trust in her own ability or perhaps even the desire to care for this child once the reality of the situation sinks in. This caring and compassion on the part of Cheryl is unique to this aspect of her life, as she changes so much over the course of the novel from being unwilling to take in Clee to now being more than willing to take her child.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Clee change her mind about adoption?



Discussion Question 2

Does Clee want the baby to return from the hospital? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Is the increased positivity in Clee and Cheryl's relationship due to only the baby?

Vocabulary

pneumonia, desaturate, incubator, undulate, contaminating, recognition, fluorescent, dehydrated, hyperventilating, hypothesis, satiny, supple, illusion, sashaying, interloper, incoherent, cavalier, minestrone, undeniable, suffused, syncopated, intimacy, ventilator, continuous, conspiring, vehemently, sedated, exhale, extinguisher, prolonged, terrace, lactation, elongated, grotesque, formidable, simulation, appropriate, inhuman, preposterous, unendurably, swaddling, expensive, undeterred, inadvertently, improbably, interlocked, bipolar, autism



Chapter Thirteen-Fifteen + Epilogue: Jack at Home - Jack's Mom

Summary

The two were entirely unequipped to handle Jack; their routine thrown into chaos as Cheryl attempted to bathe the child while Clee sat and pumped for hours on end. The two found joy in Jack's bowel movement when the plumber arrived to unclog the drain, and while they were still mentally connected, they drifted even farther apart physically. Cheryl was concerned with the vulnerability of this child, how he utterly relied on them, how trusting he was. She felt an immense level of responsibility while Clee drifted away from this responsibility. Where Cheryl was growing into her role of the mother, Clee was unable to hold Jack to her body. The end of the eight week waiting period for intimacy arrived, and Cheryl prepared for her night with Clee to no result.

Clee got a new job with her friend's catering company. One night she came home drunk from work and the two had a rushed, drunken sexual encounter. Cheryl imagined herself as Phillip again, giving herself a penis. The two completed the act and Clee ordered a pizza. Jack had been crying on and off throughout. Jack still had yet to smile by the third of July. On the fourth they all went to Ralph's and Jack smiled at the bagger. He hit his following milestones soon after, laughing and rolling over.

Cheryl attempted to initiate another intimate night but Clee said she needed more warning. Even when they kissed there seemed to be a new tension. Cheryl prepared herself for the inevitable, that Clee would take Jack and leave her. It escalated so that every time Clee left Cheryl's side either with or without Jack she imagined her driving away to San Francisco. Clee was worn down by her job and the child. One night Cheryl told a future story, one where she and Jack would meet in an airport with his new girl/boyfriend. She said they would run towards each other laughing and crying. By the end of the story he was asleep. Clee arrived later that night and Cheryl gave her the option of leaving, of finding love. Clee asked her to keep Jack while she settled into a new life away from Cheryl, and the two cried and slept together.

Clee gave Cheryl the idea of her becoming a legal guardian, and easily and they quickly accomplished this. Clee cried with joy at the idea that she would never have to pump milk again, surprising Cheryl who hadn't known how much it took out of her. Clee left the next day, the only item she left behind was a sundrop crystal. Cheryl didn't hear from her for three weeks, and found out from Suzanne that she was in love with Rachel and very happy.

Cheryl's time alone with the baby seemed to be normalizing her as she was able to get over her need for control and structure, leaving toys out and the house messier. They encountered Rick in the park where she found out that he was never homeless, simply someone who liked to garden and did not have the yard in which to do so. Rick and his



wife Carol went home with them and entered the house for the first time since Rick had delivered the baby. Suzanne and Carl were the next visitors to the house, bringing gifts that Jack could not use and shying away from the need to be called his grandparents. They stated that they would like to become friends with Jack once he had established values and they felt that he was a real person.

Cheryl understood that loving someone can only end with losing someone, and loved Jack the same. Darren, Clee's friend from Ralph's started stopping by the house first looking for Clee and later helping Cheryl out with some of the tasks that she was too old to complete. She decided to visit Dr. Broyard with the intention of seeing Dr. Tibbets as a receptionist and getting the card with the name of the man who had impregnated Clee. At the office Cheryl happened to run into Kirsten, Phillip's girlfriend whom she had earlier decided no longer existed. They took a selfie together to send to Phillip and discussed how Cheryl had given them permission to have sex. Kirsten left for her appointment leaving Cheryl alone in reception with Dr. Tibbets who gave her the card. Dr. Broyard entered the room for a moment and Dr. Tibbets' entire disposition shifted to one of joy; when he left, into one of utter despair. Cheryl attempted to break this sick spell by singing. Dr. Tibbets joined in and they reached harmony together until Dr. Broyard re-entered and Dr. Tibbets was back under his spell, utterly without hope.

When Cheryl returned home she opened the card, found the name and ripped it up, forgetting that this was the best way to get someone to call you. Phil called and asked to come over. He was the father. Phil did not know this fact, he thought it was true but Cheryl was unwilling to confirm it for him. Phil just remained, never leaving and decided to stay the night. He approached her for sex, talking about getting it out of the way. She agreed, not exactly happy with the way it was asked but still wanting to do this with him. During the act she thought of Jack and all of the coincidences and people that needed to connect in order to get him into being and was filled with pride. The next morning Cheryl had packed up all of Phil's things and he went out of her life.

A boy and his girlfriend arrived at the airport. They saw a woman waiting for them with Clee, the woman started to run towards the boy and he towards her, laughing and running just like the story Cheryl told years ago.

Analysis

The joint bonding and togetherness felt by Clee and Cheryl starts to fade when Jack joins the household. Although they are able to find joy in the little positives along the way, the major issues that each of them feel in their own relationship and in their caring for Jack put immense strain on each of them. It is clear that during this period Cheryl allows herself to grow closer to Jack, opening herself up to a future with the child at the same time that Clee is looking outwards to new work, new life goals all of which did not include Cheryl nor Jack. There is a fading in the spontaneity of the relationship and, as a result, there is a lack of trust between the participants in said relationship. Cheryl shows an immense amount of social awareness, something that had been a real issue for her in the past when she realizes that Clee is going to leave her, although she is



wrong about the timing and style of that departure. Cheryl shows a level of care for another in a way that she had not done throughout the novel, giving Clee an out while understanding that she would suffer upon Clee's departure. Cheryl does not expect to have to also hold onto Jack, but is ready and willing to do that as well in order to ensure Clee's happiness, a level of selflessness that is both admirable and new to Cheryl. It is not new for her to do something for someone else, but new that she would fully realize the negative connotations on herself before performing the action.

It is difficult to view Clee's actions in a positive light until the reader, along with Cheryl becomes aware of the physical and mental toll that pumping milk had been taking on Clee. She is to the point of tears when she discovers that she would never have to do that again. She is not a highly emotional person, and so this reaction carries weight and significance. It also puts her seeming lack of assistance regarding Jack in the previous weeks into new perspective. While the actions that Cheryl take towards Jack are more obvious and seemingly do more for Jack, the pumping takes much out of Clee as a person. This is the final step in Cheryl's humanization of Clee, understanding her pain and effort in caring for this child, and being able to take that and act on it and showing her ability to selflessly care for another person. This sacrifice that Clee made is something that she deserves credit for and Cheryl is only able to give on her way out of her life.

Their disconnection is quick and final, they never talk again in the novel and Cheryl has to find out how Clee is doing through her mother Suzanne. It is only after this separation that Cheryl is able to start to find value in herself as a mother figure. Her attempt to save Dr. Tibbets from the spell is representative of this fact, that she is willing to go the extra mile for a friend even if she fails. Even when Phil, the man she has been fantasizing about for the majority of the novel comes back into the picture and attempts to be the father of Jack, she rejects him and decides to raise Jack on her own and is happy with that decision. This act represents the new-found realism in her own life, her decision that fantasy does not live up to the real thing and that she can achieve happiness without Phil or Clee.

The epilogue differs entirely in tone and style from the rest of the novel. Where from Cheryl's point of view the world is strange and harsh, the epilogue is joyful and energetic. While it is fantastical in tone, it is a very real event. It is fantasy in a positive sense, taking real life and viewing it as positively as possible. From Jack's point of view Cheryl is his mother, not Clee, and that is all that Cheryl really wants as they run towards each other.

Discussion Question 1

What do the difficulties with Jack reflect in Cheryl and Clee's relationship?

Discussion Question 2

Who ends up the real mother of Jack?



Discussion Question 3

Was Cheryl's life improved by her encounter with Phil at the end of the book?

Vocabulary

excruciating, consummation, experimentally, pterodactyl, vulnerability, perpetually, conscripted, exotic, vigilance, brainwashing, erratically, accruing, momentum, melancholy, needlepoint, psychological, duffel, stimulating, indelible, inflammatory, deferential, ceremonially, determination, devastatingly, circumstances, incessant, endearment, appraising, whimpering, daffily, arbitrary, vehemence, unpardonable, retrospect, tax-deductible, androgyny, luminous, expansive, revulsion, resonant, intercede, equanimity, formulation, pulmonary fibrosis



Characters

Cheryl Glickman

Cheryl is the main protagonist and narrator of the novel, a middle-aged woman who lives alone, her only real company the seemingly homeless man Rick who does her gardening and takes care of the upkeep of the house. She is meticulously organized, allowing herself the use of only a small fraction of her dinnerware as well as having an intricate system of movement within her house to maximize the use of her towels and her time. This intense planning goes far beyond simple house rules and mannerisms out into her personal and relational life, as she plans what she will wear, what she will say, and what she will do hours if not days in advance. The scenarios and fantasies that she envisions prior to making any action are detailed to the exact order and manner in which clothes are removed to the way in which the table is positioned. Her personality and way of thinking are odd and she is viewed as such by the majority of those around her. Her longest-lasting fantasy regards Phil Bettelheim, with whom she desires to be with sexually and emotionally but unfortunately he is only her friend who asks her for advice.

She has Globus Hystericus, an anxiety that is heightened by her lack of control and only resolved when she acts in animalistic ways such as urinating in tupperware and disrupting the order that she works so hard to create. She tries to resolve this through therapy with both Dr. Broyard and Dr. Ruth-Anne Tibbets, going so far as to attempt a re-birth process. She struggles with adjusting and dealing with her anxiety but her issue with it pales in comparison to the problems she has with Cleo. Ultimately she is able to reach a solution to her anxiety first through fighting with Cleo and finally through her love and relationship with first Cleo and then Jack. Her relationship with Jack, who she soon comes to see as her own child, is the one that fully breaks her out of her anxiety as she is able to feel needed and depended upon enough that it breaks her at her core and turns her into a new individual. She is able to become more confident and comfortable with herself and her house as she invites Rick, who turned out not to be homeless after all, and his wife into her home. She no longer has the need for Phil, as she rejects him and the potential of their life together with Jack to live alone.

Furthermore, she feels this strange connection to certain babies that remind her of the first baby that was dependent on her, Kubelko Bondy. She has a desire to be with these babies, sensing that they carry a unified spirit. In fact, she is quite well-liked by babies and children in general, as evidenced by Cleo being enamored of her as a young child, enough that she specifically asked to stay with Cheryl when she was kicked out of her parent's home. Jack, Cleo's child, Cleo moving in with Cheryl more or less against Cheryl's will changed everything inside the house and eventually inside of Cheryl. She first lashes out against Cleo but eventually reaches a compromise with her, most likely the first compromise she has had to make in her entire life. This has the effect of weakening and eventually getting rid of her Globus, to the point where she no longer mentions it for almost the entire last third of the novel. She no longer has the need for



mental support as she has to put all of her energy towards caring for the life of another individual, first Clee, but when that love fades, Jack.

Phillip Bettelheim

Phillip Bettelheim is the first and longest lasting love interest/fantasy subject of Cheryl. It is unclear at certain points of the novel whether he really exists, as Cheryl often takes on his role in her fantasies involving him. He is certainly a real character and individual, and he seems to rely on Cheryl for a lot of his life decisions primarily the decision to have sex with his sixteen year old girlfriend Kirsten. He breaks down always and often in front of Cheryl, which at first draws them closer together but eventually simply pushes them farther and farther apart. He is not a great friend to Cheryl, not able to pick up on her attraction to him until far too late, and seems to view her more as a rock and source of advice than anything else. He is also indirectly responsible for Jack, Cheryl's mental savior, as he impregnated Clee. Of course he does nothing to reveal this to Cheryl, and even after she knows he is unable to admit his parentage as he tries to backdoor his way into life with Cheryl. He is an example of the need for instant and constant satisfaction, needing porn to prepare himself for sex and seemingly taking advantage of younger and younger women throughout the novel starting with Clee in her 20s and Kirsten who is 16.

Clee Stengl

Clee Stengl is thrust upon Cheryl as an unwanted house-guest, a sloppy, slovenly and utterly lazy girl who has absolutely no manners or ability to clean up after herself. She has been kicked out of her parent's house, who no longer are capable or willing to deal with her, showing a real lack of love for their daughter. She later is revealed to have requested to live with Cheryl over Michelle, another coworker of her parents. This seems strange given her derisive attitude towards Cheryl at first, as she is rude and antagonistic even hitting and shoving Cheryl in order to get her way and prove her dominance. From Clee's perspective it is easier to view this as a kind of adult love affair, starting with hatred because the other person does not feel the same about you, moving towards violence because it is the closest physical connection that one individual can control. As much as Clee changes Cheryl's life perspective and viewpoint, her own viewpoint and life is changed by Cheryl as she gets a job, upgrades to a better job and starts eating better, cleaning up after herself and gets herself to a point where she can move out with a new girlfriend, start a new life and be relatively self-sustaining. She also indirectly lends to improvements in Cheryl's mental health, first with the re-enactments and then with her child, Jack. She is very clearly sexually interested in both women and men, as she has had sex with both and ends the novel in love with her friend Rachel.



Dr. Ruth-Anne Tibbets

Dr. Ruth-Anne Tibbets is the individual most responsible for solving Cheryl's mental health issues as she is the one who suggests the violent role-playing with Clee could be used to mitigate her anxiety, a method that works quite well for Cheryl. She is a woman who only lives for three days a year that she is the receptionist for Dr. Broyard and gets to play his submissive. This relationship started with sex but now is merely one of economic stature. She is obsessed with the doctor, something that Cheryl is unable to understand and attempts to help her overcome to no avail. Ruth-Anne's happiness is solely founded in the doctor's opinion of her, making her look even more mentally ill than her patients.

Dr. Jens Broyard

Dr. Broyard is referred to Cheryl by her friend Phil as someone who could potentially help her with her Globus Hystericus. He is unable to perform any type of medical assistance on a mental case, and sends her to Dr. Tibbets. He is a married man, and plays a minuscule role in Cheryl's mental recovery but plays a massive role in the life of Dr. Tibbets, being the object of her obsession despite his lack of desire for her.

Rick

Rick is Cheryl's gardener. She refers to him as "coming with the house" as he gardened for the previous owners and continues to do so during her time there. He is referred to as homeless for the majority of the novel despite never showing any proof of this. It turns out that he was never homeless, he is married with a house and just gardens because he enjoys to do so. He is a shy and timid man, never fully establishing a relationship with either Cheryl or Clee and only having brief interactions with the both of them. He plays an important role in the delivery of Jack, saving both his and Clee's life when the midwife is unable to arrive in time for the birth. He is important for Cheryl in keeping her house in order but they never create a relationship outside of the favor he does for her until they run into each other at the park.

Suzanne Stengl

Suzanne is a dominating and controlling woman who wants her daughter to be successful but is unwilling to continue to house and pay for her expenses. She is quick to judgment of what she perceives as wrong, whether it be her inadequate husband or her daughter's relationship with Cheryl. She is enraged and irrational when Clee gets pregnant, but never does anything to support or assist her daughter. She refuses to develop a relationship with Jack, Clee's child, citing the reason that she wants to be friends with him for real and he is too young to be a person as a newborn.



Carl Stengl

Carl is a minor character in the novel as well as in Clee's life. He is her father, but plays a very passive role in deciding her fate, and his only contribution to the story is aggravating and arguing with his wife Suzanne, who clearly is in control of their relationship.

Kate Kwon

Kate is one of Clee's friends, she is responsible for throwing a raucous party in Cheryl's house and seems to have the same relative lack of care for her surroundings as Clee. She is representative of the lifestyle that Clee led prior to meeting Cheryl, one that was filled with laziness and debauchery. There are slight lesbian vibes from Kate's relationship with Clee, but nothing is ever confirmed.

Dr. Binwali

Dr. Binwali is the doctor responsible for the care and recovery of Jack in the hospital, keeping him alive post home-birth. He is very down to earth and has no patience for the type of non-normal and detailed questions that Cheryl has for him. He comes across as very professional, perhaps to a fault, and competent.

Kubelko Bondy

Kubelko Bondy is a very brief character in this novel, but one with a huge impact on the mentality of Cheryl. He was a little baby that she felt a connection to, felt needed by when she was a young girl still living with her parents. Kubelko has dialogue with her throughout the novel, speaking first through random babies and then exclusively through Jack. While it can be argued that he is simply a second voice for Cheryl, he did exist in her life.



Symbols and Symbolism

Purple Chalk

The Purple chalk mark on Cheryl's and Clee's shared chalkboard represents the first and only time that Clee shows her love for Cheryl, making a mark on the board that all can see but only Cheryl can understand. It also represents the reluctance with which Clee is ready to show off this relationship to the whole world, as there is only one chalk mark made and the relationship fades from this point on.

Tupperware Containers

The Tupperware containers represent both Cheryl's organization and also how close she is at all times to cracking into utter chaos. She uses them to eat out of at times because they are easier to clean, but they serve as urinals for her when she breaks down early in the novel. They represent her animalistic nature and how she attempts to cover it up but is unable to fully do so.

Cheryl's Dishes

Cheryl's dishes symbolize the extreme control that she has over her own house, as she only allows herself to eat off of a few dishes, while leaving the rest in the cabinets in order to minimize cleaning. This is thrown completely out of whack by Clee, serving as a physical representation of how her presence is destroying Cheryl's organization.

Receptionist Job

The secretary job that Ruth-Anne Tibbets holds represents her self-subjugation to Dr. Broyards that she would not only submit herself to him sexually and physically but also in the workplace, a much more public form of humiliation because she is a doctor herself. This throws Cheryl off because it is very strange to see someone with an equal academic standing working for that individual seemingly for no reason at all. It plays into stereotypes of the receptionist and the doctor, but in a way that further degrades Ruth-Anne.

Ethiopian Food

Ethiopian Food represents both Cheryl's ability to at times step out of her own comfort zone but also her inability to understand how the world truly works. She eats this food and takes it home, only to leave it on the curb imagining the joy of a homeless ethiopian finding it. Her attempts at kindness in this way are so wild and strange that they seem almost worthless, but obviously make her feel better about herself and so have value.



Pre-made food

Pre-made or frozen food is prevalent in determining the difference between how Cheryl and Clee live their lives. Clee is not willing to wait to achieve satisfaction or sustenance, eating constantly and terribly with packaged foods. Cheryl eats simply, but always something she makes herself. By the end of the novel Clee has adapted to this lifestyle, eating the food that Cheryl prepares.

Phillip's Videos

Phillip's need to watch pornographic videos in order to prepare himself for sex reflects back on society and how even the pleasures of everyday life are not enough to satisfy, there is the need for virtual satisfaction as well. Phillip buys into this more than the average person as not only does he need porn but also virtual permission and conversation with Cheryl in order to turn him on to the idea of having sex with a 16 year old girl.

Kubelko Bondy

Kubelko Bondy is the symbol of hope and joy for Cheryl, in a way it is her lost love that she only finds in Jack. It represents that need that she has for human connection, for a bond with another creature in a way that solidifies her own existence. She needs to feel needed by someone else, and in her own fantasy the babies that have Kubelko Bondy inside them really need her more than their own mothers.

Self-Defense Reenactments

These re-enactments that Clee and Cheryl perform start out as a symbolic and physical representation of their hatred for each other, of their differences in living. They quickly start to symbolize much more for Cheryl, becoming her outlet for stress and sexual release until Clee realizes what is going on. They finally become sexual for the pair and represent their feelings for each other.

Photo of Cheryl's Mother

The photo of Cheryl's mother perhaps symbolizes a lack of acceptance by her mother for who Cheryl is, or a rejection of her own mother on the part of Cheryl. This is a strange symbol, only appearing briefly at the end of one of Cheryl's fantasies in which she completes onto it.



Settings

Cheryl's House

Cheryl's house is the setting of much of the action of this novel, from Cheryl's alone life to her life with Clee, Clee and Jack and finally Phil. It is a well-organized structure that is kept in place by Cheryl's own self-imposed rules, ones that she tries to get Clee to follow. Clee disrupts this organization at first, but by the end of the novel has joined in a kind of symbiosis. The house grows with Cheryl, becoming messier but more whole as she does. It is the place where Cheryl breaks down, urinating in tupperware but also the place where she shares tender moments with both Clee and Jack. It has an energy of its own, having been cared for by Rick prior to and during Cheryl's stay there.

Dr. Tibbet's Office

Dr. Ruth-Anne Tibbet's office is strangely similar to Cheryl's own home in terms of strange urination habits, as the doctor tends to use chinese food containers that are strewn around the office. It has a kind of falseness associated with it, because while Ruth-Anne seems to be helping Cheryl, she is unable to help herself. The energy of the space transfers from nervousness and desperation to satisfied control depending of Ruth-Anne's mental state. Cheryl's reliance on this space for support and solutions to her Globus decreases throughout the novel.

Birthing Class

The birthing class is the first environment where Clee and Cheryl share a connection with both the baby and other mothers, other people going through a similar experience. It is a place of judgment and acceptance, as Cheryl and Clee's relationship is certainly one that is viewed as odd by the majority of the characters of this novel but in the birthing class all that matters is the baby and how to properly care for it and the mother. It sets up a strange dynamic between Cheryl and Clee where Cheryl treats Clee almost as a child, insisting that she perform and pay attention to all of the exercises and brings some of it back to the home.

Hospital

The hospital is perhaps the most formative location for the two main characters Cheryl and Clee. It has an air of paranoia at first, of fear and confusion as they wait to see if their child has survived his birth or if the nurses were burning him with cigarettes. Clee did not want to be there, she had not planned on giving birth in a hospital. All of this changes when Jack survives and Clee and Cheryl share a tender moment in the hospital bed. In fact, the hospital becomes almost a second home for not only Jack but also Clee and Cheryl, as when Cheryl leaves Clee there she misses her terribly. It is the



location where Clee and Cheryl become more than just friends but lovers and co-parents.

Ralph's Supermarket

Ralph's supermarket is another setting that has a double significance. It is the location of Clee's first job in the town, she meets a friendly bag boy there who eventually does some yard work for Cheryl. It is the first way that Clee gets out of the house, gets out on her own and off of Cheryl's couch. It is also a common meeting ground for Cheryl and Phil, and serves as a location to display her over-the-top mentality when it comes to controlling a situation, especially with regard to her relationship with Phil.

The Open Palm

The Open Palm is the charity where Cheryl works and serves as the location where she has the most human interaction until Clee moves in. In fact, it is only through her work that she is able to first admit Clee to her home and also find out about both Dr. Broyard and Dr. Tibbets. The Open Palm is her only escape from the organized life that she lives, and at work she tends to be more on edge and timid that she would be in her own home.



Themes and Motifs

Control

Control functions as a the main source of change in this novel. The amount of control that Cheryl has over her own life shifts dramatically as the novel progresses, and her reaction and ability to deal with this change is the defining aspect of the novel.

Cheryl's control over her own life, her thoughts and her house as well as Dr. Tibbets' lack of control over her own happiness despite her attempts to escape and regain this control are the two aspects that are most prevalent in the novel. Cheryl is meticulous in her household's appearance and preparation. She has a system of eating that only leaves certain plates dirty so that they can easily be cleaned and reused the next day. She has shelves on shelves of unused cutlery, something that Clee finds strange but Cheryl finds logical and correct. She has a method regarding her towels so that she only has to use a certain number at all times and only in a very specific order.

In her fantasies Cheryl allows herself even more control. She imagines herself wearing a specific shirt in order to gain the favor of Phil. She imagines the two of them hooking up but focuses more on where they place their clothing, how they set them up for the morning after so that they would have no issues with the rest of their day after making love. In fact, the direct control over her fantasies is what gives Cheryl the energy and control to get over her Globus anxiety attacks. When she is in control of her life she can be happy, even her outbursts and overflow events seem to be completely controlled.

It is only when Cheryl's control ends up being about someone else, Clee or Jack, that she is able to understand that complete control is not something she can or should strive to achieve. This is exemplified by her amusing attempts to limit Jack to only two or three toys, putting the rest of them in a box. Of course Jack has none of that and immediately goes to the box to get the rest of his toys. This humbling shattering of Cheryl's control awakens her to the reality of her life and how utterly unnecessary it is to control everything.

Dr. Tibbets, on the other hand, mirrors Cheryl's control as she seems entirely all over the place even as she attempts to assist Cheryl with her life and anxiety. She pees in empty Chinese food containers, and is utterly under the spell and control of Dr. Jens Broyard who has her as his receptionist in his office three times a year, three times that she lives for and he couldn't care less about. She is entirely under the control of her desires and physical needs, and even as she attempts, and more or less succeeds, to rid Cheryl of her Globus she is unable to rid herself of her own ailment.

Dr. Tibbets acts like she is in control, having a signed contract with Dr. Broyard and referring to them as equals in the game that they are playing, but it is very clear to Cheryl that this is merely an illusion that Ruth-Anne is desperately trying to keep up. The change that she experiences is in realizing that she does not, in fact, actually have



control over her own situation, something that she believed she had at the beginning of the novel.

Compassion

Compassion is a basic human emotion, one that is expected of the characters and so the lack thereof is the aspect of this theme that is most visible to the reader. Cheryl is the most easily associated with the idea of compassion and her actions clearly represent that, while Suzanne and Dr. Jens Broyard are representative of the exact opposite.

Cheryl takes a young woman into her house, someone who she has no real connection to or obligation to host, without much complaint. If that is all she does one could be comfortable labeling her as compassionate, but her house-guest begins to assault her emotionally, mentally and physically. Through all of this, Cheryl never once stops attempting to help Clee, even assisting her with her pregnancy, taking her to birthing classes, assisting her with the birth itself and eventually caring for and raising Clee's child, Jack, as her own. Of course this takes into consideration that Cheryl is quite harsh and rigid in her doling out of her compassion when it comes to others in her life, and while some of her initial reactions to changes in her life are negative and without compassion, her eventual response is to feel for the individuals with whom she interacts.

Suzanne, Clee's mother, shows little-to-no compassion for her daughter, kicking her essentially to the curb by placing her with a coworker and not supporting her sexual decisions first with Cheryl and asking her to abort her child, something that is Clee's choice only. Suzanne only regains her love and support of her daughter when Clee becomes successful and self-sufficient with Rachel. She also has no interest whatsoever in raising - or even being a part of - her grandchild's life, something that she is unable to reasonably explain.

Dr. Broyard is the example of a cold benefactor, someone who has all of the power in a situations, knows that is the case and does nothing to attempt to fix this issue. He holds the happiness of Dr. Tibbets in the palm of his hand, something that he is well aware of. He knows that he can get her to do anything for him, but he lacks interest in her and wishes only to end the relationship knowing full well that this would kill her and any hope of her happiness. He makes no effort to use his abilities as a doctor to assist her to mentally break away from him and simply lets her continue to kill herself slowly by working as his receptionist, committing numerous sexual acts with her. This demonstrates a complete lack of passion.

Relationship Change

The shift in relationships throughout this novel define not only the emotions and actions of Cheryl but also those of all the characters around her. All of the important characters are in relationships, whether its a relationship between friends, between coworkers,



between lovers, or the relationship between parent and child. The characters of this novel all experience how the lines of these relationships can be easily crossed and altered in one moment or one decision.

Phil and Cheryl go from coworkers to friends when he reveals to her his relationship with a 16-year-old girl, entrusting her with making almost every decision in their relationship, something that not only removes the label of simple coworkers from the pair but also shatters Cheryl's hopes for their potential shared romantic future. Phil attempts to alter this by re-entering Cheryl's romantic life but is unable to get through to her as she lost all of her desire for him or trust of his good will.

Suzanne assumes a different type of relationship with her coworkers when she essentially dumps her failing daughter on two of them, with Clee settling in with Cheryl in the end. Suzanne and her husband also both change the relationship between child and parents to one of friends with their strange attitude first towards their own daughter, refusing to support her or care for her because they did not agree with her lifestyle and further with their statement that they wanted to befriend Clee's child Jack later in life when they could get to know him and his interests better, he simply was not old enough for them to be friends with her.

Dr. Tibbets and Cheryl start out as patient and doctor, but when Cheryl finds out about Dr. Broyard she more or less breaches this agreement changing their relationship from professional to personal. This shocks Dr. Tibbets but the two continue to work together in the therapist's office. This shift in relationship leads Cheryl to consider herself Dr. Tibbets' friend, as she attempts to save her from her obsession with Dr. Broyard, to whom she places all of her happiness.

Clee and Cheryl's relationship is perhaps the one that changes the most in this novel, as the two start from a position of mutual dislike and disrespect that changes from hatred to violent physical interaction being the only source of their communication. This interaction leads to a sexual relationship as well as the two becoming co-parents of Clee's child Jack, a shift in relationship that Cheryl certainly did not expect or desire at the beginning of the novel. Of course the end of their relationship is as neutral acquaintances, Clee leaving Cheryl and their baby to pursue a career and new love.

Self-Image

Self-Image is a very important theme in this novel, primarily for the characters of Cheryl, Dr. Tibbets and Clee who all deal with various aspects of both their physical appearance and the way in which they are willing to present themselves emotionally and mentally. Whether it is a strange habit or some other form of action that separates these individuals from the norm, it is very clear that their struggle to accept themselves or to be accepted by the outside is very important thematically.

This starts with Clee, and her lack of acceptance into the working world at first. She is quite slovenly and even gets judged by her own parents as well as Cheryl, who really



does not have much ground with which to judge people. Clee is in a rut emotionally and mentally as well, displaying tendencies that are closely linked to depression, as she is unable to eat with other people or even pull herself away from the couch for large amounts of time during the day, tending to sleep there at night. She does not value herself to a very high professional degree as she makes no attempt to acquire acting work, resorting to work as a grocery clerk. She also has clear self-value issues as she is seduced by Phil and does not have the self-acceptance necessary to reveal that to Cheryl.

It is only with her pregnancy and romance with Cheryl that she starts to change her life, eating at the table, cleaning up after herself and upgrading her work to a catering company and later a distribution company. Her relationship with Cheryl is directly responsible for this, as it is only through their combined moments of tenderness and even love that Clee is able to value herself at a higher level. Of course, this backfires for Cheryl, as once Clee has regained her self-image and sense of self she no longer has the need to be with Cheryl.

Dr. Tibbets is incredibly successful and talented in her own right; she is a self-practicing doctor, and is very confident and knowledgeable at times, as her therapy sessions with Cheryl clearly show that aspect of her character. However, with Dr. Broyard in the room, she is reduced to a small version of herself that can only find true value in the affection and attention of him. She lowers herself to such a degree that she is barely even a person let alone a doctor, and this is something that bothers Cheryl greatly. She sees Dr. Tibbets as in some kind of cycle, a trap that has her only finding happiness in this one man who cares little for her. Dr. Tibbets gets the closest to breaking out of this cycle with the help of Cheryl, an interesting role-reversal of their doctor/patient relationship, but fails in the end to complete this and her self-image ends with her desperate need for Dr. Broyard's approval.

Cheryl herself has to deal with multiple self-image issues both mental and physical. She is constantly referring to her figure and choice of attire as older and she is, called a lesbian by Clee based solely on the way that she dresses. She also has issues with her mental state, having created as an excuse for her strange responses to stress. Cheryl claims it is her Globus Hystericus which allows her to urinate in Tupperware and lose control of her very controlled life. For Cheryl, being in control of oneself and one's house is the most important aspect of personality and image, as she needs her home to be clean at all times and easy to clean at all times. Cheryl also begins the novel having the need to please and gain the approval of Phil Bettelheim, someone who is not interested in her at the time.

At first Cheryl is able to redefine her image by taking pride in her relationship with a younger woman, Clee, something that she feels increases her value in the world. Her sense of rebelliousness against Clee's parents shows a new-found self-confidence. For Cheryl, while her Globus and self-image issues are mitigated by her relationship with Clee it is with her caring of and mothering of Jack that allows her to overcome her anxiety through her love and caring for another individual. Her self-image is redefined as a mother and that is what allows her to finally get over the hump of needing others as



she becomes needed herself and thrives with that. Cheryl is able to show her changed personality when she ignores the offer of Phil to live with her and raise her child, as she no longer needs him or anyone else.

Motherhood

Three very different stages of motherhood and types of mothers are presented in this novel, through three different characters, which draws a contrast between the three characters and creates a shock factor for readers.

Clee represents the first stage of motherhood - pregnancy, as well as an inexperienced and unprepared young mother. She is pregnant by Phil Bettelheim who plays no role in her pregnancy. She is going into this ordeal more or less on her own, and has to make numerous decisions as a mother and as an individual, first to keep the child rather than aborting it and further deciding to not put him up for adoption but to keep him. Throughout this entire process she struggles with her own responsibility and commitment to her child, at times blanking and expressing doubt in her own abilities. She mentions to Cheryl that she would be fine if Jack stays in the hospital until he is an adult, of course a ridiculous concept but one that reflects more of her own misgivings regarding her abilities as a mother than her actual worry for her son, a son that she was willing to give away for adoption until the hormones kicked in post pregnancy.

Clee is an individual who has just recently been able to support herself financially, emotionally and physically due to her relationship and new living situation with Cheryl. She is unprepared for motherhood and while she is able to undergo pregnancy, this process warps her mindset and leads her to accept responsibilities that she is unable to fully complete. This leads her to leave Cheryl and Jack and run off with Rachel, where she can finally have a life that is complete and secure without the pressures of her parents, Cheryl, or her child.

Cheryl plays the role of the mature mother with regards to childcare and security. The argument can actually be made that she had been playing this role subconsciously with every child that she labeled Kubelko Bondy as well as quite literally with Clee in her own home. Cheryl has the innate ability to serve someone who might not ever give her something in return, the ability to prioritize the child over herself as well as the need to be needed. That is an inherently necessary aspect to becoming a mother, becoming the source of all of the child's security and safety. This is something that Cheryl has to gain for herself, but once she has done so she has no issue providing that for Jack. She discusses the hilarity of the situation often, that someone like her is so important and necessary in Jack's life, but does not shy away from this responsibility, in fact she even chooses Jack over a long standing male in her life, proving that in the end she truly values Jack and being a mother over all things.

Suzanne, in the role of a mother separated from her child, is the opposite of the traditional mother. She clearly does not care all that much for her own daughter as she ships her off from house to house, unwilling to work with her and understand her

personality. The issue extends to her as a grandmother, referring to Jack callously and as someone that she would wait to see if she liked the personality before getting to know him. She lives life in very narrow blinders, rejecting any personality that does not fit hers and striving to disconnect from anything that does not agree with her sentiments.



Styles

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is decidedly that of Cheryl, a middle-aged single woman who struggles with anxiety as well as her own sexuality. She has a belief that she has a lump in her throat, something that is only caused by her own brain. She fantasizes often about sexual relationships with numerous other characters of this novel, at all times giving herself male genitalia and acting as the initiator. She is controlling to the degree that she only uses certain plates and certain towels as well as dresses in order to get a certain reaction from individuals, which is then often flawed and skewed by her perspective. She views her gardener as a homeless man simply because she never took the time to talk with him or discover why he was doing her gardening for free - he had come with the house more or less. She thinks that the soul of a baby that she befriended as a child is present in numerous other babies as well as the child of her houseguest and lover Clee. Cheryl is a woman who cannot see the true reality of life but keeps to herself and has a very pragmatic attitude, leading to interesting contrast in her perspective. She is shocked when she learns of the Adult Games that Ruth-Anne plays but immediately jumps from shock to acceptance of them in a very short period of time, assuming that not only do all adults play these games but that she must be in one herself with Clee, causing her to write out a contract much like that of Ruth-Anne. She is struggling throughout the novel with her control and her own anxiety and it is only when she starts to view the world through the eyes of her "son" Jack that she gains peace for herself.

Language and Meaning

The language that Cheryl uses stands out immediately to reader as out of the ordinary and sets her up as an individual completely outside of society. When she explains how she organizes her house, or how she views other individuals or even simple choices such as what she will wear that day, it is clear that her logic and decision making is strikingly different from that of the world around her. An example of this is in her fantasizing about Phillip: "We'd take our pants and underpants off completely but wouldn't fold them up because we'd just have to unfold them to put them back on. We'd lay them out on the floor in a way that would make them easy to put on again later" (39). Her thoughts are often where this language makes itself manifest, as even her fantasies express a mentality that is just off in comparison to the rest of the world around her. She is often concerned far more with logistics and the reactions of other individuals and this comes out the most in her thoughts. The way that she talks to Jack is also indicative of her mentality, as she refers to him as someone who has the ability to respond to her, and often gives him a voice of his own in her own thoughts when he is clearly unable to think to that degree let alone speak to her as a newborn when she says things like, "An isolated case of mistake identity" (246) to Jack and in her mind he responds.



Clee also has a language of her own, speaking in lingo and slang that is often associated with her age group, something that is very difficult for Cheryl to understand. She is more vulgar than Cheryl and often shocks her, which leads to strong reactions on both sides. Her interactions with her friend Kate display this type of language and her immaturity: "Dang, girl, you need to shave" (105). Phil Bettelheim often uses language that is at a different, higher level when he discusses the idea of two people having known each other in a previous life, he ascends the level of conversation of the rest of the participants in the novel: "But sure. I see us in medieval times, huddling together in long coats. I see us both with crowns on. I see us in the forties. (41).

Ruth-Anne, as a character, often speaks in language that mirrors contractual language spoken by lawyers. She is quick to refer to things, even sexual things in terms of a legal relationship and her tone and style of speaking puts her on an intellectual pedestal especially when in conversation with Cheryl: "Making love is something he can do with his wife. Our relationship is much more powerful and moving to me if we don't compact our energy into our genitals." (64) She is unable to break out of her very mechanical way of looking at the world, much in terms of cost-benefits analysis to the point that she is unable to examine her own situation with Dr. Jens Broyard.

Structure

This novel is structured in a very straightforward and ordered fashion, as it simply takes a narrative past tense shape as Cheryl narrates the story from her own point of view. There is one brief flashback in order to inform the reader of the Kubelko Bondy story, but there is no further diverging from the chronological flow of the novel. This flashback is utilized by the author to attempt to make this whole strange subplot make sense to the reader, as it is hard to understand why a woman would find attachment to so many unrelated babies.

There are essentially three plots in this story, all of which surround Cheryl and are from her point of view. The three plots are: Phil and Kirsten's romantic escalation, Cheryl and Clee's relationship, and Ruth-Anne Tibbets and Jens Broyard's relationship. These three stories are mixed and mingled together in a natural chronological manner, they are told all on conjunction with each other and they develop all together as Cheryl involves herself and removes herself from certain situations. There are no situations where the reader is given access to information that Cheryl does not already have, and the revelation of the father of Jack is as fresh and shocking to the reader as it was to Cheryl. The interesting aspect of this revelation is that the author does not attempt to create any suspense or buildup to this reveal, the reader is able to forget that the name had ever been on the envelope just as Cheryl had.

The biggest change in structure is in two parts, the first is Cheryl's foretelling of the future of her adopted son Jack and the second is in the epilogue where this foretelling comes true. It is a strange shift in structure, as while the reader is used to Cheryl thinking strange things to herself at times the storytelling and predictive of the future aspect of her telling a story to her baby son signify a significant shift in the realism of the



novel, as the old Cheryl would never have considered such a wild and exhilarating event to take place. The epilogue is the real world realization of that thought that she had, it is completely different from the rest of the novel in tone and setup, the viewpoint shifts from Cheryl to Jack and the tone and writing style make this an incredibly beautiful couple of pages due to their contrast to the rest of the structure of the novel.



Quotes

I put my fruit in a ceramic bowl so I could gesture to it when I said, 'Eat anything. Pretend this is your home.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 2)

Importance: This quote is not important for what is actually said but for the fact that Cheryl deems it important to mention. She is so methodical and concerned with the way things appear to others that her actions are strongly based on these feelings.

For a moment I thought he meant here at my house, right outside. But he meant Ralph's. Was this a subtle invitation? Assuming he was on the east side, I put on a pinstriped men's dress shirt that I'd been saving. Seeing me in this would unconsciously make him feel like we'd just woken up together and I'd thrown on his shirt. A relaxing feeling, I would think."

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 2)

Importance: This is another quote that shows Cheryl's thought process and how nearly everything she does is with the viewpoint of others in mind, how they will view her and how she wants them to view her. It goes beyond simply dressing nicely to seem put together, as she seems to believe she can influence the subconscious mind of Phillip.

We'd blow our noses and take off our clothes, but only the clothes we needed to. For example, I would leave my blouse and socks and maybe even shoes on and Phillip would do the same. We'd take our pants and underpants off completely but wouldn't fold them up because we'd just have to unfold them to put them back on. We'd lay them out on the floor in a way that would make them easy to put on again later. We'd get side by side in the bed and hug and kiss a lot, Phillip would get on top of me and insert his penis between my legs and then, in a low, commanding voice, he would whisper, 'Think about your thing.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 3)

Importance: This is one of the first examples of how Cheryl links her globus hysteria to her sexual life, as clearly her need for organization and control come through in her sexual fantasy, how it describes the exact placement of certain garments in order for ease of access later on. She is nearly robotic in her control except that she needs Phillip to give her the permission to combine the sex and her globus.

Before I could get my balance she shoved my hip down with her knee. I grabbed at the air stupidly. She pinned my shoulders down, intently watching what the panic was doing to my face. Then she suddenly let go and walked away. I lay there shaking uncontrollably.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 3)

Importance: This is the first physical interaction between Cheryl and Cleo and one of



the few instances where Cheryl does not have full control of a situation, and the reader can see what this does to her physically, reminding them of her age.

But the house didn't function as it once had; Clee had undone years of careful maintenance. All the dishes were out and the general disarray was beyond carpooling-there was nothing between me and filthy animal living. So I peed in cups and knocked over one of the cups and didn't clean it up. I chewed bread into a puree, moistening it with sips of water until I could slurp it down as a horse would.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 3)

Importance: This quote is damning in the way it shows just how fragile Cheryl's security and mental health really is. She is unable to distinguish herself from her animalistic nature unless she has complete control over the order and placement of certain objects, and her reaction to Clee's disturbances is shocking and disturbing.

I put it on the curb for a homeless person. An Ethiopian homeless person would be especially delighted. What a heartbreaking thought, encountering your native food in this way.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 4)

Importance: This quote is interesting in the way that Cheryl sees the world, how she is able to feel at a deep level the mindset of an outsider but at the same time having no understanding for the ridiculousness of an Ethiopian homeless person happening upon her food outside of her house.

I don't want to know the gender.' "'Oh don't worry, it's too early to tell,' said the doctor. But her eyes held fast to the ceiling, avoiding the sight of her own splayed legs. She meant ever. She hoped to never see it.

-- Clee (Chapter 8)

Importance: This quote shows the beginning of the worry/hope on the part of Cheryl that she will have to raise the child alone, inferring that Clee has no interest in loving or even knowing the sex of the child.

She laughed, or I thought it was a laugh-it ended in a gasping kind of swallow. We noticed a strange red mark on his tiny arm. I waved over a nurse with bleached-blond hair. 'Hi, little dude,' she croaked, checking his monitor. 'It's a big day for you.' She reeked of perfume, perhaps to cover the smell of cigarettes. The mark: a cigarette burn. I felt alive with anger. But I was a manager and knew how to handle this; I could already picture her crying after what I was about to say."

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 10)

Importance: Again, this quote shows the strange links that Cheryl's mind makes between certain observations. She is far too quick to judge a seemingly friendly nurse, which shows her defense and connection to the child but not any level of logical thought.



His prayer swept across the three of us; my face tingled and my head spun dizzily. I felt holy, almost married.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 10)

Importance: This is the formation of the family dynamic in the mind of Cheryl, the chaplain prays over them and gives her the feeling that she has in fact entered into matrimony with Clee, brought together by the child.

Anyone who questions what satisfaction can be gained from a not-so-bright girlfriend half one's age has never had one. It just feels good all over. It's wearing something beautiful and eating something delicious at the same time, all the time. Phillip knew-he knew and he'd tried to tell me, but I hadn't listened. I couldn't help but wonder if he'd heard the news about me and Clee.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 11)

Importance: This is the first time that Cheryl can truly understand the relationship between Phillip and the 16-year-old Kirsten, the strange feeling that is associated only with the age difference between the two lovers.

Clee patted Jack right on his soft spot, undeterred. Was all this real to her? Did she think it was temporary? Or maybe that was the point of love: not to think.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 11)

Importance: This rather insightful quote by Cheryl is indicative of the change that she is experiencing mentally as a result of the child, she is finally understanding that she perhaps does not need to overthink in the way that she normally does, which is remarkable.

His vulnerability slayed me, but was love the right word for that? Or was it just a feverish pity"?

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 13)

Importance: This is as Cheryl is working through the new feelings and mindset that she has gained due to the child. She wonders if she is able to feel some kind of real emotion, or if she is still restrained by these intellectual terms.

We thrust our babies into the air again and again, showing them what it felt like to be a mother, to be terrifyingly in love without the option of getting off.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 13)

Importance: This is the first unique social link that Cheryl perhaps ever makes, her unspoken connection with another mother as they understand the fear and love that go into motherhood.

She might grow old in this house, with her son and the employee of her parents, never knowing she was supposed to abandon me. Her impatience would ebb away, her blond hair would turn white-gray and she'd become portly. When she was sixty-five I'd be



eightysomething - just two old women with an old son. It wasn't the ideal match for either of us, but maybe it was a good enough. This revelation was a great comfort and I thought it might sustain me indefinitely, a hidden loaf.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 13)

Importance: This hope and thought to the future is something that is new for Cheryl, she is still making plans and assumptions but this time they are not only about her and her fantasies but regarding someone else and a joint life. The fact that she has comfort from the idea of living with someone like Clee is interesting after their initial relationship.

I'd always be catching up with my love. How terrible. Jack flung the spatula onto the ground and wailed. I picked it up, smack, smack. He laughed, I laughed. Terrible. I kissed him and he kissed me back with a wide-open drooly mouth. Terrible. 'Ah, my boy,' I said. 'My boy, my boy. I love you so. This can only end in heartbreak and I'll never recover.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 15)

Importance: Here, Cheryl makes correlations between the love of two lovers and that of a mother and child, knowing that at some point it will end badly but loving all the same. The repetition of terrible shows how devastating this love is to her life but also how great.

I'd been her enemy, then her mother, then her girlfriend. That was three lifetimes right there.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Chapter 15)

Importance: Her assessment of Clee and her's relationship puts it into a new perspective, three unique relationships all within the period of less than five years. An incredible amount of life and change had been thrust upon Cheryl during this time, and she is finally nearing the end.

He ran toward her and she ran toward him and as they got closer they both started to laugh. They were laughing and laughing and running and running and running and music played, brass instruments, a soaring anthem, not a dry eye in the house, the credits rolled. Applause like rain.

-- Cheryl Glickman (Epilogue)

Importance: This epilogue scene, while not explicitly stated, shows the return of Cheryl's son and his newfound girlfriend to Cheryl. This is a kind of full circle, as he is returning as part of a new relationship, much how Cheryl is his mother not by birth but by relationship. The joy and love that is shown between these two individuals is so raw and without thought that it contrasts beautifully with the tone and scope of the novel to this point. It is over the top, emotional and awe-inspiring and begs the thought that perhaps this is how Cheryl's life has been all along if only we had seen it from a neutral point of view.