

Geek Love Study Guide

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Plot Summary

The novel follows through the life of Olympia Binewski, a.k.a Hopalong McGurk, from her childhood to her death. Olympia tells the story of her family, the Binewskis, and their unique lifestyle as owners of Binewski's Fabulon, a traveling circus specializing in freaks.

The book follows Olympia's voice (often referred to as "Oly" in the book), starting with her childhood as she travels with her family in a van as a part of the Binewski Fabulon. The story opens as her Papa (a.k.a. "Aloysius Binewski" or "Al") tells the story of how he met their mother (a.k.a. "Crystal Lil" or "Lillian Hinchcliff Binewski" or "Lily"). This is no ordinary family, however, as it is quickly established that the children are all "freakish" in nature. Arturo or Aqua Man is the oldest and has flippers for arms and legs. The twins Electra and Iphigenia are Siamese twins. Olympia is an albino dwarf and Fortunato (a.k.a. "Chick") has telekinetic abilities. The parents worked very hard to create their children as freaks, as being a "norm" or normal individual is looked down upon in this family.

Flipping between childhood stories and the present-day activities, the reader follows Oly through her entire life. The reader watches as the children grow up, leaning less on their parents and more on the oldest son, Arturo, who they call "Arty." Arty becomes the leader of the Binewski clan, eventually leading the family from the Fabulon circus environment and more towards the cult following that he establishes through his act as Aqua Boy. Arty's controlling need to manipulate every aspect of his siblings' lives causes them immense pain throughout their lives.

Arty creates a cult following called Arturism. Ultimately, Arturism convinces "normal" individuals (those born without freakish qualities) to chop off their limbs in an effort to "free" themselves from the restrictions of being a normal functioning member of society. As Arty grows in power through Arturism, he begins to manipulate the lives of everyone in his family. He takes over the Fabulon. Oly becomes impregnated with Arty's child after she has Chick move Arty's sperm out of his body and into hers. Arty finally makes Oly send their daughter Miranda to a convent.

Chick has a very sensitive nature. After the twins and their baby die in a traumatic way, Chick realizes that all of the pain he feels is due to Arty. He consequently becomes so enraged he creates a massive firestorm, wholly consuming the entire Fabulon, saving only Oly and his mother Crystal Lil.

Although the Fabulon camp dies, the concepts of Arturism live on, as we learn when the adult Oly forces a friendship with a woman called Miss Lick. Miss Lick is a companion of Miranda. Miranda has also been born with a freakish quality -a small, curled tail. Miranda uses her tail to her advantage by making extra money at the Glass House, which is a strip club specializing in individuals with freakish qualities.



Miss Lick approaches Miranda after one of her performances, giving her the opportunity to "fix" herself and take off the tail, which Miss Lick will pay for. Miss Lick, as Oly reveals, is actually a devoted follower of the Arturism method of thinking and frequently will find girls whose lives seem to be predictably useless and disfigures them so that they will reach their full potential.

After the Fabulon camp is destroyed, Oly goes on to find a job reading stories on the radio, and lives on a house on Kearney Street. She brings Miranda and Crystal Lil to the same house, although neither knows that she lives with them. Miranda does not know her mother, and Crystal Lil is now blind, deaf and mentally unstable.

Oly ultimately kills Miss Lick and herself in an effort to keep Miranda the way she is. Before the murder-suicide, Oly leaves Miranda a letter and a trunk filled with notes and letters, explaining the entire Binewski Fabulon past.



Book 1: Chapter 1, The Nuclear Family: His Talk, Her Teeth

Book 1: Chapter 1, The Nuclear Family: His Talk, Her Teeth Summary

The novel follows the life of Olympia Binewski, a.k.a. Hopalong McGurk, from her childhood to her death. Olympia tells the story of her family, the Binewskis, and their unique lifestyle as owners of the Binewski Fabulon, a traveling circus specializing in freaks.

The chapter starts out with Oly and her siblings listening to their Papa tell the story of how he met their mother. Papa is the owner of a traveling circus called "Binewski's Fabulon." He met Lillian Hinchcliff when she volunteered to be a Geek that summer. A Geek is the person who rips the heads off still-alive chickens as a novelty act. The mother also tells them that the greatest gift you can give your children is the "inherent ability to earn a living just by being themselves". To that end, the parents have created children that were only freakish in nature, by "experimenting with illicit and prescription drugs, insecticides and eventually radioisotopes" while Lil is pregnant with each child.

Arturo is the oldest with hands and feet that are flippers. The twins Elly and Iphy are Siamese twins. Oly is an albino dwarf, while Chick appears normal, but has incredible telekinetic abilities.

Book 1: Chapter 1, The Nuclear Family: His Talk, Her Teeth Analysis

This is the foundation of the family childhood and the reader's introduction into a very complicated family. Essentially, the parents have experimented with a variety of drugs to ensure that their children are not born normal. They want to have freakish children and, in a role reversal of traditional parenting, become upset if the child is born completely normal, with all four limbs, etc. Oly, in fact, was considered something of a disappointment since she was only an albino hunchback. However, when the dwarfism appeared, it was a pleasant surprise. Here, the reader learns that to be completely different is a treasure in this family and that being normal is not preferred, which is a central theme throughout the story. The more freakish you are, the more value you have to the family.



Book 1: Chapter 2, The Joy of the Worm

Book 1: Chapter 2, The Joy of the Worm Summary

The story suddenly jumps to the present day in the next chapter. Here, we listen to the adult Oly as she watches a person named Miranda and keeps an eye out for her blind, deaf and mentally unstable mother, Crystal Lil. Oly does not let her mother know that she lives in the same tenement building as her mother, because she says that her mother has chosen to forget her.

Oly follows both Crystal Lil and Miranda on some days. Crystal Lil goes to a home on the top of a hill and screams that she used to live there, indicating how unstable her mental state is now. Crystal Lil otherwise spends her time trying to watch television with a huge magnifying glass in front of the screen.

Miranda is more difficult to follow, but more interesting. She has a job at the Glass House, where she has a sexy routine that culminates into her revelation of a tiny, curling tail jutting out from the end of her spine. The last time Oly follows Miranda to the Glass House, she is suddenly brought on stage during an Amateur Hour with other "freaks." She is grabbed and thrown on stage and, like any good Binewski, puts on a great show, stripping all the way down to her underwear, showing off her pink eyes and hunchback hump. When Oly is finished with the spontaneous stripping show, she races home and cannot sleep all night out of her fear of Papa, Arturo and her own pride.

Book 1: Chapter 2, The Joy of the Worm Analysis

Here, the reader learns how different Oly's current life is from her idyllic childhood. Her daughter and her mother do not recognize her, although she lives in the same home as them and watches over them carefully. She has to follow them to learn more about what they do during the day, which is completely opposite from the idyllic picture painted in the first chapter of all family members laughing and joking with each other in close companionship.

With Miranda's curled tail, the reader realizes that she is a semi-freakish Binewski like the rest of her family and takes pride in showing it off like the rest of her family. She does not realize that she has genes in her blood that allow her to put on a show and take pride in the one thing that sets her apart from the rest of society, but Oly recognizes the quality immediately.

Oly's spontaneous stripping show seems atypical for a woman who is hiding in a tenement home, hidden from even her family. This demonstration, however, shows that no matter what, Oly has been raised to take great pride in her appearance. This show foreshadows how she feels that she is superior to "norms" or those individuals that are born looking like everyone else. She knows that the Glass House wanted to tease and embarrass her, but she flipped the situation on them by putting on an incredible show



everyone would remember. When Oly returns home, however, she is fearful of her pride, her brother Arty and her Papa, which we learn is due to the fact that Oly was meant to be a small freak, not worthy of her own act as she was growing up. This show was a small act, but she was raised not to think of herself worthy of a full stage act like her siblings.



Book 1: Chapter 3, Meltdown, Diving Into Teacups from the Thirteenth Floor and Other Stimulating Experiences

Book 1: Chapter 3, Meltdown, Diving Into Teacups from the Thirteenth Floor and Other Stimulating Experiences Summary

Oly and Miranda have never acknowledged one another, yet Miranda comes to meet Oly at her radio station job. She says that she has always recognized Oly's voice and follows her radio program. Miranda wants Oly to pose for her medical drawings for a final art school project.

Oly agrees after some wavering and goes into Miranda's room. She is floored by how normal and beautiful Miranda is, although she sees glimpses of Miranda's father in some of her glances. While Oly is posing, Miranda then tells Oly about Miss Lick and how she has offered to pay for Miranda to remove her tail. She asks Oly for advice from one "freak" to another. Miranda has until after art school to get the surgery done.

Oly gets upset, although she does not indicate it to Miranda. Instead, Oly takes her snooping abilities and follows Mary Lick, getting her license plate number. Oly goes back to her apartment and opens up a chest that has all of Miranda's childhood records. It tells of Miranda's rebellious past, and she finally reveals Chick's specialty of telekinetic powers.

Book 1: Chapter 3, Meltdown, Diving Into Teacups from the Thirteenth Floor and Other Stimulating Experiences Analysis

Finally, Oly gets to meet and know her daughter. It is ironic that Miranda immediately asks her for advice, not because she sees her as a mother, but because she sees her as a fellow freak. Miss Lick is introduced for the first time, and we realize that Oly is very protective of her daughter's tail. This tail might seem like something that Miranda should hide, but to Oly, it is the only thing that keeps her from being a "norm." Finally, Chick's specialty is revealed to be the most powerful ability that any of the Binewski children had.



Book 2: Chapter 4, Papa's Roses

Book 2: Chapter 4, Papa's Roses Summary

The story switches back to Oly's childhood and explains how the Binewski children were a part of the Binewski Fabulon. Papa kept them separate from normal children as he thought they should be mysteries that the townsfolk never saw. The only companions the children ever had were each other.

The other Binewski children that didn't survive are saved and on display in the Chute. The Binewski girls will go to clean their jars filled with formaldehyde to view the five other Binewski children. Crystal Lil could remember the drug recipe that produced each of them, and people could enter The Chute to examine the fetuses.

Papa starts Oly's training as a voice announcer for the Fabulon. The children are a tight group and act like typical children, including hiding in a cherry tree until a farmer scares them out. The children, however, have the last laugh as the farmer is greeted with the freakish Binewski children instead of the expected neighborhood children.

Book 2: Chapter 4, Papa's Roses Analysis

The family dynamic is shown in this chapter. The reader sees that the children are all each other's best friends and will work together. They are their only companions since Papa does not want them to mix with the townsfolk. This command establishes to the children that they are different and special, unique from the townsfolk and should consider themselves above and separated from them. This foreshadows how the children will treat "norms" or the townsfolk in the towns they enter.

The presence of the Chute shows how the children are seen as a commercial entity in the Binewski family. Even in death, the stillborn or deceased Binewski children are put on display to demonstrate their valued freakish qualities. The Chute also shows the children how much their parents value and appreciate their unique qualities, making each one feel treasured. The fact that Crystal Lil remembers the drug recipe of each child indicates that she planned and plotted for each of her children to look the way that they do.



Book 2: Chapter 5, Assassin - Limp-Wristed and Shy

Book 2: Chapter 5, Assassin - Limp-Wristed and Shy Summary

Crystal Lil wants to take the children into town to buy them sequined matching costumes. She is over 8 months pregnant with Chick at this time and grabs all of the children to go with her.

Meanwhile, a frustrated man named Vern Bogner is having a bad day. He goes in the parking lot of a shopping center and sees the Binewski children coming out of the van, first the pregnant mother and then Arty and Oly follow out. His immediate reaction is to take his father's gun that he has been unsuccessful with the entire hunting season and shoot the Binewskis, picking them off one by one.

The children are not harmed, but they all roll under cars as soon as the shootings begin. They are taken to the hospital, and Crystal Lil struggles to stay calm as the ambulance takes the children away together. Vern is put in the back of a police car and starts crying that he missed. While he is lamenting this, a pregnant woman knocks on his window and tells him that what he did was absolutely the right thing to do.

At the hospital, the children are treated poorly as the nurses and doctors handle them roughly. Papa and Horst the Cat Man come in to take all of the children out. Everyone goes home safely together.

Book 2: Chapter 5, Assassin - Limp-Wristed and Shy Analysis

Here, the reader learns how the regular townsfolk see the Binewski's and their reaction to their freakish nature. Now, the command that the children stay away from the "norms" by Papa seems like a very smart and protecting gesture.

This man does not know anything about the Binewskis, yet he wants to kill them as they are so different from them. The children aren't harmed physically but the impact of Vern's actions stay with them for the rest of their lives. Arty, for one, will always have a personal guard when his cult takes off. In addition, the aggressive dislike of "norms" is created here for the Binewski children. The children also see Papa as their savior here for saving them from the hospital, but realize he wasn't strong enough to prevent this from happening to them in the first place.



Book 2: Chapter 6, The Lucky One

Book 2: Chapter 6, The Lucky One Summary

The reader learns how Chick is nearly abandoned by the Binewski family. When he is born, he is a little cherub with all limbs and beautiful features. The parents turn him around, searching frantically for something unique on him, but they cannot find a thing. The parents then plan to drop Chick off at the next big town. Moments before they are ready to go, Chick as an infant becomes hungry. When Crystal Lil does not feed him right away, he picks her up with his mind and puts her down in front of him so that he can feed. This single action ensures his spot with the Binewski family, and the parents congratulate themselves on their best work to date.

Once Chick's telekinetic abilities are established, the real problems of Chick's childhood begin. They have to remove every harmful object in the parent's bedroom, placing Chick in there full-time. Teaching Chick what he can and cannot do proves to be difficult until Chick is finally four-months-old. Papa researches, and the methods of a behavioral psychologist or reinforcement theory work for Chick. It was still weeks before Mama could bring Chick out of the van and carry him in her arms without his moving every colorful item in his sight.

Book 2: Chapter 6, The Lucky One Analysis

The fact that Chick has his own separate chapter exclusively devoted to his abilities indicates how powerful and important Chick is in the Binewski family. His childhood is detailed, demonstrating how much the family dynamic has to change to accommodate Chick's abilities. The reader will soon realize that Arty's growing dislike of his little brother stems from feeling less important than him and worrying that his specialty will be more highly valued than Arty's own physical deformities.



Book 2: Chapter 7, Green - as in Arsenic, Tarnished Spoons, and Gas-Chamber Doors

Book 2: Chapter 7, Green - as in Arsenic, Tarnished Spoons, and Gas-Chamber Doors Summary

Arty is the most jealous of all the children and doesn't like Chick getting so much attention. He starts comparing his ticket sales to the twins to ensure that his numbers are the highest each week. If they outsell him, he gets very angry.

Arty starts dropping hints that it isn't necessary to keep all of the new kids. After all, he mentions, Leona died suddenly in her sleep. Leona is the child that was born right before Oly and had an alligator tail. She would have definitely been chosen over Oly in Oly's mind, and Arty supports this theory in order to make Oly feel less privileged to be among the Binewskis. He makes Oly feel awful that she is so ordinary looking. He also implies that he was the one that killed Leona suddenly in her sleep, which terrifies Oly into pure submission to Arty's every demand.

Oly is put in charge of watching Chick as he is napping, but she leaves the van to listen to a story that the redheads are telling one another. Suddenly, she hears a sound like a twelve-pound hammer on sheet steel and rushes inside to check on Chick. Chick is screaming, and Arty is unconscious beside him. Oly realizes that Arty was trying to smother Chick, but Chick saved himself by throwing Arty against the ceiling with his telekinetic abilities. Oly doesn't want Arty to get caught, so she grabs his rear flippers and drags him into the living room portion of the van. When the parents and twins return, she says that Arty must have fallen trying to reach something on the counter, never noticing the large dent in the ceiling above Chick's bed.

After the incident, Oly secretly makes a promise to herself to make Arty the king of her world to prevent him from getting jealous of Chick again. It takes Arty more than a month to get back into his tank again to resume his act.

Book 2: Chapter 7, Green - as in Arsenic, Tarnished Spoons, and Gas-Chamber Doors Analysis

Here, the reader fully realizes how jealous Arty can be. He wants to be the most important member of the Binewski family and is willing to kill other siblings younger than him if he feels threatened by their specialties. The reader can assume now that Arty was responsible for the death of Oly's older sister, Leona, and would have killed Chick as well if Chick didn't possess superior telekinetic abilities.

It is interesting that Arty puts down Oly's freakish traits as being too ordinary to draw a crowd. In the Binewski family, your value can be directly attributed to the tickets you sell. In Oly's case, she is only the announcer. Although she is unusual looking, she is nothing special in a family of freaks.



Book 2: Chapter 8, Educating the Chick

Book 2: Chapter 8, Educating the Chick Summary

Papa starts trying to figure out the best ways to use Chick's telekinetic abilities in the show. He wants Chick to have his own act, but can't decide the best way to use Chick's talents. Instead, he has Chick learn to lift a wallet full of money out of Oly's pocket in a large crowd, take out all of the money and silently put the wallet back without Oly feeling a thing. Chick is three at the time. Papa and Chick learn to take ten to twenty thousand dollars from the crowd in a few hours, without anyone feeling or suspecting a thing. At the end of the night, however, the toll of this would show on Chick with his purple eyes and quiet, sleepy nature.

The other children start to resent Chick. Since he is the most normal looking one of all of them, Papa can take him anywhere. The children, however, can only live in the show. Papa takes Chick to different towns to steal money. While he is gone, Arty calls and alerts the authorities to prevent Chick from succeeding. This doesn't bother Chick, at all.

One day, Chick watches as a trainer named Mariposa has an accident that severely injures her and kills her horse. Chick screams after she falls, chanting "It hurts, it hurts" and explaining to Mama that he could have prevented her fall, but he didn't want to get into trouble. Mama gives him permission to help someone from then on, but Chick never eats meat again.

Next, Papa moves on to teaching Chick to become a world-class gambler. He has a microphone and has Chick read the cards of the other players into a speaker in Papa's ear. At that point, Papa can cater his game to win or lose the hand based on what the other players have. When Chick gets really good, they go to Atlantic City together. Yet once again, Arty alerts the authorities to bust Papa and Chick. They get into a fight with some kids who nearly kill them, but escape and hurry back to the family. Arty later reveals that it was the friends of one of the Geek boys from the show that summer.

Elly and Iphy immediately recognize that Arty is behind Chick and Papa's endangerment and take him in his wheelchair to the top of the Mad Mouse roller coaster, threatening to drop him off the highest cliff. They tell him that if he messes with Chick, they will kill him just as quickly.

Oly tries to save Arty, but eventually the twins relinquish his chair and put him back on safe ground. Afterwards, Arty laments about having a relatively normal freakish appearance. He is, after all, only physically deformed, while Chick has truly spectacular freak abilities, and the twins are fantastically different.



Book 2: Chapter 8, Educating the Chick Analysis

Oly states that looking back, she realizes no one in the family took any of Chick's abilities for a sensible purpose. Instead, the toddler is taught to steal money and cheat at poker for immediate, large cash rewards. Also, Arty's jealousy is again revealed. However, the twins' immediate reaction that they would harm Arty if he harmed Chick has long-lasting effects. This is the last instance that Arty tries to hurt Chick, but will instead attempt to control Chick for the remainder of his life.

Arty's low self-esteem is described to a larger extent, as well. It is now clear that Arty sees himself only in terms of how freakish he is. He does not feel that his freakish qualities have been established as the most valued in the family, and he will become obsessed to ensure he is the most important member of the Binewski family.



Book 2: Chapter 9, How We Fed the Cats

Book 2: Chapter 9, How We Fed the Cats Summary

Chick goes out to feed the cats with Arty, even though Arty knows that he is very sensitive to the meat fed to the cats. Chick tries to explain how he can move things, that they just want to move, and he lets them with his mind. He also explains how he feels things that are dead in a different way than a normal person.

Arty asks Chick to make him a roast beef sandwich when they return to the van, because he knows that touching the roast beef with his hands will upset him. In fact, Chick tries to put the sandwich together telekinetically, but Arty forces him to use his hands. When Chick is finished making Arty the sandwich, he goes outside the van and vomits violently.

In the middle of the night, the twins start violently fighting with one another. They bicker for quite awhile without telling anyone what started the fight. Chick reveals to Oly that Iphy said Arty's name in her sleep, which enraged Elly and started the argument.

Arty takes his show to another level and starts spouting philosophical lines, while also answering personal questions from people in the audience. This change in the show brings churchgoing folk to the tent, bolstering his ticket sales and increasing the show's crowds.

Book 2: Chapter 9, How We Fed the Cats Analysis

Arty has now moved from trying to get rid of Chick to trying to keep him fully under his control. Through little power play actions, such as having Chick make him a roast beef sandwich, Arty is making sure that all of the Binewski children are under his control. The reader also realizes how deep Chick's sensitivity to living things can be.

Finally, the division of the twins over Arty is brought up for the first time. Arty is the center of the children's worlds and, when Iphy says his name in her sleep, Elly feels threatened enough to fight her. Iphy and Arty's relationship is much closer than Elly and Arty's, and Elly does not want to lose Iphy to him.

The change in Arty's show is a turning point for him. Although Arty is now just concentrating on the ticket sales, the impact of making his show appear to a higher theoretical and philosophical ground will prove to be the catalyst for his new cult creation.



Book 2: Chapter 10, Snake Dance - Immaculate

Book 2: Chapter 10, Snake Dance - Immaculate Summary

The ages of all the children are revealed; Arty is 16, the twins are 14, Oly is 11, and Chick is only 6. Arty is growing more and more powerful in his control over the family, and the parents are beginning to wilt in his presence. Arty gets his own van and moves out of the family van with little fanfare.

Papa has always been the show's medic since medicine is his full-time hobby and most likely the impetus behind his manipulating the breeding of his children. However, Dr. Phyllis shows up one day in a van and asks to speak with Arty. They have a quiet conversation for hours, and Arty agrees that she should stay on full-time. The rest of the children are not keen with the idea.

When Dr. Phyllis arrives, she immediately takes over Papa's control of the medic van. Papa never asks her credentials or questions what she did before coming to the Fabulon. She appears out of nowhere and starts working with the family. A newspaper clipping discovered years later reveals that she once performed surgery on her own abdominal cavity as she believed there was a monitoring device inside of her, watching her every move. It needed to be taken out. Furthermore, it is suggested that she never went to school, at all.

Book 2: Chapter 10, Snake Dance - Immaculate Analysis

The presence of Dr. Phyllis, or Dr. P. as she is often called, will be another big turning point for the children as Dr. P. is the future surgeon for the Arturan cult that Arty forms. Her credentials and the idea that she most likely never went to medical school fits in well with the Fabulon, as she too cannot be considered a "normal" surgeon. No one likes Dr. P., and the newspaper clipping shows that she might be mentally unstable.



Book 2: Chapter 11, Bloods, Stumps and Other Changes

Book 2: Chapter 11, Bloods, Stumps and Other Changes Summary

The twins have their 14th birthday in Burkburnett, Texas in the middle of a huge sandstorm. A sickly horse appears on the lot of the Fabulon, and Arty gives it to the girls as a birthday present. The horse is obviously unwell. Arty gets Oly to summon Dr. P. to his van to look at the animal, even though Dr. P. sniffs that she is not a veterinarian. Arty leaves Chick alone with Dr. P.

The twins go missing and, despite a search all day for them, no one can find them anywhere. After Dr. P. is finished with him, Chick goes off in search for the twins and finds them in the portable bathrooms. One of the redheads calls Oly, tells her that Chick has found the twins and that Crystal Lil wants her. At the same time, a sandstorm approaches just as Oly and the redhead enter the portable bathrooms.

A huge gust of wind knocks the bathrooms on their side, and Oly realizes Mama and the twins are directly on top of her. She opens the door, and they fall down. It turns out that the twins were in the bathroom all day as they had their first menstrual cycle, and it terrified Elly. Mama hadn't told the twins as she wasn't sure it could happen to them. Oly now wonders if she will bleed, as well.

They celebrate their birthday together, and Iphy tells everyone that one day, she will marry Arty and take care of everyone. This enrages Ephy.

The sickly horse is finally "fixed" and given to the twins as a birthday present again. This time, the horse's legs are cut in half, and it is walking perversely on bandages. Dr. P. has performed surgery on this animal, and Chick was involved in helping the horse to not feel anything throughout the operation.

Arty is now interviewing people during his shows in an effort to make the audience feel more connected to his act. He tells Oly that he wants everyone to be working for him and that he will run the show one day.

Book 2: Chapter 11, Bloods, Stumps and Other Changes Analysis

In this chapter, the reader sees the reason for Dr. P.'s presence in the Fabulon. She is now Arty's personal surgeon. Her operation on the horse's limbs is just a small foreshadowing of what she will do to hundreds of committed cult followers of Arturism in the future. The horse is, in essence, practice for her future, larger role in the Fabulon.

If the twins can have a menstrual cycle, they can also give birth and have sexual relationships with men, which adds an element of danger to the twins' lives. They will eventually learn to use their sexual possibilities as weapons within the family and a way to exert control over themselves, rather than let everything be controlled by Arty.



Book 3: Chapter 12, Miss Lick's Home Flicks

Book 3: Chapter 12, Miss Lick's Home Flicks Summary

The reader is back in the present day with Oly now. Oly begins spying on Miss Lick intensely now. She goes to the library to research all she can about her and discovers she is a rich woman from family money. Miss Lick loves to swim, so Oly joins her club in an effort to befriend her. Miss Lick eventually asks her up to her apartment, where Mary Lick and Oly drink whiskey (Oly's first) and eat the meals created by the family company, Lickedey Split Meals.

Miss Lick shows Oly the videos of her projects, the women whose lives she has changed to prevent them from being exploited by men and wasting their potential. Oly watches videotapes of normal women who are physically altered in a drastic way and who are now at the top of their profession. Miss Lick describes how freaks are separated in society and are allowed to have different lives, freed from the usual restrictions of society.

After leaving Miss Lick's apartment, Oly plans how to successfully kill Miss Lick.

Book 3: Chapter 12, Miss Lick's Home Flicks Analysis

Oly might be planning to kill Miss Lick, but her friendship with Mary is not faked. Oly begins to understand Miss Lick. Miss Lick says that she has never shown anyone her projects before, because she didn't think anyone before Oly could understand.

The theme of society versus the freaks is touched upon in this topic. Miss Lick truly believes that the only way a woman can reach her full potential is if she is made wholly undesirable to men. Through this idea, she pours acid on women's faces or disfigures them so completely that they have to focus on themselves and finding a way to contribute to society in another fashion. In a way, Miss Lick is attempting to play God with these women, while also redefining what she considers to be the "right path" for her women to take in their lives.



Book 3: Chapter 13, Flesh - Electric on Wheels

Book 3: Chapter 13, Flesh - Electric on Wheels Summary

Zephir McGurk shows up in the Fabulon camp, wanting to speak to only Arty. He is about sixty and gives Arty a masturbator, because he wants to fix this problem for Arty. Arty gets upset and tells him that he doesn't need it, he has plenty of girls. Then, Arty preaches to the man and tells him to stop hiding his stumpy legs and show them off. His altered legs are precious, because they set him apart from the rest of society. That is what girls and others will respond to - his uniqueness. McGurk stays on to become Arty's personal electrician. He leaves everything behind in life to follow Arty and essentially make his life better in more practical ways.

Oly hears a noise outside of the van and tackles a girl trying to get into Arty's van. She quickly realizes that Arty is having one-night stands with a number of "norm" girls. Once she realizes that he is messing around and not in love with any of them, her feelings are not hurt. She happily continues to be his slave.

Meanwhile, McGurk gets into his new role as Arty's electrician and imagines a number of things that will make Arty's show even more dramatic and incredible to the audience. He plans a way to have Arty's voice bellow through the stands to give the audience a more dramatic feel when Arty speaks. He works on the lights to give him a better stage. McGurk will do anything that Arty asks and, in return, he gets all of the women that Arty is not interested in messing around with.

Book 3: Chapter 13, Flesh - Electric on Wheels Analysis

Arty finds his first follower outside of his family in Zephir McGurk. From this point forward, McGurk will do everything he can to make Arty's act and life better. When Arty has an idea, it is McGurk who will make it physically come true. In essence, McGurk has created the stage from which Arty will build his church and gather his new followers through the door.

Oly becomes very upset when she thinks that Arty has fallen in love with a "norm." She fears losing him and his control, and she is disbelieving that he would lower himself to have a relationship with a "norm" person. Here, you can see how much control Arty has over Oly and how she works her whole life to make sure he is happy. She would be lost if he was not there to control every aspect of her life, which is making sure that he is completely happy.



Book 3: Chapter 14, Pen Pal

Book 3: Chapter 14, Pen Pal Summary

The Fabulon is in Earlville. Arty is doing his typical routine when he starts talking with a fat woman in the crowd. Arty bluntly asks her if she feels ugly and starts to really work up the woman and the crowd with his speech. He asks her if she will really be all right if she stops eating and is beautiful. Then he says that if he had arms and legs and hair like everyone else, he wouldn't be happy as he would have to worry if someone loved him, too. The woman and the crowd are becoming more and more entranced, when Arty asks the woman what she wants. The fat woman hesitates and then screams that she wants to be exactly like him.

This statement stuns Arty and, for the first time, he is left momentarily speechless. He tells the crowd that that is what he wants to give them, telling them to return the next day for a special speech. The very next day, the woman comes back and waits in the bleachers until Arty's show comes back. Oly finds out that her name is Alma Witherspoon, and she is twenty-two-years-old. She is a pen pal with a convict in jail who has fallen in love with her, thinking she is a beautiful and popular cheerleader. They are to be married, and the convict has never seen her in person. The wedding has to take place in person, and Alma is terrified that he will back out as she is fat, unattractive and nothing like the pictures she sent him.

Alma becomes the first cult member of Arty. She goes into surgery with Dr. P. and slowly but surely has pieces of herself removed. With each removal, she says she feels more free, like a weight has been removed from her body. After the surgeries, Alma starts to testify for Arty and his techniques. She has lost weight through dieting and the removal of her appendages. In this way, Alma founds "Arturism" or the "Arturan Cult", and Arty's church is completely realized. The fans or the "Admitted" followers of Arturism followed the show in cars, vans and trailers to stay near each other and Arty. In the next three years, the caravan stretched over three miles long.

Alma is the leader of the Arturan cult until she finally cuts off her remaining limb - her left arm. She then starts singing to herself for hours on end, and her voice fails her entirely. Her testimonials are replaced by someone else out of the dozens of fanatical Admitted members eager to take her place. Alma is taken to the Arturans' home to live out the rest of her days.

Book 3: Chapter 14, Pen Pal Analysis

This is one of the most important chapters in the book, because it explicitly tells of the beginning of the Arturan cult. Alma helps to found the cult, but its creation finally gives Arty all the power he so desperately craves. He now has an army of followers, hanging on his every word.

Alma's reaction to the surgeries is critically important in the foundation of Arturism. She enjoys being free from the restrictions of what society expects from her and openly embraces the chance to live as a "freak," releasing herself from all of the pain she has felt for years. Rather than fighting the system that demands she be attractive, she rejects it entirely and creates her own system of acceptance. It seems in the end, however, that Alma's hold on reality slips away with the last of her limbs. She is carted off to a place where she can thoughtlessly live out the remainder of her days.



Book 3: Chapter 15, Press

Book 3: Chapter 15, Press Summary

The twins turn 17 and start to become sexually aware. They have a new piano teacher named Jonathan Tomaini, who replaces Mama. Mama is starting to slip mentally and is taking more and more pills.

Arty's flock keeps growing, and all of them are there explicitly because of him. He now owns the followers. A reporter named Norval Sanderson appears to write a story about Arty and his group and starts to stick around more and more. Arty likes him. The story starts to be told partly through Norval's notes at this point. He describes the cult through his journalist-style writing. He asks questions about the group, analyzes them and writes articles. He discovers that members of Arty's group are resorting to breaking into shops to find food, because they have turned over all of their belongings to Arty and cannot afford to buy food. Arty responds by creating a food van for his followers and creates a dining hall for them.

Book 3: Chapter 15, Press Analysis

Norval Sanderson proves to be an integral part of Oly's story from this point on. His notes and journal will tell portions of the Arturism cult that she was not around to see. His words give us a better analysis of what is really going on. In addition, the presence of a reporter also indicates that the country at large is starting to pick up on Arty's cult as it is consequently gaining more prominence.



Book 3: Chapter 16, The Fly Roper and the Transcendental Maggot

Book 3: Chapter 16, The Fly Roper and the Transcendental Maggot Summary

Norval Sanderson is fully explained. He becomes obsessed with the Fabulon. His favorite act is the Fly Roper, who string flies together by lassoing them. Norval disappears for a few weeks after spending roughly two months with the show, but when he comes back, he hands Arty a jar. In the jar, he claims, are his balls. He demonstrates by showing Arty that he no longer has any on his body. He tells a wild story about having an eighty-year-old man chop them off. He tells Arty this is his contribution to join the group of Admitted followers.

As soon as Norval leaves, Arty tells Oly that those are not Norval's balls. He knows that Norval lost his balls to a landmine in North Africa many years back. Norval entertains Arty, however, so Arty never lets on that he knows. It takes him two years, but Norval nevertheless sheds four toes in the process and stays with the group. He opens up the Transcendental Maggot booth, which is a reference to what Norval initially called Arty. Here, he sells the maggots that gather on the former limbs of the Admitted.

Book 3: Chapter 16, The Fly Roper and the Transcendental Maggot Analysis

The longer Norval stays with the Fabulon, the more that it appeals to him. Even the simplest act of the Fly Roper, who finds marvel in feces and flies, appeals to Norval. He learns every aspect of the Fabulon and after a respite to visit his mother, he returns to become a permanent member of the group. Norval's presence is invaluable to the story and to Oly's understanding of what happened in the Fabulon when she was not around. Norval's words are the only other perspective that this story allows, giving an unbiased, outsider's opinion of the events that occur.



Book 3: Chapter 17, Popcorn Pimp

Book 3: Chapter 17, Popcorn Pimp Summary

The twins turn 18 and want their own van. They move out, much to Mama's concern. They almost immediately lose their virginity to a random man that Elly chooses. He pays them for the honor, which entices them.

They make Oly promise not to tell, which she does, but she also reveals to the twins that Arty has frequent dalliances with "norm" girls. The twins then set a high price for the privilege of sleeping with them to make sure they only receive men who are highly interested in what they have to offer. They have Jonathan Tomaini, their piano teacher, become their pimp who will deliver the messages. Tomaini swears he will tell Arty, but the twins say that if he does, they will accuse him of raping them.

Book 3: Chapter 17, Popcorn Pimp Analysis

Here, the twins are accepting their sexuality. Learning that Arty is essentially doing the same thing with any regular "norm" girl, the twins can establish their own way of maturing and becoming intimate with men.

More importantly, the twins' control over their own sexuality is something that is out of Arty's control, and something that they can claim as their own. Arty cannot control who they sleep with and with whom they have relations with. This is important in a world where most of the people that the twins interact with and their every action is a result of Arty's obsessive control.



Book 3: Chapter 18, Enter the Bag Man

Book 3: Chapter 18, Enter the Bag Man Summary

Oly and Chick are helping Arty clean one evening when Chick mentions that a man has arrived to talk with Arty. He talked with Horst the Cat Man and asked after Mama and the twins. Chick doesn't like him, but he lets Arty know that the man wants to speak with him.

Arty invites him in his trailer, keeping Oly behind the security door with a gun. The man that enters is severely injured and missing half of his face, but Arty immediately addresses him as "Mr. Bogner" otherwise known as Vern Bogner, the man that shot the children when they were in the shopping center parking lot all those years ago. Vern, or the Bag Man, as he is now known, cannot speak, but instead writes to Arty.

The Bag Man tells Arty what happened to him after he shot the children. He went to court and was convicted of shooting the children. His wife divorced him and took full custody of the children. He went to a mental hospital and became convinced that his children would become "freaks" if they continued to live with their mother. After three years and six months, he is released from the hospital and drives straight to his children's school. He picks them up and drives them around the country, first to Disneyland and then promises them the Grand Canyon.

At first, the children are happy, but they quickly realize that something is wrong with their father. He tells them they will never go back to their mother, and he drives to their mother's house. He takes a shotgun inside and, as his children are in the car outside screaming, he shoots his wife at close range. Next, he tries to shoot himself, but only manages to blow off his face. Miraculously, he survives. His son calls 911 and, after a year in the hospital and a lot of surgeries, he walks out.

He is sentenced to jail quickly after pleading guilty by writing the word on a pad. He is released, however, due to budget cuts. The Bag Man goes to his mother's house and watches the news every night on television. He now wants a job working for Arty. Arty sighs and tells him that he will have to learn to type, because he doesn't have the patience of waiting for him to handwrite every message.

Book 3: Chapter 18, Enter the Bag Man Analysis

After learning about the traumatic life of the Bag Man, it seems logical that Arty would reject the idea of having a true madman work for him. Arty seems to look past this fact, however, and focuses on the thought that the man who created the internal division he has between himself and "norms" through his violent actions in Arty's childhood will now be working for him. Arty's pride enjoys the idea that this man will now be indebted to him, and Arty will essentially own him like he owns a number of other "normal" men in the Fabulon.



Also, it is interesting to note that the Bag Man didn't want his children to end up as freaks, yet they become freaks through his actions against his former wife and himself. These children will be forever psychologically scarred and emotional freaks because of him.



Book 3: Chapter 19, Witness

Book 3: Chapter 19, Witness Summary

The entire chapter here is a sampling of Norval Sanderson's notes and journal entries. Here, he analyzes that Chick would typically be the most valued member of any family with his normal looks, but extraordinary abilities. Chick is the reversal of what a deformed child typically feels in a normal family.

Norval's notes include a number of soundbytes from Arty, as well as a general description of the cult itself: a quasi-religious cult ... [that] represents itself as offering earthly sanctuary from the aggravations of life. He breaks down who is permitted into the Arturan cult, and the different qualifications that help you to be promoted within.

Book 3: Chapter 19, Witness Analysis

This chapter is mostly for the sake of the reader, giving a full and complete account of the Arturan cult's specifics. Also, the soundbytes from Arty help us get a better picture of how he communicates with people outside of his family. Norval's notes are similar to a mini-documentary about Arty and Arturism for the reader's more complete comprehension.



Book 3: Chapter 20, The Fix Unfixed

Book 3: Chapter 20, The Fix Unfixed Summary

Arty suddenly promotes a number of Admitted, which angers Dr. P., who has to work extra hard chopping off small fingers and toes for hours. She does not like the inefficiency of this, but would rather chop off the entire limb on the first surgery.

Norval, meanwhile, has become a scavenger of sorts as he starts taking the larger limbs from the operating table, although Horst has specifically requested those limbs be used to feed the cats.

The Bag Man follows Arty and the twins around to spy on them. The twins don't want Arty to take control over their sexuality and having the Bag Man follow them around prevents them from having men visit them in the evenings.

Arty finds out that a man is coming to visit the twins through the Bag Man's spying. The Bag Man breaks up their rendezvous. The Bag Man tells Arty, who becomes enraged. After addressing the twins, he tells them that they will be married to the Bag Man. The twins fight, trying to get Chick or Papa to save them, but the only one that helps them is Oly, who brings them Papa's gun for protection.

Meanwhile, Mama has seen Bag Man and knows she recognizes him from somewhere in her past. She can't place his face, however. The Bag Man enters the twins' van that evening and knocks carefully, while telling them that he really cares about them. Elly had planned to shoot him, but because he knocked, she feels sorry for him.

Suddenly, Mama rushes into the twins' van and shoots the Bag Man dead with the gun that is on the floor of the van. However, just before the Bag Man is killed, he finishes the sexual act he was performing with the twins. The twins had not had any protection on them, because they were not prepared for the Bag Man's entry.

Book 3: Chapter 20, The Fix Unfixed Analysis

The twins lose the one thing they have control over in this chapter - their bodies. When Arty marries them to the man that tried to kill them years earlier, it shows how little he values his sisters' lives. For him, everything is a power play and about manipulation, no matter what the cost.

The Bag Man's death is fitting with Mama shooting him to try to save the twins' lives. Her timing could not have been more perfect, although this scene has larger implications when it is revealed that the Bag Man has impregnated the twins' with his last act before dying.



Book 3: Chapter 21, On the Lam

Book 3: Chapter 21, On the Lam Summary

Chick leans against the twins' stomach and feels the baby growing inside of them. This is how the twins learn that they are pregnant with Bag Man's child.

The twins visit Dr. P. for the first time and ask if she will give them an abortion. She denies them and advises them to repair their relationship with Arty, instead. Upon leaving the clinic, Elly vomits violently.

Through Norval's notes at this time, we learn that the twins run away with a redhead and her boyfriend to the nearest town to get an abortion. They are in the doctor's office when Arty catches them and brings them back to camp. They are put on house arrest and only Arty can see them. After awhile, Oly is allowed to visit them, as well. Mama is denied entry to see her twins during their pregnancy.

Book 3: Chapter 21, On the Lam Analysis

Again, Arty is controlling every aspect of his family's life, including whether or not the twins can have the abortion they so desperately want. Dr. P.'s response to the twins shows how she is completely on Arty's side and is without any kind of empathy towards the twins' situation. The twins are obviously scared, but once they are caught, they are fully under Arty's control again. This control over their lives is foreshadowing of how Arty will eventually separate them through surgery. The twins will have no say in the matter, whatsoever. Arty is treating his family members like objects to be controlled rather than the human beings they are.



Book 3: Chapter 22, Nose Spites Face, Lip Disappears

Book 3: Chapter 22, Nose Spites Face, Lip Disappears Summary

Arty talks about separating the twins, even if it means losing one of them. He does not consult the twins over the possible surgery. Oly thinks he is referring to an abortion of the baby at the time and puts sedatives into their nighttime cocoa and also gives them to her parents.

After the surgery, Elly becomes a vegetable. Arty has always preferred Iphy so this does not concern him. Iphy carries the baby by herself while simultaneously propping up her lobotomized sister. She never separates herself from her sister's side.

Dr. P. is revitalized during the twins' surgery and demands a new strain of Arturism be created. She thinks that a lobotomy would be the perfect solution rather than the laborious task of chopping off toes, fingers and finally, limbs. She argues that the surgery should just be a few hours rather than years of hard work for her.

Dr. P. establishes a rebellious strain of the Arturan cult. When asked, Arty is unconcerned. He says he has been training her replacement for years - Chick. Chick has attended every surgery as the anesthesiologist.

Oly loses faith completely in her family and tells Mama that the family is dead and gone. Mama reacts by hitting her for the first time in her life. Overall, Mama remains excited over the twins' future child.

Book 3: Chapter 22, Nose Spites Face, Lip Disappears Analysis

Arty uses his complete control over his family members by essentially killing another sibling and getting away with murder. Oly is an accomplice to his crimes by drugging the family before the surgery occurs. This shows how completely she is under his spell of manipulation.

Dr. P.'s rebellion has been predicted by Arty who says that he saw it coming, but it will have serious consequences for the doctor farther down the line. The rebellion will change the dynamic of the Arturan cult. Finally, we learn that Chick is to replace Dr. P. as head surgeon for the Admitted.

Mama's reaction to the twins' separation shows how far removed she is becoming from everyone, and also is an indication of her mental state.



Book 3: Chapter 23, The Generalissimo's Big Gun

Book 3: Chapter 23, The Generalissimo's Big Gun Summary

Through Norval's notes, we learn that Oly has a boyfriend, the Pin Kid guy who sticks himself with pins for an act. Norval also sticks more soundbytes in here from Arty. Zephir McGurk's women are explained. He apparently gets whatever ones Arty is not interested in. Oly hears him one night pleading with a woman to please not go through with "it" but never sees the woman. The next day, a number of people have their limbs cut off, but Oly never sees any grief from McGurk.

Oly is oiling Arty before a show, and he mentions her boyfriend to her. He slyly asks her to stay faithful to him. She promptly goes to the Pin Kid's van and breaks up with him, but he doesn't seem upset at all, which makes Oly realize she liked him a lot more than he liked her. Arty goes to visit the Pin Kid's routine and notes that the act isn't too bad, not knowing that Oly has already broken up with him.

Oly visits the twins and massages Elly's muscles. She notices that Elly seems to be coming back mentally, becoming less like a vegetable. Iphy brushes the idea aside.

Arty has a sudden pep talk with Oly and Chick in his van, saying that he needs them to stay with him now, that it is very important. They visit Dr. P.'s van and go inside. She is asleep, thanks to Chick. She is put on a stretcher, and Oly is told to stay in the operating room with Chick as a witness to make sure he does what Arty has told him to do. Oly instead gets sick and passes out on the floor, but Chick completes his task. He fully dismembers all of Dr. P.'s limbs as a response to her rebellion against his Arturan Cult. That night, Arty removes all of the members that were on Dr. P.'s side. Although history will say he killed them, he simply asks them to leave in the middle of the night, which hundreds of them do begrudgingly.

Book 3: Chapter 23, The Generalissimo's Big Gun Analysis

Oly is growing up, and her allegiance to Arty is tested through a new relationship with another man. However, the moment Arty questions it even slightly, she immediately breaks up with the boy to remain faithful to Arty. Arty is very jealous, as usual, but does his best to keep it under control, possibly so as not to alienate Oly like he has alienated the twins, particularly Iphy.



Dr. P.'s full dismemberment is fitting for the surgeon that wanted to cut everything off an Admitted in one operation, rather than stretch it out over years. Chick is fully entrenched in Arty's surgeries now as he chops away Dr. P.'s limbs without much of a fuss.



Book 3: Chapter 24, Catching His Shrieks in Cups of Gold

Book 3: Chapter 24, Catching His Shrieks in Cups of Gold Summary

Chick is fully accepted as the new surgeon, replacing Dr. P. The Admitted are delighted, because everyone loves Chick. Oly asks Chick to impregnate her with Arty's sperm and, after some practicing on the cats, Chick successfully performs the procedure without Arty's knowing.

Mumpo is born at 26 pounds. He eats everything, draining both twins and eating solid foods. Elly, meanwhile, is coming back more and more, but lphy asks Oly not to say anything. lphy is acting more like Elly did before the surgery.

Art finds out that Oly is pregnant through Chick and assumes Pin Kid is the father. Pin Kid disappears, but Oly doesn't think Arty killed him. Arty finally realizes that Oly is pregnant with his child, but doesn't take much interest in the pregnancy. He is more concerned with the imitators of his cult that are springing up across the country.

Arty asks Chick to try to bring Elly back to her full mental capacity again. He also visits Miranda for the first time when she is 2. She appears fully normal and is crying, so Arty has the Arturan Administration Office arrange to have her sent to a convent right away. Oly is not allowed to show any anger or frustration at this.

Book 3: Chapter 24, Catching His Shrieks in Cups of Gold Analysis

Oly has gotten pregnant so that she can give Arty a child to fully worship and love him. Instead, Arty rejects the child and sends her to a convent, which demonstrates that he does not have any love for his family. He acts selfishly and does not have any familial feelings. Oly realizes after Miranda is born that Miranda is far more valuable than Arty could ever appreciate, which demonstrates cracks in Oly's blind obedience to Arty's commands.

Mumpo is seen as a cunning child that even Crystal Lil does not like. He is draining the twins, while Elly is gaining more and more mental strength. Elly's growing strength will prove to be important in the following chapters.



Book 3: Chapter 25, All Fall Down

Book 3: Chapter 25, All Fall Down Summary

Arty is getting ready for a show on the day the family loses everything. Oly walks by the twin's van and sees Crystal Lil screaming for Chick. They all rush in, and there is chaotic fighting in the bedroom. Chick screams for Elly, but Iphy calmly says that she has killed her. Elly apparently regained her senses enough to kill Mumpo, which enraged Iphy. She killed Elly and, as she admits to the crime, she says one final word - Arty - and then dies.

Chick goes berserk and repeats the word. Oly panics and rushes off to warn Arty of the danger coming, but Chick rushes past her. He becomes more and more enraged until he stares at Arty's tent and blows it up into a ball of fire. It blows through the entire camp, but Chick saves Oly and Crystal Lil. Everyone else immediately turns to ashes. Arty is boiled alive in his tank. The family vans, however, remain untouched. Horst the Cat Man sells anything of value and quickly packs up Norval's notes and journals before other reporters find them.

The story now jumps to the present day. Seven years after the firestorm, Oly is allowed by the doctors to bring Crystal Lil to the house on Kearney Street where she will set up residency.

Book 3: Chapter 25, All Fall Down Analysis

The actual disintegration of the Binewski Fabulon happens in only a few sentences. It is a spontaneous and instant death to end the complicated and twisted world that Arty had created through his obsessions and jealousy. It is interesting that Chick allowed only Oly and his mother to live, while killing the remainder of the family. It seems these two were the only ones that cared for Chick besides the twins and so were spared.

The solidity of a home is uncomfortable for Oly, at first. She must learn to stay still and establish roots.



Book 4: Chapter 26, The Swimmers

Book 4: Chapter 26, The Swimmers Summary

Oly plots the murder of Miss Lick and now has trouble in her presence, because she knows she is going to kill her. She comes very close to losing it entirely, but recovers at the last moment. She walks home to the house on Kearney Street and takes out the garbage. Oly asks Miranda to check on Crystal Lil and teaches her the noises that Lil makes in her sleep. Then, she catches a cab.

Book 4: Chapter 26, The Swimmers Analysis

Oly is now having trouble with the idea of murdering Miss Lick, because she realizes that Miss Lick is the first friend Oly has ever had - and they are very similar people. Miss Lick calls her a nickname that Arty used to use, and Oly's past floods her emotions.

Oly also teaches Miranda how to look after her grandmother as she knows that soon, Oly will not be around to help and watch out for either one of them anymore.



Book 4: Chapter 27, Getting to Know You and Your .357 Magnum

Book 4: Chapter 27, Getting to Know You and Your .357 Magnum Summary

Oly returns to Miss Lick's apartment. Miss Lick is genuinely glad to see her. They watch videos together, including one of the footage that she has on Miranda. She has spied on Miranda to get the footage.

Miss Lick takes her to see Jessica H., one of her projects. Jessica laughs when she sees Oly, because she assumes she was also another project. Miss Lick has sexually mutilated Jessica so that she will not be tempted by sex and laughs that she has gotten a lot of money for the operation.

Book 4: Chapter 27, Getting to Know You and Your .357 Magnum Analysis

Oly sees the footage of her own daughter being videotaped like all of the other projects. Next, she meets a project that has been sexually mutilated, a form of keeping women subjugated in many countries. She has voluntarily had this operation for money. Miss Lick's projects have entered an even more twisted version.



Book 4: Chapter 28, One for the Road

Book 4: Chapter 28, One for the Road Summary

Oly visits Miranda for the last time. She doesn't want to see the sketches, yet Miranda tells her she appreciates her body for its unique beauty. She mentions the surgery that she is going to have with Miss Lick and says that she will be in a nursing home for awhile afterwards, and then she will probably move away. Oly does not even get upset.

Instead, the next morning, she gets up and goes to the club an hour before the lifeguard has to leave. She pours ammonia into the steam room tubes. She goes to the bar and gets a drink to calm herself and returns to the pool. They swim together and afterwards, Oly follows Miss Lick as she enters the steam bath. She deadbolts the door behind Miss Lick. Miss Lick yells for help repeatedly.

Oly goes to Miss Lick's locker and, using her combination, opens it to get the gun inside. She opens the door of the steam room, and Miss Lick is lying across the doorway, enraged. She starts to pick Oly up with her arm, and Oly shoots her in her right eye. The police determine it was a murder-suicide since they found a notebook that explains incidents leading up to the crime, but do not give specifics. Finally, Oly has delivered a letter to Miranda, explaining everything that has happened.

Book 4: Chapter 28, One for the Road Analysis

Oly completes her task of killing Miss Lick to save Miranda's unique body. Oly also leaves Miranda with the legacy of the Binewski family, which should encourage her to keep her tail in the future years. In her final days, Miss Lick reminded Oly more and more of Arty so Miss Lick's death not only symbolizes Miranda's future, it also symbolizes Oly's final act of vengeance on her brother.



Characters

Olympia Binewski McGurk

The narrator of the story, Olympia, or Oly as she calls herself, tells the story of her life as an albino hunchback dwarf living with her family. As a member of the Binewski Fabulon, she takes a lot of pride in her unique and eccentric body. She believes that she has been born privileged, because she does not look like the rest of the clones out there.

Nonetheless, Oly is a complicated character. She has a deep need to be loved and needed in her life. While the rest of her family members can base their value off of a tent act, Oly is only worthy enough to be an announcer. She is not skilled enough to bring in the crowds and have her own act. This privilege falls to her Siamese twin sisters and her brother Arty, who has hands and legs that are flippers.

Oly's main goal throughout her childhood is to do whatever her brother Arty commands. In essence, she is the first person that Arty owns and fully committed to him. Nevertheless, after her family disintegrates, she is cut free from the binds to Arty and goes out to make a life of her own. Still needing to be essential in the lives of those she loves, she spies and supports her remaining family members without their knowledge.

Oly's last acts are filled with love and the need to save her daughter Miranda's life. She wants Miranda to appreciate and accept her history, and to see the true beauty in her eccentricities. Through her death, she hopes Miranda will understand her past.

Arturo Binewski

Arturo Binewski, or Arty as the family calls him, is the founder of the Arturan Cult. Arty is an obsessive and jealous man. He was born without hands or feet, but instead has flippers like a fish. Arty's entire life is in reaction to his physical appearance. He tries to cover up his insecurities by becoming overly controlling of everyone and everything else around him. His need to have the most ticket sales in the Fabulon indicates that he directly ties his value to the family with popularity. He is not concerned about money, but instead thirsts for the popularity that can only come through a booming tent act.

In his efforts to woo his crowd, he begins by citing philosophical remarks, but moves to found the Arturan Cult after a woman in the crowd is so moved by his speeches that she screams her desire to be like him. This is a culminating moment in Arty's life, because he finally sees acceptance, love and popularity from the "norms," or normal people that would typically shun him. All of the Binewski children have been separated from normal society throughout their lives. Yet it is Arty who craves attention from the "norms" the most, although he is loudest against them. His cult itself seeks to destroy the "norms" by making them into freaks like himself, although he cloaks it into a philosophical rejection of the standards that society sets up for all normal people.



Arty's obsessions, his malicious pride and seething apathy wreck utter havoc on the Binewski family. Arty has been a killer since he was a child and cannot see the value in his family as human beings, but instead treats them as objects solely for his manipulation. He is psychotic in his reactions to their deaths or altered states. Their existence is solely to serve him, and he achieves their full submission through a variety of power play methods.

Fortunato

The youngest of the Binewski children, Chick is the most powerful child but also the most sensitive. He does not have the vicious feelings that his brother Arty has and easily becomes a pawn under Arty's schemes. He is manipulated by both his father and Arty throughout his life. They treat him poorly and only see him as a means to an end. They never capitalize on the inherent gift that his telekinetic skills are. He is taught only to cheat at poker, become a pickpocket or aid in the surgery of chopping off the limbs of Admitted members of the Arturan cult. For a child with so much to give, he instead spends most of his life in the operating room of a sham surgeon as that is what Arty wishes.

Chick is the most fortunate of all the Binewski children, not only because his telekinetic abilities spared his life, but also because he is a beautiful, golden boy who appears fully normal. He can mingle in society without anyone immediately recognizing his freakish qualities. For this reason, the rest of the Binewski children have some jealousy towards him, but no one compares to Arty. If Arty could have been born with a normal body, he would have truly enjoyed it as he actually despises his freakish qualities. The presence of Chick reminds him of all that he could have been in life.

Rather than use his telekinetic abilities to stop Arty, Chick's sensitive nature mirrors Oly's in the need to be truly necessary to his family. For Chick to be happy, he needs to be helping someone. Only at the end does he realize that he has been manipulated and used for Arty's evil intentions his entire life.

Elektra and Iphigenia Binewski

The twins are Siamese twins who possess an inherent talent on the piano. Their skill and unique appearance is the only tent act in the Fabulon that can compete with Arty's tent act. For this reason, Arty competes with his sisters throughout his life. The sisters have a fan base and many admiring followers, which prompts Arty to create not only followers, but a rabid cult.

The twins do their best to reject Arty's control on their lives, although Iphy is in love with Arty initially. Once she and Elly realize their sexual powers, however, they mature to see themselves in a world outside of Arty's control. They can date men and fall in love with other guys outside of Arty's circle. Unfortunately, Arty still has the means to keep them under his thumb. Because of his control, they are forced to marry a man that attempted to kill them years earlier and is a total madman. They have his child despite an abortion



attempt that Arty cancels. Finally, when Arty sedates them and separates them into two sisters, they never leave one another's side. Even with Elly as a vegetable, Iphy props her up and keeps her close. Without her sister, she cannot survive. In fact, at the hour of their demise, after Iphy kills Elly for killing their child Mumpo, Iphy dies immediately. Her cause of death is unclear, but the reader instinctively knows that it is because of her sister's demise.

Miss Mary Lick

Miss Lick is a lone, solitary figure who lives off of her family's fortune. She is two-dimensional in most aspects of her life and wholly uninteresting. She eats only one version of her family's pre-cooked meals every night for dinner. The only exercise she gets is in her family's pool, swimming laps.

She sees herself as a savior of women. Although her life has been wholly unimaginative, she sees more for the futures of women she chooses as her projects. She will take a poor, uneducated girl whose mother is a prostitute and disfigure her severely. She will pay her and her mother a lot of money so that the woman will voluntarily commit to having the operation. Then, she will educate the girl to have her reach her full potential and give back to society through her career.

The only man in Miss Lick's life has been her father, similar to Oly and Arty's relationship. Her sole purpose in life is to "fix" women, and she is an appreciative listener of the concepts that the Arturan cult provided.

Miranda Binewski

The daughter of Oly and Arty Binewski, Miranda's creation was spawned out of psychological and emotional love, but not physical love. Through Chick's talents, Oly is impregnated with Arty's sperm. Miranda is created to solely worship and love her father, Arty, but as soon as she is born, Oly realizes that she is worth much more than that. She has incredible talents, but is sent off to a convent when she is just two.

For this reason, Miranda is a lost person, struggling to find her own identity in society. Physically, she is a beautiful woman, but she has a tiny tail that confuses her. Does she accept it and embrace her eccentricity, or does she cut it off and attempt to look like every other member of society? She wavers between these concepts until Miss Lick comes along, offering to get rid of her tail free of cost. If Oly had not killed Miss Lick, Miranda might have entered the perpetually-unhappy world of trying to please a society that is wholly unaccepting of its members.

Lillian Hinchcliff Binewski

Lillian Hinchcliff Binewski or Crystal Lil is the mother of the Binewski children. She originally started out as a trapeze artist in Binewski's Fabulon until she fell, prompting



her to change professions as that summer's Geek, a person who bites the heads off of chickens. She falls in love with Alonysius Binewski, and they plan to give their children the best gift in the world — future constant employment just by being themselves. By ingesting a variety of drugs, she purposely creates concoctions with her husband to produce children that the rest of society will term "freaks" for the sake of the show. Nevertheless, Crystal Lil sees the humanness in each of her children and loves them all completely, even the ones who have passed away. She ends up blind, deaf and mad, most likely as a result of the drugs taken over her years of pregnancy.

Alonysius Binewski

The owner of Binewski's Fabulon after his father passes away, Al is in charge of the entire Fabulon cast, including his immediate family. He is a avid hobbyist of medical journals and is very interested in all things pertaining to the medical field, which explains his influence over the breeding of his children. When the children are younger, they see their father as a great hero and savior to them all, but as they mature, Arty takes over the father figure persona. The children quickly see how slow their father truly is.

Horst the Cat Man

Horst is one of the constant characters in the book that is behind the scenes, yet plays an integral role in the family's life. He is actually the one that saves their legacy after the fire by protecting the journals and notes about the cult, while selling off anything of value in the vans. After the children are shot, he helps to bring them home. He is the quiet man standing over the Binewski family, looking out for their needs in a selfless manner.

Norval Sanderson

Norval Sanderson is an unscrupulous reporter who falls in love with the Fabulon after Arty has taken control, and the cult has been created. Initially, he covers Arty and the cult following, but finds himself falling under the spell of the entire act. He leaves his profession to become a maggot seller in the Fabulon, taking notes about Arty along the way. His notes and journals prove to be invaluable as they offer an unbiased report of what goes on during the Fabulon days, giving the reader more insight into the family from a perspective other than Oly's.

Vern Bogner

Later called the Bag Man, Vern unintentionally defines how Arty feels towards "norms" in one single afternoon. After attempting to kill the children and Crystal Lil, Vern is put in jail and then a mental institution. Upon release, he kidnaps his children and kills his wife, putting him back in jail. When budget cuts put him out on the street again, he contacts Arty for a job. Despite his chaotic history and the fact that he once tried to murder Arty, Arty hires him to be a slave to his commands, owning him like everyone

else in the Fabulon. Bag Man eventually impregnates the twins through a quasi-rape, producing Mumpo.



Objects/Places

Binewski Fabulon Fairgrounds

Although these are moving vans that change physical locations every few days, the Fabulon fairgrounds are the stage for everything that happens in Oly's history. It encompasses a large number of people and acts, including Arty's Aqua Man show, the twins' piano playing, the Fly Roper, the Pin Kid and Norval's Transcendental Maggot store. There are also numerous booths for games.

Kearney Street house

Kearney Street is where Oly resides in the present-day until her death. It is where she moves into after the Fabulon disintegrates. She will eventually move her mother from the mental hospital to this house and give Miranda a secret trust fund to live there, rent-free. Here, Oly watches over her loved ones without their knowledge of her existence.

Thomas R. Lick Swimming Pool at the TAC Club

The Thomas R. Lick swimming pool was donated by Miss Mary Lick's father. It's where Miss Mary Lick swims each evening. Its locker room will be the scene where Oly kills her and then herself.

Arty's tent

Arty's tent show is the scene where Arturism is born when Alma Witherspoon yells out that she wants to be just like him. It is ultimately the only place where Arty can be among the "norms" whom he so desperately despises, yet envies. Here, he will establish himself as the leader of Binewski's Fabulon through his increasingly popular tent shows.

Arty's van

When Arty moves out and gets his own van, it is a physical symbolism of his separation from his family. In addition, the van ultimately becomes the headquarters for the Fabulon, as well as the headquarters of his Arturan cult. As its leader, Arty will relay messages from a microphone piped into a room for his Admitted followers. In addition, he will make decisions from this van that affect the entire family and Fabulon staff. He is wary of strangers and has a security door with one-way glass, permitting a security person — typically Oly — to stand nearby with a loaded gun in case there was any trouble.



Elly and Iphy's van

The twins move out when they turn 18, and their van becomes a symbol of freedom away from Arty's rule and obsessive controlling. Their freedom, unfortunately, does not last long.

Schultzes

The schultzes are the portable bathrooms where the twins hide all day on their birthday after they discover they just had their first menstrual cycle.

Transcendental Maggot tent

Norval Sanderson's contribution to Binewski's Fabulon, the maggot tent is where Norval will sell the maggots off the limbs of the Admitted.

Oly's trunk

In Oly's trunk, Oly has collected all of Miranda's past records, including school report cards, progress report cards from the nuns and more. In addition, she has all of Norval Sanderson's journals, notes and related newspaper clippings. It is the full history of the Binewski family in one succinct place.

The 30.06

Vern Bogner's gun, originally his father's, was typically used to hunt unsuccessfully. He uses this gun to try and shoot the Binewski children



Themes

Jealousy

Jealousy is a common theme throughout the book. As the children grow up, they realize their worth is directly related to how popular their tent act is. If they are unique and have a successful show, they are more valued than someone like Oly, who is not freakish enough to command a tent act, but is instead relegated to being an announcer.

Jealousy is what drives Arty. He has been so jealous in the past, in fact, that he has killed other siblings that he feared were more unique and special than him. His younger sister Leona died from an "accidental" suffocation, thanks to Arty's inability to control his jealous rages. If Chick had not had the telekinetic powers he did, he would not have been able to save himself from the same fate.

Although he does not ever admit to it, Arty's separation from the "norms" causes him jealousy. He soothes his jealousy here by sleeping with as many "norm" girls as he wishes, while also establishing a cult whose sole purpose is to maim the "norms." He takes advantage of their low self-esteem and capitalizes on it in a way that allows him to no longer be as jealous of the "norms" but instead see them as pathetic creatures he can control.

Self-Acceptance

Self-Acceptance is a common theme throughout the book and ultimately the moral of the story. Self-acceptance is a key element in all of the characters' lives.

Born with freakish bodies, you would first assume that the Binewski's were shamed by their bodies. Instead, they are proud of their unique traits and feel sorry for the "norms" who all look the same. In fact, Oly wishes that she had more freakish characteristics. The parents have instilled a great sense of pride in the children for their eccentric appearances, telling them of the story of their births as Crystal Lil took a specific recipe of drugs to produce each one individually.

The Chute is a representation to the children of their mother's extreme love for her unusual children. She cannot even part with them at death and for this reason, each child feels the value and love that represents their different physical appearances.

On the other hand, Arturism is a direct response to how most "norms" feel a lot of pressure to be considered normal and beautiful in society. He takes their low self-esteem and manipulates it, having them voluntarily become freaks like him in order to better accept themselves and reject societal pressures to be perfect.



Pride

There are different layers of pride throughout the book. Arty, for example, has a lot of pride in himself, but it twists and becomes malicious. He uses his pride to destroy his family. He wants to control and own everything and everyone. His pride is only satiated when everyone is under his command. It is his pride that ultimately destroys the family. He makes decisions without their consent, including the surgery to physically separate his twin sisters. His pride and belief in his superior intellect dooms him and his family, taking the rest of the Fabulon with it.

On the other hand, Oly has a lot of pride in her body. When she is spontaneously brought on stage to do a striptease at the Glass House, she does not cower as the audience predicts, but instead puts on a show that entices and interests them. She knows exactly what she looks like and will alter her stance to make sure the viewer gets the whole perspective. When she is swimming in the pool, she turns in such a way as to show the children the full scope of her hunchback and shows off her pink eyes. She does not hide her body in any way as she is proud of what she looks like.

Miranda, on the other hand, has a great deal of pride in herself, but is uncertain about her tail. She does not have a history like Oly's that will give her the confidence she needs to carry the tail proudly. Instead, she debates cutting it off to make herself more normal. Her lack of pride in her body is a direct result of the fact that she grew up without the rest of the Binewski's.



Style

Point of View

The story is mainly told by Oly, although after Norval Sanderson is introduced, his journals and notes appear. Also, newspaper clippings will reveal additional information about some of the events surrounding actions that occur in the plot.

Throughout most of the novel, Oly seems to speak directly to the reader. As the novel progresses, however, you learn that she is indeed telling the story of what happened for Miranda's sake. Through this retelling, she will learn of her heritage and explain her present actions of killing Miss Lick.

As Oly is the narrator for most of the story, it is very important when Norval's clippings and journal entries are introduced to the book. In this way, Norval fulfills his somewhat thwarted degree as a journalist by supplying additional information for Oly's tale. Here, you get an unbiased account of what went on. In addition, you can better understand Arty and get an outsider's view of the family, how they see themselves, and how another person sees them treat each other.

Setting

The story switches between Binewski's Fabulon fairgrounds, the family vans and the present-day home of Oly.

While in the Fabulon fairgrounds, the story mainly occurs in the family van, Arty's van, the twin's van and Arty's tent act. The setting gives the reader a sense of permanency in the ever-changing landscape that dictates the Binewskis lives. Despite their physical changes from town to town, they feel a sense of belonging among the tents of the Fabulon and the vans themselves. However, a big reason why Arty's cult of Arturism takes off so well is due to their ability to reach a large audience with each town they drive into.

Interestingly, the way that the Binewski children "move away" to establish their own independence is to become yet another van in the ever-growing line of Binewski vans. In this way, they have their own space and sense of freedom despite being tied to the show and being somewhat unable to move away at all.

Conversely, Oly's sense of family and permanency are nowhere to be found in her home on Kearney Street, although she is surrounded by some family members. She feels awkward in a home at first, not traveling the road like in her childhood.



Language and Meaning

The language of the story is conversational. You are not sure who Oly is addressing throughout the story, and she will also refer to herself in the third person. Finally, in Chapter 24, Oly directly addresses Miranda which helps the reader understand that the entire story has been an explanation of Miranda's past to her. She will theoretically find this document after Oly kills Miss Lick.

While Oly tells most of the story, flipping between the past and the present-day, there are a number of journal entries and quotes from Arty that also help to give more detail to the story. These sections are told in a journalistic mode typical of a reporter, setting the stage and covering a lot of detail that Oly might have missed in her telling of the situation.

The language of both Oly and Norval contrasts to further illustrate that Oly is telling a story, tainted by her emotions, while Norval is supposedly wholly removed from the situation and can be more forthright and honest about what is happening at their camp.

Structure

The structure of the book is written in four books with 28 chapters. The novel changes between the past and present-day. Without the past history, the present-day actions would make no sense to the reader or to Miranda, the person that the novel has been written for.

The pace of the novel is fast and sometimes confusing. Many times, the reader will need to reread a passage to really understand what is happening. Smaller sentences are sometimes filled with opaque descriptions that can be hard to decipher. The subject matter can be gruesome at times, which gives the book a chaotic tone throughout the novel. There is a lot of dialogue, however, which helps to define the characters more thoroughly and help the reader see them more clearly.



Quotes

"What greater gift could you offer your children than an inherent ability to earn a living just by being themselves?" Chapter 1, page 7

"There never was such a snap and twist of the wrist, such a vampire flick of the jaws over a neck or such a champagne approach to the blood. She'd shake her star-white hair and the bitten-off chicken head would skew off into the corner while she dug her rosy little fingernails in and lifted the flopping, jittering carcass like a golden goblet, and sipped! Absolutely sipped at the wriggling guts! She was magnificent, a princess, a Cleopatra, an elfin queen!" Chapter 1, page 6

"They thought to use and shame me but I win out by nature, because a true freak cannot be made. A true freak must be born." Chapter 2, page 20

"I am merely a utensil, a temporary topic for the eternal discussion between her long eye and her deliberate hand." Chapter 3, page 30

"Hey, nit squat These are written by norms to scare norms. And do you know what the monsters and demons and rancid spirits are? Us, that's what. You and me. We are the things that come to the norms in nightmares." Chapter 4, page 46

"I was the only one who knew his dar, bitter meanness and his jagged, rippling jealousy, and his sour yearnings, and still loved him. I also knew how breakable he was. He didn't care if I knew. He didn't care if I loved him. He knew I'd serve him absolutely even if he hurt me." Chapter 7, page 78

"And we suspected, each of us, blankly and viciously, that Papa preferred his norm kid to us. With Chick he was free to go anywhere. We could live only in the show." Chapter 8, page 86

"His fascination with human mechanics certainly came before and probably sparked his idea for manipulating our breeding, and he did have a knack for it." Chapter 10, page 118

" 'Always remember,' my father used to say, 'how much leverage you've got on the norms just in your physical presence.' " Chapter 12, page 151

"Miss Lick's purpose is to liberate women who are liable to be exploited by male hungers. These exploitable women are, in Miss Lick's view, the pretty ones. She feels great pity for them." Chapter 12, page 163

"And those certain few in the bleachers, those stone-eyed kettles boiling with secret pain, received her message. Those who had been waiting finally found a place to go." Chapter 14, page 184



"I ended up with an eighty-year-old veterinarian who was Grand Wheezar of his local KKK congregation. I told him that my mother had just confessed, on her deathbed, that she had gone down with a pecan picker and I was actually sired by an octoroon Catholic communist." Chapter 16, page 199

"The younges of the Binewski children, Fortunate evidently serves as chore boy and workhorse for the others. He is generally depreciated for his lack of abnormality and has been made to feel dramatically inferior to his 'more gifted' siblings. A reversal of the position a deformed child occupies in a normal family." Chapter 19, page 221

"Are you swallowing your own line of shit, Arty Binewski? Aren't you forgetting that you're just a two-bit freak with a gimmick?" Chapter 22, page 269

"There are those whose own vulgar normality is so apparent and stultifying that they strive to escape it. They affect flamboyant behavior and claim originality according to the fashionable eccentricities of their time." Chapter 23, page 282

"Am I the first person who's ever liked her? It makes me sad. She's pretty loveable, after all. She knows how to enjoy things, and she's so decent it's scary." Chapter 27, page 333



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the concept of self-love and self-esteem in this book. How does it affect the characters? How does it affect those outside of the Binewski family? Why do the Binewskis see themselves as unique and therefore more valuable than the rest of society?

Discuss pride in the book. What different forms of pride are shown in the novel and demonstrated by the different characters?

Discuss the importance of family and its impact on a person's character. How are the Binewskis different from other families? What about Miss Lick's family upbringing made her both similar and very different from Oly?

Sexuality and pregnancy play big roles in this novel. Explain how sexual awareness and power are used in this novel through the twins Elly and Iphy, and how Oly uses her pregnancy.

Why do you feel the Arturan cult was so popular among the people that came to Arty's shows? What about his message enthralled them so much that they would give up everything they owned to be a part of his cult-like religion?

Is Miss Lick's form of Arturism the same as what Arty established in his cult? In what ways are their actions similar, and in what way are they different?

Explain how Crystal Lil and Al controlled their children's breeding and consequent births. Why do you think they did this? Compare this to Oly and the twins' pregnancies.

Explain the separation the children have between themselves and society. They experience a physical separation, because Papa never allows them to play with the rest of the normal children. However, they have a psychological separation from them, as well. What kind of impact does that have for the Binewski children?