

Good in Bed Study Guide

Good in Bed by Jennifer Weiner

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Plot Summary

Good in Bed, Jennifer Weiner's debut novel, features Cannie Shapiro, a twenty-eight-year-old writer in Philadelphia. Cannie is a typical twenty-something in her desire to lose weight, her frustration with her job, and her quest for love. Cannie is smart, sassy, and wickedly funny. She has a very supportive, if off-beat, family, great friends, and a loyal dog named Nifkin.

The book opens with Cannie reading a column in a national women's magazine entitled, "Good in Bed". The article is entitled "Loving a Larger Woman" and is written by Cannie's ex-boyfriend, Bruce. Although the woman is only referred to as C, Cannie quickly realizes that the article is about her. Cannie is humiliated and immediately enrolls in a weight loss program, where she meets a kind doctor whom she calls Dr. K.

Cannie's self esteem takes a nosedive and she begins to feel like Bruce might be her only chance at love, so she tries desperately to win him back, yet to no avail. When his father unexpectedly dies, Bruce turns to Cannie for comfort and they end up having sex, which results in Cannie getting pregnant. Bruce gets a new girlfriend, and Cannie's life becomes a wild ride. She meets and befriends a famous actress, sells a screenplay to a big Hollywood studio, and unexpectedly finds her father, whom she has not seen or spoken to in several years.

When Cannie has an accident and prematurely delivers her baby, whose health is then questionable, she realizes that there is more to life than being thin. Worrying about the well-being of her premature daughter, Cannie cannot eat and spends her days walking around the city. She ends up achieving the body she always wanted, only to discover that there are other things in life that are much more important.

Cannie's baby lives, Dr. K and Cannie fall in love, and Cannie finally accepts herself as she is, body and all. She ends up publishing an article entitled "Loving a Larger Woman" in the same national magazine which originally ran Bruce's article. The book ends with Cannie accepting herself, her body, and her family, and well on her way to living happily ever after.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Good in Bed, Jennifer Weiner's debut novel, features Cannie Shapiro, a twenty-eight-year-old writer in Philadelphia. Cannie is a typical twenty-something in her desire to lose weight, her frustration with her job, and her quest for love. Cannie is smart, sassy, and wickedly funny. She has a very supportive, if off-beat, family, great friends, and a loyal dog named Nifkin.

Cannie is an entertainment reporter at the Philadelphia examiner. Her best friend, Samantha, calls her at work and tells her to buy the new Moxie magazine and read page 132. Page 132 is an article entitled "Loving a Larger Woman" by Cannie's ex-boyfriend, Bruce, who writes a new column called "Good in Bed" as a guest columnist for Moxie. Cannie scans the article and is distressed to discover that the article is about her, specifically that the article chronicles how the author, Bruce, felt about "Loving a Larger Woman". She leaves work and confronts Bruce, who says truthfully she is fat but he loved her anyway. Cannie calls him small and goes home to read the article.

The article focuses on the fact that C., as Cannie is referred to in the article, is an overweight woman, but that Bruce loved her. His problem was not that she was large, but how this fact affected their life together. Public perception played a large part, as did the fact that C. was not happy with herself. C's low self-esteem and constant attempts to diet or appear invisible were the real problem, not her size.

Cannie reminisces about how she met Bruce and thinks about the three years they were together. Cannie thought Bruce was attractive, and she initiated sexual relations with him. It is discovered that Cannie is much more sexually experienced than Bruce, which she considers ironic given that his column is entitled "Good in Bed". Three months prior to the publication of the article, Cannie told Bruce she wanted to take a break. After reading the article, Cannie is lonely, bitter, and sad.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter introduces us to the main character, Cannie Shapiro. It also introduces two other key characters, Bruce and Samantha. Cannie's relationship with these two characters is set up immediately. Cannie's quick wit is also evident right from the first chapter.

This chapter also introduces one of the themes that is evident throughout the novel, that of acceptance, or lack thereof, at the beginning of the book. Cannie lets on immediately how she feels about herself. She has been on Weight Watchers as well as other diets, constantly thinks about food and is ashamed to be considered fat. Cannie obviously thinks poorly of her size and worries what others think of her as well. She does not accept herself.



Another theme introduced here is family. This chapter explains some of Cannie's family history. Her parents divorced when she was young and her relationship with her father appears to be nonexistent. Cannie's mother is gay and her partner is a woman named Tanya, who Cannie does not particularly like. Cannie expresses that what she will miss the most about her relationship with Bruce is his dad, whom she really liked. Cannie also indicates that Bruce is Jewish, which in her mind made him more suitable for a long term relationship.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Cannie is in bed when her mother calls and insists on meeting Cannie for a cooking demonstration in a shop. Cannie goes to pick her mother up and describes the neighborhood she grew up in. Cannie divides the houses there into two types: those where the family is still intact and those that house single parent families. The difference is that single family houses are in less pristine condition, with the lawn not mowed, the exterior not repainted as often, and the cars in the driveway not as new. On Saturdays, the single family homes have cars lined up and down the street with fathers coming to collect kids for weekend visits.

Cannie remembers what it was like for her growing up on that street, when her father used to show up for visits, long before he disappeared from their lives for good. Cannie, her brother, Josh, and sister, Lucy, used to be taken into the city to stay in his condo. Over the years, visits became less frequent and eventually stopped altogether. Cannie confides that she coped with having an absent father when she was a teenager by being tough and sarcastic, character traits that are still evident in the adult Cannie.

At the cooking demonstration, Cannie's mother, Anne, wants to discuss Bruce's article. She indicates that Cannie was never really in love with Bruce, and that she thinks Cannie might be more upset about the fact that Bruce has a monthly column in a magazine rather than the fact that the article is about her. Anne also blames herself for how Cannie feels about relationships. She alludes to the fact that Cannie's father was not always a good husband or father. Anne tells Cannie that there are a lot of men, or women, out there and that Cannie will meet someone more deserving of her love.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The theme of family is more fully developed in this chapter, specifically how Cannie's childhood helped her to develop traits that helped her adapt, like sarcasm and getting by on her own. Cannie having an absent father had an impact on how she felt about Bruce's dad and how she admired the fact that he loved his family and spent time with them. Cannie appears to miss being a part of that dynamic more than she misses her relationship with Bruce.

This chapter also introduces another of the book's main themes, that of fitting in and adhering to social norms. Cannie continues in this chapter to speak negatively of Tanya, Anne's life partner. Cannie is not upset that her mother is gay, just that Tanya is not a good choice for a partner. Tanya appears to be a loyal and loving spouse, but to Cannie she is brash and slightly obnoxious. Cannie concentrates on Tanya's outward lack of social etiquette rather than on her obvious love and loyalty to Anne.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Cannie is visiting the Philadelphia Weight and Eating Disorders Center. There is a new study that she wants to be part of that she hopes will help her lose weight. She is in a waiting room with a number of other women that are overweight. Cannie notes that the receptionist is very slim. Cannie begins to talk to the lady sitting next to her, Lily. Lily wishes Phen Fen was still on the market because it was the only thing that ever worked to keep the weight off. Cannie reminds her that it caused heart problems, to which Lily responds she would rather have heart problems than be fat.

Cannie is filling out a long questionnaire about her weight history, family weight history, emotional well being, favorite foods, and other questions. Cannie has a self-deprecating sense of humor and is very disparaging about how much she weighs and what she thinks of herself. She gives her reason for being there as "humiliated in national publication".

Cannie meets with the doctor, whom she calls Dr. K. She describes him as tall, with a deep voice and kind eyes. He asks Cannie to elaborate on her answers to some of the questions. She tells him she was in therapy briefly when her mother began her relationship with Tanya, and she didn't feel it was a positive experience. Cannie is satisfied with her life and enjoys her job but desperately wants to be thin.

Dr. K reminds Cannie that the best motivation for losing weight is for yourself, not because you're angry over a magazine article. He tells her that his program will help her lose ten percent of her body weight, which frustrates Cannie because she feels that is not near enough. Dr. K tells Cannie that with her physical frame and her heredity, she may never be as thin as she wants.

Dr. K finds out that the Good in Bed article is about Cannie. He tells her that he thinks it is a sensitive and well articulated article. As Cannie is leaving, Lily is also holding a copy of the Good in Bed article. She tells Cannie, "This guy really gets it. Can you imagine the idiot that let someone like this get away?"

Chapter 3 Analysis

How Cannie feels about her weight affects all aspects of her life. She thinks her weight will prevent her from ever finding love. It also colors how she sees the world, which in her mind is comprised of people that are slim, and those that are not. Though Cannie recognizes that she has a good life, she is still unsatisfied because of her weight. However, though she is desperate to be thin, she is also responsible and eats healthy and exercises. Unlike Lily, who would risk heart problems to be slim, Cannie understands that health is more important.



It is interesting that others see the Good in Bed article as a sensitively written article, yet Cannie is humiliated by it. Cannie's humiliation is not because the article was written about her, but because it forces her to face up to the fact that she is a Larger Lady. Her remark "I never thought of myself that way . . . as a larger woman. I mean, I know I am . . . larger . . . and I know I should lose some weight" indicates that her biggest problem is admitting that she is fat, even though she has always felt overweight.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Cannie has a dog named Nifkin. She acquired him from some former colleagues that no longer wanted him. Cannie feels strongly that everyone should have a dog because they give your life purpose and offer unconditional love. While Cannie is at the dog park with Nifkin, she meets a cute engineer named Steve, who asks her out for a drink sometime. Cannie agrees and is flattered and excited that someone so attractive wants to date her.

Cannie goes home to prepare for an interview with Jane Sloan for a piece she is writing in *The Philadelphia Examiner*, the newspaper that she writes for. Cannie covers the Hollywood beat as an entertainment reporter. Cannie is excited to meet Jane because Jane has directed a number of movies that Cannie admires. Cannie herself has written a screenplay and hopes that she and Jane will hit it off at the interview, and that Jane will read the screenplay and love it. The interview takes place over lunch and also includes the actor starring in Jane's latest movie. Jane throws Cannie off because she is abrupt and orders just lettuce for lunch. Cannie feels inadequate and cannot think of any questions to ask. The interview ends quickly.

Cannie calls her best friend, Samantha, to commiserate about the interview. She then leaves for her class at the Weight and Eating Disorders Center. The class meets with a nurse that is explaining portion control and the need to burn more calories than are consumed. Cannie is impatient with the seminar and tells the nurse that everyone in the room has taken part in various weight loss programs and that the nurse need not waste everyone's time giving them information that is certainly not new. Cannie tells her that fat people are not dumb. They just want the drugs, since that is the only new thing being offered by this program. The nurse flees to get Dr. K., who treats the group with respect and compassion. He talks to them about emotional eating, and separating physical feelings of hunger from emotional pain. Cannie is touched by Dr. K and connects with the idea of emotional eating.

Cannie leaves the Center and meets Sam at the gym. She tells Sam that she misses Bruce and may have made a mistake breaking up with him. Sam reminds Cannie of all the reasons she broke up with Bruce, even before his article hit newsstands. Cannie says she just wants to talk to him again. Sam tries to discourage Cannie from doing this.

At home, Cannie has a message from Steve inviting her to dinner. She happily accepts and meets him at a restaurant. At dinner, Steve tells her that he is not interested in dating her; he is just looking for new friends. Cannie feels humiliated and sneaks out of the restaurant, leaving Steve by himself. Cannie chastises herself for even thinking that someone like Steve would be interested in her.



Cannie is distraught and lonely and decides to call Bruce. Bruce tells Cannie that his father has just died and asks her to come to the funeral. Cannie readily agrees, thinking that the death of his father will make Bruce realize that he should be with her.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Cannie takes pride in her job, and knows that she is intelligent and a good person. She is aware that she has a lot to offer, but feels that her weight cancels out all of her good traits. Cannie assumes that Steve does not want to date her because of her weight, even though there is no indication that this is the case. As soon as she is rejected by Steve, Cannie wants to get back together with Bruce, even though she previously thought he was not a very good boyfriend. Cannie feels like no one else will ever want her and that Bruce understands her.

The theme of societal norms and fitting in is evident in this chapter. Cannie is heavily influenced by the opinions of others. She herself thought that Bruce's article was mean and insensitive, but hearing others say that it was thoughtful and sensitive makes Cannie reconsider her opinion. She even goes so far as to want Bruce back. What also drives Cannie back to Bruce is the rejection by Steve. Cannie recognizes that she is a good person with a lot to offer, but Steve's rejection makes her think she is unworthy of a decent boyfriend.

Cannie is also sensitive when she feels she is being patronized. She uses sarcasm as a defense and assumes that she is being underestimated because of her size. She is also sensitive to what others think, even Sam, her best friend. Cannie does not tell Sam what happened with Steve because she does not want to be pitied.

Cannie, though she believes she is overweight, gives every indication of being healthy. She eats healthy food, works out regularly, and walks. She completely connects with Dr. K's discussion of emotional eating, and several times in the book thus far, there are indication that she does this, like when she orders the whole tray of deserts after the interview with Jane Sloan.

Cannie's narrative on how Nifkin is a source of unconditional love and gives purpose to her days could be construed as foreshadowing Cannie's upcoming pregnancy. Cannie says that having Nifkin forces her to be responsible because he relies on her completely. When Cannie becomes pregnant, the same will also be true of her baby.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Cannie is at Mr. Guberman's funeral. Bruce is cold to Cannie and his friends are hostile towards her. Bruce's aunt tells Cannie that Bruce loves her and she should be with him. Cannie goes to the wake at the Guberman house afterward and follows Bruce throughout the house. Eventually, Cannie, Bruce, and Bruce's friends end up in Bruce's bedroom. When Bruce's friends leave, Cannie seduces Bruce and they have sex. Cannie tries very hard to make sure it is good for Bruce. Afterwards, Cannie takes this as a sign that they are getting back together and wants to stay and cuddle. Bruce tells her to leave. Cannie believe that Bruce will come around eventually.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Cannie's low self-worth is evident here. Cannie was rejected by Steve and now values herself so little that she is willing to follow Bruce around even though he and his friends treat her badly. It is also evident that Bruce does not want to get back together with Cannie, though he still desires her enough to have sex with her.

The previous chapter had an excerpt from Bruce's column about wearing condoms, which Cannie scoffs at because she knows that he hates to wear them. Cannie was on birth control while they were together, but they have now been broken up for three months. No discussion is given in this chapter to whether Cannie stayed on birth control, or whether Bruce is wearing a condom. This can be construed as foreshadowing Cannie's upcoming pregnancy predicament.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Cannie is remembering her childhood, and is specifically thinking about her father. She remembers that he loved her once, but that at some point he became a bitter, insulting man for whom nothing was ever good enough. He constantly criticized Cannie's appearance and also insulted Cannie's younger siblings, Josh and Lucy. Cannie's father left when Cannie was twelve to live with a twenty-seven-year-old woman. Two days later, he moved back. Cannie pinpoints this as the moment he stopped loving them. Cannie coped with this by trying to be invisible through her teens. When Cannie was eighteen, her father left for good and he re-married and had two more children. He insisted that Cannie attend Princeton or he would not pay her tuition fees, which forced Cannie to attend Princeton instead of the college she wanted. Ironically, the money her father gave her was not enough to cover the fees at Princeton anyway. Cannie worked while she attended college, but hated Princeton. She uses writing as an escape and compares it to being in the ocean.

Cannie recognizes that her relationship with her father affects how she enters relationships with other men. She is frustrated that even though she knows this, she let Bruce go, someone that Cannie feels truly understands her.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The theme of family is very evident in this chapter. Cannie is extremely aware of the impact her father's treatment and eventual abandonment had on her adult life. The rest of Cannie's family is also detailed more fully, though the effect of the divorce on her mother and siblings is never described in detail. Cannie's father is also contrasted with Bruce's father, who loved his family and treated them well.

It is interesting that Cannie disapproves of Tanya as a partner for her mother, even though Tanya clearly loves Anne, treats her respectfully, and is loyal. It seems that Tanya treats Anne much better than Bruce treats Cannie, yet Cannie thinks Bruce is good enough for her, while Tanya is so clearly not good enough for Anne. This indicates how little Cannie values her own worth and what she values in a partner.

The swimming motif that is evident throughout the novel is introduced here. Cannie compares writing to being in the ocean, which she considers a safe place. Her description of being in the water can be compared to the safety of being in the womb.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Cannie has not seen Bruce in six weeks and has lost eight pounds. At the Weight and Eating Disorders Center, Cannie is scheduled for a physical and some blood work. Dr. K is worried about Cannie and does not think the weight loss is good. He suggests that Cannie see a therapist.

Cannie continues to call Bruce even though he does not call back, ends their conversations quickly, and refuses to see her. Anne, Sam, and Cannie's colleagues all say that she needs to move on. They tell her to stop obsessing and stop calling him. Cannie recognizes that her behavior is pathetic, but she misses Bruce and thinks he is the only one who will ever love her. Cannie believes she made a mistake when she broke up with him.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Cannie is oblivious to the fact that Dr. K finds her interesting and thinks she is healthy and not in need of weight loss. Cannie thinks Dr. K is nice looking and gentle, but with her self esteem so low she does not consider the fact that a handsome, intelligent man could be interested in her, so she does not even see the signs. Cannie is very open and honest with Dr. K and shares her innermost feelings with him. He is patient, kind, and concerned. It is evident that Dr. K likes Cannie just as she is.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Cannie is going to New York to interview Maxi Ryder, a famous actress. Maxi stars in big budget movies and is well known for getting dumped by her co-stars. Right before the interview, Cannie reads Bruce's latest article in Moxie. At the interview location, Cannie is informed by Maxi's publicist, April, that Maxi will not be doing Cannie's interview because she is only giving interviews to the large papers. Cannie pleads with April to get an interview with Maxi, but April threatens to call security.

Cannie is frustrated that she traveled all the way to New York for nothing, and is also upset about Bruce's newest article. She goes to the hotel restroom in tears and cursing Maxi Ryder. Maxi herself is actually in the bathroom crying and smoking a cigarette, and demands to know why she is being badmouthed. Cannie explains the situation and admits that it is not really Maxi's fault. Maxi is upset about her recent break-up and the two lament their broken hearts. Cannie tells Maxi the whole story about Bruce and the break-up and the article in Moxie. Maxi admits that she has read the column.

Maxi surprises Cannie. She is very nice, down-to-earth, and business savvy. As an actress, Maxi has her entire evening scheduled by her publicist for photo opportunities. Maxi decides to blow them all off to spend the day with Cannie, and agrees to give Cannie an interview. They go to the spa, shopping, out for lunch, and then to a nightclub. Maxi tells Cannie that their lives are ruled by other people's perception of their bodies: Cannie because she feels too fat, and Maxi because she has to maintain an unrealistic Hollywood body standard.

They get drunk and Maxi tells Cannie, from experience, that the best way to get over Bruce is to hate him. Cannie says she cannot do that because she thinks there is still a chance that they can get back together. Maxi insists that Cannie can do better, but that if she wants Bruce, she should just call him and lay it all out. Either they will get back together or Cannie can move on.

It is one o'clock in the morning and Cannie decides to call Bruce from Maxi's cell phone. She wakes him up and there is another woman there. Cannie hangs up and decides it is time to get over Bruce. She asks Maxi to teach her how to hate him. Cannie and Maxi get drunk and leave in a cab. Cannie gives Maxi her manuscript and then passes out. Maxi insists that she and Cannie are friends and that Maxi will take care of her.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter introduces the theme of judgment and assumption. Cannie is surprised to learn that Maxi is a real estate mogul. Maxi is beautiful and an actress, so Cannie is surprised to learn that she is also smart. It is interesting that Maxi ends up being the person that Cannie hoped Jane Sloane would be. Cannie thought that because Jane



directed movies that Cannie admired, she would be the smart and personable woman that Maxi turned out to be. Maxi makes movies that Cannie does not admire, so Cannie assumed she was just a Hollywood bimbo.

The theme of social perceptions and the social pressure that women feel is more closely examined in this chapter. Maxi draws a parallel between how both women are judged by how much they weigh, even though their bodies are very different. Maxi is trying to tell Cannie that being thin does not exempt a person from feeling societal pressure. Maxi is basically telling Cannie that the problem is not her body, it's her head.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Cannie wakes up in the penthouse suite of a New York hotel. There is a note from Maxi taped to her forehead telling Cannie to feel better, that there is a car waiting to drive her back to Philadelphia, and to please call. Maxi leaves her phone and fax numbers and e-mail address.

Back in Philadelphia, Bruce is waiting at Cannie's apartment. He tells her that he is seeing someone else and wanted to tell Cannie before she reads about it in his next column. Cannie is heartbroken and calls Sam, who reminds Cannie that she broke up with Bruce for a reason and that the only reason she wants him back is because he is no longer available.

Dr. K. calls Cannie at work to tell her that she is being disqualified from the study based on the results of her blood work. Cannie panics and Dr. K assures her that she is in good health, but is pregnant. Dr. K says that if she decides not to keep the baby, she can be reinstated into the study, but if she chooses to stay pregnant, he can arrange for her to get her money back. Cannie assumes he is being nice because he is a right-to-lifer and wants her to keep the baby.

Cannie does not want to deal with making a decision about the pregnancy and wishes that she was not pregnant. She decides to go home to her mother's for Thanksgiving and think about what she is going to do. Cannie admits to herself that she wants to be back together with Bruce because of what happened with Steve. Cannie thinks that Steve is the epitome of what is available to her in the dating world, meaning guys that do not want to date her.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The theme of family is again evident in this chapter. Though Cannie thinks poorly of Tanya, she obviously sees her home as a refuge. Early in the chapter, Cannie says that Thanksgiving at her mom's house is not something she wants to do. However, when she is in need of support and a place to clear her head, she goes home to her mother.

Cannie has also finally accepted that Bruce is over her and not coming back. She does not tell him about the pregnancy because her experience with Bruce has taught her that he would not be supportive, regardless of what she decides about the pregnancy. This is indicative of Cannie's low opinion of herself at this point; she wants Bruce even though she recognizes that he is unsupportive. Cannie's low self-esteem is also evident when she admits to herself that she only wants Bruce because she was rejected by Steve. Cannie agrees with her family and friends that Bruce was not a very good boyfriend, but she thinks that he is the best that someone like her can get.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Cannie is recalling her first summer internship at a newspaper. One employee kept brushing against her breasts and her boss only gave her photocopying to do. This was the summer that Cannie first began standing up for herself. She dropped something on the employee that was touching her and told her boss that she had to start getting real work or her internship would not count for college credit.

Cannie is recalling this as she debates what to do about the pregnancy. She is also thinking about how she first found out about Tanya's relationship with her mother. Anne called Cannie at work to tell her that she was gay and that her girlfriend had moved in. Cannie was shocked and needed some time to process the information. Bruce tells Cannie at the time that she should be happy for her mother. Cannie is irritated by this since Bruce comes from a family where he would never have to deal with the issue and Cannie is jealous. Cannie has a hard time accepting Anne and Tanya's relationship and goes to see a therapist, whom she does think was particularly helpful.

Right after Anne shares her news, Tanya also calls Cannie to introduce herself and tells Cannie all about her history of sexual abuse and her previous girlfriend who was co-dependent. Cannie thinks Tanya over shares. At Christmas that year, Cannie discovers that her old bedroom has been given to Tanya to store her loom and other belongings. Cannie is very put out by this. Cannie and her siblings agree that the issue is not that their mother is gay, but that they do not approve of her choice of partner.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The theme of family is evident again in this chapter. Cannie and her siblings love their mother and want what is best for her. Though their father left, there is obviously a lot of love and support in the Shapiro family. It seems that the real issue is that none of the Shapiro siblings want to admit a new person into this dynamic, so they reject Tanya on superficial grounds and think their mother could do better.

Bruce tells Cannie that she is being judgmental about Anne and Tanya. She recognizes this, but is also jealous of the normal families that Bruce and his friends have. This ties in with the theme of social norms that is evident throughout the book. Cannie wishes that she could have a normal family like Bruce and his friends instead of just accepting her own family for the loving and supportive unit that it is.

Cannie's recollection of how she stood up for herself at her summer internship could be construed as indicative that she intends to begin standing up for herself again.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

It is Thanksgiving and Cannie and her siblings are at their mom's house with Anne and Tanya. There are also family friends that are at Thanksgiving dinner. Lucy announces that she has found an agent that has booked her a photo shoot. Cannie worries sometimes about her sister's life choices, but vows to not judge and to be a better person.

On her last day of Thanksgiving break, Cannie goes swimming with just her mom at the Jewish Community Center. She knows that if she is going to terminate the pregnancy that she has to do it soon. She does not realize until that moment that she had already decided in her heart that she is keeping the baby. In the locker room, Cannie's mother tells her that she knows Cannie is pregnant. Anne is ecstatic that Cannie has decided to keep the baby.

Cannie goes back to Philadelphia. She knows that being a single parent will be tough, but she is willing to do it. She cleans her apartment and makes a list of healthy food to buy. Cannie is sad, but not as heartbroken as she was. She checks her answering machine and Bruce has not called. She says, "He loved me once, but he doesn't love me anymore and that's not the end of the world".

Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter marks the beginning of Cannie's journey toward acceptance. She has decided to accept her sister's life choices, and to accept the fact that Bruce is no longer a part of her life. She has also accepted the fact that she is pregnant and makes a conscious decision to make the necessary changes in her life.

The swimming motif is again mentioned here. Cannie has not gone swimming with her mom since Tanya moved in with Anne. Cannie's new attitude also includes a return to an activity that she enjoys doing with her mom. Her return to swimming is symbolic of Cannie's newfound acceptance of herself and her family.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Cannie tells Samantha that she is pregnant and Sam assumes that Cannie is going to terminate the pregnancy. She is upset to hear that Cannie intends to keep the baby. Sam tells Cannie that her whole life will change, that meeting men will be even harder as a single mother. Sam also suggests that Cannie is keeping the baby to hang onto Bruce. Cannie informs her that she does not intend to even tell Bruce. Sam tells Cannie that she should tell Bruce, that he has a right to know, and that he would be a good father. She also says that Bruce could find out and then sue for custody.

Cannie goes to work and lets her boss Betsy know that she is pregnant. Betsy is very supportive, but tells Cannie to keep it quiet at work for now. They work out the details of time off and schedule for returning to work. Cannie plans to take six weeks of paid leave, an additional six weeks of unpaid leave and then return to work part time.

Cannie sees her doctor and finds out her due date is June 15th. She gets vitamins, folic acid, and lots of pamphlets of information. Cannie's last stop of the day is to see Dr. K. She wants to let him know that she will be keeping the baby and therefore withdrawing from his program. He says that he can get her a refund, or that she can use the money towards a nutrition course that the Center is offering. Dr. K's kindness makes Cannie start to cry. Dr. K brings her to the rooftop to see an amazing view of the city, hoping to make her feel better.

Dr. K encourages Cannie to talk to him. She tells him how she got pregnant and that she has not decided yet when or if she should tell Bruce. She also admits that she still misses Bruce and worries that she does not know if she broke up with him because he was the wrong guy, or because her parents' marriage has caused her to believe that no guy will ever be the right guy.

Dr. K tells her that no matter the situation, if he were a father, he would want to know. He also tells Cannie that she reminds him of his sister, who died when he was nine. His sister was very beautiful, but never thought she was good enough because of her weight. He also tells Cannie that he is half Jewish. He begins to ask her something, but notices that she is cold and brings her back inside. Cannie thinks he may have been about to ask her out, but with everything that happened with Bruce and Steve she no longer trusts her instincts.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Societal norms are further examined in this chapter. Sam tells Cannie that life as a single mother will be hard because she will find it harder to meet men. The stigma against single mothers is alluded to here. The stigma that Cannie will face at work being pregnant is also alluded to by her boss, Betsy, who tells Cannie to keep her pregnancy



from her colleagues. It is evident that Cannie is beginning to change because Samantha's and Betsy's allusion to the stigma she will face does not sway her from her decision.

Cannie is facing what anyone with an unplanned pregnancy would be facing. Some of the people in her life are supportive; others do not understand her decision. Cannie herself is struggling with whether to tell the father. This is all very true to how many women struggle with these issues.

Cannie obviously considers Dr. K at least a friend. She goes to tell him in person that she has decided to keep the baby. This can be considered foreshadowing, since it is now obvious that Dr. K is important to Cannie. Dr. K telling Cannie that he is Jewish furthers this point, since it is known that Cannie considers this important.

Dr. K again lets Cannie know that he likes her just as she is. He compares her to his sister, whom he says was beautiful but never thought so because of her weight. He is telling Cannie that her weight is not an issue to those that love her, only to herself.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

It is early December. Cannie decides to write Bruce a letter to let him know that she is pregnant and keeping the baby. The letter says that she does not expect anything from him, but that telling him is the right thing to do. She indicates that he can be as involved with the child as he wants, or not. She sends the letter and waits for a response.

In the meantime, Cannie spends Christmas with her family and begins to tell more friends and relatives about the pregnancy. She keeps in touch over e-mail with Dr. K and with Maxi, both of whom offer to help in any way they can.

Cannie reads Bruce's December column, which is about public displays of affection. More time passes and she still doesn't hear from him. His February column features a full page photo of him in his boxers in a bed with a beautiful woman. Cannie continues to clean her apartment and wait for the baby's arrival. She boxes up everything from Bruce and turns her study into a nursery. All of her mother's friends have sent things from when they had children, including clothes, books, a car seat and a stroller. Cannie reads to her belly every night and then dances.

Cannie is feeling great physically but she is mildly depressed that she is pregnant and without a partner. Everywhere she looks, outside and in pregnancy books, the pregnant woman always has a partner. Cannie apologizes to her unborn child that it has no father. She still has not heard from Bruce.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Cannie is very conscious of societal norms and perceptions. Seeing that other pregnant women have partners, even in books, makes Cannie feel inadequate. She has the continual support of her family and friends, yet Cannie depressed not to have a man.

The theme of family continues in this chapter. Cannie is spending a lot more time with her own mother. Bringing a child into the world has made her more conscious of spending time with her family. However, Cannie continues to ignore Tanya and does not accept her.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Cannie is out shopping with Sam and Nifkin. They run into Dr. K, whom Cannie almost does not recognize because he is not wearing doctor clothes. He introduces himself to Samantha as Peter. Samantha takes Nifkin and leaves Cannie alone with Dr. K, who offers to come shopping with Cannie. They go for breakfast, then to New Jersey to shop. While shopping, Dr. K is patient and attentive and carries Cannie's bags for her. He also buys Nifkin a treat while Cannie is in the restroom. When they get back to Philadelphia, Dr. K brings Cannie's bags inside and offers to put together her crib, which is still dissembled in the nursery.

While Dr. K is at Cannie's apartment, Maxi calls to tell Cannie that her studio, Intermission, would like to buy the screenplay that Cannie gave Maxi the first day they met. Maxi would play the lead in the movie. Cannie is excited, and touches her belly, where she feels the baby move for the first time. Cannie compares her baby moving to the ocean.

Chapter 14 Analysis

While Cannie is out shopping with Dr. K, she realizes that her depression has lifted and she is happy. She does not attribute this to the time she spends with Dr. K. Sam also seems to like Dr. K, while she did not like Bruce. Even Nifkin likes Dr. K and really hated Bruce. This foreshadows the point where Cannie will finally realize that Dr. K is a good man and a good match for her. Cannie's loved ones are like a barometer for the men in Cannie's life and how good they are.

Symbolism is apparent throughout this chapter. Cannie feels the sun on her face and realizes that she is happy. Cannie's depression is lifting and her career is about to take off, symbolized by when she feels the new life inside her move for the first time. The swimming motif is also alluded to here when Cannie says that her baby moving is like a big ocean wave.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Cannie flies to Hollywood to meet an agent so that she can sell her screenplay. She is going to sign with Maxi's agent and the studio has given her a suite at the Beverly Wilshire hotel for the night. She flies first class and takes Nifkin with her. While she is on the plane, she reads Bruce's column in the April issue of Moxie. It is about how he does not love C. anymore but that it still hurts to think about her. Cannie still has not heard from him since she sent the letter.

Maxi arranges for Cannie to have her hair and make-up done and they go to a party. Maxi mingles, and Cannie is called fat by a young Hollywood starlet, whom Cannie then humiliates in front of her friends. Cannie then sees her idol, Adrian Stadt, but is too shy to talk to him. Maxi arranges an introduction, and Adrian suggests that he and Cannie leave the party.

Adrian is drunk and possibly on drugs and begins kissing Cannie. He suggests that they drive to the beach. Cannie drives and when they get there, Adrian promptly passes out. He is sweating and non-responsive, and Cannie is worried, so she calls Dr. K for advice. Dr. K assures Cannie that Adrian is fine, and Cannie calls Maxi, who gives her directions back to her house. The two girls bring Adrian, who is still passed out, inside. Cannie, content, falls asleep.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Cannie's evolution becomes more evident in this chapter as Cannie is obviously feeling more sure of herself. This is evidenced by the fact that she responds to the starlet that called her fat, and is not willing to be disparaged by herself or anyone else. Cannie is accepting how she looks.

It is also obvious that Cannie values Dr. K and sees him as a friend, the kind of friend that you can call in the wee hours of the morning. Dr. K shows again that he is patient and understanding. He listens and responds to Cannie's concerns and does not appear upset that she called him at an unreasonable hour. He is also concerned for Cannie and wants to make sure she is safe.

Again, the topic of Nifkin as a prelude to a baby arises. Adrian tells Cannie that she will make a great mom and she agrees, based on the fact that she is able to care for her dog.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Cannie wakes up alone in the living room at Maxi's house. There is a note from Adrian saying that he has left to shoot on location. He has left her the keys to his convertible, saying the lease is up next month and to just drop it off at the dealership when she's done with it. Cannie gets cleaned up and looks in Maxi's kitchen for food. Because Maxi is an actress, Cannie expects the cupboards to be pretty bare. But Maxi's kitchen is stocked with lots of great food, and Cannie makes breakfast for herself and Maxi. They then go to see Maxi's agent to get Cannie signed so that she can sell her screenplay. Cannie is ecstatic with the amount of money they offer her for the screenplay and she readily agrees to sell it.

To celebrate, Maxi takes Cannie to a jewelry store to buy herself something nice. When Cannie objects, Maxi insists that Cannie deserves nice things. Cannie then calls her family and friends to let them know she is doing well and has not yet decided when she is coming home. Cannie is in her thirtieth week of pregnancy.

Next, Maxi and Cannie go to a meditation class. The woman leading the class is a larger woman in a leotard who is completely at ease with her body and very confident. Cannie is amazed by this woman. Back at Maxi's, Peter has sent a care package of thoughtful gifts from Philadelphia, and a homemade dog-dish for Nifkin. Cannie again wonders how old Dr. K is, and if he sees her as a patient, a friend, or maybe more.

Maxi has to go to the plastic surgeon and takes Cannie with her. While at the office, Cannie sees that one of the partners in the practice is her father, who is also a plastic surgeon. Cannie is very upset.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The theme of societal norms is explored here. Cannie thinks it is odd that a larger woman can be so comfortable with herself. She sees her as a role model and seems to be accepting herself in the body she has. It is also apparent that Cannie's perception of herself has changed. Instead of wanting to be thin like the other women in the class, Cannie wants to be comfortable with her self as she is, like the woman leading the class.

Maxi taking Cannie to a jewelry store is symbolic. Cannie is beginning to see herself as a worthwhile person, and Maxi telling her that she is a person that deserves beautiful jewelry reinforces that notion. It is also symbolic in the sense that Cannie is independent and can buy herself nice jewelry; she does not need a man to buy nice things for her, or to help her raise her baby.



For the first time so far in the book, Bruce is barely mentioned. This is indicative of the fact that Cannie is moving on and accepting her life without Bruce in it. As Bruce is becoming less a part of Cannie's life, Dr. K is becoming more a part of it. The fact that he is kind and generous and considerate is reinforced each time he is mentioned.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Cannie borrows a wedding and engagement ring from Maxi and makes an appointment to see her father using a fake name. He is surprised to see her. Cannie is angry at him and demands to know why he left and did not tell anyone where he was. Dr. Shapiro says he did not think they wanted to know and that he has nothing to give. He walks away from Cannie.

Cannie calls Samantha to tell her what happened and lets her know she is coming home. She flies to Newark International Airport, where she sees Bruce for the first time since she sent him the letter. He is holding hands with a girl who Cannie assumes is his new girlfriend. Bruce comes over to apologize for not calling. He says that with his father's recent death, the news of the pregnancy was too much to cope with. Cannie unleashes all of the anger she has for her father on Bruce, belittling him and telling him she is far too good for him anyway and that she does not need anything from him. She walks away from him and goes to the airport restroom.

Bruce's girlfriend follows Cannie to the bathroom and belligerently tells Cannie to leave Bruce alone. Cannie informs her that she has done nothing but leave him alone for months and tries to leave the bathroom. The girlfriend shoves Cannie, who twists her ankle on the wet floor, hits her stomach off the sink, and falls to the floor. Cannie begins to hemorrhage and then blacks out.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Cannie has finally drawn the parallel between Bruce and her father. By not acknowledging the pregnancy, Bruce has deserted her much the way her father did. Cannie also finally realizes that she deserves better than that and that their behavior is their shortcoming and not a reflection on who she is.

The theme of social perceptions and norms is again raised in this chapter. Though Cannie has become more accepting of herself, societal norms still dictate her life. She obviously does not want to show up to her father's office pregnant and not married. Her reason for this is that she wants to prove to her father that she is loveable. Cannie is beginning to trust her own opinions, yet it is still important to her that her father know that she is loved.

The fact that Bruce's girlfriend is not given a name is symbolic. Either Bruce never says it, or Cannie never reveals it. This is a way of making the new girl in Bruce's life insignificant.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Cannie is in the hospital. Before regaining consciousness, she has a series of dreams. She dreams of her childhood and of her father, and that she is underwater and swimming. When she finally comes to and realizes she is in the hospital, her first thoughts are for her baby. Anne, Lucy, Tanya, and Bruce are all in her hospital room. When Cannie wakes up, everyone leaves to get the doctor except Bruce, who tries to talk to Cannie.

The doctor comes and tells Cannie that her placenta detached and they had to remove her uterus. She will not be able to have more children. The baby was delivered six weeks early and was deprived of oxygen and no one is sure yet whether or not she will be okay. She is underweight and cannot breathe on her own. Cannie names the baby Joy.

Maxi, Samantha, and Dr. K also come to visit. Dr. K smuggles Nifkin in, as well as Cannie's favorite pastries from a local bakery. Cannie is not interested in eating them. Anne continues to visit every day and tries to cheer Cannie up. Cannie is angry at Bruce and his girlfriend, whom she blames for what happened to Joy. Cannie also blames herself for failing to keep Joy safe. Cannie reveals to her mother that she thinks she is a failure and that no one loves her: her father didn't and neither does Bruce. Anne says, "I know you don't believe it, but you're going to be fine. You have everything you need. You just have to know it in your own heart".

Cannie is finally released from the hospital, but Joy has to stay. Anne and Lucy drive Cannie home to a new apartment in the same building that is bigger with much better views. It has been completely remodeled and refurnished, decorated with all of Cannie's favorite things. It is a gift from Maxi. Cannie thinks her new home is beautiful, but cannot enjoy it because Joy is not with her. Cannie is still very angry and asks her family to leave so that she can take a walk.

Every day, Cannie walks to the hospital to visit Joy. These visits are the only moments when Cannie is not consumed by rage. When she leaves the hospital, Cannie walks aimlessly around the city for hours. She does not speak to any of her family or friends, and does not return any phone calls.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Many of Cannie's dreams feature her being in the water. Previously, Cannie had compared being in the water to being safe and feeling happy. Cannie views the water as a good place. The fact that she is dreaming about water as her baby struggles for life and Cannie herself struggles for consciousness is symbolic.



The fact that Cannie is not interested in the food that Dr. K has brought is foreshadowing. She admits that they are some of her very favorite foods but she has no interest in eating them. Cannie's weight problem is by her own admission a result of her love of food and eating. The fact that she is not interested in eating her favorite things foreshadows the inevitable result that Cannie will get thin.

Cannie's life has changed dramatically and the things she used to want the most are no longer important to her. Cannie has spent most of the novel wanting Bruce back, but now that she is alone with him, she does not want to talk to him. All of her life, Cannie wanted to be able to take food or leave it, and now she has achieved that but no longer thinks it is important.

It is also worth noting that the only person that Cannie is not irritated with is Dr. K. While she does not seek him out, she also does not snap at him or ignore him as she does everyone else.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Cannie is still angry. She is still walking around the city for hours at a time. She does not shower, wash her clothes, or eat. She just visits Joy and walks. On one of her walks, she picks up the newest issue of Moxie and reads Bruce's column, which is about how he reacted to news of her pregnancy. This makes Cannie angrier.

When she gets to the hospital, Bruce's mother, Audrey, is visiting Joy. Audrey is startled by Cannie's appearance and tells her that she has gotten very thin. Cannie seems to notice for the first time that she has lost about forty pounds. Audrey apologizes for Bruce's behavior and indicates that she wants to be a part of Joy's life. Cannie says she has not yet decided whether she will be staying in Philadelphia and asks Audrey to leave.

Cannie is too angry to visit with Joy and leaves the hospital to walk. She suddenly realizes that the sole has fallen off her shoe and that she has no idea where she is. She gets directions to the Philadelphia Weight and Eating Disorders Center and goes to see Dr. K. He brings Cannie to his house, where she bathes and changes into clean clothes. She throws the clothes she was wearing away. Dr. K makes Cannie dinner, and when she eats it, she recognizes that food actually tastes good for the first time since she awoke in the hospital. Dr. K tries to get Cannie to tell him about her anger. She insists that she is fine. Dr. K kisses her, and tucks her into bed. Cannie gets out of bed and goes to him and asks him to help her.

Joy is finally allowed to leave the hospital and come home with Cannie. The two go stay at Anne's. Peter comes to visit and takes Cannie and Joy out. He asks Cannie about her career and if she still wants to write. She tells him that she would like to write an article for a magazine about her recent experience.

Cannie goes back to her mother's house and writes for the first time since Joy was born. She writes an article about how she learned she was fat from her father; that no matter what other words could be used to describe her as a person, in her mind, fat was always first and foremost. She goes on to write that almost losing Joy put her life in perspective; that people may not always like the package that she comes in, but that her body is strong and healthy, and that she has finally realized that that is much more important than what other people think about it. Cannie then calls Moxie and speaks with the managing editor.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Cannie entitles her article, *Loving a Larger Woman*, which is the same title Bruce used for his article. However, this time, Cannie is talking about the journey she went on to go about loving herself and making peace with her body. This is a very different picture



than the one Bruce painted of Cannie in his initial article. Cannie is also trying to sell the article to the same magazine. This shows how Cannie has come full circle since the beginning of the book.

Though Dr. K's first name is revealed earlier in the book, this is the first time that Cannie begins to refer to him by it. This is symbolic of how her feelings for him have changed, and that Cannie now sees him as more than a doctor. Cannie throwing away her old clothes is also symbolic. She has chosen to throw out the all consuming rage and clean herself up. After doing so, she is able to taste food again and feel something besides anger.

The theme of family is also brought up again. Cannie's father abandoning her used to be a defining feature of Cannie's life, but now her mother's support has become the defining aspect of Cannie's family. Cannie is also beginning to finally accept Tanya, which is symbolic of Cannie's new attitude to herself and her family; that she is accepting people for how they are, not as she wishes they would be.

This is also the point where Cannie admits that she needs support. Her attitude since her father left was always that she was fine and could take care of herself. Now she is reaching out to the people that care about her to say that she wants to accept their support.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Joy is eight months old. It is December 31 and Cannie is hosting Joy's naming ceremony. Cannie is feeling that her life is on track: Joy is continuing to get healthier, Cannie's manuscript is in pre-production, and her article appeared in the November issue of Moxie. The editor of Moxie tells Cannie that her article received an unprecedented positive response, and she has invited Cannie to be a monthly contributing columnist. Meanwhile, Bruce's contract has not been renewed. Cannie is seeing a therapist that she likes and is continuing to write part time for the Philadelphia Examiner.

Cannie has also called Audrey to apologize and let her know that she would be thrilled if Audrey would like to be a part of Joy's life. Audrey apologizes again for Bruce's behavior. Though Cannie has let go of much of her anger, she is still angry at Bruce and refuses to contact him.

Peter continues to visit with treats for Cannie, Joy, and Nifkin, and he takes them out regularly. Peter tells Cannie that he wants to be romantically involved, but Cannie worries that he is too old for her, thinking he must be at least forty-five. Peter tells her he is thirty-seven, which makes Cannie happy. They kiss and watch the fireworks with Joy. The chapter ends with midnight fireworks on New Year's Day, 2000.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Cannie has come full circle and matured since the beginning of the book. Not only does she accept herself, but also her family and her past. However, it is not an unrealistic Happily Ever After for Cannie. She still harbors anger at Bruce and is seeing a therapist to get help. Though things have changed for the better for Cannie, she still has unresolved issues, like anybody else.

The book ends at the start of a new millennium, which is symbolic. Not only is it a new millennium, but Cannie is starting a whole new life with a baby that is now healthy, and with a boyfriend who respects her. Cannie also has positive feelings about herself and her family and has come to accept herself and others as they are.

It is interesting that as Cannie's life has come together, Bruce's has fallen apart. At the beginning of the book, Cannie was jealous that Bruce had a column in a monthly magazine while she did not. Now it is Cannie that has a contract with that same magazine, and Bruce's contract has been canceled. Also, through much of the book, Bruce did not want to talk to Cannie, and now it is Cannie who does not want to talk to Bruce. This relationship, like much of Cannie's life, has come full circle.



Characters

Cannie Shapiro

Cannie is the main character of the book and is the narrator. Cannie is the eldest of three children of divorced parents. Her father left when she was a teenager, and she has not seen him in years. Cannie's mother still lives in Philadelphia, with her spouse Tanya, whom Cannie dislikes.

Cannie's father leaving had a significant impact on Cannie's self-esteem. Her father was the person who first told her that she was fat and that perception has stayed with Cannie her whole life thus far. She recognizes that her family history has an effect on how she enters relationships, but continues to doubt herself and be validated by having men be interested in her. What men think of Cannie has a huge affect on her self-confidence; no matter how much her family or friends tell her that she is beautiful and good, it is the treatment by men that causes Cannie's self-confidence to soar or fall. When Bruce's article is first published, Cannie immediately seeks a weight loss program. When Steve rejects her, she pursues Bruce, thinking that even though he is far from ideal, he is the best someone like her can do.

Cannie is fun, smart and interesting, with a job she likes and great friends. However, she is completely obsessed with her weight and desperately wants to be thin. She has tried many different weight loss programs and works out regularly. She believes that she is judged by others based on her size and she herself categorizes people as thin or not thin.

Cannie's journey to accept herself is what drives the plot of the novel. It is also the journey to accept others for their life choices, and to accept help when she needs it. It is when Cannie becomes depressed and despondent over the ill health of her daughter that she achieves the figure she dreamed of her whole life. It is then that she realizes that there are more important things in life than her weight, and that the body she has is healthy, and that is what matters most.

Bruce Guberman

Bruce is Cannie's ex-boyfriend. They were together for three years and Cannie broke things off with him three months prior to the start of the novel because she thought he was lazy, inconsiderate, and unmotivated. Bruce writes about their relationship in a monthly column in a women's magazine.

Bruce is the father of Cannie's child, but does not acknowledge the pregnancy at all. He does not contact Cannie after he finds out about the pregnancy and chooses to deal with it by ignoring it and taking no responsibility, which is typical of Bruce's character. When he runs into Cannie at the airport he makes excuses for why he did not contact



her, saying that with his father's recent death, the pregnancy was too much to deal with. Bruce is immature and irresponsible.

Dr. Peter Krushlevensky

Peter is the doctor running the weight loss program that Cannie enrolls in. Cannie describes him as tall and handsome with a deep voice. He is always calm and treats Cannie and others with respect, courtesy, and consideration. For most of the novel Cannie calls him Dr. K, and he represents everything that Bruce lacked: courtesy, compassion, and maturity.

Dr. K is interested in having a romantic relationship with Cannie, but gives her space to sort out her life, while also offering support and guidance. Dr. K. does not have any issue with Cannie's weight and thinks she is healthy. It is when Cannie drops weight rapidly that he is concerned for her health and well-being. It is due to his help and support that Cannie eventually comes out of her depression.

Anne Shapiro

Anne is Cannie's mother. She is very supportive of Cannie and her other two children, and contacts and see them regularly. She is fifty-five years old, and was a teacher before retiring. She and Cannie's father divorced when her children were teenagers and she now lived with her new spouse, Tanya.

Though Anne cares for her children, she often lacks tact. For example, she chooses to call Cannie at work to tell her that she is gay and that her lover has moved in. She also moved Cannie's things out of her childhood bedroom to give more space to Tanya. She did so without calling Cannie to let her know so that she could pack up her own things.

Anne obviously loves and supports her children and supports their lives. She continues to support Cannie, even when Cannie ignores her, is rude, or tries to shut her out. She is the complete opposite of Cannie's father, for whom nothing ever seemed good enough, and who eventually left the family. Anne worries that her relationship with Dr. Shapiro may have impacted Cannie's ability to understand how to be in a functional relationship.

Tanya

Tanya is Anne's spouse. Tanya is brash and often gives an uncomfortable amount of information to everyone and anyone. Tanya obviously cares for Anne and Anne's children and wants to be a part of the family. Tanya is kind-hearted and is comfortable with herself and her life. She is also quite oblivious and does not seem to care what others think of her. She is a direct contrast to Cannie, who worries what others think, and is not comfortable with herself.



Samantha

Samantha is Cannie's best friend. Sam helps Cannie with Nifkin and is always reinforcing to Cannie that Cannie is a good person. Samantha discourages Cannie from getting back together with Bruce because she does not think he is good enough for her. It is Samantha that alerts Cannie to Bruce's first column.

Sam always has Cannie's best interests at heart and tries to talk reason with Cannie at all times. When Cannie tells Sam that she has decided to keep the baby, Sam tells her that a baby will change her whole life and that in many ways it will make life harder. Sam also tries to discourage Cannie from getting back together with Bruce by reminding her that she had reasons for breaking up with him. Sam does not try to dissuade Cannie by bashing Bruce, but rather reminds Cannie that she had reasons to begin with and those reasons have not changed. Sam is a practical influence in Cannie's life.

Maxi Ryder

Maxi is a famous and successful movie actress. She is constantly being dumped by her co-stars and is consistently in the tabloid magazines. Cannie meets Maxi in the restroom of a New York hotel and the two become friends. Maxi is instrumental in getting Cannie's screenplay read by a studio and sold for a large amount of money. Maxi is generous and kind and a great friend to Cannie. She is also very down-to-earth.

To Cannie, Maxi is full of contradictions. She is a beautiful and successful actress who makes a lot of money, yet she also earns money by buying and selling real estate. She is very thin and lives in Hollywood, the home of the caffeine and cigarette diet, yet she has a kitchen stocked with great food. Maxi is also very beautiful and successful, yet has love troubles, just like other people. Cannie discovers that there is much more to Maxi than what is written in tabloid magazines.

Joy Shapiro

Joy is Cannie and Bruce's daughter. She is born six weeks early and her health is very fragile. She has to stay in the hospital for several months. Joy is a beautiful baby and is doted on by Cannie and her family and friends.

Dr. Shapiro

Dr. Shapiro is Cannie's father. He left the family when Cannie was eighteen and Cannie has not seen him since her graduation from Princeton, when he showed up but did not actually attend the ceremony. Previously, Cannie did not know where he was, but discovers during the course of the novel that he works as a plastic surgeon in Los Angeles. Dr. Shapiro is not interested in Cannie or in being part of her life.



Nifkin

Nifkin is Cannie's dog. He is a small rat terrier that she inherited from some former colleagues. Nifkin brings Cannie's life structure and purpose and offers unconditional love. Nifkin and Bruce did not like each other, but Nifkin appears to really like Dr. K, who also likes Nifkin. Nifkin acts as a barometer for the people in Cannie's life, those that Nifkin likes tend to be good people, and those that Nifkin does not like end up being the people that treat Cannie badly.

Steve

Steve is a cute engineer that Cannie meets at the dog park. He asks Cannie out, but when they go to dinner, he says that he only wants to be friends and is not interested in Cannie romantically. This is the catalyst that drives Cannie to want to get back together with Bruce.

Audrey Guberman

Audrey is Bruce's mother. Cannie thinks that she is always flawless looking and she is also kind to Cannie. She wants to be a part of Joy's life and constantly apologizes for her son's behavior. She is very classy and elegant.

Leonard Guberman

Leonard is Bruce's father. Cannie adores him and feels like he is her surrogate father. He likes and respects Cannie also. It is her relationship with Mr. Guberman that Cannie misses the most when she and Bruce break up. Mr. Guberman's death is what brings Cannie and Bruce back together long enough to conceive Joy. Joy's middle name, Leah, is after Leonard.



Objects/Places

The Philadelphia Weight and Eating Disorders Center

This is the clinic where Dr. K. works. It is where Cannie and Dr. K. meet.

The Philadelphia Examiner

This is the newspaper where Cannie works as an entertainment reporter.

Moxie Magazine

This is the magazine that publishes Bruce's monthly "Good in Bed" column, and also eventually publishes Cannie's version of "Loving a Larger Woman".

Newark International Airport

This is where Cannie sees Bruce for the first time since she found out she was pregnant. It is also where Cannie has the accident that almost causes her to lose the baby.

Philadephia

This is where the story is set, for the most part. It is where Cannie, Dr. K, Anne, Tanya, and Samantha live.

New York

This is where Cannie meets Maxi.

Hollywood

The story briefly moves to Hollywood for a few chapters. It is where Cannie sells her screenplay and sees her father again.

Food

Cannie feels like food is her enemy. She loves to eat rich foods and all kinds of food. She thinks that it is her love of food that makes her big, since she does exercise.



Jewish Community Center

The Jewish Community Center is where Cannie used to swim with her mom. Once she is pregnant, she starts going there with her mom again, and after Joy is born, the three swim there every day. It is also where Cannie realizes she has made the decision to keep the baby.

Anne House

This is the childhood home where Cannie grew up and where her mother now lives with Tanya. Cannie considers this place a refuge and goes there after she finds out she's pregnant, then takes Joy to live there after she comes out of the hospital.



Themes

Family

Good in Bed explores the theme of family in many different ways. There is Cannie's own non-traditional family, with divorced parents and a gay mother; there is Bruce's family, which Cannie considers the ideal family and one that she longs for; and there is the family that Cannie is creating for herself, with Joy and the people that will be part of Joy's life. The dynamic of all these different facets of family has an affect on Cannie and helps her along her journey.

First there is Cannie's own family. It is well studied and documented that divorce affects children. In the case of Cannie, she is very cognizant that how her father felt and his leaving has had an enormous effect on her and how she enters relationships. Cannie's recognition of the effect of her family on her life is part of her journey in the book. Cannie's mother's relationship with Tanya and Tanya herself also influence Cannie's life. Cannie feels alienated since Tanya moved in and took over her room with no notice. Cannie used to go swimming with her mother then stopped when Tanya moved in. Cannie makes the unconscious decision to start going again when she decides to keep Joy, signifying that she is beginning to accept her family as it is.

Cannie's family is contrasted with Bruce's family, which Cannie considers a traditional family. His parents are still together and they dote on him. Cannie admires his family and basks in the attention of his father. Cannie's nickname for Bruce's mother, the always-tasteful-Audrey, indicates she thinks that Audrey is well put together and elegant, a contrast to her own mother.

Cannie's relationship with her family changes when she begins her own family. Cannie becomes more accepting of Tanya, and her place in her mother's life, and also accepts that her father is not part of her life. She begins to create a new type of family with Joy and makes the conscious decision that Bruce will not be a part of that, knowing that not having a father is not the worst thing that can happen.

Societal Norms and Perceptions

Cannie is a woman that is very aware of body image and social pressure. She is very conscious of how her body is different from what is considered to be socially desirable. Cannie struggles to not care what others think, while always being aware of what she believes they must think. When she goes shopping with Dr. K. in New Jersey, she tells him that people are going to assume he is the baby's father. She is nonchalant about it, but she still is aware of what others may think. When she reads Bruce's first article, she is immediately concerned that people are going to know it is about her, and worries what they will think.



When Cannie is rejected by Steve, she does not tell her best friend because she does not want Sam to pity her. She also assumes that Steve must have rejected her because of the way she looks when there is no indication that this is the case. When Cannie goes to see her father, she wears a wedding ring, because she wants her father to know that someone does love her. The reason Cannie gives for wanting to be thin is because she feels social pressure and wants to be desired and considered socially acceptable.

Cannie is also hostile towards Tanya, although Tanya is a loving, supportive, and loyal companion. Cannie believes Tanya is brash and over-shares, and is not, to Cannie, socially acceptable.

Acceptance

Acceptance, especially self-acceptance, is one of the major themes of the book. Cannie's journey over the course of the novel is to accept herself as she is, to accept her family, and to accept her past as the past and to move forward.

Cannie starts out badly wanting to be thin and obsessing about food. She does not spend time at her mother's house because she does not like Tanya. When Cannie is rejected, she wants Bruce back because even though she did not think he was a good boyfriend, she thinks it is the best she can do.

As the novel progresses, Cannie gets pregnant and this appears to be the turning point in how she views herself and the world. After making the decision to keep the baby, Cannie accepts that she and Bruce will not be together. In Hollywood when a young actress calls her fat, Cannie stands up for herself instead of just accepting that what the woman said is the truth.

The true evolution occurs when Joy is ill, and through lack of food and punishing exercise, Cannie finally achieves what she thought she wanted most: a thin body. It is at this point that Cannie recognizes that her life is a good one, and that how you look does not define who you are. Cannie accepts her body for its health and support, she accepts that Tanya is part of her family now, and she accepts that she may need some help and seeks therapy, as well as accepts the support of her friends and family.

Judgment and Assumption

The theme of judgment and assumption is evident throughout the book. There are many situations where Cannie makes assumptions that do not turn out to be true and where she judges things based on very little information. Cannie herself also feels judged based on the way she looks.

Cannie assumes that because Jane Sloan directs movies that Cannie admires, that they will have a lot in common and will become friends. Jane ends up being very different than Cannie assumed. At the same time, Cannie assumes that Maxi Ryder is responsible for canceling her interview because she's a big name Hollywood actress



and is therefore inconsiderate. Maxi turns out to be very different than Cannie assumed: she has love problems, is very down to earth and nice, and is a successful real estate dealer as well as an actress. Cannie's assumptions about these two women end up being way off the mark.

Cannie also assumes that Dr. K is much older than he actually is, likely because he is tall, mature, and wise. She also assumes that because he must be older, he is unsuitable for her. Additionally, Cannie fails to see the signs that Dr. K is a good relationship prospect and is interested in her. The fact that she is comfortable talking to him, that her dog like him, that he treats everyone with kindness, and that he respects her just as she is all seem to escape Cannie's notice.

Cannie also judges other people in her life based on superficial things. Bruce is educated but unmotivated, handsome but inconsiderate, and irresponsible. Cannie stays with him for three years even though it is never really apparent what he has going for him other than good looks and an expensive education, and the fact that he is attracted to her. She also judges Tanya based on superficial reasons. Tanya's loyalty to Anne, her dedication and love all seem less important to Cannie than her embarrassing demeanor, questionable decorating taste, and tendency to share too much information.

Cannie also believes that she is judged based on how she looks. She assumes that Steve rejects her based on her appearance and that people will always see her as fat first, and all of her other qualities are secondary to that. It is at the end of the novel, when Cannie has lost forty pounds and has the figure she thought she always wanted, that Cannie realizes that what can be seen on the outside is no indication of what is on the inside. She was thin, but her heart was broken, her baby was very ill, and she was consumed by rage. By the end of the book, Cannie realizes that things are not always as they seem.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is first person. This is effective because it is the story of Cannie's inner journey, told from Cannie's perspective. This is important because one of the main themes of the book is how Cannie feels about herself and how this changes. This emotional growth would not have been so obvious if it was not told from Cannie's own experience.

The story is a blend of narrative and dialogue, which is also very effective. Cannie has many people in her life and the dialogue helps to propel the story and show how Cannie interacts with others. Cannie's narrative is also important, because she fills in important details and gives background information on things such as her relationship with Bruce and her history with her father.

Also included are excerpts of the articles that Bruce writes and the article that Cannie herself writes in the end. This is a great way to have a different voice included in the book, without deviating from Cannie's voice.

Setting

The novel is mainly set in Philadelphia, where Cannie lives and works. The paper that Cannie works for is here, as is the weight clinic where Cannie meets Dr. K.

The novel also moves temporarily to New York, where Cannie meets Maxi Ryder, and goes briefly to L.A. where Cannie sells her screenplay and makes enough money to support herself and Joy. This is also where she sees her father again.

The novel is briefly set in New Jersey, at Newark airport, where Cannie sees Bruce again for the first time since he found out about the pregnancy, and where she has the accident that causes her to almost lose the baby. New Jersey is also the setting for Bruce's father's funeral, where Cannie gets pregnant by Bruce.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is light and comedic. It includes a lot of slang and informal language, as well as very well written dialogue and narrative. This is effective, since the novel is told from the point of view of a twenty-eight-year old woman in the late 1990s, who is also a journalist. Any other type of language would not have seemed genuine.

Similes and metaphors are used throughout the novel, as are analogies. Cannie compares her relationship with her father to that of a lab mouse in a psychology



experiment. She also compares Bruce to a six-pack of white socks. Cannie's use of these devices adds imagery to the book, and makes the story come alive much more.

There is also a water motif running throughout the book. Cannie says that writing is like being in the ocean, and also compares her baby moving to being in the ocean. When she is unconscious, she has many dreams of being underwater and swimming. Cannie says that her father taught her to swim, and every day she swims with Joy and her mother. Cannie says that being in the water you can be lighter, more graceful. This can be compared to the safety of a womb.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty chapters, which are not named and vary greatly in length, from ten to forty pages. The chapters are divided into five parts, which are titled. The book sometimes moves quickly through time, while sometimes spending several pages on one event.

The plot is quite simple and focuses completely on the main character, with no evident sub-plots. The lives of the other characters are not followed except where they intersect with the life of the main character. Though the plot is simple, the journey of Cannie, the main character, is not. She starts off reading an article about herself written by her ex-boyfriend, which sends her to a weight loss program. There she meets a kind doctor that she eventually falls in love with. Along the way, she tries desperately to get back together with her ex-boyfriend, gets pregnant, meets a famous actress, and sells her screenplay in Hollywood. She nearly loses her baby, and eventually comes to accept herself and her life the way it is.

The novel's pace is slow in some areas, but very quick in others. The story is mostly linear, but some chapters include flashbacks to round out the story. The back story is integral to the plot of the book and is interesting to read. Overall, the novel is very witty and entertaining, and a light and easy read.



Quotes

"I'll never forget the day I found out my girlfriend weighed more than I did". Chap. 1, p.13

"Dogs give your days a rhythm and a purpose. You can't sleep ridiculously late, or stay out all day and all night, when there's a dog depending on you". Chap. 4, p. 46

"Cannie's very bright, she'll be able to take care of herself. Not a beauty, but smart". Chap. 6, p. 105

"I wasn't stupid, and I wasn't blind, and I knew that there were many ways in which I differed from Farrah Fawcett, from girls in movies and on posters in boys' bedrooms . . . I was his daughter, his little girl. He was supposed to love me". Chap. 6, p. 105

"Writing was like slipping into the ocean, a place where I could move easily, where I could be graceful, and playful, and invisible and visible all at once—a byline, not a body". Chap. 6, p. 109

"But what we're really trapped by is perceptions. You think you need to lose weight for someone to love you, I think if I gain weight, no one will love me. What we really need . . . is to stop thinking of ourselves as bodies and start thinking of ourselves as people". Chap. 8, p. 147

"Some days I'd get angry and be furious at him for letting me stay with him so long . . . or for not coming back when I wanted him to. But I'd try to put the anger in a box, the way I'd put away his gifts, and keep moving forward". Chap. 13, p. 233

"And that's when I felt it. Like a wave cresting inside of me. Like I myself was in the ocean, being gently tumbled, over and over, by a wave . . . my baby was moving". Chap.14, p. 243

"To me, the movie industry was like a guy you lusted after from across the high school cafeteria—so good-looking, so perfect, that you knew he'd never notice you, and that if you asked him to sign your yearbook at graduation, he'd stare at you blankly and grope for your name". Chap. 15, p. 247

"Whatever my father could say, whatever answer he could provide, whatever excuse he could muster, it wouldn't be right. And it wouldn't ever be enough". Chap. 17, p. 300

"I knew at that moment, that my anger wasn't really for him [Bruce]. It was for my father, of course, the Original Abandoner, the author of all of my insecurities and fears. But my father was three thousand miles away, with his back eternally turned". Chap.17, p. 304



"Guys like Bruce were as common as white cotton socks sold in six-packs at Wal-Mart, if not as clean, and all I'd have to do to acquire another one would be to show up at a Phish concert and smile". Chap. 17, p. 306

"I walked and walked, and it was as if God had fitted me with special glasses, where I could only see the bad things, the sad things, the pain and misery of life in the city, the trash kicked into corners instead of the flowers planted in window boxes". Chap. 19, p. 336

"In profile, I was Jessica Rabbit: nonexistent butt, flat belly, improbable bosom, thanks to the milk. If you didn't get close enough to notice that my hair was dirty and matted, that I had giant black circles under my eyes, and that, most likely, I smelled bad, I was an actual babe". Chap. 19, p. 341

"Love . . . is the rug they pull out from under you. Love is Lucy always lifting the football at the last second so that Charlie Brown falls on his ass. Love is something that every time you believe in it, it goes away. Love is for suckers and I am not going to be a sucker ever again". Chap. 19, p. 353

"The truth is this—I am alright the way I am. I was all right, all along. I will never be thin, but I will be happy. I will love myself, and my body, for what it can do—because it is strong enough to lift, to walk, to ride a bicycle up a hill, to embrace the people I love and to hold them fully, and to nurture a new life. I will love myself because I am sturdy". Chap. 19, p. 364



Topics for Discussion

What do you believe is the source of Cannie's hostility toward Tanya? Is this hostility justified? Why or why not?

Do you agree with Bruce's statement, "Fat is the last acceptable prejudice, that fat people are the only safe target in our politically correct world"? Why or why not?

When Joy is in the hospital, Cannie admits that her real anger is at herself for "failing Joy". What do you think she means by this?

To what degree did Cannie's father influence her adult life?

Discuss how Cannie's relationship with her mother changes over the course of the novel.

What role does Nifkin play in the book? Would the plot have worked without him? Why or why not?

Steve telling Cannie that he only wants to be friends causes her to leave him at the restaurant. Was this a justified response? Why or why not?

Do you think Cannie is a selfish person? Why or why not?

Is Bruce's reason for not calling Cannie after he gets the letter justified? What other reasons may he have had for not calling?

Do you think the "Loving a Larger Woman" article by Bruce was sensitive or insensitive? Discuss your choice.