

# **Let the Great World Spin: A Novel Study Guide**

**Let the Great World Spin: A Novel by Colum McCann**

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# Plot Summary

"Let the Great World Spin," a novel by New York Times Bestselling author, Colum McCann, is a novel that follows the lives of several different characters who all either witnessed or heard about one event - a tightrope walker walking between the World Trade Center buildings in August 1974 - and whose lives become interconnected in one way or another.

Chapter 1 introduces John Andrew Corrigan, known as Corrigan, and his older brother Ciaran, whose name is not revealed until later in the book. As the story progresses, the reader will see that Corrigan and Ciaran were somehow involved in most of the other characters' lives throughout the book. The first chapter is told through Ciaran's point of view as he shares background information about his childhood, Corrigan's childhood in Dublin, and Corrigan's road to becoming a priest and working with prostitutes in New York City. Chapter 1 also reveals that Corrigan was in love and having a relationship with Adelita, which was something that caused much conflict for him. Chapter 1 ends with Corrigan dying in a car accident with one of the prostitutes he often helped, Jazzlyn.

Chapter 2 is written from the perspective of Claire, a well-to-do judge's wife who is hosting a meeting at her house for a group of mothers who all lost sons in the Vietnam War. Claire's connection to other characters becomes apparent later in the book.

Chapter 3 is written from the perspective of Lara, a married artist who is a recovering drug addict. Robert was driving the car that causes the accident that killed Corrigan and Jazzlyn. Lara is deeply affected by the accident and attends Jazzlyn's funeral where she meets Ciaran. Chapter 3 ends with a suggestion that Lara and Ciaran are falling in love.

Chapter 4 introduces the tightrope walker's perspective or the amount of work he put into preparing his big walk and how he feels when walking in the air. Chapter 5 is written from the perspective of a 14-year-old person, Fernando, who took a famous picture of the walker during his walk. This photo will eventually connect Fernando to Jazzlyn's daughter, Jaslyn.

Chapter 6 is told through the eyes of four computer programmers or hackers in California who have heard about the walk and speak to various New Yorkers by calling pay phones close to the World Trade Centers. Chapter 7 is recounted through the perspective of another prostitute helped by Corrigan, Tillie, who is also Jazzlyn's mother. She shares her life story of becoming a prostitute, feeling guilty about the life that she gave Jazzlyn and feeling unable to live with the possibility that she could do the same to Jazzlyn's daughters. The chapter ends with an insinuation that Tillie committed suicide while in jail.

Chapter 8 is more of the walker's perspective. He is still unnamed but he shares more of his background, about the stunts he performs on his big walk, and his arrest following his walk. Chapter 9 introduces the perspective of Judge Solomon Soderberg, Claire's



husband, a disillusioned judge who receives the walker's case in court, along with the cases of Jazzlyn and Tillie Henderson.

Chapter 10 comes from the perspective of Adelita, the woman with whom Corrigan was in love and developing a relationship. Chapter 11 is recounted from the perspective of Gloria, a woman who was part of the woman's group in Chapter 2. The chapter reveals that she becomes good friends with Claire, finds out what happened with Claire's husband, and ends up fostering Jazzlyn's two young daughters.

Chapter 12 ends the book through the eyes of Jaslyn, daughter of Jazzlyn, the prostitute helped by Corrigan. Jaslyn's story reveals that she had an extremely close relationship with Claire and that she visited Ciaran who is now married to Lara in Ireland. Tillie died in the jail cell. One of her most precious belongings is a picture taken of the tightrope walker because it was taken the same day that her mother died. The book ends with Jaslyn lying in bed with a sick Claire, thinking about the world continues to spin no matter what happens.



# Prologue, Book One, Chapter 1, All Respects to Heaven, I Like It Here

## Prologue, Book One, Chapter 1, All Respects to Heaven, I Like It Here Summary

The people of New York City become hushed when they see a man standing at the top of one of the World Trade Centers. Although everyone seems to be coming to their windows in their offices, stopping in the street or looking on from the ferries to watch him, no one quite knows who the person is or what their intentions are. When sirens start sounding, the watchers begin to wonder even more what is about to happen. What's the person doing up there?

The tension is both broken and exposed when someone yells "Do it, asshole!" because the watchers begin to laugh and because the sentiment is shared amongst them all. Finally, they see the person bend over and then something falling, although it was just a shirt. With their eyes on him, the watchers see the person put one foot out and take a step. He had begun.

Chapter 1 begins with the main character, who is unidentified by name, remembering what his childhood was like with his brother, Corrigan, and their mother in Dublin, Ireland. He remembers he and his brother having a deep love for their mother and, in particular, loving that she was a good musician. Their father, a physicist, left them many years ago but still sends weekly checks. The main character remembers sharing a room with Corrigan, how he began sneaking out and how it wasn't until two years later that he learned Corrigan snuck out for nightly walks and would occasionally give his blanket to a homeless drunk- an act that foreshadowed who his brother would become.

The reader learns that Corrigan began getting drunk at the age of 13 or 14, when he would spend his time at the flophouses. The main character remembers Corrigan sometimes coming home without articles of clothing, telling their mother that he was doing "God's work." Corrigan and the main character's mother died when they were 17 and 19, at which point their father arrived. Corrigan seemed to be filled with anger towards his father and, the day of their mother's funeral, Corrigan gave their mother and father's clothes away to the people from the flophouses.

The rest of the chapter focuses on how Corrigan continued working with the poor, became a priest and was eventually sent by his Order to work in New York City. After being hurt in a bombing in Ireland, the main character joins his brother in New York City, where he is shocked to see his brother's dangerous neighborhood and poor living conditions. The reader learns that Corrigan has been working closely with the prostitutes in his neighborhood, allowing them to use his bathroom, and with the residents of a nursing home, taking them on daily outings.



The main character finds himself getting frustrated with Corrigan's lifestyle and questions him on the reasons that he chooses to do his work with this population of people. Eventually the main character accepts Corrigan's choices and begins helping him on his outings. After observing his daily routine for several days, the main character begins to believe that Corrigan is using heroin. But Corrigan reveals that he has a mild form of TTP, a disease that causes bruising, and that he is involved in something much worse than heroin - love.

Corrigan shares that he's in love with the nurse at the nursing home, Adelita, and that they have been spending large amounts of time together. Corrigan discusses his inner struggles with these feelings, given that he is a priest. But Corrigan doesn't get the chance to make a decision about Adelita because Corrigan and Jazzlyn, one of the prostitutes he helps, are in a horrible car accident. Jazzlyn is killed instantly however Corrigan is in the hospital with blood loss and internal injuries. Although the text doesn't say outright that he died, the main character's rendition of the story, looking back at it from the past, indicates that Corrigan dies.

## **Prologue, Book One, Chapter 1, All Respects to Heaven, I Like It Here Analysis**

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to a main character, who is not named in the chapter, and his brother, John Andrew Corrigan, known as Corrigan. The chapter provides a fair amount of background information about their childhoods in Dublin, Ireland, and gives many examples of Corrigan's giving nature, foreshadowing who he will become. The main character and Corrigan's mother died when they were 19 and 17, respectively. Soon after, Corrigan takes to living on the streets of their town and eventually becomes a priest who is sent to New York City by his Order.

To escape the violence in Ireland, the main character at age 33, joins Corrigan in New York City and, upon his arrival, quickly learns that Corrigan is working closely with prostitutes, as they come in and out of Corrigan's apartment to use the bathroom. As the main character gets to know Corrigan again, he finds himself disagreeing with Corrigan's idea of what helping others means since, for Corrigan, helping others usually means making their choices and directly walking in their footsteps.

Although happy with his works, Corrigan finds himself struggling as well, as he has fallen in love with a nurse, Adelita, and he is not sure what to do- lose his relationship with her or lose his relationship with God? Corrigan never gets a chance to make that decision, however, because he is involved in a car accident that, as suggested by the text, ultimately takes his life.



# Chapter 2, Miro, Miro on the Wall

## Chapter 2, Miro, Miro on the Wall Summary

Chapter 2 focuses on the life of Claire Soderberg. The reader learns about her husband, Solomon, at the beginning of the chapter, that he is a judge and that they have been married for 31 years and he is mentioned throughout the chapter. The chapter finds Claire getting ready to host a group of girls. As she gets dressed, she spends time looking at herself in the mirror, thinking about being 52 years old and thinking about the gray streak in her hair, how she now accepts the streak as part of her. As she hurries around her penthouse to get ready for her guests, she appears nervous about doing, saying and wearing the right thing. Claire remembers when she learned that it was her turn to host the mothers at her home and how she felt nervous, almost embarrassed, to give them her address because it indicated her wealth.

She calls the doorman to let him know that she's expecting guests and to make sure he makes them feel welcome, to which he agrees. While having a cigarette and waiting for her guests to arrive, Claire thinks back to when Joshua learned how to play the piano well at a young age and when he learned to shave for the first time. She then thinks about he can't be pieced together again in Saigon. She wills herself to continue preparing for her guests but continues to think about Joshua's death as well. Claire remembers how the doctor didn't want her to take pills but told her to laugh instead. She remembers how Joshua decided to join the military in order to help count the number of dead soldiers and civilians, how he was charged with developing a computer program to track these numbers as well and how, ultimately, he became a number in his own system. She remembers the last day she saw him and how she somehow knew it would be the last time she saw him.

As her guests arrive, she knows she has to pull it together. The reader sees her insecurities about whether or not the other mothers have talked about her and what they will think of her apartment. It is then that the reader learns that the group of mothers gathering is a group of mothers who have all lost sons in the Vietnam War. Upon entering her home, it was clear that one of the mothers, Marcia, was upset by something. She proceeds to say that there was a man tightrope walking between the World Trade Center buildings and that she was intrigued to watch him because she thought it could be her son coming back to her. Marcia shares that she stopped watching because she didn't want to see what happened- if he lived she knew it wasn't her son.

The man walking seems to trigger all of the ladies to think about their sons even more, although Claire is also annoyed because not only is the walking man changing the tone of their meeting and keeping her from talking about Joshua, but he is also making careless choices with his life. Eventually, Claire is able to tell the story of when she learned about Joshua's death and how she couldn't stop smiling to hide the pain. After telling her story, she feels much better and feels closer with the women in the group.



## Chapter 2, Miro, Miro on the Wall Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces a new character to the story, Claire. From the time that Claire is preparing to host guests in home at the beginning of the chapter, the reader gets the sense that Claire is somewhat of a nervous and insecure person. However, as the chapter progresses and the reader learns that Claire is hosting a group of mothers who have all lost sons in the Vietnam War, it becomes clear that Claire is continuing to grieve for her son and seems to feel mostly nervous because she appears to be in a different social and economic class than the other woman.

Claire seems to want to be friends with the other mothers but she seems worried that they will not be willing to accept her because of the differences in their living situations. Throughout the chapter, Claire seems to struggle with focusing on the discussion, whether it's because she's trying to make the right hosting decisions or because she is flooded with memories of her son, Joshua.

Claire finds herself highly annoyed with the story of the walking man because not only is his stunt taking away from the purpose of the meeting and her chance to share her story of Joshua, but because she finds it maddening that this person would treat his life with such disregard after her son lost his. By the end of the chapter, however, Claire's feelings of nervousness go away when she shares her story of Joshua and finds acceptance in the group.





# Chapter 3, A Fear of Love

## Chapter 3, A Fear of Love Summary

The beginning of Chapter 3 takes the reader back to the car crash that killed Corrigan and Jazzlyn and introduces the people that were in the car that initially hit Corrigan's car, a married couple, Blain and Lara. Lara describes her and Blaine as 28 and 32, respectively, and says they are artists who live and dress as though they are in the 1920's. Lara remembers that Blaine had just lit a joint when they tapped the back bumper of Corrigan's van and watched as it began to spin out of control.

Lara remembers seeing Corrigan and Jazzlyn's face as the van continued to spin out of control and she remembers watching the rest of the accident happened as they passed the van. Lara asks Blaine to stop the car and Lara remembers the scene of newspapers, broken glass and Jazzlyn's crumpled body on the road.

When Lara sees Blaine lamenting over their car and hears the sirens, she decides that it's best that she and Blaine leave. Lara then shares with the reader that a year before, in 1973, she and Blaine decided to leave the city and move into a cabin in upstate New York. When Lara and Blaine arrive to their cabin, Blain erases any sign that they ever left the cabin that day and then they share some cocaine while talking about the accident.

Lara finds herself deeply affected by Jazzlyn's death however Blaine continues to state that it wasn't their fault and that Lara needs to forget the whole thing. Lara remembers how they made their money in New York City, how Blaine directed several art films that brought him fame in certain circles and how magazines began to profile him.

Lara remembers how they began to use any drug they could get their hands on and how they slipped into a life of partying. Lara and Blaine continued with the party lifestyle until their apartment was raided and their dealer was arrested, which led to their decision to move to the cabin. Throughout the chapter, Lara struggles to process the accident and Jazzlyn's death.

When Blaine seems unaffected and seems caught up on a new art idea, Lara finds herself becoming less tolerant with him. She returns to the city for an art supply but ends up going to the hospital to find out about Jazzlyn and Corrigan. Lara finds that they've both passed away and, after lying about being Corrigan's relatives, she signs for his things and decides to return them to his address.

When she arrives at Corrigan's apartment, she meets his brother, Ciaran, and sees Adelita crying and cleaning. Lara learns that Jazzlyn's funeral is that day and, unable to stop herself, she asks if she can go. She ends up going with Ciaran and finds herself moved by the pastor's words and by the story told by Jazzlyn's mother, Tillie, who will



return to jail after the funeral. Lara offers Ciaran a ride after the funeral and, when he sees her car, he knows that it's the car from the accident.

He demands to know why Lara didn't stop but then invites her for a drink. While getting a drink, Lara confesses that she wasn't the driver and Ciaran kisses her. Lara says she needs to leave but looks back in the bar one last time, making eye contact with Ciaran, and she thinks that there is a fear of love.

## Chapter 3, A Fear of Love Analysis

Chapter 3 is told from the perspective of Lara, who was in the car that tapped the back of Corrigan's van and began the accident that eventually killed Corrigan and Jazzlyn. Lara was in the car with her husband, Blaine, and they were leaving New York City after a night of drugs, partying and trying to sell their artwork. Lara distinctly remembers seeing Corrigan and Jazzlyn's face and feet during the accident, as well as Jazzlyn's body after the accident, and these vivid pictures continue to haunt her throughout the chapter.

While Lara is deeply affected by the accident and, in particular, by Jazzlyn's death, Blaine seems to be much less unaffected and he shifts the blame to Corrigan's driving and faulty brake lights, while using denial and drug use to forget what happened. While Lara says that she and Blaine used to be happy, she seems to become increasingly annoyed with Blaine throughout the chapter because he refuses to acknowledge the accident or her feelings and because he seems to be focused only on his new art idea.

Taken by grief, Lara finds herself at the hospital inquiring about the accident and, eventually, at Corrigan's apartment. She meets his brother, Ciaran, and she can't help but attend Jazzlyn's funeral that same day. After the funeral, she admits to Ciaran that she was in the car that started the accident and they end up getting drinks together. Ciaran and Lara appear to have a connection but the chapter ends with Lara returning home and thinking that there seems to be a fear of love.



# Chapter 4, Let the Great World Spin Forever Down

## Chapter 4, Let the Great World Spin Forever Down Summary

Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the perspective of the tightrope walker that is training to walk between the World Trade Center towers in New York City. The walker is not named throughout the chapter. The chapter begins with the walker admiring the meadow he uses as one of his training sites. He admires the red-tailed hawks and the communication between mother and chicks, thinking that this is one thing that keeps him going during training. He has trained in many different places over the past six years but finds that he has a particular fondness for the meadow.

He talks about how he runs a cable 250 feet along the middle of the meadow so that he can practice with the most wind. He remembers practicing in many different weather conditions, including thunderstorms and rain, so that he can learn the rope and his body inside and out. He uses different balancing exercises, such as doing a full turn, walking tiptoed, doing cartwheels and bouncing a soccer ball on his head, in order to improve his strength and balance. While practicing in the meadow, he lives in an abandoned wood cabin and goes in and out of the cabin using the windows rather than the door. He wonders what the wildlife think of him when they see him holding the balancing bar while practicing in the meadow.

He remembers seeing a coyote playing in the snow underneath his wire and filled with curiosity, he went out to the wire and climbed it without a pole. While walking on the wire to investigate the tracks, the snow struck him as cool, beautiful lake and he had the irresistible urge to dive in. However, he jumped in feet first and soon found himself trapped in the deep snow while inadequately clothed. Although incredibly strong, he struggled to free himself from the snow but was eventually able to wrap his scarf around the wire and pull himself out of the hole.

He never walked on snow again but instead admired the snow for reminding him of what could happen. Although he found it hard to leave the meadow, the walker eventually enters into the city and begins memorizing the World Trade Center towers in preparation for his walk. But no matter how much preparation he does, he knows that it all comes down to him and the wire, how the weather that day could cause the towers to sway and rope to tighten, how the buildings swaying could snap the wire in half and how all of this was up to chance.

He thinks about how he and his friends will have to sneak into the towers to attach the equipment and communicate through an intercom. On the night before the walk, the walker stretches out the cable in order to clean it and make sure there are no snags or



surprises for the walk. It took him and his friends ten hours to put the equipment in place and, although tired, the site of what he was about to do thrilled him.

As he stepped out onto the cable, he paused while getting his balancing pole into place. As he continued to walk, he felt as though he were floating and failure never crossed his mind. He thinks that he's doing this all for the beauty of it, for everything could be new while walking in the air. He felt, at that moment, "another kind of awake."

## **Chapter 4, Let the Great World Spin Forever Down Analysis**

Chapter 4 provides the reader with the perspective of the tightrope walker whose tightrope walk between the World Trade Center buildings is mentioned throughout this book. The walker is not named during the chapter. The chapter begins with the walker contemplating the beauty of his surroundings in the meadow where he practices. Although he has several different practicing locations, the meadow is his favorite and he finds it the hardest to leave.

The reader learns about the lengths that the walker goes to in order to practice his walk, improve his balance and his strength. It is clear that the walker takes his art very seriously but also gets a large thrill out of mastering something so difficult. Through his practicing, it seems that the walker has become one with his body and with the cable.

Based on his accounts with nature and his observations of the world around him, the walker seems to interpret all events as a sign and, when he's engaged in the walk between the World Trade Center buildings, he reveals that he thinks all things can be rewritten and that all things are possible in the air.



# Book Two, Chapter 5, Tag

## Book Two, Chapter 5, Tag Summary

Chapter 5 begins to tell the story of 14-year-old Fernando Yunque Marcano. The beginning of chapter 5 describes Fernando as the type of person that can be seen in the "crook of the carriages" taking photos. Fernando is taking pictures of the tags of graffiti art found in the tunnels of the New York City subways.

Although Fernando works in his stepfather, Irwin's, barber shop, he shares with the reader that photographing tags is what he really lives for. More specifically, he talks about loving the underground tags the most because it takes more guts to do it in the tunnels than on a wall above ground.

He notices that the taggers have moved from using one color, silver, to using from two to four colors in their art and that they are using different nozzles on their cans to get different texturing effects. Fernando thinks back to when he was mostly interested in the artwork on the outside of the subway trains and the dedication it took to "bomb" an entire train.

He tried to make friends with the taggers on the concourse but they called him names and made fun of him for being a straight-A student who never skipped class. But one day he noticed a tag in a tunnel and he was amazed that a tagger went underground to do the tag and then came back above ground.

From then on, Fernando began riding the subway more often looking for more underground tags. Doing this seemed to provide purpose in his life and he found that he was less annoyed working in the barbershop. Fernando shares that he has never tagged anything himself but he says that, if he thought he could do it without getting caught or getting any consequences, he would invent a whole new style to make other taggers take notice.

He would want to be known as a genius but he remembers a teacher telling him that you're only a genius if you think of it first. Fernando remembers having one new idea of wanting to use a projector to put his father's face all over his house so that his mother would have to see who she kicked out, who he has not seen in 12 years and who she got rid of for Irwin.

Although he often thinks that he should be tagging, Fernando thinks that he can do better with his camera because, through his photographs, he can "bring them out of the darkness, lift them up from the alleys." He remembers getting the camera as a gift from someone in the barbershop and, for the first time, being really interested in something. He also thinks about how the camera gives him someplace to hide.

Fernando thinks about the several times that he took his photographs to newspapers to get them published, how they laughed at him and how he thought that, one day, they



would be begging him to take pictures for them. As the train gets to downtown, Fernando thinks that the real genius would be for someone to start tagging in this area.

Just then, he notices in the distance that it looks like someone has and he is excited. But then he hears the radios of cops and thinks they're coming for him. When he sees them running off the train and up the stairs, he is intrigued and follows them, thinking that Irwin and the barbershop can wait.

## **Book Two, Chapter 5, Tag Analysis**

Chapter 5 introduces Fernando, a 14-year-old boy from New York City who has a passion for photographing graffiti art- tags- found in the underground tunnels of the New York City subways. The text used throughout the chapter and Fernando's perspective suggests that Fernando feels like somewhat of a social outcast. He makes several references to trying to fit in with the taggers but being made fun of for his good grades and school attendance and he states that the camera gives him somewhere to hide when feeling embarrassed at home or at school.

Although their relationship is not fully developed in this chapter, the text suggests that Fernando feels anger and resentment towards his stepfather, Irwin, and possibly towards his mother. The reader gets the sense that photography provides Fernando with a sense of purpose and identity while also providing him with an immense amount of joy.

At the end of the chapter, after figuring out that he's not getting thrown off the subway for hanging out of the window to look for tags, Fernando decides to ditch his job at the barbershop in order to follow the cops that are rushing towards the downtown area of the city.



# Chapter 6, Etherwest

## Chapter 6, Etherwest Summary

Chapter 6 introduces four new characters, Dennis, Gareth, Compton and Sam Peters "Kid." The four are computer programmers/hackers that work in California. The reader learns that Dennis is almost 30 and served two tours in Vietnam, Compton graduated from U.C. Davis, Gareth's been a programmer for ten years and Sam is 18, has been spending time at the institution since he was 12 and is the "best hacker" they have.

In this chapter, the four men are using a program they created- called the blue box program- that allows them to hack into computer systems and call pay phones around the world. Sam explains that this is something they all do when they want to escape the stress of doing other programming. He remembers talking to people in London, Australia and in the Shetland Islands. Sam remembers one case in particular when they were almost able to speak directly to President Nixon but they decided to hang up in case they could get caught.

Today, Compton is using the program to try and reach someone near the World Trade Center towers in New York City because they heard about the tightrope walker and they made a bet about whether or not he would fall. He connects with several people and tries to find out if they are near the World Trade Centers but the people who answer seem to think it's a prank call and they continue to hang up on him.

Finally, Compton is able to reach someone who doesn't hang up, Jose. Compton asks Jose for information about the walker and, although Jose gives them some information, he also seems unable to focus on anything else other than the fact that Compton is calling from California. Through a series of back and forth questions between Compton and Jose, Compton and the other guys learn that the walker is currently walking, that he did a hop from one foot to the other, that he sat on the cable and that he lay down on the cable.

Thinking that there must be someone better to talk to, Compton asks Jose to pass the phone to someone else. Jose does and the next person that talks says that something terrible happened- the walker fell- and hangs up. Unable to believe it, Compton tries to call back but the line is busy. Sam is able to get through on a different phone and a woman answers this time. She gives them information about how long the walker's been up there, that he has walked across six or seven times, that helicopters and police got close to him but then backed off and that the walker saluted the crowd.

Compton, Dennis and Gareth make fun of the lady, Sable, because of her vocabulary and because she has opera binoculars but Sam is taken with her voice and has the desire to get to know her more. Sam asks her how old she is, if he can get her number and if she's married. She answers "no" but is unclear about what she's saying no to.



Sable says the walker is done, that he's inside now and that the police have him, and she hangs up. Sam tries to call her back but is unable to reach her. With the rest of the guys making fun of him for liking Sable and then going to sleep, Sam feels angry but continues to work on the program for the Pentagon.

## Chapter 6, Etherwest Analysis

Chapter 6 introduces four computer programmers/hackers that live in California- Compton, Dennis, Gareth and Sam- although the chapter is told through Sam's perspective. Sam is 18 and a great computer hacker who developed a program that allows the men to anonymously call pay phones around the world. In this chapter, the four men have heard about the tightrope walker in New York City and they have made a bet about whether or not the walker will fall.

To help settle their bet, they are trying to call a pay phone near the World Trade Center buildings for information. After being hung up on several times, Compton finally reaches someone who doesn't hang up- Jose- but the four men are disappointed when Jose seems unable to focus and answer their questions. After getting a small amount of information from Jose, they ask him to put someone else on the phone but that person hangs up after telling them the walker fell.

Sam is able to call a different pay phone and a woman, Sable, answers. Sable gives them the information they are looking for and she ultimately tells them that the walker made it across safely six or seven times before being done for good. Sam finds himself intrigued with Sable's voice and he asks her for personal contact information, although she doesn't give it to him.





# Chapter 7, This is the House That Horse Built

## Chapter 7, This is the House That Horse Built Summary

In Chapter 7, the reader gets to know Tillie Henderson, one of the prostitutes helped by Corrigan and Jazzlyn's mom. Throughout the chapter, Tillie shares many memories and current events with the reader and they are in no particular order. She tells the reader that she was born a prostitute. She shares that her mother as a prostitute as well before becoming religious. Tillie became a prostitute at age 15 and she shares with the reader her first experience with her first pimp. She tells the reader that she left Jazzlyn with her mother but that she vowed to treat Jazzlyn well and she swore that Jazzlyn would never be a prostitute.

Tillie left Jazzlyn in her mother's care when she moved to New York. She takes the reader through her various experiences with pimps, being transferred to different parts of town and fighting for space on the street with other prostitutes. She remembers wanting to make enough money to go back to Jazzlyn and get a nice house. In the present day, Tillie shares that she is in prison and that she feels like the worst mother in the world- a sentiment that continues throughout the chapter.

Tillie tells more stories of different pimps, how she was always their favorite girl, which meant getting beaten more often, and how they often bought her beautiful things. She remembers encounters with the men that paid her and she thinks that she never felt ashamed of her body. Tillie speaks of one man in particular that she was with for one week at the Sherry-Netherlands. Although he never wanted to touch her, she remembers liking him a lot and thinking that he was a good man because he simply admired what he saw.

Tillie remembers when Jazzlyn was 8 or 9 years old and joined her in New York and she remembers when Jazzlyn became a prostitute and started using heroin "horse" as well, something that Tillie blames herself for. She reveals that she is not going to kill herself until she sees her grandchildren. While in jail, Tillie gets a visitor. She doesn't recognize the person at first but as they keep talking she realizes that she's Lara, the girl who came to Jazzlyn's funeral with Ciaran. Lara asks Tillie about prison life, if she's eating ok and when she's going to get out.

Lara tells Jazzlyn that she is dating Corrigan's brother, even though she's still married, and that she is getting her life together after suffering through addiction. She tells Jazzlyn that she'll put some money in her prison account. Tillie thinks back on the good memories with Corrigan and how he always listened to anything they had to say. Tillie tells the reader that she got into a fight with another prisoner and that, when the boss



matron threatened to send her to the penitentiary, she accidentally kicked her tooth out while being restrained.

Tillie was taken to court and, after a verbal outburst about wanting to see her grandchildren, was sent to the penitentiary. She was surprised when the woman fostering her grandchildren brought them to visit her and was even more surprised when they didn't seem to know her. After visiting with them, Tillie decided that she couldn't live with what she'd done to Jazzlyn and she couldn't risk doing the same to her grandchildren. The chapter ends with Tillie saying that she is coming to see Jazzlyn.

## **Chapter 7, This is the House That Horse Built Analysis**

Chapter 7 is told through Tillie Henderson's perspective. The chapter is made up of short to moderate length stories and memories told by Tillie as she is contemplating her life in jail. The structure of the chapter and the random order of the stories seems to indicate the Tillie's failing mental state and, at one point during the chapter, she mentions that she is not going to commit suicide until she sees her grandchildren.

In this chapter, the reader gets a broader sense for who Tillie is and how her life experiences have shaped her. Although she doesn't seem particularly ashamed of her own actions as a prostitute, she seems unable to forgive herself for her actions as a mother and for Jazzlyn becoming a heroin-addicted prostitute. Furthermore, Tillie seems convinced that she will influence her grandchildren to follow in the same footsteps and seems determined to keep this from happening.

The reader also learns in Chapter 7 that Lara is dating Ciaran, even though she's still married, and that she's working to get her life back together. After pleading guilty to assaulting the boss matron and receiving a longer sentence to be served in the penitentiary, Tillie is finally able to visit with her grandchildren.

Although they don't seem to know her, Tillie is satisfied that they are living a good life with someone who seems to be taking care of them. The chapter ends with Tillie unable to bear the thought of what she did to Jazzlyn or the idea that she could do the same to her grandchildren. The text implies that Tillie is about to follow through with her plan to commit suicide.



# Chapter 8, The Ringing Grooves of Change

## Chapter 8, The Ringing Grooves of Change Summary

In Chapter 8, the walker, who is still unnamed, is providing more of his perspective. He remembers how, before walking between the World Trade Centers, he used to perform in Washington Square Park, a fairly dangerous side of the city. He thinks about performing there for tourists and making money that he knew the drug dealers and users thought about taking. However, because he brought so many tourists and "easy targets" to the area, the residents of the neighborhood let him stay.

He had an apartment in St. Marks Place and he remembers how, one night, he walked the rope to a Japanese woman's apartment. He stayed there for many hours but, when he walked back to his own apartment, he realized that she was just distracting him so that all of his possessions and savings could be stolen. The walker thinks back to jobs he took as a magician/performer at parties, although he always told his employers that he may not do anything for the entire party.

However, people liked the small tricks he did do and they found him charming so he became a fixture at parties. He shares one trick where he told all of the men at the party that, by the end of the night, he would know all of their birthdays. Because the men's wives showed him their driver's licenses, he was able to do so and astonish the crowd. The walker thinks about walking again and how the only time he can truly forget himself is when he's in the air.

The walker then takes the reader back to the walk between the World Trade Centers, to the time that the helicopters started circling around him. He did not pay much attention to helicopters, because he felt sure that they wouldn't approach him. He was also surrounded by police on both towers that were using megaphones and shouting at him to get down. When the walker hears the sirens, he thinks about how the sirens seem to drown out all the other sounds of the city, even at that height.

Because he enjoyed the walk and the freedom of the walk so much, he knew that he had to have one more moment of silence. To get this, he walked to the exact middle of the rope, which is 100 feet from either tower, and just stood there, breathing in the city. When the cops continued to shout at him to get down, he nodded his head in agreement and ran off the cable as fast as he ever had run from a cable. He was immediately handcuffed and walked out through a cheering crowd.

Using a paper clip he'd picked up in the World Trade Center's station command earlier in the day, he was able to easily undo the handcuffs and wave to the photographers. The cops chastised him for doing so but seemed to admire him as well. He was walked



by police through crowds of photographers and journalists asking "why?" but he didn't answer because the towers were there and that was a good enough reason.

As he was driven away in the police car, he saw the cable being taken down and then everything was overtaken by the blue and red lights and the siren. But for many years afterward, the walker would still see himself up there between the two towers and still feel the sensation of what it was like to do that walk.

## **Chapter 8, The Ringing Grooves of Change Analysis**

Chapter 8 returns to the perspective of the still unnamed walker that walked between the World Trade Centers. He shares more of the experiences he had before he walked between the World Trade Centers and thinks specifically about performing in Washington Square Park, his apartment getting robbed and losing everything he owned and working at parties as a magician/performer to being making money again.

The reader already knows that the walker has impeccable strength and balance but, in chapter 8, the reader learns that the walker also has a charming personality and is somewhat arrogant, although the walker shares that a certain level of arrogance is needed when walking in the air. The walker shares that he feels he can truly lose himself when he's walking and that he experienced the ultimate feeling of losing himself and losing track of time when walking between the World Trade Centers.

The walker also shares in this chapter that he didn't like being asked why he did this walk because, for him, the towers were there and that was a good enough reason. He did not seem to be phased when getting arrested and even charmed the crowd and the cops by using a paper clip to undo the handcuffs. The walk between the World Trade Centers seemed to be a turning point in the walker's life, something he vividly remembered for years afterward.



# Book Three, Chapter 9, Part of the Parts

## Book Three, Chapter 9, Part of the Parts Summary

Chapter 9 introduces the reader to Judge Solomon Soderberg, husband of Claire, who was introduced in chapter 2. Chapter 9 begins with Solomon thinking that the tightrope walker incident brought a sort of sense to all of the ordinary days in New York. He thinks about how New York only keeps moving forward because it doesn't care about what's left in the past. He thinks about how the walker made himself into a temporary monument- the only type of monument that New York has- the type of monument that makes everything think, "Can you believe it?"

As Solomon enters the courthouse to begin his work day, he thinks about how far he has come in his career and how much nicer his office is now than when he first became a judge. As he begins reading the newspaper and drinking his coffee, his colleague, Judge Pollack, enters his office and tells him that he missed the tightrope walker. Solomon hopes to receive the tightrope walker's case in his arraignment court today.

He thinks about how his perspective on the people in his courtroom has changed, how he now refers to them as "scum" but never would have when he first started. Solomon remembers back to his days at Yale when he thought that he was going to change the world but how, as he's gotten older, his perspective has become more realistic and he's learned to appreciate his wife, his home and how small his grief is compared to most other people's.

He remembers first getting appointed to be a judge and how on his first day, he was ready to make a difference. Solomon shares with the reader how his impressions of the court and his job changed, how he now feels he is a "part of the Parts," how he is unable to dispense any real justice because his job seems to be making sure that the court system doesn't get clogged.

Solomon reflects on how many of the charges are dealt with somehow and how he feels caught in the middle between filling his quota, keeping his bosses happy, keeping all of the other people involved in the court happy and holding the accused accountable. Throughout the chapter, Solomon takes the reader through a typical day in court and the monotony of asking the same questions over and over throughout the day.

Solomon takes a lunch break at his favorite restaurant, Harry's, and tells Harry about the tightrope walker. Harry calls him a genius but, the more Solomon thinks about it, the more he doesn't want the walker's case because he is sure it would be a pain to deal with. While at lunch, Solomon thinks about how he doesn't show his grief over the loss of his son but how he cries in the bathroom sometimes and questions whether or not things he said/did during Joshua's childhood led him to get involved with the military.



After lunch, Solomon returns to court and sees that he got the walker's case. The first case he hears is that of Tillie and Jazzlyn Henderson. Jazzlyn's case is dismissed but she is almost held in contempt for taking her shirt off and wearing only her bathing suit in court. Corrigan is there and helps her to avoid this. After displaying some attitude, bad language and some flirtatious behavior with the judge, Tillie pleads guilty to petty larceny and is sentenced to 8 months in jail.

## **Book Three, Chapter 9, Part of the Parts Analysis**

In chapter 9, the reader gets to know Judge Solomon Soderberg more thoroughly, as the reader has already been briefly introduced to him in chapter 2. Based on his perspective throughout the chapter, Solomon appears to be a contemplative man. The chapter starts with him observing that New York doesn't seem to care much for history and that the only type of real monument the city can have is a temporary one, which is why the walker was so genius.

The reader learns about Solomon's journey to becoming a judge in this chapter as well and, as the chapter progresses, it becomes clear that Solomon loves the idea of his job but has become burned out and disillusioned by the bureaucracy, by the cases and by the apathy of everyone else involved. This chapter also serves to connect the different characters in the book, as the Hendersons, Corrigan and the tightrope walker are all a part of Solomon's story.

By the end of the chapter, when Solomon hears the case of Tillie and Jazzlyn Henderson, the reader is able to get a better sense of the timeline of the book and when the events in the book happened in relation to one another.



# Chapter 10, Centavos

## Chapter 10, Centavos Summary

Chapter 10 focuses on the perspective of Adelita, the woman with whom Corrigan was in love. The chapter begins with Adelita and Corrigan in bed together and she shares with the reader that this is first time Corrigan has slept over. As she lays in bed, awake, Adelita thinks about her children, Eliana and Jacobo, do not have school because it is summer and she looks at Corrigan while he sleeps.

She notices that she and Corrigan are not undressed properly, because they were in a rush last night, so she unbuttons his shirt and takes it off for him. When Corrigan wakes up, they talk about how they had too much wine and, by his actions-touching her then pulling away, looking at her then looking away- Adelita can see that he is continuing to struggle with what to do about his relationship with her and his relationship with God.

Adelita thinks back to when she first saw Corrigan at the nursing home. She remembers watching him with the nursing home patients and thinking that he was loyal, a thought that strengthened as she got to know him. Adelita thinks about how hasty she and Corrigan were to make love the night before, how the thought of making love with a man who never had before was thrilling at first but how he cried and couldn't bear to look at her afterwards.

Adelita finds herself understanding and thinks that he is entitled to anything he wants for holding his vows as long as he did. The day that Adelita is remembering in this chapter is a day she knows she will remember forever, how the memories are so pure and beautiful that she doesn't know how describe them. She thinks back to how, after Corrigan had been awake for several minutes, they decided to make love again.

Her children came to the door looking for breakfast and, after getting them cereal, they made love again. Adelita remembers how, after he showered, he came out and spent time with her children and how they thought nothing of his being there. She looks at Corrigan sitting next to the picture of her dead husband and she knows that Corrigan would never ask her to take it down because he is the father of her children.

She thinks about how much loves her children but wishes that, for just one hour, her children would disappear so she could be alone with Corrigan. Adelita watches as Corrigan drinks his coffee, puts his spoon on the end of his nose and makes the children laugh. She thinks back to all of the things she's learned about Corrigan and about all of his idiosyncrasies that she's observed. She remembers how he sat on the couch cuddling with her children and how she wishes that would have never ended.

Adelita wishes she knew what Corrigan's last words to her were but she couldn't understand them. She knows that it could have been about anything, any part of his work, the walker, the walker being set free from the court after Tillie got 8 months in jail



or anything else. She thinks back to how Corrigan said that a wounded faith was the best faith and wonders if she was just something he used to test his faith. But no matter what, Adelita knows that, wherever she goes, she will always have her memories and the couch where he sat with her children.

## Chapter 10, Centavos Analysis

Chapter 10 is told through Adelita's perspective. In chapter 10, Adelita is remembering one day in particular- the first time that Corrigan spent the night at her house and the first time that they made love. Her perspective throughout the chapter shifts between that day and the present day. Based on her perspective and her thoughts, Adelita seems to be a very understanding and patient woman.

She is aware of Corrigan's conflicts between his relationship with her and his relationship with God and she seems to be respectful of the ways in which Corrigan wants to approach their relationship. But, while he was alive, there was a part of Adelita that wanted Corrigan to realize that he could have a relationship with both her and God.

Corrigan's death seems to have caused Adelita to question their relationship in a different way. She finds herself often wondering if Corrigan ever intended on staying with her or if she was a merely a test to help Corrigan figure out and strengthen his relationship with God.

In the end, Adelita knows that she will always have that memory of Corrigan in her apartment a week before the accident - a memory that will always be precious and beautiful to her.





# Chapter 11, All Hail and Hallelujah

## Chapter 11, All Hail and Hallelujah Summary

Chapter 11 introduces Gloria more thoroughly, as she was mentioned in chapter 2, and chapter 11 is told through her perspective. She starts the chapter by talking about her childhood in southern Missouri. She thinks about the good times with her family- her mother, father and five brothers- and how her mother and father had a love strong and pure. She shares that she has lost two marriages and three sons.

Gloria remembers the afternoon in Claire's apartment when she and the other mothers who have lost sons in the Vietnam War gathered to meet. She remembers how the other ladies acted rudely by blatantly showing their boredom and interrupting Claire when she was talking about her son. Gloria remembers how Claire asked her to stay behind after the other ladies left. Gloria lied to Claire about having choir so she could leave but Gloria remembers that, most likely out of desperation and nerves, Claire offered to pay Gloria.

When Gloria was leaving Claire's building, she thought back to how many of her ancestors were slaves and how Claire probably wanted to pay her to clean her apartment after the party. Even though Claire called down to the doorman and requested that the ladies come back upstairs, Gloria kept walking away from the building. Gloria thought that maybe Claire just wanted someone to spend time with her but she kept walking home anyway.

On her walk home, Gloria thinks about how she left home, moved to Syracuse on an academic scholarship and became one of the first African-American women to graduate from Syracuse with honors. She thinks back to her first marriage to Thomas, a man who was a well-known debater but who, after 11 months of marriage, indicated that he was scared of the world and was just looking for another place to fit in. Somewhat ashamed and scared to go home, Gloria stayed in Syracuse until her parents passed away within a week of one another.

The death of her parents caused Gloria to realize how badly she wanted to see New York so she moved there, worked at a race track and got married to her second and last husband, who left her with three boys. While walking home, Gloria got mugged by a girl who took her purse, pictures of her sons and money. Instead of going home, Gloria took a cab to Claire's apartment and Claire welcomed her with open arms.

After getting a bath and healing her wounded feet, Gloria and Claire spent the afternoon drinking and listening to piano music. Gloria thinks about how her sons joined the military to escape their neighborhood, how she encouraged them and how they never came back. Gloria stays at Claire's for dinner and meets her husband, Solomon, who doesn't seem happy she's there and brushes her off.



He does, however, say that he charged the walker a penny per floor and sentenced him to perform again, but in a safer place. Claire gets Solomon to apologize and then takes Gloria home. When they pull up to her building, Gloria sees two children being escorted out by social workers. She knows the children are Jazzlyn's and, even though she's made it a point to avoid interacting with Jazzlyn, she sees that the children need help and they reach out for her. Gloria feels the need to stop the cops and tell them she knows the children, which is a lie.

## Chapter 11, All Hail and Hallelujah Analysis

Chapter 11 is told through the perspective of Gloria, one of the mothers in the group that met at Claire's house in chapter 2. In this chapter, Gloria shares her perspective and her life story. The reader learns that Gloria has been married twice and had three sons, all of whom were killed in the Vietnam War.

In addition to sharing details about her childhood, her education and her marriages, Gloria shares her perspective on what it was like to be in Claire's house the day of the meeting. Although Claire did not go about it in the right way, Gloria could sense that Claire needed company and Gloria eventually returns to Claire's apartment. Through an afternoon of drinking, talking and music, the two women become friends.

This chapter also reveals what happened to the walker, as Solomon shares with Claire and Gloria the sentence he gave him. This chapter also serves to further connect the characters in the story because, at the end of the chapter, the reader learns that Gloria lived in the same building as Jazzlyn and that she becomes the foster mother to Jazzlyn's two young daughters, Janice and Jazzlyn.



# Book Four, Chapter 12, Roaring Seaward, And I Go

## Book Four, Chapter 12, Roaring Seaward, And I Go Summary

Chapter 12 introduces the perspective of Jazzlyn- now Jaslyn- the daughter of Jazzlyn, granddaughter of Tillie and foster daughter of Gloria. The chapter begins with Jaslyn thinking about the photo of the walker that she bought at a garage sale in San Francisco. She remembers buying the photo because it was taken the same day her mother died. In the security line at the airport, she is standing behind an Italian man who has a "Doctors without Borders" patch on his bag.

She and the Italian man spend their flight to New York talking. She learns that his name is Pino, he's from Genoa, he is divorced and he has two kids. Jaslyn is unsure of what to tell him about herself, seeing that her mother and grandmother were prostitutes, her grandmother died in jail and that she changed that spelling of her name because it used to be spelled like her mother's.

Through her thoughts, Jaslyn also shares that she went to Yale and that her sister, Janice, went to the army. What Jaslyn does share is that she helps people who have lost their belongings in hurricanes with tax preparation. She is a boss at her foundation who is known as having "ice in her veins," although Jaslyn doesn't necessarily want to give off that image of herself. She thinks about things that she would like to say to Pino and how her life seems to consist of these moments where she thinks of things to say but never says them. Jaslyn and Pino stay together until he gets into a cab. Before doing so, however, he gives her a kiss and his card with his contact information on it. She returns the gesture.

When Jaslyn arrives at her destination, the reader learns that she is at Claire's apartment, that Claire is sick and that she, Gloria and Janice were so close with Claire that Claire called her "niece." When Jaslyn enters Claire's apartment, however, she is greeted by Claire's biological family members and quickly realizes that she is not welcome. Jaslyn shares with the family members that she is there to be with Claire for a few days and this reminds her of when she and Janice spent time with Gloria before she passed away.

She thought about their walks along the river in south Missouri and how Gloria was buried by her childhood home with some of her mother and father's belongings. Because Claire is sleeping, they will not allow Jaslyn to see her so Jaslyn leaves and checks into the St. Regis hotel. While at the hotel, Jaslyn thinks about how she went to Ireland with her sister. Without her sister, Jaslyn went to Dublin to look for Corrigan's brother, Ciaran.



She found him easily, as he is a CEO of an online company, and they talk about Corrigan and her mother's relationship. Ciaran invites her to dinner with his wife and Jaslyn learns that his wife's name is Lara and that they live in the home that Corrigan and Ciaran grew up in.

The next day, she finds Pino in a coffee shop and they spend the day together, talking, laughing and making love. She then goes to Claire's apartment and, when she learns that only one other person is there, she goes in and sees Claire, who had a stroke. The story ends with Jaslyn lying on the bed next to Claire while the world spins on.

## **Book Four, Chapter 12, Roaring Seaward, And I Go Analysis**

Chapter 12 is told through the perspective of Jaslyn- daughter of Jazzlyn and granddaughter of Tillie. Through her perspective, the reader learns that she had a good relationship with her foster mother, Gloria, with Gloria's friend, Claire, and, overall, that she had a pretty good childhood with Gloria.

The reader learns that her sister, Janice, entered the army and is now working at the embassy in Baghdad. Although their relationship is not fully developed, the text suggests that Jaslyn begins a long-term relationship with an Italian man named Pino. The reader learns that Jaslyn has returned to New York to be with Claire following Claire's stroke and subsequent health problems.

This visit to New York prompts Jaslyn to think back on many different memories, one of which being her visit with Ciaran and Lara, who are now married and living in Dublin. The reader learns that Jaslyn's grandmother, Tillie, died in a jail cell and that the walker walked between the World Trade Center buildings on the same day that her mother died. The story ends with Jaslyn lying with Claire, thinking about how we all stumble but how the world keeps spinning.



# Characters

## John Andrew Corrigan

Corrigan is one of the characters in the book that is connected to most other characters in the book. Although none of the chapters are written through his perspective, the first chapter goes a long way to develop his character. The reader learns that, from a young age, Corrigan was a faithful person who went to sleep at night saying prayers.

As he gets older, Corrigan begins sneaking out of the house to help provide different items to the homeless. As a young teenager, Corrigan begins to spend time at the flophouses, talking with the homeless and drug addicts and even drinking often while doing so. Although his mother asked him to stop, Corrigan was unable to stop helping those in need and after his mother's death when he was only 17, he basically took to the streets himself, became a priest and eventually sent to New York City by his Order.

In New York, Corrigan focused on helping the prostitutes in his neighborhood, most notably Jazzlyn and her mother, Tillie, and on providing services to a nursing home. At the nursing home, Corrigan met Adelita, a woman with whom he would soon fall in love and begin a relationship.

Corrigan found himself extremely conflicted about his relationship with Adelita and his relationship with God and by the time that his brother joined him in New York, it was clear that Corrigan was emotionally and physically worn. While driving Jazzlyn back from a court date, Corrigan and Jazzlyn were tragically killed in a car accident and their deaths would go on to affect many other characters in the book.

## Ciaran Corrigan

Ciaran is Corrigan's brother and his name is not revealed until Chapter 3. Chapter 1 is told from his perspective and in Chapter 1, the reader learns that Ciaran is 2 years older than Corrigan and it is through his perspective that the reader learns so much about Corrigan's personality. Based on his perspective, Ciaran seems to be outgoing, intelligent, thoughtful, somewhat impatient, caring, and loyal.

Ciaran shares that he and Corrigan had a deep love for their mother and that they had little to no connection with their father. Ciaran remembers sharing a room with Corrigan in their house in Dublin and how Corrigan would often get in trouble for sneaking out at night or not coming home after school so that he could help the homeless.

Throughout his childhood, Ciaran often finds himself in awe of Corrigan's selflessness and of his constant need to help others. This feeling continues when Ciaran moves to New York and lives with Corrigan, although Ciaran starts to worry that his brother's living conditions are too dangerous and that he's trying too hard to connect with those he's



trying to help. After Corrigan's death, Ciaran meets Lara, who was in the car that started the accident that killed Corrigan.

Lara and Ciaran seem to have an instant connection although it is not until later in the book that the reader learns that Ciaran and Lara get married and move back to his childhood home in Dublin. Also following the death of Corrigan and Jazzlyn, Ciaran seems to serve as a connection to Corrigan and Jazzlyn for Tillie and Jazzlyn's children.

## **Tillie Henderson**

Tillie was one of the prostitutes that worked in Corrigan's neighborhood and someone with whom Corrigan seemed to have a particularly strong connection. Tillie was also Jazzlyn's mother and grandmother of Jazzlyn's children, Jazzlyn (later Jaslyn) and Janice. Tillie is mentioned in several chapters of the book and one chapter is written through her perspective.

In the chapters that are not from her perspective but where she is mentioned, she comes across as bold, brazen, flirtatious, and defensive. But in the chapter written from her perspective, Tillie reveals other sides to her personality as a caring, well-intentioned, and intelligent person who also experiences strong feelings of shame, guilt and hurt.

Tillie makes it clear that she is not ashamed of anything that she has done to her own body or any of the choices that she has made for herself. Her shame and guilt comes from the childhood that Jazzlyn had, for exposing Jazzlyn to and allowing her to become a prostitute and for the possibility that she may do the same to Jazzlyn's two daughters.

The reader learns from Tillie's perspective that she is hard on herself for how Jazzlyn's life turned out and that she can't bear to live with the possibility of her grandchildren having the same life. While in jail for petty larceny, Tilly is charged with assault and sentenced to more time in jail. After she sees her grandchildren and sees that they are in good care, Tillie decides to commit suicide.

## **Jazzlyn Henderson**

Jazzlyn is another prostitute that worked in Corrigan's neighborhood and seemed to have a special connection with Corrigan. Each time that Jazzlyn was mentioned in the book, she was described as young, vibrant and beautiful. She appeared to carry herself as a seasoned prostitute and had a flirtatious attitude to match but she also seemed kind, funny and loving towards her children.

Jazzlyn was arrested with her mother, Tillie, for prostitution and robbery but Jazzlyn was released by Judge Soderberg. On her way home with Corrigan, Jazzlyn and Corrigan were in a tragic car accident and Jazzlyn was killed on impact. Her death affected many other characters in the book.



## The Walker

Although never named throughout the book, the walker has two chapters that are written from his perspective. The reader learns that the walker is extremely devoted to his art- practicing in various locations and learning the cable inside and out and how his body responds to each type of weather condition. The walker presents as extremely strong and well-balanced, as well as charming. He discusses finding a certain type of freedom while walking and he reports walking between the World Trade Center buildings as the epitome of that freedom.

He walked between the buildings because they were there and for the excitement. He is a major character in the book because every other character in the book either watched his walk or heard about it. The picture of him walking between the buildings is one of Jaslyn's most prized possessions because his walk happened the same day her mother died. The reader learns that the walker was charged by Judge Soderberg to pay one penny per floor of the World Trade Center and ordered to perform again, only this time in a safer location.

## Claire Soderberg

Claire is the well-to-do wife of Judge Solomon Soderberg. In the chapter that is written from her perspective, she is seen as a grieving mother who lost her son in the Vietnam War; as insecure about who she is and what she has when around the group of mothers that meets at her house; and as a nervous and lonely person.

She is also portrayed as generous, caring, well-intentioned, and thoughtful. Claire becomes lifelong friends with Gloria, one of the mothers in the group, and, through that friendship, Claire becomes like an aunt to Gloria's foster children, Jaslyn and Janice-Jazzlyn's orphaned daughters. The end of the book finds Jaslyn returning to New York to visit with Claire after Claire's stroke.

## Lara Liveman

Lara was in the car that started the accident that killed Corrigan and Jazzlyn. Lara is a 28 year old married artist who, along with her husband, Blaine, is a recovering drug addict who relapsed the night before. Through the chapter written in Lara's perspective, she provides the story of her background, her descent into a lifestyle consumed by drugs and partying, her experience of hitting rock bottom with Blaine and their decision to move out into a cabin in upstate New York.

Blaine was driving the car and it is clear that Lara was deeply affected by the accident and, in particular, by Jazzlyn's death. She finds that she can't stop thinking about it and that she feels her life has changed forever. Additionally, Blaine seems determined to forget about the accident, continuing using the drugs they got in the city and move on to focusing on a new art idea, furthering the gap between them.





Unable to stop thinking of Jazzlyn's death, Lara eventually meets Corrigan's brother, Ciaran, and goes to Jazzlyn's funeral. After the funeral, it is clear that Lara and Ciaran have a connection but it is not until later in the book that the reader learns that Lara and Ciaran are married and live in Ciaran's childhood home in Dublin.

## **Adelita**

Adelita is a nurse who works at the nursing home where Corrigan volunteered his time and efforts. Adelita and Corrigan seemed to develop an instant attraction to each other that only deepened when she identified that Corrigan had a disease called TTP that caused him to develop random bruises. In the chapter written from her perspective, Adelita seems to be caring, loving, patient, and understanding.

It is clear that she wanted to have a long-lasting relationship with Corrigan but she seemed to understand the deep conflict he was experiencing because of his relationship with her and his relationship with God as a priest. Adelita shares that Corrigan had a great relationship with her two children and she reveals that she and Corrigan made love a week before his death.

## **Solomon Soderberg**

Solomon Soderberg is a judge who is married to Claire. In the chapter devoted to his perspective, it is clear that Solomon is a caring and loving man who is comfortable with his lifestyle but disillusioned with his work. The reader learns that Solomon is the judge that heard and sentenced Jazzlyn and Tillie's cases, as well as the case of the tightrope walker. He dismissed Jazzlyn's case, sentenced Tillie to 8 months in jail and sentenced the tightrope walker to pay one penny per floor of the World Trade Center and to perform again in a safer location.

## **Gloria**

Gloria was first introduced in chapter 2 when she attended Claire's meeting for the group of mothers who lost sons in the Vietnam War. The reader learns that all three of her sons were killed in the war. In the chapter on her perspective, Gloria presents as caring, thoughtful, intelligent, giving, and wise.

She shares that she developed a deep friendship with Claire and, at the end of her chapter, the reader learns that Gloria lived in the same apartment building as Jazzlyn and lied about knowing her children so that the children wouldn't be placed in the system. Gloria became the foster mother for Jazzlyn's children and they all had a close relationship with Claire.





## Jaslyn

Formerly Jazzlyn, she is the daughter of the prostitute, Jazzlyn, that Corrigan helped and was killed in the car accident with Corrigan. The last chapter of the book is devoted to her perspective and the reader learns that she had a great relationship with her foster mother, Gloria, went to Yale, is a boss at a small tax foundation in Little Rock, Arkansas, and considered Claire to be her aunt. Jaslyn's perspective confirms that Tillie died in a jail cell, that the walker did his big walk on the same day her mother died and that Ciaran and Lara are married and live in Ciaran's childhood home in Dublin. Although somewhat shy and uptight, Jaslyn appears to be smart, caring and well-adjusted overall.

## Fernando Yunque Marcano

Fernando is a 14 year old boy from New York City who, through his perspective, portrays himself as an intelligent social outcast who has a passion for taking photographs of graffiti-tags- found in the tunnels of the New York City subway system. He eventually takes the picture of the walker that becomes the prize possession of Jaslyn.

## Sam Peters

Sam is an 18-year-old computer programmer or hacker who lives and works in California with a group of other programmers and hackers at an institution. He created a hacking program, called the blue box program, that allows them to anonymously call pay phones around the world. On the day of the walker's big walk, Sam and his fellow programmers called pay phones near the World Trade Centers in New York City and talked to random New Yorkers to get information about what was happening. The information he received allowed the reader to get a sense for what the city was like and what the walker was doing.

## Dennis

This is a fellow computer programmer or hacker that works with Sam. He is almost 30 and served two tours in Vietnam.

## Compton

This is a fellow computer programmer or hacker that works with Sam. He graduated from U.C. Davis.



## **Gareth**

This is a fellow computer programmer or hacker that works with Sam. Gareth's been a programmer for ten years.

## **Eliana**

This is Adelita's daughter.

## **Jacobo**

This is Adelita's son.

## **Jacqueline**

This is one of the mothers that attended the meeting for grieving mothers at Claire's house.

## **Janet**

This is one of the mothers that attended the meeting for grieving mothers at Claire's house.

## **Marcia**

This is one of the mothers that attended the meeting for grieving mothers at Claire's house.



## **Objects/Places**

### **New York City**

This is the main setting of the book.

### **World Trade Center Buildings**

This is the location where the walker did his famous tightrope walk.

### **Dublin, Ireland**

This is the hometown of Corrigan and Ciaran and final residence of Ciaran and his wife, Lara.

### **Pink Parasol**

This is the prop used by Tillie.

### **The Tinkling Shop**

This is the nickname used by the prostitutes for Corrigan's apartment in New York City because he left his apartment open for them to use the restroom.

### **Park Avenue**

This is the location of Claire's apartment.

### **The Cable**

This is the tightrope used by the walker.

### **Centre Street**

This is the location of the court house where Judge Soderberg worked.

### **Plastic Keychain**

This is the important keepsake that Jazzlyn kept of her daughters, Jaslyn and Janice.



## **The Photograph of the Walker**

This is the prized possession of Jaslyn because it was taken the same day that her mother died.

## **1927 Pontiac Landau**

This is Lara and Blaine's car that started the accident that killed Corrigan and Jazzlyn.

## **Southern Missouri**

This is Gloria's hometown.

## **Poughkeepsie**

This is the place where Gloria raised Jaslyn and Janice.

# Themes

## **We're All Connected**

A theme that can be found throughout this novel is that we are all connected in some way. The book consists of 12 chapters, each told from the perspective of one of the characters in the book. Although the characters may seem completely unrelated at the beginning of the book, the reader learns as the book progresses that all of the characters are connected to at least one other character in the book.

Furthermore, not only are the characters connected to one another, they are connected in ways that mean something significant in their lives. Characters like Corrigan impacted other characters through his life, his generosity, his acceptance, his love and his death. Lara and Ciaran would have never met and gotten married had Lara not been impacted so deeply by Jazzlyn's and Corrigan's death, for instance.

Gloria would not have ended up being the foster mom to Jazzlyn's two young daughters had she not lived in the same apartment building and Jaslyn wouldn't have had a close relationship with Claire had it not been for Gloria and Claire's strong bond. But perhaps the character who connected everyone in the story in one way or another was the tightrope walker.

Each character in the book either witnessed his walk or talked to someone else in the book about his walk and his walk changed them in various ways. Another way the characters in the book are connected is through shared emotions and thoughts about not only the walker's walk but about the lives and deaths of other characters in the book. The way the author physically and emotionally wove together the characters in the book serves as a reminder that we are all connected by shared human experiences.

## **Good Will Goes a Long Way**

One gesture that can be seen in many of the story lines is the gesture of good will. The character that displays the best example of this quality is Corrigan. From a young age, Corrigan found himself sneaking out of the house or not coming home after school in order to help the homeless and others in need.

His good will gestures continued when he moved to New York. Corrigan not only offered his time and services at a nursing home, but he made it a point to provide food, drinks, conversation and a restroom to the prostitutes in his neighborhood. Although he may have gone too far in taking on the problems of those he tried to help, Corrigan's generous and compassionate nature allowed those he helped to feel a sense of hope and self-worth.

Gestures of good will can be seen throughout the novel in other characters' storylines as well- Lara visited Tillie in jail, Claire and Gloria helped each other in various ways,



Gloria volunteered to foster Jazzlyn's children, various people in the streets of New York provided information about the walk to a stranger over a pay phone and Jaslyn came to be with Claire after Claire's stroke.

Either directly or indirectly, most if not all of the characters benefitted from the other characters' acts of good will, again sending the message that we are all connected and that one gesture of good will can affect many more people than the immediate recipient.

## **The World Keeps Going No Matter What**

One theme that a reader may identify in this book is that, no matter what, the world keeps going. All of the characters in the book, whether directly or indirectly, experience tragedy of some type- death, illness, loss of innocence, loss of freedom, loss of a relationship, loss of self, loss of self-control, loss of children, loss of dreams, etc. Some of the characters find it easier to move on with their lives after these losses, like Solomon, Blaine and Ciaran, while others found it more difficult to leave their losses in the past, like Lara, Claire, Tillie, Adelita and, in some respects, Gloria.

But, despite their losses, the characters learned through experience that the world keeps going and, with the continuous motion, the characters make new friends, new loves and have new experiences. Solomon points out this theme when he observes that New York City seems to always move on without any regard to what it's leaving behind, hence the fact that there are very few monuments in the city. The walker points this out when he's high above the city but observes that, although time seems frozen for him, life continues to move on below.

The theme can be seen when Lara is giving her account of the accident and she notices that, despite the horrible accident that just occurred, the rest of New York continued to be impatient and focused with moving on with the day. Along with many other places throughout the novel, the theme is most focused on my Jaslyn in the last chapter, as she sits with Claire and thinks about how events happen, people make mistakes and the world always keeps going.

# Style

## Point of View

"Let the Great World Spin" is written either from the first or third-person perspective, depending on the chapter. The author is successful in creating several main characters and, no matter which point of view the chapter is written in, the author's clear and vivid descriptions provides the reader with an exact picture of how each character thinks, feels, and reasons. When the chapter is written in the first person perspective, the author tends to use more dialogue that contains sexual and/or foul language.

When the chapter is written in the third person perspective, the author tends to flashback more often to the character's memories and the chapters contain more passages that explain the character's thought process. Because each chapter focuses primarily on one character, the author takes the opportunity to fully develop each character. Each character was enhanced if they were mentioned in other chapters as well. The author's personal writing style also allows the reader to relate easily with the characters and to experience their fears, joys, disappointments and losses, causing the reader to form a strong connection with the characters.

Because the author uses the dialogue and thoughts to reflect the perspectives of the different main character, the point of view varies based on the age, employment, education, social/economic class and experiences of each character. The characters share a common perspective, however, because they are all amazed by the tightrope walker.

## Setting

The main setting of "Let the Great World Spin" is New York City in August 1974. There are specific places within New York City that serve as settings for the novel as well, including the World Trade Center buildings where the tightrope walker did his famous walk; the Bronx where Corrigan, Jazzlyn, and her children, Tillie and Gloria lived; Park Avenue where Claire and her husband lived; Centre Street where Judge Soderberg worked; the New York City subway system where Fernando spent most of his time; the FDR where Corrigan and Jazzlyn had their fatal accident; the jail where Tillie was housed and eventually died; and the streets of New York themselves where Tillie and Jazzlyn worked.

One of the chapters was from the perspective of computer programmers/hackers who worked in California and the chapter written from Gloria's perspective centered somewhat in her home in southern Missouri. Another setting that could be considered important is that of the tightrope walker while he's on the cable completing his walk, as almost a whole chapter is devoted to his experience in that space.



Chapter three mentions Lara and Blaine's cabin in upstate New York and chapter one and twelve have parts that take place in Dublin, Ireland. The time period is 1974 but, outside of the date being mentioned throughout the book, there is not much else mentioned, i.e. clothes, trends, dialogue, etc., to identify the characters who are living in that time period.

## Language and Meaning

"Let the Great World Spin" is a gender-neutral adult novel. The book contains numerous sexual references and scenes and occasionally discusses drug and alcohol use. The language throughout the book is straightforward, although the author makes frequent use of inappropriate language, particularly when the chapter is written in the first-person perspective. Also when written in the first person perspective, the author uses more dialogue whereas the chapters written in the third person perspective contain more paragraphs that provide historical information, memories of the character and/or the character's thought process.

Additionally, there are several chapters in which the characters memories and/or interactions with others are divided into sections that are not necessarily in chronological order. As each chapter focuses on the perspective of one character, the author makes little to no use of foreshadowing and, when the technique is used, the author most typically implies the ways in which characters are related. The story contains a fairly good balance between dialogue, descriptive text and passages that illuminated the character's thoughts, feelings and reasoning.

Although all of the stories and characters are eventually connected, each chapter can be viewed as a mini-story and the author's clear writing style allows the reader to easily understand each chapter and connect with each character. The author is also successful in using language, thoughts and feelings that are realistic and believable for each of the character's differing backgrounds.

## Structure

"Let the Great World Spin" is three hundred and forty nine pages long. It is divided into four books that contain a total of twelve named chapters. It also contains a prologue that sets the scene and the attitude in New York City of those who were witnessing the tightrope walk. The majority of the chapters are on the longer side so the reader may find it difficult to read more than two chapters in a sitting without becoming fatigued. "Let the Great World Spin" is a stimulating read that follows the lives of several different characters who become interconnected in some way as the story progresses.

As previously mentioned, the book is divided into twelve chapters and each chapter is written from a different character's perspective. Each chapter contains a different story and a different character but, as the story progresses, characters will begin appearing in additional chapters and the reader will begin to see the way in which the characters' stories and lives intertwine.





Because each chapter focuses on a different character, different time periods are displayed and, within each chapter, the character spends time sharing their views, thoughts and feelings about events that are happening now, have happened in the past and, in some cases, the characters mention events that happen in the future.

However August 1974 is present in each chapter, as each of the characters experienced the tightrope walker's walk in some way. The last chapter in the book moves many years into the future and provides updated information about the characters previously mentioned in the book.



## Quotes

"God's work" (Chapter 1, p. 16).

"Ah, no, they're good people. They just don't know what it is they're doing. Or what's being done to them. It's about fear. You know? They're all throbbing with fear. We all are" (Chapter 1, p. 29).

"With all respects to heaven, I like it here" (Chapter 1, p. 47).

"You ask me if I'm using heroin, man? It's worse than that, brother, much worse" (Chapter 1, p. 57).

"How dare he do that with his own body? Throwing his life in everyone's face? Making her own son's so cheap" (Chapter 2, p. 113).

"You clip a van, you watch your life fade away" (Chapter 3, p. 127).

"You will be walking someday in the dark and the truth will come shining through, and behind you will be a life that you never want to see again" (Chapter 3, p. 145).

"There is a fear of love" (Chapter 3, p. 156).

"My babies" (Chapter 7, p. 222).

"Here I come, Jazzlyn, it's me. I got a knuckle-duster in my sock" (Chapter 7, p. 236).

"Strange things occurred precisely because there was no necessary regard for the past" (Chapter 9, p. 247).

"Made to glorify the gods. And dull the idiots. Here, have a little more" (Chapter 9, p. 262).

"A man who holds a vow that long is entitled to anything he wants" (Chapter 10, p. 277).

"You know, I'd be happy to pay you, Gloria" (Chapter 11, p. 299).

"Yes" (Chapter 11, p. 322).

"The faint tang of the old woman's breath on the air. The clock. The fan. The breeze. The world spinning" (Chapter 12, p. 349).



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the role the tightrope walker played throughout the book.

Identify two sets of three characters and discuss the specific ways they are connected.

Identify and discuss three specific feelings that Tillie talks about in her chapter.

Why did the tightrope walker choose to walk between the World Trade Center buildings?

If a main character had to be chosen, which character would you choose and why?

Other than the tightrope walker, does there seem to be one person that ties every other character together? Explain.

Discuss the reasons that Judge Soderberg might be disillusioned by his job.