

# **Hotel du Lac Study Guide**

**Hotel du Lac by Anita Brookner**

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## Plot Summary

Edith Hope, a fiction writer, arrives at the Hotel du Lac at the urging of friends after a failed marriage attempt. The first people she meets are Iris and Jennifer Pusey, a wealthy mother and daughter who are staying at the hotel solely to shop for luxuries in the nearby towns. Edith is slightly in awe of the Puseys, especially the mother, Iris, who possesses an air of confidence about her at all times. Edith is also jealous of the close, loving relationship the two share because this is something that Edith herself never experienced. Jennifer is close in age to Edith but she does not attempt to befriend Edith; she is entirely devoted to her mother and the two are inseparable.

Edith also becomes acquainted with Monica, a tall, thin, attractive woman who is at the hotel to recuperate from an eating disorder (although she seems to be making little effort to do so).

Throughout her stay, Edith writes letters to David, a married man with whom she is having an affair. She seems to care for him very deeply and refers to him lovingly in her letters. During their relationship, Edith had accepted a marriage proposal from Geoffrey Long, a nice man to whom she was introduced by her close friend and neighbor, Penelope Milne.

On her wedding day, Edith dresses and enters the waiting car; but instead of going directly to the Registry Office, she instructs the driver to circle around the park first to give her a chance to clear her head. When the time for the ceremony arrives, Edith tells the driver to keep going, horrifying the members of the wedding party as the car passes by without stopping. Her friends are shocked at Edith's behavior and Geoffrey refuses to speak to her. Because of this event, Edith's friends urge her to get away and so she has arrived at the Hotel du Lac, where the bulk of the story takes place.

During her stay, Edith meets a man by the name of Mr. Neville. He takes a liking to her and they go on a few outings together. Just before Mr. Neville plans to leave the hotel, the two enjoy a boat ride and Mr. Neville asks Edith to marry him. Although he admits that he does not love Edith and Edith does not love him, Mr. Neville insists that his life and hers would fit perfectly together; she could stay at home and work on her novels while he is away. Since they are both unattached, it simply makes sense for them to wed. Edith is surprised by his proposal and takes some time to consider it.

By that evening, Edith decides to accept. That night she goes up to her room to write a letter to David to inform him that she will be marrying a man she met at the hotel and will no longer be seeing him. The following morning, Edith wakes early to mail the letter; as she exits her room, she sees Mr. Neville quietly slipping out of Jennifer Pusey's room. Edith realizes that they have been having an affair and is not surprised. Instead of mailing the letter, Edith goes back to her room, tears it up and throws it away. She then goes downstairs and sends a one-word telegram back home to England: "Returning."



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Edith Hope, a romantic fiction writer using a pseudonym, arrives at the Hotel du Lac in late September. She is there to take a break from her life at the urging of her friends. It seems that she has experienced an "unfortunate lapse," although the specific event remains undefined, which has caused them to suggest that she get away for a while. Edith is driven to the airport by a friend and neighbor who will forgive her for her indiscretion only if she takes the time to think about what she has done and returns having learned her lesson and ready to apologize.

Edith views herself as a serious, responsible person who is seen by her friends as being beyond the age of indiscretion. As for her physical appearance, Edith notes that several people have commented on her resemblance to Virginia Woolf. She also mentions that she does not profess anything about the success of her writing but understands that it is doing very well.

Upon entering her hotel room, Edith immediately writes a letter to David, who appears to be her love interest. She describes the details of her trip and the hotel to him and tells of her mixed feelings upon her arrival. After finishing the letter, Edith unpacks, although she superstitiously leaves most of her clothes in her bag as if she could be leaving at any moment.

The Hotel du Lac is described thoroughly. It belongs to the family Huber and has a reputation for distinguished service and for the quiet retreat it provides its guests. Each of the hotel's guests is either a longstanding patron or a new guest with references from one or more names already in the hotel's files, as required by a hotel of its caliber. The Hotel du Lac is by no means lavish, with no sauna, hairdresser or gift shop; instead it provides its guests with agreeable scenery, a place of sanctuary and the assurance of privacy.

Edith descends the stairs from her room and encounters a tiny dog at the foot of the stairs. She observes how tall and slender the dog's female owner is and remarks to herself that she must be a dancer. She promises herself to ponder this thought later.

Edith enters the dining room for tea and sits down to work on her novel. She notices a "pug-faced" older woman whom she had seen earlier. The woman is now seated in the dining room eating carelessly, with crumbs falling into her lap unnoticed and her legs wide apart.

After a while, a glamorous blond woman in a silk dress enters the room and Edith finds herself fascinated by her presence and beauty. As if hypnotized, Edith watches the woman interact with the waiter. Soon the glamorous woman is joined by her husband.



Edith then observes a mother and daughter in the dining room. She comments to herself that the daughter bears a strong resemblance to her mother, perceiving her to be about 25 years old and unmarried; but she is not worried about it. As she watches the two of them interact, Edith feels pangs of jealousy for their close-knit relationship and for the younger woman's confidence and ease with her surroundings. When the two make a move to leave, the girl jumps up to help her mother out of her chair. Edith is surprised to see the effort the woman exerts to stand up and mentally recalculates both their ages, guessing the daughter to be in her early thirties and the mother to be in her upper sixties.

Edith goes for a walk after tea and enjoys the solitude along the lakeshore, although she misses David's company and conversation. Meanwhile, M. Huber, the hotel's owner, reviews the names of the day's new arrivals and lingers over Edith's name.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

At the opening of the novel, the description of the scenery surrounding the Hotel du Lac gives the atmosphere a rather grim, gray tone. The perception is that the surrounding town and its inhabitants are quiet as well.

In her letter to David, Edith characterizes herself as she describes her trip to the airport. She tells him of her stop in an airport restroom, where she looks at her reflection in a mirror and sees a proper, inoffensive, conservatively dressed woman. Edith contrasts herself with the crowd around her; while most people are hurrying purposefully from place to place, she is not intent on going anywhere but instead, feels that she is being forced to leave. It seems that her friends have coerced her into taking this small vacation after she commits an "indiscretion." Although its exact nature remains unclear, it is apparent that Edith's behavior was out of character for her.

While she is beginning to accept her visit to the Hotel du Lac, Edith's reluctance to stay is evidenced by the fact that she leaves most of her things unpacked, opting to leave them in her bag in case she decides to leave.

Edith periodically mentions the "novelist" in her - a reference to her instinctive impulse to characterize everyone she meets at first glance. This emphasizes the creative writer in Edith but also prepares us to expect to read her impressions of the other characters in the story as she encounters them.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Edith dresses and reluctantly goes downstairs for dinner. As she walks down the hallway, she catches a rosy scent in the air and remarks to herself that it must be coming from the tall, slender woman with the dog; sure enough, the woman emerges immaculately dressed, the dog tucked under her arm.

Upon arriving in the dining room, Edith realizes that she is early. The "bulldog-faced" lady appears and Edith reminds herself to refer to her correctly by her name, Mme. de Bonneuil. Edith leans back in her chair and briefly closes her eyes, allowing herself to experience the dread she feels about this evening, since public meals like this are not to her taste.

She shudders as she recalls the last meal she had before leaving England. Her agent, in an effort to raise her spirits, had taken her out to lunch. Their conversation had turned to the subject of different types of women, and Edith had categorized women into two types, in line with Aesop's fable: tortoises and hares. In Edith's books, it was the tortoise who always got the man; the quiet, humble, inconspicuous girl would steal the man away from the hare, or temptress. However, Edith thinks, this is not what happens in real life. In real life, Edith believes that with few exceptions, it is always the hare who gets the man. The hare does not acknowledge the tortoise as any type of worthy competition and because of this, the hare always wins.

Edith thinks of the meals she cooks for David and how he always appreciates her cooking. She watches him intently when he eats, serving him more to satisfy his appetite until he drinks his tea and finally leaves her for his other life. He always comes back, she points out; sooner or later, he does come back.

As Edith looks around the dining room that evening, she remarks to herself that she has been reduced to complete "tortoisedom." She watches the thin woman arrive and is slightly disappointed that her entrance is not quite as grand as she had expected. Edith notices that the thin woman barely eats any of her food, instead letting it fall mostly onto her lap, where her dog picks it up. Edith notes to herself that the woman must be attached to the dog for more than one reason.

Just after Mme. de Bonneuil erupts with a loud belch after not so gracefully consuming her dinner, the grand woman Edith had seen at tea appears in the doorway with her daughter, making the kind of entrance Edith had envisioned for the thin woman with the dog. Edith describes her feelings about the mother and daughter as a mixture of envy and fear, the kind of fear she always feels in the presence of strong personalities.

As she follows the two women from the dining room to the salon for coffee, she realizes that it was their rosy scent that she had noticed earlier in the hallway. In the salon, the



daughter walks over to Edith and asks her to join her mother and her for coffee. Edith introduces herself to them. The older woman introduces herself as Iris Pusey and her daughter as Jennifer. Mrs. Pusey explains that she hates to see anyone dining alone and that she had told her daughter to ask Edith to join them because she noticed that Edith has sad eyes.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Edith is growing accustomed to her surroundings at the hotel. The characters she encountered previously have begun to take shape. She spends a great deal of time watching others and attempting to characterize them in her mind; each of the people she meets is given a thorough inspection. Edith finally meets the Puseys personally rather than viewing them in awe from the other side of the dining room.

The discussion with her agent about tortoises and hares relates directly to Edith's own life. By her own definition, she is a "tortoise," making it clear why, in her books, the tortoises always win the men. Edith views the other women at the hotel, both the Puseys and the thin woman with the dog, as "hares," watching their regal movements enviously.

Edith's belief that hares always win in real life because they never even notice the tortoises is the way Edith views the world around her. She envies the women around her for their movements, the presence they create, their lives in general. When Mrs. Pusey invites Edith to sit with Jennifer and her, it is as if they have reached out to include her in their hitherto exclusive world.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

The next morning, as Edith drinks her coffee, she reflects on the preceding night and remarks that at least one thing has been accomplished: people are beginning to have names. She ponders her meeting with the Puseys and, although she had conversed with both Mrs. Pusey and her daughter, Edith thinks that Iris Pusey "held the stage," as she describes it. Mrs. Pusey controlled the conversation and seemed able to function only when in a dominant position.

Edith had learned that the Puseys stay at the hotel briefly each year for the sole purpose of shopping. Edith believes that they reached an informal, unspoken agreement during their conversation: Edith will spend her free time with the Puseys when she is not busy doing something else; if she is busy, her activities will be carefully evaluated. Edith does not object to this arrangement in the least and actually accepts it quite readily. Her contact with the Puseys gives her the opportunity to observe a class of women with which she is completely unfamiliar.

Edith feels that the Pusey women possess an aura of high self-esteem. She views the relationship between mother and daughter as rather unique: a combination of physical closeness and real love that she finds to be slightly unrealistic. Although Jennifer is fully grown, her mother still speaks of her and treats her like a small girl and Jennifer continues to act like one.

Mrs. Pusey speaks of her married life and her late husband as if the memories are a dream. Her husband clearly provided her with everything she desired and she continues to enjoy that lifestyle. She invites Edith to the Puseys' room and shows her some of their purchases, telling Edith that she always ensures that Jennifer is fitted out like a queen. Later, when Edith recalls the Puseys' room with all of its carelessly strewn luxury items, she compares it to Aladdin's cave.

The next morning, Edith decides that she has been somewhat careless with her appearance and takes careful note of herself in the mirror. She goes for a walk and when she reaches a café with large glass windows, she sees the tall, thin woman with her dog sitting at a table. The woman, eating a macaroon, looks up and raises her fork to Edith in a small greeting. Edith continues walking aimlessly through town, finally returning to the hotel just in time to see the Puseys entering the back of a limousine, no doubt off on yet another shopping trip.

Edith writes a letter to David in which she describes the people she has met so far and her feelings about each of them. Concerning the Puseys, Edith says that although she and Jennifer would seem likely companions, it is clear that Jennifer's only companion is her mother. As for Mrs. Pusey, Edith tells David that she adores the confident woman and is curious to learn how she accumulated her wealth.





Thinking of the previous evening, Edith recalls the image of the mother and daughter lovingly embracing one another as they walked her to her room and bid her good night. The physical closeness and love between them, as well as their attractiveness, are things that Edith has never experienced. Her mother had once been a beauty but was an unhappy woman who fought unsuccessfully against her fate until she eventually gave up and let herself go.

The thought of Mrs. Pusey's charm triggers painful memories for Edith of her mother's dreary apartment and its unhappy inhabitants. As a child, the annoyance and frustration of her mother and aunts had upset Edith a great deal and she would cling to her father for comfort; after his death, Edith found the start of a loving invitation from her father to her mother. With this memory, as she wipes a tear from her face, she concludes her letter to David, telling him how much she longs for him and cannot wait to see him again.

Then Edith returns to the task of working on her novel, *Beneath the Visiting Moon*.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Edith's conversation with the Puseys at the end of the previous chapter is reviewed at the beginning of this one as Edith wakes up the next morning and finds herself thinking about it. Readers learn a great deal about the mother and daughter through Edith's observations of them. Their loving relationship is something Edith never experienced with her own mother.

Edith accepts the invitation the Puseys have extended to her. She sees it as an opportunity to observe a world that, because of both their wealth and their close relationship, is unknown to her. Edith is somewhat awed at the lavish things she sees in the Puseys' room but is jealous not of their material wealth but of the loving relationship they share.

Edith's memories of her own childhood are rather painful. Her mother was an unhappy woman as were her sisters, Edith's aunts. Edith remembers hearing the women complain about their unsatisfying lives, which upset her as a child. Instead of being close with her mother, it was her father who provided Edith with the attention and caring she craved.

Edith seems to cling to the elusive "David," to whom she continues to write lengthy letters.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Edith leaves her room that afternoon, tired after working several hours on her novel. When she finds the dining room almost entirely empty, she walks into town and takes an outside table at the café. She closes her eyes for a moment and enjoys the feeling of the sun and the atmosphere. When she opens them, she sees the tall woman chasing after her little dog.

The Puseys arrive soon after and Mrs. Pusey is visibly upset that the woman in town who used to make blouses for them seems to have disappeared without giving them any notice. She comments that she wants only the best and that her husband used to say, "Only the best is good enough." To this her daughter lovingly replies, "Mummy, you are the best." Edith looks at Jennifer closely and finds her to be a testament to her mother's good care, from her round, fair face to her eyes and blonde hair, although her plump body and close-fitting apparel give the impression that Jennifer is outgrowing her clothes.

Edith remarks to herself silently that her conversations with the Puseys will always be one-sided. Mrs. Pusey begins most of her sentences with "of course," exuding confidence and leaving little room for disagreement. Edith is somewhat disturbed by the fact that, while Jennifer must be very close to her own age, she silently refuses any type of friendly relationship with Edith. She seems to belong solely to her mother.

Her thoughts are interrupted when a man approaches Edith and hands her her notebook, which had fallen from her lap. The man asks her if she is a writer as if finds the idea amusing; Edith replies by simply smiling and avoiding any further questions. As soon as he leaves, Mrs. Pusey tells Edith that she has an admirer.

Edith longs to talk to David and thinks back to when they first met. She had been intrigued by the first words she ever heard him say: "I must be getting back to the Rooms." Edith asked him what he did and David replied that he was an auctioneer.

David and Edith had met at a party given by her friend, Penelope Milne. Penelope and Edith were opposites, especially when it came to men. Penelope thought of men as conquests and was much more flirtatious than Edith. Because she felt that Edith's books were about romantic encounters that were absent from Edith's real life, Penelope pushed Edith to attend social functions, at which Penelope would introduce her to all kinds of men.

After Edith met David, she asked Penelope about him while they washed the dishes in Penelope's kitchen. Penelope told Edith that David had also asked about her. Penelope said that she had gone to school with David's wife. Edith remembered David's wife from



other social events: she was tall, blonde and very attractive, with an air of authority and confidence.

Edith proceeded to have an affair with David. He arrived at her house and they had fallen into bed, laughing with pleasure later when they woke up together. After that, it seemed to Edith that she knew everything about David. Edith kept her house filled with food because David was always hungry. The two were discreet about their affair so that no one would be hurt.

Thoughts of David and their relationship bring tears to Edith's eyes so she quickly excuses herself to the Puseys, who had joined her and leaves the table.

A few hours later, Edith arrives at dinner and finds the room bright and alive with people. As she takes her seat, the man who had returned her notebook earlier rises slightly in recognition of her. Mrs. Pusey arrives and remains in the doorway for a moment until M. Huber steps forward, takes her arm and leads her inside. The woman with the dog lets out a snort, which Mrs. Pusey chooses not to hear, as she sees this.

Edith feels anonymous again and accepts this, making a quiet exit to the salon for coffee. When the Puseys eventually arrive at the salon and signal for Edith to join them, she goes to their table like an anxious-to-please child. Mrs. Pusey tells Edith that her face reminds her of someone. By the end of the evening and the close of the chapter, she finally remembers who it is: Princess Anne.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Edith finds herself quietly analyzing Jennifer Pusey as she and her mother join Edith at the café. Although the two of them must be close to the same age, Edith is surprised that Jennifer has made absolutely no attempt to be friendly with her. Jennifer belongs solely to her mother and seems content with this arrangement; she obviously loves her mother deeply.

A new character is introduced in this chapter, although he remains nameless. Mrs. Pusey is convinced that the man, who has returned Edith's notebook to her, is an admirer of hers; and anything that Mrs. Pusey says is not to be disputed.

The reader learns a great deal more about Edith's life through her thoughts of David and their relationship. It is clear that Edith cares for him deeply. The reader learns about the circumstances surrounding their meeting and about the fact that David is married. Their relationship seems slightly unbalanced, however. Although there is mutual respect between them, David is a central part of Edith's life, while David has a life of his own, including a wife and children. On the nights when she is in bed alone, Edith finds herself thinking about this and is troubled by it.

When Edith recalls David's wife, she remembers her as a pretty woman with an air of confidence about her; this description is strikingly similar to the way she describes Iris Pusey. Edith seems taken by both women because she feels entirely different from

them. She seems to accept her role in David's life, however and is always available for him, just as she accepts her role in her relationship with the Puseys. In both cases, she is always ready to please.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

That night, Edith has difficulty falling asleep and finds herself reviewing the events of the evening over and over in her mind. When she finally awakens the next morning, much later than usual and with a painful headache, Edith knows that day will be squandered. The sound of a bell in the distance tells her that it is Sunday; it is a beautiful, sunny day.

Edith wonders what the other hotel occupants will be doing that day. She heads out to the terrace to take in the beautiful day and sees the man who had returned her notebook the day before. He stops for a moment to talk with the woman with the dog, then nods to Edith and to Mme. de Bonneuil before departing.

As soon as he leaves, the woman with the dog calls Edith over and introduces herself as Monica. Edith enters the conversation cautiously. The subject of the Puseys arises and when Monica speaks of them sarcastically, Edith tries to remain neutral, telling herself that she will not confide in this woman.

Monica tells Edith that she is staying at the hotel for her health. When Edith asks her if she has been ill, however, Monica replies that she has not and quickly changes the subject by ordering coffee. As she lights a cigarette, Monica nods toward it and tells Edith that she is under strict orders not to smoke.

The two women observe Mme. de Bonneuil with her son. Monica tells Edith that, although the poor woman lives for her son, he visits her only once a month and then forgets her. Her son's wife refuses to allow her to live with them.

Edith and Monica pass the morning pleasantly together and as lunchtime approaches, Edith is surprised at Monica's insistence that they go to the café for more coffee and cake. Watching Monica eat her éclair, Edith remarks to herself that she is not a very good judge of human nature; while she can invent characters on paper, she is useless at understanding real-life people.

The subject of Jennifer arises and Edith tells Monica that she cannot figure her out. Monica replies with narrowed eyes, assuring her that Jennifer is entirely straightforward. At one o'clock, Edith insists that they head back and a reluctant Monica follows her. The Puseys are on the terrace when they arrive, speaking to the unknown man whom Edith had seen earlier that morning. Mrs. Pusey calls Edith over and they leave for the dining room together. Monica, who clearly dislikes the Puseys, heads off on her own.

The man is introduced as Mr. Neville and the four of them sit together. Mrs. Pusey announces that she is a romantic and it turns out that she is reading a book written by Edith herself. While Edith says that the book is not one of her best, she feels a slight pang because she is actually proud of that story. She remembers when she wrote it; it



was over three years ago, when David was away with his wife in Greece. She wrote for 10 hours a day to keep from thinking about it.

After tea, Mr. Neville and Edith go for a walk and Mr. Neville reveals that he knows about her pseudonym. When he tells her this, Edith laughs for the first time in weeks. Mr. Neville tells her that this is a great improvement from her usual expression, to which Edith replies that she was unaware that anyone was interested in her expression. They begin a pleasant conversation during which Edith says others think of her as someone who should listen but not speak. Mr. Neville disagrees with her and compliments her. Edith smiles once again and finds her cheeks flushed with his flattering words as the two head back to the hotel.

That evening, Edith sits alone at her table but feels herself smiling from time to time. She excuses herself from dinner early and heads back to her room. Opening her window, she notices the moon and the calm air; it is a beautiful night. She suddenly hears a scream and sees a light coming from the Puseys' room. Edith thinks that someone has had a heart attack, but it turns out that Jennifer screamed because she saw a spider. Later that night, Monica's dog, Kiki, begins making noise, which keeps Edith awake. As she finally drifts off to sleep near dawn, Edith thinks she hears a door close.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Edith is finally introduced to the man Mrs. Pusey insisted had an interest in her. Mr. Neville is an intelligent man and he and Edith get along well. During their conversation, Edith reveals her perception of how other people see her. It seems that she is not used to being noticed; when she smiles and Mr. Neville says that it is a pleasant change from her usual expression, she says that she was unaware that anyone paid attention to her expression. She continues, saying that she is useful as an audience, but only in the way that a model is useful to a painter: both can be put away when they are no longer needed.

Mr. Neville asks her if she thinks of herself as a layperson and Edith replies that this is the way others think of her - that she should listen and not speak. Although it has been clear that Edith accepts her role as a mild-mannered, quiet woman, she has never expressed her opinion about the way she thinks others view her to anyone. Edith obviously longs for attention and companionship and is pleased with Mr. Neville's interest in her. The positive effect this has on her can be seen by the way she smiles for the first time in weeks and later continues to do so, even while dining alone that evening.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Edith writes yet another letter to David, telling him that her identity as an author has been discovered. She apologizes for not having written recently and tells him about the strange new relationships that have blossomed over the past few days. Instead of just hearing about shopping from the Puseys, she is beginning to shop herself with Monica; she tells David about a beautiful blue silk dress she purchased and thinks he will like.

Edith tells him more about Monica and her eating disorder. Her nobleman husband has sent her to the hotel to recuperate because he desperately wants an heir. If this does not happen, Monica will be told to leave. Monica is understandably unhappy about this and about the fact that she, too, wants a child. She eats several cakes every day, not bothering to pretend with Edith. She tells Edith that she feels safe with her.

When Edith begins to describe Mr. Neville and the long walk they took the day before, she puts down her pen, feeling that it would be inappropriate for her to continue.

Edith continues to think about Monica, her complicated life and her need for a companion in whom she can confide but whose opinions she can discount. Edith was this companion for her. She admits to herself that she fills the same function for Mrs. Pusey.

Edith is disturbed by Mrs. Pusey's need for attention. She has caught her in numerous ploys designed to attract the attention of passers-by, noting her insatiable desire for constant attention. Mrs. Pusey takes a negative view of Monica, seeing her as a fortune hunter who simply cannot be allowed in her presence.

Edith believes that it is women's need for companionship that drives them into marriage, admitting that this is how she feels. She leads a quiet life, writing and tending to her garden, but all the while she yearns for David. She lies well about the man in her life, although David does not do so well himself, even hinting to his wife during fights that he might look somewhere else.

His wife laughs at these hints, however, saying that he is too busy with his job and family to have time for an affair. His friends support him by granting him permission to enjoy himself, although they suspect that he does so with tough young secretaries and other men's wives, not with Edith.

Edith does her best to avoid seeing David's wife in public, but she once attended a social event, not knowing that his wife would be there and found it difficult to stay. She had behaved as she believed she was expected to behave: she remained quiet and polite, even though she found herself looking at David's wife and painfully thinking to herself how attractive and sexy she was.



Later that evening, she watched David beside his wife and saw that they would make love that night. The thought of it upset her so much that she left the party immediately. A man by the name of Geoffrey Long offered her a ride home. The unpleasant memory of that night was forgotten soon afterward when Edith and Penelope had gone shopping and encountered David. As Penelope turned to have a word with David's friend, David discreetly winked at Edith, wordlessly agreeing to meet.

Now in her room at the Hotel du Lac, Edith feels guilty about her thoughts about the women who have befriended her there. She remarks to herself that she is too harsh on women because she understands them better than she understands men. She understands their need to appear successful, their patience and their watchfulness, because she is one of them. Edith believes that she is critical of women because of her memories of her mother's unkindness. Then she reminds herself that not all women are like her mother; her father would have told her to think a little and she would see that she had made a false equation. With these thoughts, Edith bends her head sadly.

A while later, Edith decides to head downstairs for tea. Mme. de Bonneuil is the only one there when she arrives and smiles at Edith as she enters. The Puseys arrive soon after and Mrs. Pusey remarks that Edith has been a stranger for the past few days and that Jennifer thought she had deserted them. Jennifer adds that Mrs. Pusey was really upset. Edith murmurs her apologies and asks them what they did that day; in response, she hears a great deal of trivial information.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

The reader learns more about Edith and her life as she recalls past events. We now know that Edith's relationship with David is not new; it has been going on for over four years. Edith seems content to be by herself, tending to her garden, writing her novels and thinking about her lover. Only social pressure forces her to get out and attend gatherings. Edith is upset by the existence of David's wife, as evidenced by her reaction to the sight of them together at a party; she is even more upset because his wife is so attractive.

In the past few days at the hotel, Edith has spent most of her time with Monica as their friendship has grown. In her letter to David, she admits that she has become the companion Monica needs, one in whom she can confide and whose opinions she can disregard. Edith then writes that she plays the same role in her relationship with Mrs. Pusey. When Monica tells Edith she feels safe with her, Edith thinks to herself, "Who doesn't?"

Edith's view of herself continues to emerge. She sees herself as a quiet person whom people expect to be a silent companion and nothing more. While Edith appears to accept this role, she yearns for real attention, for someone to pay attention to her instead of just expecting her to provide companionship to them. Edith also thinks that she has been harsh on the women she has met at the hotel and that she is too critical of women in general because of her mother's unkindness.





# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Edith has lunch with Mr. Neville and afterward, they take a walk to the top of what seems like a mountain to Edith; the hotel and all its inhabitants appear to be at the opposite end of the universe from that vantage point. When she asks Mr. Neville who goes to this place, he replies simply, "People like us." Edith notes that Mr. Neville is a man of few words, although the few words he does speak are carefully selected and impeccably delivered. She remarks to herself that, while people expect writers to entertain them, no one ever thinks to entertain writers.

Noticing the expression on Edith's face, Mr. Neville says that she might feel better if she tells him what she is thinking. Edith dismisses her thoughts and asks Mr. Neville what he is doing at the hotel, saying that he must be bored there. Mr. Neville says that he assumes that Edith is there to finish a book; Edith tells him that he is correct. Then Mr. Neville informs Edith that he is there to attend an electronics conference in Geneva. He is in no hurry to return home and, since the weather is nice, he has decided to stay for a while.

Mr. Neville explains to Edith that he owns a rather large electronics firm for which he is second in command and that he has a farm, which is his real joy. His wife left him three years ago after running away with a man 10 years younger than her; but despite everyone's predictions, his wife and the younger man are still very happy together. Edith replies that it is marvelous that they are still happy but then quickly takes it back, realizing that this was an inconsiderate comment. She then adds that people divide writers into two categories, wise and naïve and that she belongs in the latter category.

Mr. Neville says that Edith looks unhappy and asks her if she thinks about being happy. She replies that she is rather unhappy and that this is very disappointing to her; she thinks all the time about being happy. Mr. Neville then tells Edith that she must be in love, as if to punish her for her earlier comment. Edith becomes angry but Mr. Neville continues, saying that it is a big mistake to expect to find happiness with one person or situation.

Since he has realized this, Mr. Neville says, he has found the secret to contentment. The secret is simply that, without a huge emotional investment, one can do whatever one wants and never be unhappy again. Edith points out the possibility that one may never be happy again either. Mr. Neville calls her a romantic and Edith agrees.

Mr. Neville tells Edith that she has no idea how promising the world is once one decides to have it all to oneself, to discount others; one's decisions become entirely selfish. Although Edith does not entirely agree with his argument she finds herself enjoying his way with words, his eloquence, which surprises her, since she had initially thought him



to be quiet. As she contemplates both his physical appearance and his intelligence, David comes to mind.

Mr. Neville says that Edith is wrong to think that she cannot live without love. Edith replies that she is not wrong and that she cannot live without it. Mr. Neville tells her that she is a good woman because good women always think it is their fault when someone else is being offensive; bad women never take the blame for anything. He says that Edith that she needs less love in her life, not more. He tells her that, instead of love, she needs social standing, she needs marriage. Once she is married, she can behave just as badly as everyone else or even worse, considering how good she has been. He adds that she would be popular with one and all, would have so much more to talk about and would never need to wait by the phone again.

Edith is slightly insulted by his last comment about waiting by the phone and when Mr. Neville notices this, he apologizes, saying that he did not mean to offend her. To this, Edith pleasantly replies that he is in fact sadistic. Mr. Neville replies that his wife used to tell him the same thing. Edith tells Mr. Neville that she hates him and that she finds his smile unamiable. He replies that, when she gets to know him better, Edith will discover just how unamiable it really is.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Edith and Mr. Neville spend the afternoon together, discussing their views about love and companionship and finding that they possess widely divergent opinions. Although Edith is intrigued by Mr. Neville, she cannot bring herself to agree with him that the best way to live life is without love, all alone, making completely selfish decisions. Edith admits to being a romantic and thinks that it would be impossible for her to live well without love.

The two go back and forth until Mr. Neville gives Edith his prescription for her problems: marriage. He believes that the social position that marriage would provide her is exactly what she needs. Edith is insulted, however, when he says that she would no longer need to wait by the phone. She is very sensitive to any comment that applies to her relationship with David because in this case, Mr. Neville is correct. Edith writes in her room because she does not want to miss his call if David telephones her, although he never does and this is why she is so insulted at Mr. Neville's insinuation. Despite their small quarrel and their difference of opinion on the subject of love, the two seem to grow closer and continue to enjoy each other's company.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Edith writes another letter to David in which she informs him that she has discovered that Mrs. Pusey's true age is 79, which shocks her. She thinks Jennifer is the kind of girl who will never leave her mother and mentions her friend Penelope Milne, who has refused many offers of marriage because her mother did not approve of the man. Edith wishes that her mother had given her guidance and advice; she never knew her own mother to do much more than bark disdain at her. She writes that her mother's fantasies, which remained unchanged throughout her life, taught Edith about reality. While she faces reality constantly, Edith wonders at times if it serves her any better than it did her mother.

The night of Mrs. Pusey's birthday, Monica openly feeds her first course to her dog Kiki and no one seems to care. Mme. de Bonneuil sits silently between courses, smoothing her tablecloth. Edith herself is three-quarters of the way through her sweetbreads when Mrs. Pusey, protesting the entire time, is led into the dining room by M. Huber. Her table is decked with flowers and she is dressed in a lavish outfit, her hair and nails freshly done.

Edith and Mme. de Bonneuil watch as the hotel staff dart around to serve Mrs. Pusey. Monica rolls her eyes. Jennifer is also dressed up for her mother's birthday and her hair is done as well. Everyone is served a glass of champagne so that they can drink to Mrs. Pusey's health.

Then an enormous cake is rolled out and cut. Mrs. Pusey covers her face with her hand, embarrassed by all the attention. Since it would be improper to leave Mrs. Pusey alone after dinner, all the guests, for the first time since their arrival, take their coffee together in the salon. Surprisingly, Monica and Mrs. Pusey strike up a conversation, discussing clothing and designers.

Edith finds herself wondering if Jennifer will ever marry. If she does, the man would have to be of equal or greater wealth and position and these qualities would have to come before his physical appearance. Edith expects that, for Jennifer, married life would simply be an extension of her present life, except that her husband would take part in it.

Mrs. Pusey gives the impression that she will live forever. When Monica asks which birthday she is celebrating, after being asked several times, Mrs. Pusey finally admits to being 79. Everyone then immediately calculates that Jennifer must be 39. At the coaxing of Mr. Neville, Mrs. Pusey explains why she did not have children during the early years of her marriage. She and her husband had tried for 12 years and nothing seemed to work until one day, Jennifer came along.



Mrs. Pusey continues to speak, telling stories of Jennifer's childhood years. Edith lays her pen down, feeling that the letter will need to be revised and finished later. The guests remain in the salon together until midnight. Back in her room, Edith searches for a reason for her low mood. Then she remembers the perfunctory birthdays of her childhood.

Still feeling depressed, Edith ponders her stay at the hotel and supposes that once it is over, she will return to her life. She remembers her father telling her, "I am clearing the decks, Edith," as he tore up papers on his desk; she applies this analogy to her life as the reason for her stay at the hotel.

Her father had said those words with the sad knowledge that nothing would be the same after that, that his stay in the hospital would not be the brief visit he had promised Edith's mother it would be. In fact, he had not come home at all. Edith reflects on the possibility that she, too, may not go home, her heart breaking with sorrow at the thought. As she sits alone in the silence of the evening, she thinks back to the events that brought her to the Hotel du Lac.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Mrs. Pusey's birthday celebration brings all the guests together. Even Monica, who had previously shared only a mutual dislike with the Puseys, takes part. Mrs. Pusey thoroughly enjoys the attention she receives this evening and is happy to share anecdotes from her marriage and from Jennifer's early childhood. The revelation of Mrs. Pusey's age takes everyone by surprise, especially because of the age it makes her daughter.

Edith contemplates the possibility of marriage in the future for Jennifer and finds herself imagining a rather humorous situation in which Jennifer's husband accompanies Jennifer and her mother on their outings.

Finding herself in hopelessly low spirits that evening, Edith is unable to pinpoint the cause. Memories of her childhood birthdays with her parents do nothing to improve her mood. She begins to contemplate the meaning of her visit to the Hotel du Lac. Edith considers the possibility of returning home and finds herself comparing her visit to the hotel to her father's clearing his desk before going to the hospital. He never returned from the hospital and Edith considers the possibility that she will never return home. Her deep sadness at the thought makes her feel distinctly uneasy, the same way she feels when she sees the plot of a novel finally working itself out. As she revisits the reasons for her arrival at the hotel, Edith doubts her return home.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

It is the morning of Edith's wedding day. Edith wakes up earlier than usual and catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror, surprised to see how pale and drawn she looks. She tells herself that she is no longer young and that this is her last chance. She thinks Penelope is right when she says that it is time for Edith to forget her high hopes, the ones she was born with and face reality instead.

Her impending marriage would assure her the comforts of pleasant company, comfort and proper holidays. The prospect is reasonable and she is a reasonable woman. Geoffrey Long had courted her in the traditional way. Edith had been impressed by his devotion, generosity and endless flowers and finally accepted his mother's opal ring. Geoffrey will provide Edith with a complete life, including a home, new friends and a cottage in the country: all the luxuries she would never be able to afford herself. People constantly remind Edith of her good fortune in marrying Geoffrey and once again, she tells herself how lucky she is.

Edith visits her garden, a place she considers truly hers and contemplates the marital bedroom that awaits Geoffrey and her. Even though she picked them out herself, Edith dislikes the bedroom's colors. She had selected them in such a hurry, with so much pressure from Penelope and from the salesman for whom she felt sorry, that she was actually quite unhappy with the results. She could not picture herself writing in the room or even taking a nap there. She also notes that there will be no garden at the house. Then she thinks about David and all the things that have been left unsaid and this troubles her.

Edith bathes and then dresses simply and modestly. When she looks in the mirror, she is pleased with the way she looks: elegant, controlled and quite grown up. She experiences the first stirring of pleasure she has felt all day. As she descends the stairs, the others are so busy with preparations that they have no time to speak to her. So Edith returns to her garden, leaving Penelope and her cleaning lady, Mrs. Dempster, to oversee the preparations inside.

When the car arrives for Edith and she leaves her home, she begins to see her house and the town as if she were looking at them for the first time. As the car passes the Registry Office, where the ceremony is to take place, Edith feels like a visitor from another planet as she observes the scene. When she sees Geoffrey, his mouse-like appearance registers with Edith for the first time. Calmly, Edith leans forward and asks the driver to please continue on because she has changed her mind. Edith sees Penelope's and Geoffrey's mouths drop open in horror as they watch the car drive past the Registry Office.



Back at her home, she finds Geoffrey in the drawing room and approaches him. She puts her hand on his shoulder and tells him that she is sorry. Geoffrey refuses to speak to her, saying that she has made him a laughing stock; Edith replies that it is she who is the laughing stock. Geoffrey ignores this comment and says that he is glad that his mother did not live to see this day. They both look at the opal ring on Edith's finger and Edith returns it to him. Then Penelope and Mrs. Dempster berate her for her behavior for what seems like hours.

Edith calls the auction house and asks David to see her that evening. She is unable to explain her actions to him completely so instead she makes a joke out of the situation, saying that she is simply not cut out to be a married lady. After David leaves, Edith is disappointed to note that he did not touch the plate of food she had prepared for him. Soon after, she leaves for Switzerland and the Hotel du Lac.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter is devoted to Edith's recollection of her failed attempt to marry Geoffrey Long. Through her memories, the reader finally learns the reason why Edith had been persuaded by her friends to get away from home. When thinking about Geoffrey on the morning of their intended wedding, Edith tells herself over and over again what everyone else has been saying to her: that she is lucky, that he is a good man, that he had been good to his mother.

When Edith looks in the mirror and thinks these things, it is apparent that she is still unsure about marrying Geoffrey and is using others' opinions in an effort to persuade herself. It is clear from the beginning that Edith is not enamored with the idea of marrying Geoffrey. Although he is a nice man who will provide her with everything she needs, Edith is dissatisfied and cannot convince herself to go through with the marriage. Her attachment to David interferes too when she thinks about him on the morning of her wedding. It is with David that she finally finds at least some comfort later that evening.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Edith gave herself a headache by recalling her failed marriage attempt. She finally went to bed very late, after the entire hotel was silent.

The following morning Edith is very hungry; sadness always gives her an appetite. She plans to head into town for some coffee, anxious to get away from the hotel. She has no heart to deal with any conversation with the hotel guests today. As she changes into her walking shoes, Edith hears a commotion coming from the Puseys' room. She runs to the room and finds Monica, M. Huber, his son-in-law and another hotel staff member already there, along with the Puseys. Mrs. Pusey asks Edith to sit with Jennifer. Edith finds her in bed, saying that she is fine and that she just needs more coffee, since hers has gone cold.

Edith is surprised to find nothing wrong and soon learns that the reason for the commotion was that Mrs. Pusey had been awakened by the sound of Jennifer's door; someone had entered Jennifer's room. Mrs. Pusey forced herself to go into her daughter's room and was relieved to find her safe; still, she remained in shock. Edith assures her that all she had heard was someone bringing in Jennifer's breakfast. Mrs. Pusey blames the boy who brought breakfast for the commotion. She says that she does not want him around anymore, that she had never liked him and that his eyes are too small.

Edith makes a mental note to herself to be less available to the Puseys from then on. Edith is disturbed by Mrs. Pusey's inability to admit her own mistake; instead, she has to blame someone else for her error.

Edith heads to the café and sees Monica already seated, devouring a piece of chocolate cake. Edith asks her if she is fond of her mother and Monica replies that she is; although her mother is a mad hatter and small doses of her are sufficient, Monica adores her. Edith tells Monica that she thinks she must be an unnatural daughter because, even though Edith's mother is dead, she hardly ever thinks of her. Edith says that she only misses her mother in the sense that she wishes she had lived long enough to see that Edith is like her in that they both prefer the company of men to that of women.

Edith adds that perhaps the incident that morning had provoked these thoughts. Some women fear and hate men and Edith despises their attempts to make her their accomplice. Monica does not grasp Edith's meaning and changes the subject. She says that Mr. Neville has taken quite a liking to Edith. Edith brushes this off, saying that they had only gone for a walk together.





Monica orders cake for both of them and they eat in silence. Edith wonders why Kiki is not monstrously fat with everything Monica feeds him to eat; Monica explains that he throws up most of it. She changes the subject back to Mr. Neville, saying that he is quite attractive and so is Edith when she puts her mind to it (although she tells her that her clothes are horrible). Edith says that she has not noticed that Mr. Neville is attractive.

Edith walks into town with Monica to go to the hairdresser; she is touched by the contact of Monica's arm as she links it with Edith's. Edith considers why she and Monica are here at the hotel and realizes that, in both their cases, they are there to get other people out of trouble. No one considers their hopes and wishes. As they walk past a bookshop, Edith sees one of her books on display and thinks to herself that it was her best work; but the thought of writing romantic novels for the rest of her life strikes a chill in her heart.

After returning to the hotel, Edith begins a letter to David. Later at dinner, Mrs. Pusey calls Edith over to her table and asks her what she has done to her hair. She tells her that she likes it better the other way.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Edith begins to realize how little she has in common with the Puseys after she witnesses Mrs. Pusey's overdramatic reaction to the morning's events. Edith is shocked, unable to believe that Mrs. Pusey will not admit that she has made a mistake and instead, insists on blaming the young boy who brought Jennifer her breakfast. Edith leaves the Puseys as soon as she can, still frustrated and unable to comprehend Mrs. Pusey's behavior.

Edith then spends most of the day with Monica, although the two are unlikely companions. Edith is troubled when she approaches Monica at the café and tries to explain her feelings to her about women who have an aversion to men; but Monica does not understand what she means. Both women seem down that morning and although they speak little about their feelings after Edith's initial attempt, they take comfort in each other's company.





# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Edith shivers slightly as she takes Mr. Neville's hand and boards the boat for its last trip of the season across the lake. As the boat leaves the shore, Edith feels uneasy about being cut off from dry land. She tells herself that she could have spent the entire day writing, but the thought of it makes her feel sick.

Mr. Neville tells Edith to walk around the deck with him so that she can warm up. He tells her that the cardigan she is wearing is not warm enough and that he wishes she would get rid of it. He also says that whoever told her she looked like Virginia Wolff did her a disservice, although she must have considered it a compliment.

Then Mr. Neville pulls her hand more firmly through his arm and pushes her forward, walking her around the deck again so that she can get her color back. Edith remarks at the grayness of their surroundings and thinks that this outing is much too serious to be considered a diversion. She begins to wish that she had not accepted Mr. Neville's invitation, feeling unsafe and distressed.

They finally arrive at their destination and Edith and Mr. Neville sit down to lunch. Edith says that she lost her bearings on the ride and feels that they might not be allowed back. Mr. Neville tells Edith that although she is fascinating, she certainly knows how to make a man feel uncomfortable. He then asks her if she is referring to returning to the hotel or returning to her home in London.

The thought of returning home is unsettling to Edith. Although this boat trip had been uncomfortable for her, it had relieved her of having to think about what was going to happen next. Mr. Neville then attempts to describe Edith's life in London: she has a comfortable income and attends social parties and publishers' parties but does not really enjoy any of it. People are always glad to see her but Edith returns home alone. She is fussy about her house and she leads a secret life.

Edith studies Mr. Neville as he leans toward her, noticing that he suddenly seems younger and less controlled than usual. While it had been easy for her to imagine him, an attractive man in his fifties, as the kind of man who surely had a library in his house, it was difficult for her to picture him in any other room.

Suddenly Mr. Neville tells Edith that he thinks she should marry him. Edith's eyes widen in disbelief when she hears this and Mr. Neville hurries to explain himself. He tells her that he has a small estate, a very fine house and a beautiful collection of *famille rose* dishes because he is sure that she likes beautiful things.

Edith interrupts him, saying that he is wrong, that she does not like *things* at all. Mr. Neville continues, adding that he has a lot of business overseas and enjoys entertaining. After he has been away he hates returning home to a house occupied only



by the couple who live there while he is away. Mr. Neville finishes by telling Edith that she would fit perfectly into the setting he has described. Edith replies that he has made it all sound like a description for a job for which she has not applied. When Mr. Neville asks if she would prefer to go home to an empty house instead, Edith says nothing and simply shakes her head.

Mr. Neville says that his wife's affair made him look like a laughingstock and although he thought he could get over it with dignity by doing nothing, he finds the situation to be completely the opposite. People seem to want him to break down and therefore he needs a wife, one whom he can trust, so that he can repair his wounded dignity. Edith tells him that he is not making this easy for her. He insists that he is making it *easier* for her, that he has watched her try to talk to the women at the hotel and that when she is alone, he sees that her face is full of sorrow. Edith asks why he sees her as such a hopeless case and Mr. Neville replies that she is a lady, which makes her a rare species. He tells her that as his wife, she will do very well; but on her own, she will look like a bit of a fool.

Edith asks him what she will do in his house while he is away and he replies that she can do the same thing she does now, only better. Edith Neville is a fine name for an author and she will have the social position that she needs. Marrying him will give her confidence and sophistication, as well as the satisfaction that she is giving him credibility.

Mr. Neville explains that Edith is not the sort of woman men fear: hysterical women who act as if they are the constant object of scandal or desire, boasting of conquests and their performance, thinking that they can do anything as long as they entertain their friends and keep up appearances with their husbands. Edith tells him that women are afraid of that sort of woman too; Mr. Neville replies that most women *are* that sort of woman. Edith tells him that she was under the impression that men prefer women like that, that they hate the kind of peaceful existence Mr. Neville is describing. He responds that men do prefer those women, in a sense, but they soon realize how tiring that sort of relationship is.

Mr. Neville continues to explain his logic, telling Edith that he is not asking her to give up everything for love; instead, he is proposing a partnership based on esteem and fashion. If she wishes to take a lover she may do so, as long as she does so in a civilized way; the same would apply for him. Their union would be one of shared interests, of companionship. He asks Edith if she has ever desired vindication; if she marries him, she will be able to entertain her friends and people will at last feel comfortable with her. Mr. Neville tells her that she is lonely.

The air has grown colder and they speak little on the return trip. Edith tells Mr. Neville that she does not love him and asks him if this bothers him. Mr. Neville replies that in fact it reassures him, since he does not want the burden of her feelings. Edith asks him if he loves her. Mr. Neville replies that, although he does not love her, she has gotten past his guard, moved him and touched him. She is like a nerve he has managed to deaden, only to be annoyed to find it coming back to life.



As they walk back to the hotel, hand in hand, Edith tells him that she has to think about this. Mr. Neville replies that he hopes it will not be for too long, since he does not want to make a habit of proposing to her; and besides, they will have to leave by the coming weekend. Edith asks one more question: "Why me?" Replies Mr. Neville with a smile, "Perhaps because you are harder to catch than the others."

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Despite her misgivings, Edith reluctantly accepts Mr. Neville's invitation to join him on the final boat trip across the lake of the season. Edith soon finds herself shocked by Mr. Neville's marriage proposal. He makes the whole idea sound more like a business arrangement than anything romantic by the way he describes the potential benefits to each of them. Their discussion goes back and forth as Edith tries to clarify the idea in her mind. Mr. Neville seems to have thought the idea through beforehand because he presents Edith with a seemingly foolproof proposition.

It is Mr. Neville's belief that both Edith and he will appear foolish if they remain unmarried; she, because she will be pitied as a lonely single woman and he, because of his wife's escapades. To him, their union makes perfect sense and he does his best to convey his reasoning to Edith, who is left to ponder his proposal after receiving satisfactory answers to all of her questions. She must decide quickly, because Mr. Neville plans to leave in only a few days.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Edith has bathed and changed and sits in her room waiting for dinnertime. It seems to her that, at this point, she is finished with this room. Whether this is the case or the room is finished with her instead, it seems that some sort of unspoken conclusion has been reached and it will soon be time for her to leave. She passes her hand over the manuscript of her book, puts the manuscript back into her folder and places the folder into her empty travel bag. Having done this, she is startled, since the action was not planned; but having done it unconsciously, she decides to accept it as final and continues to pack the rest of her belongings. All around the hotel, there seems to be a feeling that it is time to leave.

Edith sits alone in the salon for a while, remembering her first night there. As she looks back, she thinks of herself as having been younger, braver and determined to make it through the trip and return home unaffected by it. Since then, she feels that she has achieved a seriousness for the first time in her life and that from now on, all decisions she makes will have a significant impact on her life. She feels that she is about to enter a world that she had previously seen as belonging to others; a world in which she had no business and to which she didn't belong. It would be a world of household tasks and matrimonial issues. She had once heard David ask his wife if they should take his car or hers and the comment had recently taken on a great deal of significance.

Edith observes Mme. de Bonneuil on the other side of the room and feels a pang of sorrow for her. She gets up and walks over to her, offers her arm and is greeted by a pleased yet slightly confused smile on Mme de Bonneuil's face. Just then Monica enters, takes the older woman's other arm and the unlikely trio enter the dining room together. Mme. de Bonneuil presses Edith's and Monica's hands in a gesture of gratitude before sitting down at her table.

Halfway through dinner, Mrs. Pusey arrives with Jennifer. Afterwards, as they take their coffee in the salon, Edith feels that Mrs. Pusey treats her a bit distantly. Mr. Neville arrives and is greeted graciously by Mrs. Pusey. He tells the group that he will be leaving the day after tomorrow. Edith excuses herself and firmly places a hand on Mr. Neville's shoulder, telling him not to get up. She finds herself suddenly tired of her reticence.

When she returns to her room, Edith starts to write her final letter to David. She begins by stating that this will be her final letter to him and the first one that she will actually mail. She tells him that she plans to marry a man she met at the hotel by the name of Philip Neville and that she will live in his house in Marlborough and does not think that she will ever see David again.



She tells David of her deepest feelings toward him, that he is the breath of life to her, but she adds that she is aware that she should not say such things. She says that, while she does not love Mr. Neville and he does not love her, he has made her see what will happen to her if she continues to love David as she does. Edith tells David that she has lived for him, although she only sees him perhaps twice a month. In between their meetings she is tortured with thoughts of him with his wife and family and, even worse, by the thought that someone new may catch his attention, perhaps at a party, the same way she had met him. She finds herself studying women on the street, wondering if any of them would be to his liking; she states that, although she may lack the details, she knows David very well.

Edith finally realizes that she is not David's type. She tells David that she will try to be a good wife to Mr. Neville. She says that, just like her publisher, David constantly tried to get Edith to make her stories more modern and cynical but that he was wrong. She believes every word she writes, although she has come to the conclusion and accepts the fact that none of it will ever come true for her.

She points out that David has known her address for the past two weeks but has made no attempt to contact her; therefore, there is no point in telling him where she will be moving. She ends the letter by telling him that she was the more willing of the two in the relationship and sends him all her love always.

Edith awakes very early the next morning and waits until dawn for the front desk attendant to arrive so that she can go downstairs to mail her letter to David. As she makes her way down the hallway, she sees Mr. Neville quietly slipping out of Jennifer's bedroom, although he does not see Edith. Edith is not surprised at the sight and finally realizes that the noise she had heard on her sleepless nights had really had been the sound of Jennifer's door.

Edith returns to her room and destroys the letter she had written to David. She then leaves her room and heads back downstairs once again, this time to send a telegram home. She begins by writing the words "coming home," then scratches them out and writes simply, "Returning."

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Through Edith's final letter to David, the reader is able to fill in the remaining pieces of the story of their relationship. She finally realizes that she has been the more willing of the two of them and that it is useless for her to continue to pine away for a man she sees twice a month. She loves and cares for him deeply, but she must move on. Edith has resolved to accept Mr. Neville's marriage proposal until she sees him leaving Jennifer's room at dawn, after which she abruptly changes her mind.

Edith's wording of her telegram to London is significant. Before she left her room that morning, Edith had been resolved to begin a new life, to let go of her feelings for David and move on, accepting the fact that she would never see him again. She had realized

the way her life was heading and was willing to marry Mr. Neville in order to change its direction.

When she changes her mind after learning of Mr. Neville's escapades with Jennifer, however, Edith tears up the letter to David, which had contained all of her resolutions about her future life, the only evidence of her vows of change and prepares to send a telegram home instead. The single word she writes, "Returning," indicates that instead of simply going home, Edith will go back to the life she had before the Hotel du Lac.



# Characters

## Edith Hope

Edith is the main character of the novel; the story is told through her eyes and centers around the development of her character. Edith is a romantic fiction novelist who leads a rather dull life, attending social gatherings only at the urging of her close friend and neighbor, Penelope Milne. At one of these parties, Edith meets David and the two are instantly attracted to one another. Although David is married, he begins an affair with Edith that continues for over four years. Edith loves David, thinking about and writing to him constantly. She views herself as the type of woman who is expected to listen to others but not speak, to serve as a companion; she is the kind of person in whom people feel comfortable confiding. Edith serves this purpose in her relationships with the women she meets at the hotel and seems to accept this role. Her acceptance, however, is accompanied by a longing for real attention. She seems to find this in David and perhaps this is why she misses him so much.

Before arriving at the hotel, Edith had been engaged to marry a man named Geoffrey Long but failed to appear for the ceremony. After this disastrous event, Edith leaves home for the Hotel du Lac in order to get away for a while at the urging of her friends. While at the hotel she meets Mr. Neville, a businessman who converses with her and flatters her; Edith enjoys his attentions. They spend time together and just before he plans to leave the hotel, Mr. Neville proposes marriage to Edith, telling her that she needs the social position that marriage would provide. After careful consideration, Edith plans to accept his proposal, but changes her mind at the last minute. Instead of leaving Hotel du Lac with Mr. Neville, Edith returns home.

## David

David is Edith's primary love interest in the novel. Although he never appears in person, Edith spends a great deal of time thinking about him and writing to him; therefore, he plays a central role in the story. Since they met, David has been having an affair with Edith. He owns an auction house and has a wife and children; his busy lifestyle leaves little time for Edith, although they have managed to continue their relationship for over four years. While they do not see each other often, Edith's feelings for David remain strong and she tends to his every need, lovingly providing him with generous amounts of food every time he visits. David is not as careful as Edith about hiding his affair, dropping small hints when he and his wife quarrel that he might look elsewhere, although she laughs at him when he does so. David's friends see him as good-looking man with license to enjoy himself a little, although Edith is the last person with whom they would expect him to have an affair.

At the end of the novel, Edith reveals her true feelings for David in a letter and the reader finally learns how much she cares for him, how she lives for him. Although she sees him



only twice a month, the rest of the time she is plagued with thoughts of him with his wife and children and even worse, with the possibility that he may find a new mistress. David is a central part of Edith's life, the element of love without which she claims she cannot live.

## Iris Pusey

Mrs. Pusey is staying at the Hotel du Lac with her daughter, Jennifer, for one main reason: to shop. Iris Pusey is an extremely wealthy widow whose primary purpose in life is to provide for her daughter, Jennifer. Mrs. Pusey is stunningly beautiful, tall and blonde; the kind of woman people staring at when she enters a room. Edith notices her immediately and thinks she is much younger than she really is. Mrs. Pusey has had a fairytale life: a great deal of wealth and a perfect husband who worshipped her and provided her with everything she desired.

When her husband dies, Mrs. Pusey is left with only her daughter, Jennifer, who, although she is approaching middle age, is still treated like a young child by her mother. The two are inseparable and share a very close, loving relationship. The Puseys are regular guests of the hotel and as a result its owner, M. Huber, is willing to do anything to please them. Mrs. Pusey has little in common with Edith and simply uses her as a companion to whom she can recount her trivial anecdotes about shopping and her adoring daughter. Edith soon grows weary of this and realizes that she has nothing in common with the Puseys. She decides to spend less time with them and grows more distant from them as the novel concludes.

## Monica

Monica has been sent to the Hotel du Lac by her husband, a man of noble blood who is in desperate need of an heir, to recuperate from an eating disorder. Monica, however, seems to be making no attempt to recover. She is a tall, beautiful woman who is painfully thin. She spends all day at the café eating cakes but when she goes to dinner, she eats nothing, pushing her food around with her fork and letting it fall to the floor, where her little dog, Kiki, eats it for her. Monica befriends Edith, saying that she feels safe with her, so Edith becomes her companion. The two spend a great deal of time together, more as Edith eventually grows tired of the Puseys and their superficial ways. Toward the end of the novel, although Monica has told Edith that she hates her husband, she seems excited to be going home and her fate is left undetermined.

## Mr. Neville

Mr. Neville is second in command at an electronics firm and was attending a conference in nearby Geneva when he decided to stay a little bit longer, finding himself at the Hotel du Lac. He was married, but his wife left him three years earlier for a man ten years her junior and is still happy with her younger boyfriend. This event has taken a toll on Mr. Neville, who is still upset by the situation and how it reflects poorly on him as a man. He





tells Edith that the secret to being totally content is being emotionally unattached and able to do whatever he wants.

However, just days before he plans to head home, Mr. Neville proposes marriage to Edith. He believes that marriage is the best alternative for them, since it will provide them both with benefits they will never receive if they remain unattached. He believes that since his wife abandoned him for a younger man, it has left him looking foolish; having a sensible wife would repair his damaged reputation. Edith, on the other hand, would benefit from the companionship and social status that marriage to Mr. Neville would offer. Although she is ready to accept his offer, when Edith realizes that Mr. Neville has been having an affair with Jennifer Pusey, she changes her mind and returns home to London, presumably without ever speaking another word to him.



# Objects/Places

## The Hotel du Lac

The two-week span of the novel takes place entirely at the Hotel du Lac. The atmosphere is a quiet one since the hotel is operating during the off season and its guests are few in number. Still, these guests provide Edith with a small group of interesting acquaintances with whom she interacts throughout the duration of her stay.

## The salon

Edith and the other hotel guests take their meals in the salon. This is where Edith goes to have tea upon her arrival at the hotel and where she becomes acquainted with each of the hotel guests she meets during her stay.

## Edith's room

Edith's hotel room serves as a place of refuge for her during her stay. When she first arrives, she is reluctant to stay, unpacking only a few items of clothing and leaving the bulk of her things in her travel bag in case she decides to leave at the spur of the moment. As her stay progresses, however, Edith escapes to her room when the events of the day prove too much for her to handle; it is where she goes to grapple with her feelings after excusing herself from an activity. At the end of the novel, Edith sits in her room and is overwhelmed by the feeling that she is finished with it, that she has reached a conclusion with it. At that point it symbolizes her need to move on.

## Letters to David

Throughout the story, Edith writes letters to David. These serve to fill him, as well as the reader, in on the main events that take place throughout her stay at the hotel. The letters also indicate the depth of her devotion to David; she seems to write to him nearly every day. Edith also expresses her feelings for David in her letters. However, it is only when she writes her final letter to him that we realize that she has never actually mailed any of the previous letters.



# Themes

## Tortoise vs. Hare

This is an analogy used by Edith near the beginning of the story to describe two different types of women she believes exist in the world. In her stories, it is always the tortoise who wins the man, while the hare is left scorned and confused. It is her belief, however, that this is the complete opposite of how things really work in the real world. Her definition of a tortoise is a woman like her who is quiet, shy, mild-mannered and conservative, the type of woman who does not do a lot of flirting or chasing after men. In her books, this woman always ends up with the male hero.

The hare, on the other hand, is the confident, attractive, sexy woman who is not afraid of going after a man but who usually does not have to, since men are drawn to her in the first place. Edith is fully aware that she belongs in the tortoise category and is ready to accept the consequences that go with it. The reason Edith believes that the hare always wins in real life is that the hare never even bothers to acknowledge the tortoise as legitimate competition.

Edith's view of the two types of women is evident in her everyday interactions with the other women at the hotel. Through her characterizations of them, Edith clearly views Mrs. Pusey and Monica as fitting into the "hare" category. As a tortoise, she accepts this and it is evident in her relationships with the two women. To each of them she becomes the type of companion who simply serves as someone in whom each can confide, someone who listens but doesn't speak and whose opinions they can discount. Since she sees herself as this type of person, she accepts her relationship with the "hare" women willingly, further testament to the categorization of women in which she seems to believe so strongly.

## Confidence

Although she does not say it in so many words, this is a trait that Edith Hope lacks and one that she is drawn to in other women. There are two main women characters in the story to whom Edith feels inferior. The first one she meets is Mrs. Iris Pusey. When she first sees her, Edith is struck by her strikingly beautiful appearance; she exudes confidence in all her movements. She is drawn to Mrs. Pusey and watches her from the opposite side of the dining room with awe as she interact with others. Edith has never encountered a woman with so much presence as Mrs. Pusey

The second woman whom Edith characterizes as exuding confidence is David's wife, a woman she describes as being pretty, tall, blonde, sexy and confident. The thought of David with his wife disturbs Edith a great deal, but when she sees her at a party one day, she is even more upset to see that she is an attractive, sexy, confident woman, all traits that Edith believes that she does not possess.



Edith describes these two women in the same way and views herself as inferior to them because of the confidence they exude in their behavior, their speech and their movements. She describes her observations of both women and concludes that this confidence, something that mild-mannered, quiet Edith does not possess, is key to their appeal.

## Love

Love is the eternal question that romantic fiction writers have pondered since the dawn of time. Since Edith Hope is a romantic fiction writer in a romantic fiction novel, the subject is discussed a great deal. Edith originally conveys her feelings on the subject to Mr. Neville, who tells her that the secret to total contentment is to be completely unattached, to live one's life by one's own rules and to make every decision completely selfishly. He claims that love is not a necessary part of life; on the contrary, it is simply a complication.

Edith's opinion on the subject differs completely. She states that she is unable to live well without love. To her, life without love is devoid of meaning and therefore, not worth living. Her love interest, David, is a married man, but Edith is deeply in love with him anyway. She spends her days thinking about him and waiting for his next visit, although they are few and far between. She practically lives for him, looking forward to nothing more than his arrival at her house and the chance to spend a few hours with him. His visits are the central focus of her life and even while she is away, her thoughts are consumed by him. Edith continues to grapple with the question of love as she moves through her life, receiving two proposals of loveless marriages and eventually rejecting both. Although she is about to accept Mr. Neville's marriage proposal, meaning a life without true love and say goodbye to David, in the end she changes her mind and returns instead to the life she left in London.



# Style

## Point of View

The story is told in the first person through the eyes of the main character, Edith Hope. She tells the story primarily from her own point of view, although the author switches to an omniscient narrator to describe a few select parts of the story for which such a narrator is necessary. First person point of view is appropriate in this novel because the plot focuses primarily on the personal development of the woman through whom the story is told. In order to fully grasp Edith's thoughts and feelings, it is most effective for the story to be told from her personal viewpoint.

The reader is provided with Edith's innermost thoughts and feelings in order to get a true sense of what she is experiencing in every event of the story. Edith's thoughts also add a lighthearted element to the story, since she has many amusing thoughts that would be inappropriate to speak aloud and that would not have been included at all if the story had been told another way. Edith is able to tell the reader directly what is going through her mind as she interacts with the characters and experiences inner turmoil. As Edith grapples with her feelings, the reader experiences them along with her and obtains an intimate view of Edith's personal struggles, around which the novel is centered.

## Setting

The entire novel takes place in Switzerland's Hotel du Lac during its off-season as winter approaches. The hotel itself provides a unique atmosphere for the development of the story because of its seclusion and limited selection of characters. Edith and the other guests of the hotel remain there throughout the two-week duration of the story, making it possible for Edith to meet and develop a unique relationship with each of them. Had the story been told in any other setting, this may not have been possible. The caliber of the hotel also contributes to the character selection in the story. Since the hotel is exclusive and any new guests must arrive with references from well-to-do former visitors, all its inhabitants possess wealthy backgrounds and wildly different lifestyles than Edith's.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is colloquial, with somewhat elevated vocabulary. The reader experiences Edith's thoughts as she thinks them and they are strikingly similar in style and wit to the writing in her letters, which is provided in quotations, exactly as she writes it. Edith also shows her personality through colorful analogies about her life and the goings-on around her as well as through her characterizations of the people she encounters, which serve to describe each of the story's characters to the reader in detail.

## Structure

The story is divided into 12 chapters of approximately equal length. The chapters progress in chronological order, beginning with Chapter 1, in which Edith first arrives at the hotel and begins to encounter its guests and ending with Chapter 12, when Edith makes the decision to return home to London. One exception to chronological order is Chapter 9, which consists entirely of Edith's recollections of her failed attempt to marry Geoffrey Long - the reason why she winds up at the Hotel du Lac. The story itself progresses in chronological order, with Edith's memories of her past filling in the gaps for the reader as the plot moves forward.



## Quotes

"Edith Hope, a writer of romantic fiction under a more thrusting name, remained standing at the window, as if an access of good will could pierce the mysterious opacity with which she had been presented, although she had been promised a tonic cheerfulness, a climate devoid of illusions, an utterly commonsensical, not to say pragmatic, set of circumstances-quiet hotel, excellent cuisine, long walks, lack of excitement, early nights-in which she could be counted upon to retrieve her serious and hard-working personality and to forget the unfortunate lapse which had led to this brief exile..."

Chapter 1, page 8

"...Now you will notice, Harold, that in my books it is the mouse-like unassuming girl who gets the hero, while the scornful temptress with whom he has had a stormy affair retreats baffled from the fray, never to return. The tortoise wins every time. This is a lie, of course," she said, pleasantly, but with authority...'In real life, of course, it is the hare who wins. Every time. Look around you. And in any case it is my contention that Aesop was writing for the tortoise market...hares have no time to read."

Chapter 2, Page 27

"I rather thought I was useful as an audience, but only as a lay figure is useful to a painter: both can be put aside when no longer required."

Chapter 5, Page 76

"I have been too harsh on women, she thought, because I understand them better than I understand men. I know their watchfulness, their patience, their need to advertise themselves as successful. Their need to never admit failure. I know all that because I am one of them. I am harsh because I remember Mother and her unkindness and because I am continually on the alert for more. But women are not all like Mother and it is really stupid of me to imagine that they are. Edith, Father would have said, think a little. You have made a false equation."

Chapter 6, Page 88

"...I meant that I cannot live *well* without it. I cannot think or act or speak or write or even dream with any kind of energy in the absence of love. I feel excluded from the living world. I become cold, fish-like, immobile. I implode. My idea of absolute happiness is to sit in a hot garden all day, reading, or writing, utterly safe in the knowledge that the person I love will come home to me in the evening. Every evening."

Chapter 7, Page 98

"Women like to share their sadness, thought Edith. Their joy they like to show off to one another. Victory, triumph over odds, calls for an audience. And that air of bustle and



exigence sometimes affected by the sexually loquacious-that is for the benefit of other women. No solidarity then."

Chapter 10, Page 149

"The fact is that there are very few distractions in a place like this and one gets to fear one's own boredom. It is not true that Satan makes work for idle hands to do; that is just what he doesn't. Satan should be at hand with all manner of glistening distractions, false but irresistible promises, inducements to reprehensible behaviour. Instead of which one is simply offered a choice between overwork and half-hearted idleness. And that is scarcely a choice at all. One cannot even rely on Satan to fulfill his obligations."

Chapter 11, Page 158





## Topics for Discussion

How does Edith's occupation play into the development of the story? How would the story have been different if she were not a novelist?

What is the role of Madame Pusey and her daughter in the story? How do their interactions with Edith affect the development of the story?

What do we learn about Edith through her letters to David? How does it affect our perception of their relationship when we learn that none of these letters were ever mailed?

In the beginning of the novel, Edith tells of her view of women as "tortoises" and "hares." How does this view relate to her life in the beginning of the story? Has her view changed toward the conclusion? If so, how?

What is the significance of the single word on the telegram Edith sends home at the conclusion of the story? Why did she change the wording?

Before her arrival at the Hotel du Lac, Edith left Geoffrey Long at their planned wedding ceremony, having decided not to marry him after all. Have her feelings changed toward the end of the story when she considers marrying Mr. Neville?

The physical descriptions of David's wife and of Iris Pusey, as seen through Edith's eyes, are strikingly similar: both are tall and blonde and exude an air of confidence. What is Edith's reaction to these women? How is her reaction to each of them similar?

The Hotel du Lac is a secluded place with few visitors, which makes for a short character list and limited interaction between Edith and other people. In essence, Edith interacts only with the Puseys, Monica and Mr. Neville. How does the seclusion of the environment affect the story?

When Edith was a child, she did not have a very close relationship with her mother; in fact, she did not have much of a relationship with her at all. How does this affect her view of the relationship between Iris and Jennifer Pusey? How does it affect her view of women in general?

On multiple occasions, Edith admits that she is the kind of person in whom people naturally confide, that she is meant to listen and not to speak and that people expect her to behave this way. How does this opinion of herself play into her behavior and her view of herself with respect to other women? How does it affect her behavior with men?