

Love Me Back Study Guide

Love Me Back by Merritt Tierce

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Plot Summary

"Love Me Back" by Merritt Tierce is a disturbing story about a young mother named Marie who discovers she is pregnant after attending a church retreat. She carries the child to term, and at her father's insistence marries the father, but the outcome is disastrous. Marie suffers an acute case of postpartum depression that remains untreated. She quickly spirals into despair, and begins cutting herself in hidden areas in an effort to focus the pain that seems ready to overwhelm her at every turn. She feels inadequate as a wife, and hopelessly lost as a mother, but still resents her parents when they are eager to help by taking her daughter Ana off her hands now and then. The feelings of uselessness push Marie to move her new family out of her parents' home, but the drastic measures don't help. In fact, the only time that Marie is able to cope and feel normal is when she is hip deep in customers at the restaurant in which she works.

Marie continues to cut herself, do drugs, and drink to excess, but none of it quiets the storm in her mind. Finally, she begins to step out on her husband, sleeping with her co-workers, her boss, and even some of the staff from the establishment next door to where she works. She becomes well known as the party animal who will sleep with any man, anywhere, any time. When she contracts a sexually transmitted disease as a result, her husband is devastated. The situation becomes much worse when Marie realizes she is expecting again, and can only narrow the father down to one of three men. Unwilling to gamble on who the father is, Marie and her husband go to Planned Parenthood where Marie aborts the child. Her husband changes after that, becoming withdrawn, quiet, and taking long walks with Ana. Finally, Marie moves out, leaving Ana and her father to cope on their own.

If her behavior was self-destructive while she lived with her husband and daughter, it became even worse when she began living on her own. The only things in Marie's life that make sense to her are her job and her daughter. While at work, Marie is competent and capable - able to handle any crowd or customer, but once she is done a shift, her life spirals again. When drugs, alcohol and sex are not enough to dull her senses, she cuts or burns herself to focus the pain in one area. Then, for a little while, she feels as though she can cope again.

One night during a shift, an employee from the establishment next door approaches her and tells her that a friend of his is outside and would like to have sex with her. Despite having never met him, she goes out back after work and has sex with him in her car. While they are in the middle of things, his friend opens the car door and pours beer over Marie's head, calling her a slut and commenting on her enjoyment of the exercise. When she asks him to close the door, he smacks her hard across the head, and continues to abuse her in this manner while his friend continues to enjoy the sexual experience beneath her. Finally, Marie sees herself in a light so unflattering that she simply quits. She stops doing drugs. She stops sleeping with everyone and anyone and she even avoids the rear entrance in an effort to keep her distance from temptation.

It isn't long before Marie is back to her old tricks however. She resumes her use of cocaine, and her sexual promiscuity, in a never ending search for someone who will love her unconditionally. During one of Ana's visits to her apartment, Marie realizes that her little girl loves her without reservation, regardless of who she is, and the thought brings her to tears.

Marie works her way up in the restaurant industry until she is finally employed in a fine dining establishment called The Restaurant. She learns the ins and outs of correct service, and discovers that she is a competent and capable server, something to be proud of and the beginning of self-respect.



Part One: The Olive Garden

Summary

Marie Young is almost seventeen years old, and is fortunate to be hired by The Olive Garden – one of thirteen places she'd filled out applications for. Marie has no experience in the restaurant industry, so when Christopher shows her around, he introduces her as a virgin to the rest of the wait staff.

Marie has sex with one of the servers who is fired just three weeks later when he was caught harassing a salad girl who was under age. Marie is pretty sure that he knew he had impregnated her, but just didn't care. It was seven months before her pregnancy was so apparent that she was forced to move her apron down lower, riding on her hips. Marie continues to work at The Olive Garden until her baby girl is born.

At four months pregnant, Marie all but begs Christopher to have sex with her, following him around the restaurant and touching him at every opportunity. He finally takes her up on her offer, but afterward, he ignores her phone calls. She calls him constantly, hoping he'll pick up, and knowing he won't, unsure of what she'd say to him if he did. He would acknowledge her at work, but only barely. Marie decides to try makeup in an effort to improve her chances with him, but she'd never worn makeup in school and had no idea how to put it on. When she gets to work, he calls her over and pulls her to him, telling her she has something on her chin. He uses the heel of his fist and then a handkerchief to wipe her face, and she stands there humiliated while he does so. Then she covers his hand with her own as he wipes her face, pressing his hand to her cheek, but he jerks away, calling her a little freak.

Marie washes up in the women's restroom, breaking the rules by using it, but unwilling to face any of the other staff. Then she calls her baby's father collect and when he answers, asking her if she is alright, she suggests they get married.

Marie only tries to stiff her bus staff once, before she knew much about anything in the business. She hadn't made much and was a couple of days beyond her due date. She owed her busser three percent of her sales, and when she skips that part, the busser complains to Tara. Tara confronts her about it, insisting she give him his share and she does, apologizing to him. He hugs her and tells her that it's okay, but she knew he was angry when he spoke with Tara, even though it was only six dollars.

Marie weighs only a hundred and twenty-eight pounds when she gets pregnant, and three months later, she is only one hundred and ten. Both her mother and the midwife warn her, but Marie's morning sickness is so intense that she has trouble keeping anything down. She is working part time as a temp for Sally Beauty Company at the time, and spends each day throwing up in the garbage can in her cubicle. She does little in the way of work, choosing to read rather than compile the Y2K information she was supposed to. At night, Marie called the baby's father, talking to him about the future, but



not in a way that presumed they would have a future together. He may have wanted that, but Marie didn't. They'd spent only five days together, during Spring break in 1999 on a mission trip to Mexico. At fifteen weeks, the morning sickness finally stops and she feels the baby for the first time.

Analysis

Marie Young is introduced as the main character in this story. She is just two weeks short of her seventeenth birthday, and weighs under a hundred and thirty pounds. Marie is eager to start the job offered to her by Rajiv George, the manager of The Olive Garden, and has no problem with beginning immediately. She has no experience in the restaurant industry, but assures Mr. George that she is a hard worker and he will not be disappointed. Mr. George introduces her to Christopher Kendall who teases her about how young she is.

Christopher is an enigmatic man who served in Desert Storm. He is confident and self-aware and as he gives Marie the ten-cent tour of the place, he makes suggestive and lurid comments to other employees while making it clear that Marie doesn't have to worry about pleasing the boss as much as she needs to be concerned with getting along with the people on the floor. Christopher's attitude and ongoing sexual innuendos foreshadow possible upcoming intimacy between him and Marie.

Marie is insecure and confuses sex with intimacy as she works her way through the men employed around her. She lives in her parents' house, sleeping in the same room that she grew up in, for the duration of her pregnancy. She met the father of her baby in the spring of 1999. She was sixteen and on a mission trip on the way to Mexico when they met, and after five days together, she is pregnant. She knows he isn't her usual type – too good looking and too popular for her and he normally would have considered her to be too intelligent to be with him, but together and away from their normal environs, they feel as though they'd known each other forever.

Marie's youth and inexperience shows as she attempts to make herself look older and more appealing to Christopher by putting on makeup for the very first time. Her embarrassment is acute when Christopher, rather than seeing her as old enough to be interested in takes out a handkerchief and wipes her face, suggesting she go wash.

Marie struggles with the first trimester of her pregnancy, morning sickness making her lose weight rather than gain as she should have been. Even her own mother worries that perhaps Marie is trying to lose the baby by not providing it the nourishment it needed. In reality however, Marie began the day vomiting, repeated the procedure again at about noon, and again around two o'clock. By the time the third stomach emptying event, Marie is shaky, pale and dizzy, and painfully hungry. Marie's pregnancy is something that she gives little consideration to, especially in the beginning. Since she is single, and shows no signs of settling down, it is no surprise that her mother believes she may be trying to abort the baby.



Marie and the baby's father talk on the phone regularly, discussing the things he did as a trim carpenter, and the kind of house they thought they'd live in. The conversation wasn't based on something they had in mind for the future together however, or if it was, it was on his part only. Marie wanted nothing to do with a unified future, despite having asked him to marry her during a moment of panic and insecurity after an episode with Christopher. Their lack of emotional intimacy makes it clear that they are not likely to succeed as a couple without considerable effort.

Discussion Question 1

What does Christopher tell Marie during her 'orientation' about making it in The Olive Garden and why is that truly the case?

Discussion Question 2

What is lacking in the descriptions that Marie gives of her pregnancy and why is it likely that there are no mentions of these kinds of feelings or attachments?

Discussion Question 3

What does Marie do to try to get Christopher's attention and what happens as a result?

Vocabulary

sadistic, superlative, humiliated, contingency, comprehensive, assertion, impede, assertion



Part One: Chili's

Summary

Kevin tells Marie that it seemed like she was trying to sell Barrett drugs and as such he has to let her go. She thinks about the thirty Vicodin tablets she sold Barrett, left-overs from wisdom teeth she had removed. Kevin gives her a way out; asking her if she gave Barrett needed something for a headache, and Marie tells him that is what happened.

Marie gets into a routine of sorts. Their daughter sleeps in their room, and when he gets up to shower, Marie puts her in the bathroom where the running water lulls her back to sleep again. Once he leaves for work, Marie and the baby sleep until 7:30, but then hunger and discomfort makes her fussy to be changed and fed. She is a quiet and calm, happy baby. Marie loves what motherhood has done for her figure, but isn't thrilled with the effects it has on her mind. Now, she has the kind of breasts she always wanted and for the first time in her life, she feels like a woman, but her mind feels black inside like an open sore. Exhaustion is normal for Marie as everything she consumes turns to milk for the baby. At six months, Marie goes back to work, and while she is gone, he feeds her either rice cereal or some mashed banana, and by the time she gets home, her breasts are close to exploding with milk.

Most of the time Marie worried that someone would notice how lost she felt and how lacking in maternal skills she was. She found a place for the three of them to live when the baby was three months old and let her husband explain it to her parents. Her mother cried, but he told her they were just across town and promised to take care of Marie and the baby.

Marie's father came to see her at Chili's one day, likely because her husband had told them she wasn't doing so well, but working had helped. At Chili's, Marie learned how to use work as a tool to forget; how to anticipate needs; how to consolidate and she also learned that she was a terrible wife. At night, she would be too busy to have the kinds of images going through her mind that plagued her during the day, but when morning came, so did images of butcher knives and machetes. She cried throughout those days, worried that she was a bad mother.

Although Marie struggles to understand how to be either a wife or a mother, she manages to understand the rules of waitressing. Mostly, it's never-ending examples of Murphy's Law which soon taught her that superstition applies as well. She learned never to say it looks like it will be a slow night aware that if she did, she'd likely suffer the consequences of a mad rush instead. If she tipped over a salt shaker, Marie made a point of throwing a pinch over her shoulder.

Marie gets an STD from John Smith, a man she cheats on her husband with. She doesn't tell him at first, but when she does, he asks if there was anyone else. She admits there was, and he asks her if she even managed to hold true to her vows for a



year. She tells him she did, but hurt and angry, he puts a fist through the wall. She had managed a year, but the day after their anniversary, she'd slept with John. That was in September. Next came Luke in October and Damon was in November. There was a bit of an overlap with each so it is no surprise that all three of them were affected by the STD. She learns a great deal about sex from Damon, and takes her newfound knowledge back to her husband. When they realize she is pregnant, he asks her if it is his, but she has no idea. He goes with her to Planned Parenthood, and after that Marie doesn't see Damon for a while. At the same time, her husband seems to age, lose weight, and takes long walks with the baby.

One day Marie confuses the start time of a shift she is covering, and Kevin tries to punish her, but after a short time at the dish pit, Marie walks out. She goes to Damon's and tells him what happened. She smokes some of his bong with him, and discovers that he grows what he is smoking in his closet.

Marie and her husband help build a road outside a village named Toluca. Marie shows her spirit and determination when she works through the entire day – the only woman who did.

Analysis

Marie doesn't do drugs or drink, and finds it ironic that she might lose her job over it since she is just about the only one at work who doesn't do drugs or drink at this time.

Marie admits to having low self-esteem in this segment although her ongoing sexual escapades make it clear that she is seeking approval and hopes to get it by giving herself to one man after another. The low self-esteem also clearly reveals itself during the time Marie lives with her parents during the three months after Ana is born. Despite the fact that her parents are only trying to help her, and that they only want to spend time with their grandchild, Marie constantly feels as though their helping hands are a direct commentary on her inability to properly parent. She fears that her parents can see right through her, and that they know how lost she is as far as looking after her baby is concerned and resents every time they take her daughter off her hands, although they are only trying to give her a break. At the same time, Marie admits to herself that since her baby was born, she finally feels what it is like to be a female. Until then, her breasts had been almost unrecognizable – so small that they embarrassed her. Now, she has a C cup that she truly enjoys the feeling and femininity of.

Marie's lack of experience and her poor self-image are likely the reasons she became pregnant at an early age, and is at the foundation of her infidelity throughout her short marriage. Her husband is devastated when he realizes that she is regularly unfaithful to him, his pain compounded when she brings home a STD. Marie tells John, who isn't surprised by the knowledge and makes it clear that it is not the first time he's had to deal with this situation. Damon is less understanding, but her husband is livid.



Once they'd moved out of her parents' house, they seldom returned even though they didn't live all that far away. Marie's parents had seen Ana born and helped out so much afterwards that Marie often feels as though her baby isn't her own. Now she realizes that they didn't think she was incompetent; but merely wanted to go back to the days of wonder and amazement that a new baby brought into life.

Marie sleeps with three men during the three months that follow her first anniversary with her husband. Damon is the third, and he introduces her to marijuana. For the first time afterward, Marie feels like the secrets of the world have been released to her. She knows about everything in life and what it all means and remembers how much she loves her husband and their baby.

When Marie and her husband realize she is expecting again, he asks her if she knows whose it is, but Marie has no idea. She may have kept it had she known for sure who the father was because if it was Damon's baby, she would have wanted it. If it was her husband's child, she would also have kept it. Unfortunately, she can't find it in herself to want the baby without knowing who the father is for sure, so she and her husband go to Planned Parenthood together. The experience changes her husband however. He ages, becomes withdrawn, doesn't eat, and goes for long walks with Ana foreshadowing changes for Marie and her little family.

Marie is willing to take any shift or combinations of shifts, making her schedule erratic and inconsistent. She takes on any shift she is asked to by anyone, always hoping that she can find her way to a place where her mind can focus on work and nothing more. She admits she feels strange when she is around children, that she doesn't fit in somehow.

Marie quits her job at Chili's after she mistakes the beginning of a shift and comes in almost an hour late, no idea that Kevin is livid. He forces her to work in the dish pit where embarrassment gives way to anger and she finally walks out. Despite the strength it took for her to walk out of this job, internally, she is having suicidal thoughts, imagining herself impaled or fatally injured in a number of ways. Stressful situations make this feeling more prevalent, and quitting her job at Chili's makes her imagine all manner of injury. This clearly reveals Marie's struggle with postpartum depression, but it goes unnoticed by those around her.

Discussion Question 1

Based on this segment, what is Marie's relationship with her daughter and her husband like?

Discussion Question 2

What does Marie learn from Damon, and what does she do with the knowledge?



Discussion Question 3

How does Marie feel about children and why might that be the case?

Vocabulary

emphatically, mesmerizing, translucent, femininity, bludgeoned, contagious, consolidate



Part One: The Dream Café

Summary

Marie is fired from her job at the Dream Café. Marlo sat down and told her she knew what she'd done. Tanya had told her not to ring up all of the drinks she'd had on her day off, and Marie hadn't, but Marlo knew.

Marie is an organized server who can handle fifty to sixty covers over two hours during a busy lunch without messing up, dropping food or confusing orders. One of her tables, a young couple with a baby, owned the Smoothie King nearby, and somehow Marie loses track of the credit card they give her to pay the bill. They call her back to the table and she searches for it, but is unable to find it. Finally, Craig is forced to comp their bill. He tells Marie not to ring it through, just in case they find the card, but by the end of the day that hasn't happened, so after making Marie wait to cash out, Craig finally runs the sale through. He won't take it off the total sales however, so Marie still has to tip out on money she earned no tip for. Frustrated, she turns and sees the card lodged in the frame of the door where it had fallen. She tells Craig but by then the sale is rung out.

Marlo asks Marie if she has anything to say for herself, and when all Marie says is that she doesn't want to lose her job, Marlo reminds her that she was stealing, and is lucky that getting fired is all that happens to her. Marie tries not to cry as she gathers her things and leaves. She calls her boss Marshall from her night job at the Italian restaurant and asks for the night off which he gives her without issue. Then she calls Tanya and tells her she was fired, but Tanya doesn't ask why. Instead she invites her over for a drink, and Marie goes. Tanya comes on to her and actually gets Marie undressed before she realizes that Marie doesn't shave herself. Marie uses it as an excuse to make a quick exit, not sure why she was there to begin with. She drives home to the apartment she lives alone in, thinking about her daughter and wishing she could be with her instead.

In the morning the phone rings and when Marie sees it is The Dream Café, she tells the phone she doesn't work there and ignores it, even when the phone rings a second time. Later, she listens to the two messages Craig left – the first asking where she was and the second saying he'd talked to Marlo who told him she'd fired her, but he'd told her they needed her and please would she come back to work the next day. Marie is so relieved she cries, and then angry that such a crappy job would bring her to tears she gets up and using a box cutter she slices her thigh open, demanding control from herself. By the third horizontal cut, blood is pooling on her sock but the cuts still don't cause her as much pain as the noise in her brain or the sight of her face in the mirror.

Marie only starts to get acne when she begins to work in restaurants, and Marlo soon asks her to begin wearing make-up. She also asks that Marie wear long sleeves under her uniform to cover up the marks that Marie tells her are burns. After working at The Dream Café for nine months, only Tanya and Zeke had been there longer. She and



Zeke do the crosswords together and eventually end up at his place after a shift. Zeke asks her about the marks as well, and she tells him the same story. Zeke's place is a low point in Marie's life that she tries hard to forget.

Marie thinks about her husband and the trip they took to the bayou shortly after she'd begun cutting herself. Marie's parents paid for the trip and watched Ana while they were gone in the hopes that some intensive marriage counselling will help, but it doesn't. When they get home, her husband announces he wants to attend college, so Marie's mother begins watching Ana at night. They filed for divorce and he gave Marie half of his student loan money so that she could move into a rented apartment in Dallas where she didn't know a soul, and had no job.

She also thinks about their trip to Mexico and about how she'd passed out after eating. Their guide tells them it is not unusual, citing the sun and the mountain. All Marie remembers is waking to see her husband's concerned face, and wishing she could stay right there in that moment forever.

Her husband calls Ana 'Little Boot' because she never cries when she falls. By the time she is four, she can read and has a slight lisp that Marie adores. She stays the night with Marie now and then, and after she is asleep, Marie does lines of cocaine off the book they were reading together. She gets back into bed with Ana, shivering, and hardly able to contain the amount of love she feels for the little body next to her. Marie is soaring with bliss one moment, and hurtling into darkness the next. She doesn't realize that she is talking out loud until Ana asks her what is wrong and Marie realizes that Ana lives only in that moment, and if her mother is crying, she is crying as well.

Analysis

Marie is caught in a cycle of self-destruction. Although she manages to be competent at her job, regardless of where it is, her time off is another story. Marie continues to struggle with self-image, punishing herself for the shortcomings she perceives she has. Self-mutilation, beginning with cutting is how Marie deals with the internal pain she feels. Whenever she is weak or upset, or generally feels an inability to cope, she does something to cause herself more intensely focused pain so that the physical pain will finally overcome the mental pain she is feeling so overwhelmed by.

Marie doesn't begin with box cutters. She began much more simply, digging her finger nails into her palms or something similar to distract herself from the way she felt, and generally, no matter how much damage she did to herself, it still doesn't measure up to the degree of pain she is in emotionally. When she begins using a box cutter, she cuts areas that she doesn't think anyone will see, and if no one else sees it, she won't have to face the fact that it is happening. Over time, she cuts her arms and then later her thighs to ribbons. The scars left behind are long and evenly spaced – and she uses the metaphor that they resemble a fret board when she describes them. She tells anyone who questions her that they are burns, but they quite clearly are not. Marie continues to use this method to cope with disappointment in herself, or her own inability to cope with



life around her. For Marie, cutting takes the pain out of her brain and transfers it to something more manageable, more remote.

Marie continues to sleep with anyone who wants to, constantly seeking approval and often the men are strangers to her. She almost allows Tanya to draw her into a sexual escapade with her, despite the fact that she has no real interest in women sexually, and only manages to disengage herself when Tanya gets her undressed and discovers that she doesn't shave herself. Marie even sleeps with Zeke, despite the condition of the place he lives in, and how disgusting their surroundings are. Somehow, she manages to ignore all of it and allows Zeke to do as he wishes. He asks her how adventurous she is, showing her anal beads, and later, when she leaves his apartment, Marie avoids the entire block in an effort to block out the experience revealing just how disgusted she was that it had happened at all. This clearly reveals her self-destructive tendencies and the degree to which she is willing to degrade herself.

Zeke is the first one other than her parents and her husband who notice the marks on her body, and he immediately recognizes them for what they are, acknowledging that she is "one of them." Beyond that, the self-mutilation doesn't seem to bother him as he doesn't bring it up again. When Marlo notices the cuts Marie again explains them as burns, but it is clear that Marlo doesn't believe her. She suggests that Marie wear long sleeves and begin wearing makeup to cover how tired she looks rather than suggesting Marie get help.

Marlo is the kind of manager who never backs down. She has no trouble with asserting herself and being in control. Marie admits to Craig that she thinks Marlo hates her, but Craig tells her that Marlo's husband is ill with Crohn's disease and that likely has a lot to do with her attitude and demeanor. Marlo copes with the lack of control she has over her husband's disease by exerting complete control over her environment at work. In many ways, she and Marie are very similar. Marie also uses work as a coping mechanism, feeling her best when she is too busy with work to think about anything else. That may partially explain why Marie cries with relief when her job at The Dream Café is in no longer in jeopardy and she is given an opportunity to return despite the fact that down deep she hates the job.

Marie doesn't like to fly. She doesn't like the feeling that she is so high in the air and so out of control of her circumstances. Lately, she admits to feeling the same way even driving home from work which gives the reader insight into how out of control Marie feels in her life in general. It also reveals that left untreated, Marie's condition is not improving, but is instead getting worse.

Marie recalls several incidents involving her husband and her daughter, some before their divorce and some after, but each with emotional connotations. In one such memory she recalls how she and her husband had gone to Mexico and the heat of the sun had caused her to faint. When she woke, she saw her husband's face, looking so concerned about her that she didn't want the moment to end. This reveals the depth of her insecurities, and her desire to have someone who loves her unconditionally and without reservations. This is something that she finds in her daughter Ana, described in another



memory when Ana comes to stay with Marie overnight. Ana is in bed asleep and Marie, having done drugs after Ana had drifted off, begins by thinking about how much her daughter means to her. She considers how beautiful she is, and cold, she gets into bed with her little girl, but the feeling of love and overwhelming bliss she feels evaporates quickly. Suddenly she is overcome with a hate for herself that has Marie talking out loud about how close highs and lows in the brain are. When the thought brings Marie to tears, Ana wakes and cries also, overcome with empathy for her mother. Marie is aware in that moment that her daughter is tied to her emotionally.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Marie lose her job at The Dream Café and what should she have done differently, if anything?

Discussion Question 2

What happens when Marie misplaces a credit card, and what is the outcome for her financially as a result?

Discussion Question 3

What sexual escapades does Marie find herself involved in during this segment, and why does she regret these experiences?

Vocabulary

punctuated, proficient, attributable, indentured, interminable, digression



Intermezzo

Summary

A black Yamaha concert grand piano sits in The Restaurant and Jimmy plays it from seven to eleven three nights a week, or until they are customer free – whichever comes first. Jimmy was hired eight years ago, after Valentino's burned down and he found himself out of work. He had really enjoyed working at Valentino's, the situation there much more conducive to having a personal life, and he was treated with respect. By comparison, Jimmy had to drive farther to play at The Restaurant, he often was forced to park across the street rather than in the lot, and he was forced to wear a suit and tie. Despite sometimes wearing the same one all week, no one ever troubled him about it.

On his second night at The Restaurant, Jimmy had asked the bartender for a glass of wine at eleven after closing the piano lid, and Lissandri had come over almost immediately to remind him that he wasn't there to drink, he was there to play. After that, Jimmy played. He played Happy Birthday several times a night; he played requests with good cheer and enthusiasm, even when he was asked to play the Cielito Lindo for Hank Earl Jackson which he resented only slightly less than the Jim Brickman he was sometimes requested to play.

Hank Earl Jackson stands six foot seven and has a head as large as a steer. He owns an eponymous bar by the stockyards in Fort Worth – an A-list venue for country acts in Texas that Hank was famous for, despite having made his money in oil. After that, he invested his money like Lissandri in the restaurant business. Hank Earl never requested his song until after two or three bottles of chardonnay, and often the Mexican cook could be heard joining in with that Ay, ay, ay, ay from the kitchen.

Hank Earl lived across the street in the Hotel Fitzandrew. He would have his driver pick him up at the hotel in the carriage entrance, drive across the street to The Restaurant, and drop him off, doing the same in reverse later in the night. His driver Hector tells Jimmy that he is grateful when the big man only urinates in the back of the car, and had often vomited or passed out as well.

Ted and Ed are also hired to play at The Restaurant, but they are nothing compared to the musician Jimmy is, Marie tells him one night. She would stand on the dais with her hands clasped behind her back at the ready and Jimmy would play entire concerts for her in between requests. After a few months, Jimmy began quizzing Marie, and testing her about her musical knowledge and Marie was right more often than not. Marie is the one who suggested that he would make much more money if the tip jar was in sight on the piano instead of inside it. Jimmy stops her however, and insists he is playing for her. Marie doesn't realize that he means it. Jimmy even tries to dissuade people from tipping him, although some are more persistent than others. One time Hank Earl stumbled up on the dais and insisted on tipping Jimmy for playing his request yet again, and although Jimmy tries to dissuade him, Hank Earl is drunkenly persistent. Before Marie



comes out of the kitchen, Hank Earl has spilled part of a glass of chardonnay on Jimmy and Jimmy is holding the balance of it in the air away from the keys. Marie rescues the glass and escorts Hank Earl back to his seat, coming back to apologize to Jimmy afterward. Jimmy tells her not to worry about it.

Analysis

Jimmy LaRosa is introduced as one of three piano players at The Restaurant, another of the restaurants in which Marie waitresses. Jimmy is a musician, his concern mostly surrounding the artists and his expression of their music while the other two piano players concern themselves primarily with a snifter that holds tips, and playing any commercial nonsense in order to fill the snifter. Jimmy is different. While he can play anything, and will play requests if asked, Jimmy uses the time between requests to play entire concerts, mostly for Marie who is the only one who shows any interest in the music he plays.

Jimmy plays a concert grand piano by Yamaha – a piano worthy of a musician with talent and a love for music. Jimmy worked at Valentino's before coming to The Restaurant to play. It was a job he loved and gave him lots of freedom to play other outings as well. When Valentino's burned down, Jimmy was forced to settle for a situation that he finds much less pleasant.

Hank Earl Jackson is also introduced, and is an example of a man who has more money than he knows what to do with. He and the owner of The Restaurant, Lissandri, both made their money elsewhere. Hank Earl was once an oil man, and invested in a bar called the Fort Worth Stockyards where country music is played live. Hank Earl lives in the Hotel Fitzandrew across the street from The Restaurant, and rather than walk over, he has his driver Hector pick him up and return him each evening. By having himself driven across the street for a meal, Hank reveals his own insecurities, covering them with money to hide them. By having a driver take him to The Restaurant, Hank reveals his wealth and status, using them as a shield to hide behind.

In the eight months that Jimmy is employed by Lissandri at The Restaurant, Marie's knowledge of music grows. In time, she is able to recognize the artists who wrote the music Jimmy plays, and although Jimmy tries to trip her up, he is able to do so less frequently all the time, which gives him a measure of satisfaction.

Jimmy, unlike the other piano players, didn't like to collect tips for doing his job. Hank Earl tries on more than one occasion to tip Jimmy and when he turns the man down, he drunkenly insists and unable to separate money from his clip, he gives the whole clip to Jimmy. In the process, he manages to spill his glass of Chardonnay on Jimmy and on his bench. Marie is horrified when she comes out of the kitchen and realizes what had happened while she was in the kitchen. She helps him to clean up, knowing that his respect for the instrument is higher than his respect for the man.



Alcohol and drugs are an ongoing theme in this story and Hank Earl is no exception. He drinks to excess each evening, slurring his words and using his wealth to excuse his drunken behavior, his vomiting, passing out or urinating in the car. Despite the almost nightly soiling of his vehicle, his driver Hector continues to work for him, and to clean up after him night after night, revealing just how much money can excuse behavior that otherwise would not be tolerated or regularly forgiven.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Jimmy prefer his job with Valentino's over his job playing at The Restaurant?

Discussion Question 2

How does Jimmy differ from the other two piano players that work at The Restaurant and who else recognizes the differences between them?

Discussion Question 3

What behavior is often excused in Hank Earl, and why is this behavior likely directly connected to his considerable wealth?

Vocabulary

arpeggio, lucrative, reprimanded, requisite, repertoire, oppressive, frenetic, eponymous



Part Two: Suck It

Summary

Danny is the go-to guy for most anything. He swears with extreme color and the frequency of a man who has Tourette's syndrome. Danny has connections and charisma and if you want to get something accomplished, he is the one to see. Sometimes, he'd come in on his day off, ask Marie if Pablo is on shift and then ask her to pick up his drugs for him. Danny would ask her to put it under a Chianti bottle at the top of the wine wall and gives Marie sixty dollars to send back the other way discretely. Danny liked cocaine, and he and his roommate Lou Ambrogetti liked to bed the same women.

Salvatore Lissandri, part owner of The Restaurant first came into the Dream Café and met Marie there. Waitresses fought over who would serve him because he would tip generously and was easy to serve. He seldom even looks up from his New York Times until Jamie serves him for the first time. Jamie was a yoga instructor and Sal flirted with her from the start. He even offers her a job but she has no interest in working nights. Sal often comes in with Laura, an off and on companion and one lunch shift when it was extremely busy, he flags Marie down to take their order. Marie serves him so competently that when he comes in the next time, she feels confident asking him for a job at The Restaurant, and he immediately agrees. After Marie had been there a month, Sal invites her to accompany him to Cosimo. Marie goes, but ends up taking Lou out back and servicing him while Sal is stroking the beautiful people, and when the night is over, Sal is gone.

During the next three months Marie beds somewhere around thirty different men who either came into the steakhouse, worked there themselves, or in the bar next door, Il Castello. Marie isn't interested in socializing, but is ready and willing to bed anyone who asks or shows interest. She had no inhibitions; ready, willing, and able to do anything with anyone. She sometimes talked to Calvin about her exploits and he assures her that sex is nothing to be ashamed of, and that there is nothing wrong with having fun, provided that she is careful. For Marie, it has nothing to do with fun however. Marie is simply trying to replace one kind of pain with another. Most of the time, Marie would go somewhere else in her mind until it was over. After one particularly abusive encounter involving one of the senior servers, Mickey and his friend James, Marie stopped using drugs, and started parking in the front of the restaurant instead to avoid encounters of that kind.

Marie pays for Ana's health insurance and for her care after school. Her father brings her to the restaurant every Friday and Ana enjoys the attention she gets from the staff and management alike. Even Cal enjoys interacting with Ana. One Friday Marie and Ana go out with a friend to dinner at La Calle Doce where a wishing well and an amber lit koi pond are the centerpiece of the restaurant. Ana takes a penny to the koi pond to make a wish and stays there throughout the entire meal. Marie mistakenly thinks Ana is



mesmerized by the koi, but when she goes to collect her Ana tells her that she doesn't know what to wish for, and gives Marie her penny. Marie puts her arm around Ana and thanks her, then closes her eyes and pretends to make a wish. They both watch the penny flutter down to the bottom before going home.

Analysis

This segment is titled not only to reflect the general content it contains - an overview of the depths that Marie sinks to in an effort to replace one kind of pain with another, but is also the favorite phrase used by Danny. Used as a verb, a noun, or even an adjective, Danny finds a way to use "suck it" in conversation a hundred times a day.

Danny is a facilitator. He can provide anything for anyone at pretty much any time, even providing cocaine once service is over for the night. He gets his drugs from Pablo, often using Marie as his cut out to pick it up. He knows Marie doesn't like this arrangement, and Pablo isn't happy with it either. Marie is worried about protecting her job, so she doesn't refuse to do as Danny asks her, giving another example of how wealth or position can affect the behavior of others.

Danny and Marie have similar unrestrained sexual appetites. It is not uncommon to find Danny bending a waitress over in his office and he happily reenacts the event later for anyone who will listen. Danny's roommate and business partner Salvatore Lissandri is no different and it is immediately clear that Marie will sleep with them both, which of course she does.

Marie's self-destruction accelerates while her own health deteriorates. She willingly submits herself to anyone, often allowing more than one man to use and abuse her. Like cutting, Marie uses sex to cover pain she feels elsewhere in her life. Her spiral into depravity continues until one day she is asked by Mickey, one of the servers next door, to go outside with his friend James. She hesitates, but only momentarily before going out to the parking lot and in full view of other staff members coming and going, or standing outside for a smoke; she mounts the perfect stranger in her vehicle. The door opens and Mickey stands there watching James as he continues to pump away at Marie. Mickey pours a Modelo Especial over her head, telling her what a slut she is. James continues, unfazed by the interruption, and when Marie asks Mickey to close the door, he slaps her across the face and tells her to shut up. This is clearly a turning point for Marie. While she is willing to sleep with anyone who asks, this kind of abuse is new to her and gives her a view of herself that finally sinks in. For the time being, she copes with the abuse by allowing her mind to go to Ana. Meanwhile, Michael continues to pour beer over her and hit her face. When James is finally done, so is Marie. That night convinces her to quit drugs and to avoid the back parking lot entirely. While Marie has little self-respect, she decides she has enough left to stop the self-abuse and does so immediately.

At work Marie continues to be on the top of her game. It is the only place where she has any control over her life, and she devotes all of her skill to making sure everyone is



served to the best of her ability. It is a matter of pride with her that she never has to call on anyone else to bail her out or to take a table from her, regardless of how busy they are, how much she is interrupted, or how hard she tied one on the night before.

Marie believes that she and her daughter have ability to sense things, although she admits that they are mostly insignificant. What she is feeling is more likely the connection that most mothers feel with their children, who after nine months inside them develop connections that they will have with no one else for the rest of their lives. This connection is deep and subconscious, but undeniable.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Danny impose on his relationship with Marie, and what changes that makes her uncomfortable with the situation?

Discussion Question 2

How does Marie cope with the parade of strange men who become intimate with her, and what is she hoping to accomplish, if anything?

Discussion Question 3

What makes Marie decide to stop doing drugs and sleeping with anyone who shows the slightest interest in her?

Vocabulary

egregiously, ostensibly, aberrant, philandered, pejoratively, etymology, pruriently, precarious, preponderance



Part Two: The Dangler

Summary

There are two women that have earned the nickname "the dangler" as far as Marie is concerned although most only know about one. Shaila is a beautiful woman who is almost too perfect in appearance. Once married to the man who began Glamorous You, she made out so well in the divorce that she can afford to take impromptu trips to the Bahamas at will, or simply drink her nights away in the bar each evening. She then involved herself briefly with Ahmed who is a Pakistani New Yorker who owns a pizza company and left his wife and four children for her. She soon got bored however and left him. Shaila has an orange Ferrari, and earned her nickname when she came into the bar in a slinky number that inadvertently showed the string from a tampon dangling between her thighs.

The other woman Marie calls the dangler in her head at least is a woman who is standing in front of Marie at the Public Storage. She had her hair up in two ponytails, held by pink plastic balls on elastic bands and was wearing denim cargo shorts and a Mickey Mouse t-shirt. Her key ring is held onto her purse with a Mickey Mouse carabiner and a Mickey Mouse charm dangles from a chain on each ankle. Marie guesses her age to be somewhere near forty, and listens to her argue with the clerk for several minutes before going back out and climbing into the back of a pickup.

The one hurt most by Shaila is Matt. Shaila had originally dumped Ahmed in order to take a trip with Matt to Cabo. It doesn't take long before the whole group knows that Shaila is willing to sleep with any of them, and simply works her way down her address book until she finds a man willing to service her for the evening. Ahmed is angry that Shaila doesn't care about any of them but in Danny's mind she is the perfect woman – one who is willing to bed you without the bullshit.

Meanwhile, Marie develops a fondness for a jazz musician that she refers to as her hateful man. He is on one hand loving and on the other wants no physical contact unless he is either bedding her or tickling her. She gets angry with him one night when he won't stop tickling her, and spits on him. He was somewhat intoxicated and hits Marie across the face hard enough to slam her head back into the chair. His idea of an apology is putting on a record and sharing his love of the music with her. He was also happy to make her tacos whenever she got off work, and the gesture is one Marie deeply appreciates. She can't help but think of her ex, who would have done anything for her. She would yell at him for bringing home the wrong orange juice even though he would have done anything for her. Marie thanks him for his love by sleeping with everyone from work, so he put his fist through a wall and left her. Now Marie wishes she could love that gentle man who plays his guitar and teaches special education at the middle school. Instead, she wants the man who knows the history of jazz, but little else while the man who truly loved her and is kind to a fault is of no interest to her.



Frank has a custom pendant made for Shaila and asks Marie to pick it up. The note he has her write inside suggests she "Dangle this" and calls her "the player with the heart of cold." Frank wants Marie to deliver the necklace personally. She does, and her message Marie was to respond with is graphically grateful. Then she closed the door and Marie decided to text the response verbatim, just in case it mattered to either of them. Shaila wears the spider necklace regularly from that point onward rather than the choker Matt had given to her. After too much to drink, Matt tried to take Danny on, but telegraphed his intentions and Danny easily avoided him. When Kole throws Matt out, Shaila pleads that he be gentle, but does nothing to deter him. The drugs that fell from Matt's pocket in the scuffle are pocketed by Danny who leaves with Shaila afterward.

The following day Marie learns that Matt drove his car through a construction barrier; hit and killed someone in the process. Matt walks away with a broken wrist but is now facing manslaughter charges. Shaila ends up seeing Kole instead of Danny, and watching the whole fiasco from the sidelines, Marie can't help but do some sole searching. When the hateful man calls to announce his return, Marie directs him to a storage locker and tells him he should begin making the payments on it as well.

Marie is with the hateful man when Ana gets sick and her ex calls her and tells her Ana is asking for her. Marie later learns that all Ana had was a bad cold, and wanted her mother, but Marie was otherwise entertained with the hateful man who chose that time to want sex with her. Even though all she could think about is Ana, Marie gives in to him, and even relents when he wants her a second time. The second encounter doesn't have a happy outcome, and he is furious with her, but all she can do is apologize.

One benefit of being involved with the hateful man is that Marie develops a reputation for being straitlaced at work especially as the staff turnover occurs and more people who know nothing about her are hired. Marie didn't go out with them anymore, but it isn't because she's finally grown up and settled down but more that she had the hateful man to mess with her head now and didn't need to go out. She continues to take her job seriously, and to do it with pride and competence.

Analysis

Shaila is introduced and described as nothing short of a goddess. Her nickname as the Dangler is explained but in spite of it, she is the kind of woman that men leave their wives and girlfriends for, or can be convinced to fool around. Shaila has absolutely no conscience. She married a man who was wealthy and after the divorce she can finally live the lifestyle she wants – able to come and go as she pleases; jet off to the Bahamas if she wants to; or just while away the hours on a barstool. She sleeps with a wide variety of men who happily fall all over each other in their attempts to outspend each other on her. Shaila's behavior can easily be compared to Marie's behavior – both lacking the self-confidence and self-worth to refrain from seeking the approval of a long parade of men who are interested in little more than satisfying themselves. Shaila has the advantage of unlimited funds, which may or may not benefit her as it gives her more time to seek companionship. A woman of this nature leaves a trail of broken families



and relationships in her wake. In this segment, Ahmed leaves his wife and four kids for Shaila; Frank takes her to the Bahamas; Danny takes her to Vegas; and Matt is so devastated over his time with her that he drinks himself into a stupor and hits and kills a man with his car. Matt is just one more in a long parade of men who follow women like the Dangler and have their hearts broken as a result. The self-destructive behavior follows the revelation that they are "one of many" not 'the one'. The gifts given to Shaila by the parade of men in her life include a pendant from Frank, custom made from white gold. It is a spider with a sapphire shaped like a heart on its back and she favors it over the choker made out of rubies that Matt bought for her when he took her to Cabo.

Marie becomes involved with a man she refers to as the "hateful man" whose most remarkable comment about Marie is that she is the best he can get for now. Her penchant for self-abuse and self-destruction continues, despite the fact that she had reached a point where she'd finally stopped sleeping with anyone who wanted her, and gave up the drugs she'd been doing. By becoming involved with the hateful man she manages to clean up her reputation at work however. Most restaurants have high staff turnovers so in time, everyone there thinks that she's grown up or settled down, or some combination of the two, but the real truth is that the hateful man is abusive enough that she feels no need to go out. Either way, her reputation changes from the girl who is willing to do anyone to a paragon of consistency, good work, and professionalism.

Marie is still so desperate for someone to love her that she is willing to take almost any abuse in return. This is made clear in this segment when she allows her "hateful man" to control her movements and behavior simply by announcing he has a physical need for her. Her desperation for approval and attention are such that she forgoes all else in favor of his request, even her own daughter who is sick wants nothing more than her mother.

Watching the entire circus that surrounds the Dangler is an education for Marie and has a profound effect on her. While none of it actually happens to her, it is enough to have Marie thinking about her own life in a different light. So much so that when her hateful man calls to announce his return from Miami, she tells him she isn't interested. Whatever desire she was waiting for him to fulfill is finally defeated.

Marie continues to maintain her professionalism at work. She takes pride in being able to do her job without issue night after night, regardless of how tired she is or how busy it gets. She arrives at five every evening, and doesn't leave until every table is polished and the restaurant shows no sign of the chaotic disarray it had become earlier. Marie loves the idea that she can begin a shift in a pristine and silent state; take it all the way to deafening chaos, and then return it to its original state as though none of it had ever happened. It is the one thing in her life that she seems to have complete control over and it is obvious that Marie would love to have this kind of control over her personal life as well.



Discussion Question 1

How does Shaila get the nickname the Dangler, and what does she have in common with the other woman that Marie calls the Dangler?

Discussion Question 2

In this segment, who becomes involved with Shaila and how invested in the relationship with her do they each become?

Discussion Question 3

What does Marie learn from watching the circus that surrounds Shaila, and what impact does it have on her own life?

Vocabulary

exhilaration, entreaties, embouchure, perplexed, infiltrated, paragon, chaotic, disarray



Part Two: Roman and the Bishop

Summary

The liquor rep sends Danny a gift of hookers and some high quality coke on his birthday and as such manages to secure the business for a new whiskey he is pushing. While the rate for the whiskey is good, the quality is not. Danny tells his staff to push it anyway.

Felipe is the barback's barback. Sanchez is the barback and Danny likes to tell the story of his rise from dishwasher to barback. Sanchez is responsible for making all of Roman and Ethan's drinks and for making the drinks for the servers as well. The staff like to joke that Roman can't use the washroom without Felipe's help. On Roman's birthday a cake is made and candles are lit, but Roman is too busy to come and blow them out, so the staff tells Felipe to do it since he makes all his drinks for him too. Felipe blows them out and takes a piece of cake to Sanchez.

Roman's wife is a Puerto Rican beauty with long black hair and a well-rounded, nicely put together body. She is trilingual, extremely smart, and has a sense of humor that makes those who meet her question why she would chose a man like Roman. Marie believes Roman has a member to be envied, which would explain his lovely wife, but one day Danny asks her if she wants to see it. Roman tells her he is hung like a silverback gorilla, and pulls it out of his pants. Marie can hardly see it and Roman puts it away again telling her that the silverback gorilla has the smallest member in the world.

Danny tells his liquor representative a story about Roman the bartender after closing one evening; the story one that reveals Roman has a member too small to be believed, and Marie listens in from the door. Danny offers her a drink but she is uncertain as to whether or not she wants to join them. She declines, deciding to go home instead when Felipe returns to the bar with a fancy SLR camera complete with telescopic lens. Danny tells Sanchez he should take some photos of him, and opens his pants. Out of loyalty to Danny, he does so. Later Marie will learn that the camera has pictures of a controversial black religious leader at an orphanage in Africa.

Calvin is who served the Bishop's table, but he had already gone home and although Marie had helped to serve wine at his table, she hadn't noticed the camera. Neither had Calvin, and when he found out, he would seriously consider quitting his job. Later a national magazine runs a story about a controversial black religious leader and the work he has done in Africa and Marie will recognize some of the photos. Calvin had gone home that evening on a high, after having served the Bishop and his guest the Professor.

The next morning Marie is doing office work for Danny when he comes in wearing his street clothes. Marie asks if he knows who the camera belongs to, and he admits he doesn't, but whoever owns it now has "prime footage of the silverback gorilla." Marie is



nervous about someone else seeing it, but Danny insists there are no shots of his face and he thinks it is amusing. He goes home to change and Marie decides to look at the other photos to see if she recognizes anyone, but the battery is dead. Later on, the Bishop's handler comes in, and when she sees him, Marie realizes who the camera belongs to. For a brief moment, she considers removing the memory card, but can't decide how to tell Danny when it gets back to him, so instead she just returns it.

After that, the Bishop and his handler are not seen for months, and when the handler calls to cancel the Bishop's birthday reserved since the previous year, she doesn't ask why. Instead, she asks that he give their best to the Bishop and adds her hopes that they see him again soon. The handler realizes she is the one who returned the camera, and asks her to pass a message on to Danny. The message was that Danny was a sick man and has no shame. As such, the Bishop will never return. Marie hangs up after apologizing, feeling the shame of the incident to her core.

Marie remembers the last night she and her ex spent in Mexico together, and how they'd stayed by the fire until long after it dies talking quietly. Afterward, they are supposed to sleep in separate quarters, but the youth minister never checks on them. Marie's ex leads her into the back of the church to a pantry where they share a sleeping bag, warming quickly. Marie remembers that she had never felt safer, more known or more whole since that night. They pretend they are characters in a series of books they'd both read by Robert Jordan and wake together in the early morning.

Marie remembers another time when she and her ex are watching reruns of The Cosby Show. Marie burns her neck with a fondue skewer feeling relief at the pain that somehow manages to synchronize the rest of the pain inside her. When her ex asks about it, Marie tells him it is likely an insect bite.

Ana and Marie build a jigsaw puzzle of a Saint Bernard to make up for the fact that they are not allowed pets in their apartment. Ana buys a bag of dog food with her own money and names him Barry, feeding and watering him every day. She realizes that by the time she grows up, Barry will be too old to travel with her, so she asks Marie if she will take care of Barry when she moves away from home, and Marie promises she will.

Analysis

This segment reveals Danny for the man he is. He constantly walks a tightrope between his own moral depravities and the image he tries to project in front of the customers at The Restaurant. His coarse language and abrupt attitude notwithstanding, Danny is a man with few morals, and although he puts on a front for his customers. Danny runs his restaurant with the adage that one hand washes the other which is how Marie and the rest of the wait staff find themselves pushing substandard whiskey on their customers and claiming it is the new Crown Royal. It is a measure of Danny's character that he is willing to serve whatever is cheapest to his clientele, and reveals his distinct lack of class. He seems unaware that by this behavior, he not only loses customers, but also



the secondary customers that come by word of mouth and recommendation, concerned only with repaying the liquor representative who supplied him with drugs and women.

Danny drinks to excess, spending so much time at Silver City that he can get VIP treatment for clients at a moment's notice; he does coke whenever he can get it, and takes the company of hookers whenever they are offered. His moral standards are low, and he expects his staff to turn a blind eye to most of his behavior, while demanding their loyalty if they want to continue working. Danny does his best to play the role of a gangster, even dressing to push that image on his time off work, wearing the kind of hip-hop accessories that include white puffy sneakers; a hoodie; and driving an SUV with the windows tinted black instead of the entrance he makes when he is working, wearing a two thousand dollar handmade Italian suit. Regardless of how he is dressed or presents himself, he stands ready to defy anyone who is prepared to underestimate him. His appearance and behavior no longer surprises Marie who is finally getting used to it.

Danny and his friends have a dirty sense of humor but Marie is not easily offended. As such, she stands listening to the joke Danny is telling the liquor representative. Danny offers her a drink but she isn't in the mood. He continues his examples of debauchery when after a few shots of Tequila, he unzips his fly and pisses on the floor. When he learns that the floor has already been washed, he is furious and takes out his ire on Sanchez when he comes in to show them the camera Felipe found in the dining room. Danny insists that Sanchez take photos of his nether regions, but Sanchez balks despite his loyalty for Danny. Danny is simply looking for a way to punish Sanchez because he is embarrassed by his own behavior. Danny decides to deal with Sanchez later, and leaves with the camera announcing the next day that Roman's silverback gorilla is one of the photos the customer will find when they return for it. Later it is revealed to be the Bishop's camera, foreshadowing a coming rift between Danny and the Bishop.

A magazine article is printed that reveals the Bishop had just returned from Africa and had found common ground with the Professor after years of unfriendliness. Marie shows the article to Calvin, telling him that it was his energy that allowed this forging of an alliance to begin and that after spending time being served by Calvin, they couldn't help but feel the love. Calvin can't help but think of how Danny ruined it with his shameful photographs and although Marie assures him that it is no fault of his, he tells her it doesn't matter as everything is everyone's responsibility.

Once the camera has been returned, Marie fields a phone call from the Bishop's handler that makes it clear that Danny is shameful and disgusting and the photographs are enough to cost him the Bishop's business permanently. This is no surprise to either the reader, or Marie.

Calvin, introduced earlier as Marie's confessor, and her friend, is the one who serves the Bishop and his friend the Professor when the camera is inadvertently left behind. He has already completed his shift and gone home when it is turned into Danny in the office, and has no idea that the photos of Roman's personal parts are added on. When



he discovers the truth, he considers leaving his job despite having cultivated seven years of clients who ask for him when they come and tip extravagantly for his charismatic service.

Marie remembers a time with Ana's father in Mexico – recalling how the last night there was one in which she felt more whole or safer than she does at that moment with him. This is followed by a memory in which she burns herself with a fondue fork while watching television with him. The memory reveals that Marie still struggles with an internal pain that she can't cope with. To focus the pain rather than have it take over, she creates a spot that she can make the pain so intense that it folds all of her other pain in with it. This is another example of self-mutilation like cutting.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Danny accept the second rate whiskey from him to sell to his customers and what does that reveal about Danny's character and business practices?

Discussion Question 2

What mistake does Calvin make and how does Danny try to make him pay for it?

Discussion Question 3

What does Danny do that costs him the future of the Bishop's business and why did he do it?

Vocabulary

prominence, controversial, immaculately, charismatic, antiquity, vizier, encroach, precariously

Part Two: Calvin D. Colson

Summary

Cal is king in The Restaurant – a hustler who originally comes from Memphis. He is particular about the way people are treated and served when they come in, and Marie soon learns to do things his way. Cal works in a bank during the day as well – a job he'd been given through one of the high-rollers he served.

In the beginning, The Restaurant was Marie's entire life. She'd run away from her husband and daughter Ana, and she quickly learns that Cal's way is the right way. He taught her that she had to care if she wanted to do a good job, and no matter what else you do, you have to treat people as though they mattered. It is this attitude that begins Marie's admiration for him, and this grows into more as their time together increases. She finds herself wanting to please him. He is profiled as a server in a great Texas steakhouse who provides the "old-school" dining experience and after reading the article, Lissandri is so impressed with the terrific publicity that he presents Calvin with a Rolex.

Cal has worked at The Restaurant for so long that he has a list of call parties that he knows will tip heavily when they come in – generally between fifty and eighty percent of the tab and the tabs were seldom less than five hundred dollars. One night, Konstantin, a German-American who often arrived with clients in big business came in and when they were done, he tips Cal just three hundred dollars on a tab that ran just over sixteen hundred in total. While most servers would have considered that to be a great tip, Cal is offended. He approaches Konstantin and asks him what the problem is, showing him the check presenter. Konstantin asks if he missed something and Cal asks him if that was what he thought the service was worth that night. Was there something that he wasn't pleased with? Konstantin looks at it and changes the tip from three to nine hundred, apologizing and assuring Cal he meant no offense.

Later in the parking lot, Nic Martinez does an impression of Konstantin that has everyone in stitches. Cal is so confident that at the end of the night, he would often pour himself a taste – a shot of Grand Marnier and Danny didn't much care provided he was discrete about it. One night, after he'd had more than a taste or two, he boldly sits beside Cassandra Melton, Doc's woman. Doc is one of the clients who inflates the gratuities for Cal and tosses in tickets for the Mavericks and he likely would not have approved of Cal feeling Cassandra up under the table. Later Cal brags about it and Marie can't believe that he doesn't go all the way and fool around. She also wonders how much of his bravado and showmanship is real, and how much is put on, questioning whether he was really that perfect or was he a mess inside like everyone else.

One summer Cal and Marie spend many afternoons in her apartment in between his shifts at the bank and the time they would have to be at The Restaurant. She and Cal



spent many hours on the soft carpet but he never allows her to touch him, insisting that his woman would kick him "to the curve" and he might as well just move in with her at that point. Marie tells him to go ahead then, but he assures her that she isn't ready. Those afternoons end after his wife begins to suspect he and Marie are fooling around. Calvin calls Marie and asks her to talk to Max and set her mind at ease. Max couldn't understand how Cal could have a six hundred dollar phone bill with most of it calls to Marie if they are not involved.

One day Cal brings Marie a twenty dollar bag of coke, somehow knowing that while she wasn't sleeping around, she had gone back to the drugs she'd given up. He tells her that they came from the Baron and warns her to be careful as it isn't the cheap stuff that she used to get from the Mexicans which was cut seven ways to Sunday. Marie does a single line, and Cal warns her to wait and see how it affects her before continuing. For a change, she listens and soon after she feels as though her brain is melting. She tells him that she feels like her face is falling off and repeatedly asks why he did that to her. Cal reminds her that he didn't do anything, and asks how she is going to work her shift now, or even drive to work. Finally, Cal says he had to go so he can get ready for work himself and warns her to get it together.

After Cal leaves, Marie turns on a burner on the stove and gets out a steak knife. She heats it up and pulling down her pantyhose, she burns Cal's initials into her stomach, just to the right of her navel. The letters are one inch square, and she cuts a hole in her pantyhose so that it won't stick to the damaged skin. Marie manages to get to work, but when she sits down with Danny before her shift, she is unable to stop crying. She allows him to believe it has something to do with Ana. Danny lets Marie go home and Cal won't even look at her as she leaves.

Angry with Cal, Marie calls her friend Clark who comes over and gets her stoned, but then leaves for a prearranged dinner party. He comes back afterward, and sleeps with Marie who finally comes down enough to sleep herself afterwards.

One Valentine's Day Cal brings his wife and daughter in. Marie avoids the table, unable to go over there and lie to Maxine. Cal was the manager then, and Marie was unhappily seeing the hateful man. Marie picks up Danny's dry-cleaning on the way in, and misses the meeting where the rest of the staff is informed that Max will be helping out for the evening. She doesn't learn Max is there until she turns with a stack of plates and asks her to take them to the kitchen, not realizing until it was too late that it is Cal's wife. Marie isn't happy with the fact that Cal didn't even give her warning, but rather than respond, he criticizes her work ethic which only makes her angrier.

She entertains the notion of quitting more than once, serving tables and imagining that she just walks out, but even as tired of it as she is, Marie knows that the alternative is being unable to pay her rent.

Marie doesn't realize she is carrying Ana until after she makes her valedictorian speech. It has been six weeks since the mission trip, and she doesn't track her cycle so closely that she would notice. When the truth comes out, the youth minister in charge of the



mission trip resigns with regrets that he failed to keep his charges safe. The elders meet with Marie and she is mortified by their attention to her behavior. She retreats into herself, allowing her consciousness to leave and the next thing she is aware of is waking up in her own bed at home.

Analysis

This segment reveals a great deal more Calvin and about Marie's relationship with him. Despite the fact that Cal is married, he and Marie spend a considerable amount of time together. Although Cal never actually has sex with Marie, they spend much of their time almost naked and mostly intimate. The "almost" part of this situation is frustrating for Marie who pushes for more but Cal sticks to his code of behavior. This foreshadows the end of the emotionally intimate relationship Cal and Marie share.

Cal is profiled in a piece about Texas steakhouses, and described as able to provide customers a combination of great personal service, a bit of performance art and the kind of professionalism that assures his customers receive the highest level of service. Calvin breaks all of the rules where fine dining is concerned. He begins by telling guests his name rather than maintaining a formal and anonymous service style. Cal engages with customers, unafraid to touch a shoulder or back as he does so, although by proper serving standards that should never happen. Cal will also push one dish over another, even telling his table how to eat a dish if the situation calls for it. When a customer leaves, Cal gives them his card and makes sure they will ask for him when they return. The personal touches that Cal provides are enough to have customers returning again and again and tipping him outrageously for his service.

The high tip ratio Cal has come to expect from certain customers makes him bold as is exemplified by his confrontation with Konstantin. Cal pulls out a check presenter with Konstantin's sixteen hundred and twenty dollar tab on which he tipped Cal three hundred dollars and is indignant until Konstantin changes the tip to nine hundred – three times his initial tip.

Honor is a word that some would use to describe Cal, but he is a man of standards as well as a man of contradictions. He's not only willing to chase down a customer and tell them that he expected more, but lives by a code in his personal life as well. He looks after his body, (Marie admitting that despite being twice her age, he is in better shape than she is) and refuses to have sex with Marie or allow her to have intimate contact with him beyond kissing. He believes that he is faithful to his wife as long as he doesn't actually commit a sexual act. He has what Marie describes as military standards and believes in the power of belief. At the same time, he expects Marie to talk to his wife Maxine and reassure her that they have no sexual relationship and do so in such a manner that she will accept it as the truth. He takes for granted that she won't tell Maxine how far they go, without actually going all the way. By asking her to cover a portion of their relationship where Maxine is concerned, Cal loses some of Marie's respect, and foreshadows a cooling of their friendship.



Friendship is a theme, rare in Marie's life as Cal and Marie's friendship deepens and Cal reveals some of his history to her. He tells her how his first wife Tamara and he had a child that was stillborn, and the marriage died as a result – unable to survive when the child had not. As such, his marriage and subsequent child with Max is something he cares deeply for. He does everything he can to promote his daughter, encouraging her modeling career and worrying about her lack of sexual education. He threatens to have "the talk" with her himself if Maxine hasn't done it before her next birthday.

Marie responds by revealing some of her personal history, telling Cal how and why she'd married Ana's father, and why she left them both. She describes her escape from that life as a cold-blooded snake molting out of a skin, leaving it behind. She admits that she was unable to cope with the responsibilities of being a wife and a mother.

Accountability is a theme for both Cal and Marie as Cal brings Marie a twenty dollar bag of cocaine, aware that she is occasionally using again. Marie immediately tries it despite his warning that it is stronger than she is used to. When she realizes she is too high to go to work afterward, she becomes angry with Cal for giving it to her. They argue, Marie insisting he'd done this to her on purpose and he angry that she couldn't wait until after work before sampling the drugs. He tells her that she's sabotaged herself – a pattern that is normal for Marie – but she refuses to see the situation for what it is, insisting that someone who intimately touches "every woman he passes and wonders why his wife won't put out" can have the nerve to talk to her about right and wrong. The situation is not resolved and Marie continues to backslide into old habits, so angry and upset with herself that she is not only willing to blame her best friend for bringing her the drugs, but also willing to burn his initials into her stomach as a constant reminder of the incident and her failure to cope.

Purification is a theme that is a yearly event for Cal. He takes this time to eliminate from consumption all cheese, sugar, meat, alcohol and weed. The cleansing lasts from Christmas until about April and is a testament to his determination to live a long and healthy life.

Purity and pregnancy are both themes Marie discusses as she reveals how she became pregnant while on a youth minister's retreat. The pregnancy is a surprise to Marie who didn't usually track her cycles and who paid little care to birth control. Nine church elders meet with Marie privately, increasing her impression that what she and her baby's father had done was wrong, shaming her for her impure thoughts and decisions. Marie is horrified and embarrassed suffering a split in her personality to cope with the situation, and sending her consciousness into a four inch tall sprite that hides in the bookshelf while the girl at the table is attacked and demoralized.

Acceptance is a final theme in this segment as Marie reveals the reason she is able to cope with anything that occurs during a shift she works at The Restaurant. She is capable, competent, and manages to simply go from one task to another. When asked by the sous-chef what her secret is, she tells him that she simply accepts that everything will be a problem and she just rolls with it. Don't bitch, adapt, she tells him.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Cal chase after Konstantin after he pays the check and leaves and what is the outcome of his confrontation?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Cal's code of honor in life and how does he back it up?

Discussion Question 3

What causes Cal and Marie to fight and why is accountability a large issue?

Vocabulary

effusive, audacity, laconic, fissure, synesthesia, synapses, clemency, disseminated, capriciousness



Part Two: The Private Room

Summary

Marie and DeMarcus work The Private Room where thirty white men over fifty have come for lunch. Marie is backwaiting, glad that DeMarcus will be handling the group and that she will have little communication with them beyond taking their orders. Marie and DeMarcus each work their way down one side of the table, an unspoken race to the end without appearing to rush the customer. After that, Marie fills wineglasses and brings cocktails. One guest gets up and makes a speech about a recently deceased colleague and then the conversation turns to more mundane subjects like cash flow and due diligence; liquidity and mergers. Marie employs a trick she learned from Cal and begins bringing the guest she dubs "Lushie" double tall drinks to slow down the number of times she runs to the bar for him.

After the hors d'oeuvres are cleaned away, the boss begins to tell a few off-color jokes and Marie can tell that DeMarcus is trying to stifle a laugh. The room is intolerably hot and Marie goes to ask Danny to check the settings. Danny says he'll get on it, but the owner of the building is too cheap to replace the air conditioner, despite being a millionaire. Marie helps clean away dinner dishes and offers espresso or cognac with dessert. Lushie is drinking wine along with the seven or eight whiskeys he'd consumed and is on his way to obliteration. Several of the men want to light up cigars but both Marie and DeMarcus tell them they can't smoke in the building. DeMarcus steps away to put together a bill while Marie steps out into the hall, scaring one of the bussers, Benito, when he pulls a pile of chairs forward.

Benito is nearly sixty, but still spry and has a work ethic that is equal to Marie's own. Benito's sons also work in The Restaurant, and have the same work ethic as their father. One son, named Benito after his father, but called Sanchez at work is a barback while Orlando works the salad line and his youngest, Francisco, who everyone calls Nino, is a busser. She enjoys having Nino work her station, often tipping him more than she is required to. Danny often jokes that he needs to bring any more sons he has over as well.

Marie and DeMarcus stand outside the The Private Room and wish their guests a good evening, thanking them and making sure everyone is happy. DeMarcus and Marie wait outside afterward with a full bottle of Chardonnay left behind untouched for Asami who offered to share some of her stash earlier. Nino was out before them, and did the required beer run before everything closed, returning with a case. They pass around a bowl, open a beer and begin the process of unwinding. Nino, the cooks, and the bussers leave and soon after Asami heads out as well. Marie and DeMarcus sit in her car, and Marie voices her wish that Asami had left something to smoke behind with them. DeMarcus invites her back to his place and when his brother J pulls in, she climbs into the truck between them without so much as a thought for how she'll get home.



Marie can see that J is on something, crack perhaps, and DeMarcus puts his hand on Marie's thigh. Marie swings herself onto his lap and J watches as he unbuckles his pants. DeMarcus turns her to face J, pushing her to her knees between them. Marie has lost so much weight from doing coke that DeMarcus can pull her pants down over her hips when he is unable to open them correctly. J wants to get in on the action as well, and encourages Marie to service him while DeMarcus moves into her from the other side. Marie doesn't argue when the boys decide it is time to trade places, thinking about her daughter and anything else she can to take her mind off what is actually going on. J collapses while still inside her, pulling out hard and passing out in the passenger seat, but DeMarcus isn't concerned and instructs her not to stop.

When they finally get where they are going, DeMarcus and Marie go inside, leaving J unconscious in the front seat of the truck. Inside, he greets his father and asks Marie if she wants to shower. Trying to keep everything together, Marie agrees. She stands under the spray of warm water, trying not to think ahead. DeMarcus gets into the shower with her, and when they get out, J is lying on the bed. They lie down, Marie between them and she dozes off. When she wakes up DeMarcus offers her a ride back. J is already gone and DeMarcus offers to pay for the morning after pill if she tells him how much it is. Marie doesn't tell him that she has a dose at home, and by the time they get back to The Restaurant where her car waits, it is seven in the morning and Marie is due back at five.

At home she cleans her apartment, has another shower and takes the first of two pills along with some ibuprofen. Then Marie calls her ex and talks to her daughter for a few minutes. She climbs into bed at eight and doesn't get back out again until three, wondering if she has any diseases. Warned that there may be a test on wines this week, Marie studies the basics. An hour before she has to start work, Marie begins the procedure of showering; plucking eyebrows; brushing her teeth; fixing her makeup and hair; and buffing and filing her nails – the latter because she knows that the customers see her hands more than anything else. She puts on the uniform and grabs the second pill, hoping she remembers to take it at eight that evening. Then she goes to the cleaners where she drops off and picks up, ready to begin another day clean, pressed and looking trustworthy of taking care of the customers she will have that evening.

Analysis

Unpredictability is the first theme in this segment as Marie discusses how after working for a while you can get a feel for who will order appetizers and a white wine spritzer versus who will spring for lobster tail and champagne – the latter of course tipping more as a result of the higher tab. Of course there were always exceptions to every prediction.

Cooperation is a theme closely linked as well, here and throughout this story. Marie works in the position of backwaiter with DeMarcus taking the front when a large party comes in for service in The Private Room. This kind of cooperation is found in all sections of restaurant service beginning in the kitchen where several employees work



together to create and serve the meals; to the dishwasher and bussing staff who clean and restock; to bar staff who create the drinks required; and the wait staff who often require help with larger tables or parties that come in.

Service is tied into cooperation, but also stands as a separate theme as shown when Marie and DeMarcus take the dinner orders for the large group in The Private Room. Each takes a side and works their way down the table, using shorthand question and response cues that are common to wait staff everywhere.

Work ethics are a theme here and throughout this story as well, with focus on Marie who shows up for every shift ready to give everything she's got, but including DeMarcus who is all business and professionalism on the floor. When the shift is over, anything goes, and they are eager to drink, smoke and couple in an effort to forget the shift they completed, but not to such an extreme that they are unable to return for the following shift. This work ethic extends to the rest of the staff as well. Benito and his sons work in The Restaurant as well, each with the same diligent work ethic as their father, and a compliment to any of the waiters or waitresses who work in conjunction with them.

Self-worth continues to be a theme as Marie has not only returned to drugs but also to sleeping with anyone who asks her. In this segment she takes a five hour drive with DeMarcus and his brother J; servicing them both on the way home. Her motives are clearly not on building a relationship with either one, and she spends her time thinking about her daughter or counting as she is providing the sexual favors she gives so freely.

Friendship is also a theme, rare in this story as Marie and Asami talk both during and after their shift. It is clear that although Asami also drinks and does drugs, sharing them with anyone who remains after their closing shift, Asami is determined to do what she has to for her children. Marie clearly respects her for her work ethic and her attitude towards her children.

Marie suggests that working at The Restaurant is synonymous with being in the army. Her comment refers to the fact that chef expects his servers to know all of the fifteen ingredients that are in the hoisin sauce for the lobster; and the sommelier expects them to have better than a passing knowledge of the wine they are serving. These are just two examples of the things a server is expected to know and remember which likely accounts for the high turnover.

Hospitality is a theme that Marie discusses when she is confronted by it in DeMarcus's house after they arrive. DeMarcus offers her the use of their shower, and Marie mistakenly thinks it is because she smells like a French fry, but DeMarcus corrects her. After nuzzling her neck, he tells her she smells like crème brulee instead. Marie understands that life is all a performance and working in The Restaurant prepares them to cope gracefully in any circumstances.

Discussion Question 1

How does Marie handle the heavy drinker in The Private Room and why?



Discussion Question 2

What is unique about Benito and his family and why does Marie typically tip him more than she would other bussers?

Discussion Question 3

What does DeMarcus offer Marie on the way home, and what is significant about her thoughts on the issue?

Vocabulary

aneurism, diligence, amortization, truncate, piously, boisterous, sommelier



Characters

Marie Young

Marie finally gets work in the fourth restaurant in which she interviews – The Olive Garden. She'd applied at nine more – thirteen in total. Marie is two weeks from turning seventeen years of age, but lies to the people she works with, adding a year to the total.

Marie marries her husband when she is just seventeen after her father hits her for the very first time. When Marie reveals she is pregnant, he slaps her across the side of the head and tells her that they need to plan a wedding before she begins to show. He doesn't add the fact that otherwise everyone they know would think she was giving herself to everyone, but Marie understands and goes along. Ana is only three when she realizes she can't be a mother or a wife, and leaves them both. She still admits that Ana's father is a great man, and that she loves him fiercely, but that didn't change the emotional turmoil Marie had felt since the day her daughter was born, and couldn't shake the feeling that she wasn't meant for either marriage or motherhood. Convinced she was in the wrong life, she just got up one day and left them both.

Marie suffers from postpartum depression, and for years after her daughter is born, Marie struggles with emotional turmoil; thoughts of death and suicide; self mutilation including cutting and burning herself; and indifference to sex so strong that she is willing to sleep with anyone and everyone. This leads to deeper issues of depression, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and a general disregard for her own health or safety.

Marie seldom wears make up of any kind and rarely does much to fix her hair up either. Coupled with large square hands, she is sometimes mistaken for gay and although she does have one brief encounter with a woman from work, the act is unconsummated when Marie's unshaven nether regions are discovered.

Marie has little self-respect, and even less self-worth. She treats herself with so little care that it is surprising that she doesn't suffer more serious physical disease as a result. Some of this changes when Marie meets and watches the antics of Shaila - also known as "The Dangler." Shaila is a divorced woman of means who is an Alabama beauty. She has the sexual appetite that many men share and is known for spreading herself around liberally. In return, men flock to her, each trying to outdo each other by giving her expensive gifts and taking her on trips. Shaila enjoys it all, and then goes home alone. Watching her, Marie is given a glimpse into herself, and doesn't like what she sees. It is the first of two incidents that change her behavior, or moderate it at the very least.

The second incident that forces Marie to take stock involves a server named Mickey and his friend James. Mickey works next door to The Restaurant and comes to her one night intending to pimp her out to his friend James. Although Marie had never met



James, she agrees and goes out to her car with him. They are soon joined by Mickey who takes great pleasure in abusing her both mentally and physically while James continues to get what he came for unfazed. When they are done with her, she is done as well and goes home vowing to stop the drugs and men for a while. She does so, and manages to clean up her reputation for a time, but old habits die hard and it isn't long before she is doing both drugs and men again.

Marie eventually realizes that excesses of drugs, alcohol and sexual encounters are a detriment to her well-being, and while she stops for a while, she can't help but return to both drugs and sex with strangers.

Ana's Father

Ana's father has red hair and a peach colored complexion. He also has a calm disposition – one he passes on to his daughter as well. Marie's ex has a beard that is autumn-red in color and warm brown eyes.

Ana's father desperately wants to make Marie happy. He says nothing when she rails at him for coming home with the wrong juice or steps out of line in some other meaningless way. Marie only uses these excuses as a way to push him away from her and provide her with personal space to cope with the depression that she struggles with postpartum.

Marie's ex is willing to do almost anything for her, including look after her when she is sick, or getting up in the middle of the night to look after Ana. He plays guitar in his free time, and during the day he teaches special education at the middle school.

After Marie leaves him to raise Ana by himself, she can't help but admit that he is a warm and generous man and that she wishes she could love him in the manner that he deserves.

Christopher Kendall

Christopher is a better than good looking man. He wears a cross of pewter around his neck, hanging by a piece of leather and wears a ring with a Celtic knot on his thumb. He has tattoos of snakes on both forearms and was once in Desert Storm according to Rajiv.

Christopher is the person who first instructs Marie as to how to be a good server at The Olive Garden. He not only shows her around, but gives her the ins and outs of surviving a busy shift. He warns her about going through the swinging door, so that she never earns the wrath of another server who is coming the other way with a full tray.

Christopher's consideration continues to include her footwear which he inspects and recommends she change immediately, even telling her where she can find an alternative that isn't cost prohibitive.



Christopher is filled with words and phrases of wisdom, but one of the best is when he tells her that there are only two times of any importance in a restaurant - before and after.

Shaila (aka The Dangler)

Shaila is a beautiful woman with long legs a slender waist and breasts that are all natural and perfect. She has long and straight hair that is dirty blond and wears clothing that shows off her assets. She is what most men would call gorgeous and would do anything for. As such, she is followed by a parade of men who all try to outdo each other with gifts or trips in the hopes that she will bestow her radiance on them for a while.

Shaila gets the nickname The Dangler when she enters a bar one evening wearing a dress that is little bigger than an eyelash, and that reveals the string from the tampon she is wearing. Despite the unflattering nickname, she is seldom wanting for company. Shaila married and then divorced the man who began the company "Glamorous You" and has enough money now that she is set for life. As such, she is free to enjoy life, drive her orange Ferrari, travel at will, or simply drink the evenings away if that is what she feels like. Shaila lives on Turtle Creek in a penthouse with her two children which are cared for by a nanny named Maria.

Calvin D. Colson

Cal is a forty-four year-old black man who Marie describes as a hustler who is the king of The Restaurant. Originally from Memphis, he quickly schools Marie on the right and wrong ways to serve customers where fine dining is concerned. Cal cares about his customers, treating them with the same care and concern he would have had they been seated in his home. Calvin worked in a bank as well as holding down his job in The Restaurant.

Cal is in better shape than Marie despite being almost twice her age. He has a trim waistline that he maintains daily with pushups, curls and crunches before making his daughter Elena breakfast and getting her to school. He has shoes that are always buffed and believes in the power of belief sure that if he believes in something, it will be. He is married to his second wife – the first named Tamara, a black woman who had a stillborn child that they never recovered from, Angeline. He and his current wife, Maxine have a daughter named Elena who is such a natural beauty that he has already begun investigating a career in modeling for her. She is tall – already five feet tall at the age of eight, and has skin the color of caramel. Calvin is concerned that Maxine hasn't had "the talk" with her yet, thinking she is still too young, but Cal knows it won't be long before the boys take an interest in her.

Calvin is profiled by a local newspaper and the reviewer is filled with such praise for his service at The Restaurant that he holds him up as the example for what fine dining is supposed to be. When the article comes out, Lissandri is so pleased that he buys Cal a



Rolex. Cal breaks all the rules for fine dining and his customers love him for it and tip him outrageously because of it.

Hateful Man

The hateful man is a Ghanaian British man who likes to wear hats and plays the trombone in a twelve-piece band. He is tall and mean and the only time that he is sweet to Marie is when they are in bed. Aside from that connection, he wants little to do with her. He doesn't like it when Marie sits beside him or touches him out of context at all. Compared to her ex, who punched a hole in the wall when he learned she was sleeping with everyone in the restaurant, the hateful man had no reservations about hitting Marie across the face when he was mad.

DeMarcus

DeMarcus works with Marie at The Restaurant. In this story, Marie works a table with DeMarcus in The Private Room in which Marie works as backwaitress to him. DeMarcus is somewhat sensitive about his name, bristling whenever someone calls him Mark instead of using his full name. DeMarcus wears his hair in tight waves and is tall and lanky in stature. He has great teeth. DeMarcus has a brother whom he calls J and Marie never knows him as anything else. DeMarcus is one of the many people in this story that Marie sleeps with, as is his brother J.

Asami

Asami is someone that Marie considers to be a friend. She is a beautiful woman and is often compared to Sandra Oh, and hates it. Asami shares her stash with Marie and DeMarcus after work, but seldom stays long. She is a speech teacher in Fort Worth at an inner-city high school and works three nights a week at The Restaurant as well. She used to party with Marie for longer and more often, but is more focused these days. She loves the kids she teaches at the high school and it is clear that they are where her attention lies.

Benito

Benito is one of the bussers at The Restaurant who takes great pride in his work. He is nearing sixty years of age, but is still considered spry and capable by anyone who works with him. His sons share his work ethic; the youngest is a busser like his father and the other two works one as a barback and one on the salad line.



Matt

Matt is a personal trainer who becomes involved with Shaila after Ahmed and before Danny. A former alcoholic, he would come to the bar and drink iced tea while he waited to get coke from Danny. Matt is the one who is most devastated by Shaila when she left him.

Frank

Frank was a criminal attorney who handled large white collar cases during his career, and often dealt with minor issues for his friends such as clearing Danny's traffic violations or handling the violations of the health code. He fixed the DUI Ahmed got when Shaila dumped him in favor of a trip to Cabo with Matt – a personal trainer. Marie often runs around for Frank, handling things like his lunch.

Hank Earl Jackson

Hank Earl is sixty-six years of age and owns the country bar called the Fort Worth Stockyards – a country venue that boasts top acts. Hank Earl made his money as an oil man. Hank Earl is six feet seven inches tall and has a head that could be compared to the size of a steer.

Hank Earl is also an alcoholic who lives in the Hotel Fitzandrew. He drinks himself into a stupor at The Restaurant and then has his driver drive him across the street.

Damon

Damon is a black man with smooth but knotty forearms that are colored pecan. His lips are large, fat and in Marie's eyes, perfect. His hair is thinning but he wears it in carefully constructed dreads. Damon tells Marie he was adopted. As such, he is somewhat wary of most people and seems closed off and untethered to most. He likes to talk to Marie, telling her about the tropical fish he wanted to get; the record he is making on CD Baby, and the house sitting that he does. Damon introduces Marie to marijuana and considerably expands her sexual experience, both giving and receiving.

Jimmy Larosa

Jimmy is one of the piano players hired by Lissandri at The Restaurant and is the only musician out of the three who play there. The other two piano players play for money and are commercially driven while Jimmy plays for the music and the joy of others who are entertained by his efforts.



Tanya

Tanya works with Marie at The Dream Café. She was reasonably nice to Marie and had helped her as she got used to her new job. She is a tall woman who is somewhat butch in appearance which suits the position she has in the café which borders on the "gayborhood" in which Marie is a heterosexual minority. Tanya comes in on her day off and after having eight drinks, she asks Marie to bill her for only five of the eight drinks she'd consumed. Marie does so, and is fired by their boss Marlo soon after.



Symbols and Symbolism

Cabbage Patch

This is what Christopher Kendall calls Marie Young when he first meets her, which is directly related to how young she is and looks.

Porte Cochere

A porte cochere is a carriage entrance or covered portico-like structure through which a horse drawn carriage, or later a motor vehicle can pass through, stopping to allow their passengers to get out under cover, and protected from the elements. French for "coach door," the architecture was popular in the Renaissance and were a commonly found feature in palaces and homes built in France during the reigns of King Louis XIV and XV. It is symbolic of wealth and opulence.

Ferrari

Shaila drives an orange Ferrari which is symbolic of wealth and represents the lifestyle that she has become accustomed to as a result of her marriage and then divorce of the owner of Glamorous You.

Spider Necklace

The spider necklace is a custom made pendant from an Arab jeweler, commissioned by Frank for Shaila. It is made out of white gold and on its back is a heart-shaped sapphire. The spider is symbolic of Frank's assurances that Shaila makes love like a spider monkey and as such, he had this necklace commissioned. He sends it to her with a note that is addressed "To the Dangler" and calls her a player with a heart of gold, suggesting she "dangle this."

Rolex

A Rolex is a symbol of wealth and success, a token of appreciation that is given by Lissandri to Calvin after a review of him puts The Restaurant in a favorable light for fine dining, calling it the place to be.



Sex

In this story, Marie uses sex as a symbol of love, and will agree to sleep with anyone who shows interest on the off chance that it will provide the love and self-worth that she is seeking.

Morning After Pill.

The morning after pill is what DeMarcus offers Marie after she goes home with him and his brother, having sex with them both on the way. The pill is symbolic of Marie's desire to keep from becoming pregnant, and her sex life is so varied and frequent that she actually keeps the expensive morning after pills on hand at home.

Sommelier.

The Restaurant's use of a sommelier is symbolic of higher class restaurants that cater to the kind of people who will question the wines and their attributes when ordering as opposed to the kind of restaurant in which a glass of house wine would be most likely ordered.

Tips

Tips are symbolic of the job done by the wait staff in any establishment. The amount is determined by the quality of service and by the amount of money spent by the customer on their food. Occasionally, if the service is exceptional, the tip will exceed the usual fifteen or twenty percent, and in some more rare cases, a server can cultivate return business that leads to larger tips such as Calvin's customer, Konstantin who regularly tips up to fifty percent - a gratuity that Cal has come to expect.

French Fries

When Marie goes home with J and DeMarcus after work one night, he asks her if she'd like to shower. She asks him if she smells like fries and makes the observation that many restaurant workers have discovered - regardless of what you serve all day to customers, by the end of the shift you will smell like fries regardless of whether you'd served steaks, infusions, compotes, reductions or anything else. The smell of fries becomes the symbol every restaurant worker recognizes and works to rid themselves of after every shift.



Settings

The Olive Garden

The Olive Garden is the first place out of thirteen applications Marie fills out to offer her a job. Run by Rajiv George, the restaurant is an important job for Marie as she has no experience in the restaurant industry, making securing a job difficult at best.

Sally Beauty Company

Sally Beauty Company is where Marie works as a temp for twelve weeks where she is supposed to be compiling Y2K contingency plans, but instead she reads *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Marie spends much of her time at this temp job doubled over with morning sickness and throwing up into a garbage can which is presumably why the temp job was not renewed.

East Texas

The father of Marie's baby works in East Texas at his uncle's contracting business. He works as a trim carpenter; finishing chair rail, laying baseboards or finishing closets.

Chili's

Chili's is a restaurant that Marie works in. The boss is named Kevin.

Planned Parenthood

Planned Parenthood is where Marie and her husband go when she discovers she is pregnant again, and isn't sure who the father is. There are three men who could be the father, and of them she would only want to raise the child if it was one of two of the men involved. Since she can't be sure, she and her husband make the decision to abort the child - a decision that deeply hurts and changes Marie's husband.

Toluca

Toluca is the village that Marie and her husband go to so that they can help build a road. This is a fond memory for Marie, one that she recalls as the only time that she'd ever felt safe.



The Dream Café

The Dream Café is one of the restaurants that Marie worked in. It is a popular place with athletes and trainers, as the menu is one that contains a great deal of vegetarian and organic dishes available.

The Restaurant

The Restaurant is yet another place where Marie works as a waitress. It boasts a Yamaha grand piano that her boss hires people to play and is where Marie learns the ins and outs of fine dining.

Hotel Fitzandrew

The Hotel Fitzandrew is where Hank Earl Jackson stays and is located across the street from The Restaurant where he likes to drink. The hotel has a porte cochere which is where Hector picks Hank Earl up each evening, and returns him to later.

Glamorous You

Glamorous You is the name of the company that Shaila's husband started, and that gave Shaila her wealthy freedom when they divorced. It is a multi-million dollar mall makeover photography company.

The Private Room

The Private Room is a dining area separate from the regular dining in The Restaurant in which larger parties can be seated and enjoy an evening without disturbing the ambiance other customers have come in to enjoy, and allowing them to be a bit more boisterous, hold speeches, or just have more privacy than regular seating can afford them.



Themes and Motifs

Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression is a theme that begins in the second chapter of part one, where Marie reveals that she feels an 'exhaustion that is metallic'. She avoids her parents because the only thing she feels she has to report is that she hates her life. Postpartum or postnatal depression is a clinical condition that can affect both women and men, occurring after a child is born. Symptoms of postpartum depression can include anxiety, irritability, low energy, sadness and even changes in eating and sleeping patterns. Causes of postpartum depression are complicated and not well understood by the medical community, but emotional impacts can include anxiety about caring for the new baby, a feeling that one is losing control over one's life; sleep deprivation and a general feeling that there is a lack of support from one's spouse. Many speculate that hormonal changes are a possible cause, but there is no concrete evidence as yet.

Marie exhibits many signs of postpartum depression which begins for her with a feeling that she is incapable of caring for Ana. Marie struggles in her position as wife and mother, despite the fact that her parents are more than willing to help her and her spouse is supportive and contributing. She still suffers from low self-esteem and describes a constant emotional pain that she seems incapable of controlling or expelling. Instead, she begins to cut herself in areas that are not immediately evident. This cutting is a form of self-mutilation that she believes helps her to focus her pain in one area, dulling the overall effects she feels. Cutting is not the only method Marie uses to regain self-control. She burns herself as well, especially when emotional pain is overwhelming, evident when Calvin leaves her and she brands her stomach with his initials. Cutting and burning are not the only ways that Marie applies in order to cope with her condition, or feel as though she can. Marie uses drugs to excess; drinks; and uses sex as a way to distract herself from the pain she feels in her life.

Postpartum depression can be treated, although it sometimes passes with as little intervention as counselling or other forms of therapy such as anti-depressants, although it is unclear as to which are most effective. This form of depression can cause problems with bonding and the development of the parent/child relationship. In Marie's case, she felt so incapable of dealing with her new role of wife and mother that she left her new family for her husband to cope with. She turned to drugs, alcohol and the company of strangers to cope with the way she was feeling, unaware that her condition was medical and treatable. Conduct disorder is not uncommon and Marie exhibits this frequently as her decisions often place her in positions that she feels the need to escape in her mind from. Had Marie been correctly diagnosed from the beginning, it is possible that she and her husband would have been able to raise Ana together. Instead, Marie sets herself adrift from them, and does anything she can to forget her pain. Of the nine symptoms listed as criteria for diagnosis of postpartum depression, Marie suffers from all of them. Only five are considered necessary for a diagnosis. She has feelings of sadness or emptiness; weight loss (which can possibly be attributed to cocaine use); changes in



sleep patterns; feelings of guilt and worthlessness; loss of energy; recurrent thoughts of death; and a loss of pleasure or interest in activities. Had Marie been properly diagnosed, her life may have been much different.

Fine Dining vs Family Restaurant

Fine dining is a theme that is first revealed in part two when Marie begins working at The Restaurant with Calvin D. Colson. He teaches her the difference between working in an ordinary cafe and serving people in a fine dining establishment. Fine dining is an art form honed by serving staff everywhere that there are restaurants in which the quality of the food extends beyond hamburgers and fries. Fine dining is more than just lobster and steak however. It is a combination of ambiance, food, and service that leaves a guest feeling as though they'd been served the best cuts; treated like royalty throughout their meal; and sent away sated and content. Fine dining requires service that extends beyond simply bringing the correct food to the correct table. Fine dining begins with presentation. Knowing this, Marie takes great care when she readies herself for work. She ensures that she is clean, her hair is washed, her hands and nails are clean and buffed and her uniform is pressed and starched with such care that it will still radiate professionalism at the end of a long shift. Once Marie began working at The Restaurant, Cal educated her as to the correct form and manner required to keep her job, beginning with the fact that you never serve anything with the wrong hand so that you must cross the guest to put the plate or bowl down. Doing the job correctly requires that she care about her job. Cal teaches Marie to be all that she can be on the floor so that she can provide the fine dining experience that people come to The Restaurant for. He teaches her to bring pride to work; serve customers as though they are the most important thing she will do each day, and in Cal's mind, they are. Marie learns the showmanship required to elicit return clientele and gratuities that are far above usual.

A family restaurant is exactly opposite than the fine dining experience. A family restaurant is somewhere you can get all manner of regular food from burgers to pancakes, and is served with unending coffee or tea by a waitress who is sure to bring crayons for the kids to color with. In a family restaurant, there is little in the way of a liquor menu, if one exists at all; the volume of the overall clientele is generally louder; and the turnover is faster. In a family restaurant, unless you are a regular who comes in to drink coffee and watch the world pass, the dining experience is usually over shortly after the meal is. There are dessert menus, but seldom include the options of Crème Brulee or baked Alaska and are more likely to serve pie or ice cream instead. Serving staff in a family restaurant is concerned mainly with a high turnover as that is the only way the staff makes any money while in a fine dining establishment, cognac would be offered and the guests would be encouraged to continue coffee or after dinner aperitifs. A family restaurant is where you take your children for a meal before a movie whereas a fine dining establishment is where your spouse makes reservations on your anniversary for a romantic meal.



Beauty Brings Wealth

In this story, there are several instances in which wealth and the working class collide. An entire segment is devoted to the Dangler for example - a woman who earned her nickname for inadvertently allowing her tampon string to show when she wore a revealing dress to a nightclub one evening. Called the Dangler ever since, Shaila is not only a woman of means, but is also gorgeous. She has long, brown sugar tanned legs, a slender waistline and breasts that are all real and perfect. She has long and straight dirty blond hair and an Alabama kind of beauty that never quits. Her former husband owned the company "Glamorous You" and in the divorce Shaila manages to secure a lifetime of luxury in which she never has to work again.

With enough money to either jet off to Cabo for the weekend, or simply warm her favorite bar stool night after night Shaila has no interest in settling down. Instead, she enjoys herself as a parade of men tries to outdo each other in an effort to get her attention. Ahmed is one of those men. He leaves his wife and four children for Shaila who has no interest in settling down however so now Ahmed sits in the corner of the bar, bleary eyed and wondering what went wrong. Frank takes Shaila to the Bahamas. Danny takes her to Vegas. Frank is so impressed by her that he has a necklace made for her - a spider with a heart shaped sapphire set into its back. Shaila likes it so much that she takes off the ruby encrusted choker that Matt bought her when he took her to Cabo. Each of these men spends a small fortune on Shaila who sits back and collects the gifts and trips with a smile on her face.

Playing the field in this manner has consequences however. Matt is so devastated that he can't win Shaila's heart that he drinks himself half to death. Then Matt takes a swing at Danny for taking an interest in Shaila and Kole kicks him out. In a drunken stupor, Matt hits and kills someone with his car on the way home. Shaila and Danny leave soon afterward in her orange Ferrari and in an effort to console "poor" Shaila, Danny decides to take her to Baja.

Regardless of her nickname, and the string of broken hearts in her wake, Shaila continues to have the time of her life, and want for nothing. She travels, is given gifts of great value and could have her pick of many men who adore her. Her beauty excuses her behavior and makes men behave in ways that they would never do otherwise.

For some reason however, the parade of men and gifts that find their way to Shaila have a profound impact on Marie, who watches it all from the sidelines and realizes that she should make some changes in her life. Shaila goes from one man to another, taking whatever each is willing to give her, and on the sidelines Marie decides to make some changes herself.

Self-Injury

The act of self-injury, also known as self-harming and self-mutilation is a deliberate action to injure oneself by cutting or burning. This is a recognized psychiatric disorder,



and those who find themselves needing to do this to themselves are in no way suicidal or seeking to end their own lives. The injuries caused are surface injuries and represent an unhealthy way to deal with pain, frustration, and intense anger. Although the act of self injury may help with the immediate issues, generally the action is followed by shame and guilt.

Marie suffers from depression and anxiety, and begins cutting herself in an effort to cope. The first incident she reveals is after she is fired and then rehired from The Dream Cafe in the third chapter of part one. After that, there are several instances in which she admits to having cut in the past, even once before moving out of her parents house with her husband and baby. Later in the story, she also resorts to burning herself, actually searing Calvin's initials into her stomach after an emotionally painful incident with him. Her actions reflect the need to manage or reduce anxiety, alleviate pain, and to regain a sense of control over herself and her life. Her inability to control her complex emotions causes her to turn to alcohol and drugs, but when they cease working well enough so that she can cope, Marie begins cutting herself.

The first cutting incident of record occurs when Marie learns that her job at The Dream Cafe still exists. She is so relieved that she isn't fired after all that she cries, and then becomes angry that such a crappy job should have the power to bring her to tears. To regain control of herself, she cuts three lines deep into her thigh where no one will see it, telling herself to suck it up, and calling herself a whiny little turd as she does so.

Marlo notices the marks on her arms, and asks what they are, revealing that this is not the first time that Marie has cut herself. Marie tells her that they are burns, but the fact that they are spaced uniformly argue that likelihood. Zeke notices them as well, calling Marie 'one of those' and doesn't mention them again.

Marie uses a fondue skewer to burn her neck while her daughter watches The Cosby Show on her bed. Marie turns on the gas and holds the rod over the flame until the plastic handle is warm and the prongs are red. Knowing her skin will crackle when it burns, she waits for a laugh track before pressing the rod hard on her neck and counting to three before taking it off. She hurts, but the pain feels good. It synchronizes the pain that she feels all over into one sharp pain that Marie feels as though she can manage.

Another time, Marie argues with Cal and when he leaves to get himself ready for work, she burns his initials into her stomach as a way of coping with how upset she is that they have argued. The letters are an inch square and remind her of letters carved in a tree. The skin melts and she has to cut a hole into her pantyhose so they won't stick.

When Marie first begins burning herself, her parents paid for a week of marriage counseling and looked after the baby while Marie and her husband were gone. When they returned afterward, everyone made an effort to ensure that Marie wasn't left alone with Ana. Marie and her husband file for divorce soon after.



The self-harming slows down once Marie is introduced to marijuana. Drugs, alcohol and sex become substitutes for cutting and burning and while not as obviously harmful to Marie at first glance, she loses weight and self respect in equal portions.

The Cost of Promiscuity

In this story, Marie uses a variety of methods to cope with the internal pain and anxiety she feels. A large portion of these feelings can likely be attributed to postpartum depression as they began shortly after her daughter Ana was born. Marie doesn't begin cutting or burning herself until after Ana's birth, but self-injury is only the beginning. While it might be argued that becoming pregnant as a young teenager points to even earlier issues, the truth is much simpler. Marie never expected to become pregnant, the story line implying that Ana's father was her first sexual encounter and occurred on their fourth and final night in Mexico. As such, Marie's spiral into promiscuity came later, beginning around her and her husband's first anniversary. She begins to describe those encounters throughout this story, revealing how each affected her.

The first direct cost of Marie's promiscuity comes when she learns that she has contracted chlamydia and had given it not only to her husband, but to Damon, Luke and John as well. All four men handle the information differently. Damon is the first to realize there is an issue and describes how the doctor's visit was so painful that it almost brought him to tears. John isn't overly surprised while Luke berates himself saying he'd known at the time that sleeping with her was a stupid idea. Marie sleeps with John one day after her anniversary. That was the month of September. In October, she sleeps with Luke and in November, Damon.

When Marie realizes she is pregnant again, her husband asks her if she knows who the father is, but Marie has no idea. She considers the consequences of keeping this child, but without knowing for sure whose child it was, she wasn't willing to take the risk. Instead, she and her husband go to Planned Parenthood together, and she aborts the baby. The cost is her husband. After the abortion, he becomes withdrawn, and seems older, wiser and sad. He loses interest in food and takes long walks alone with Ana. This is the end of Marie's marriage - although the separation doesn't come immediately.

When Marie and her husband divorce, Marie continues to deal with pain in ways that are unhealthy and unforgiving. She cuts herself, burns herself, and sleeps with anyone who shows even the remotest interest in her. As a result, she gains a reputation for being a good-time girl who is willing and able. Word soon gets around that she is easy, and before long she has men coming with their friends who want to have sex with her. Complete strangers make no difference to her, and she willingly goes along.

Several instances reveal the cost of Marie's promiscuity to her. The first is the outbreak of chlamydia; the second is her marriage; the third is when Mickey, a server from the restaurant next door pimps her out to his friend James, and while she accommodates him in her car out back, Mickey opens the door and after pouring beer over her head, he slaps her face; and the fourth occurs when Marie watches how Shaila (the dangler)



interacts with the men in her life. While the last incident has nothing to do with Marie personally, she can't help but compare some of it to her own lifestyle, and it is the catalyst that helps Marie to make some changes.

For a time, Marie stops doing drugs and having sex with anyone who asks. She avoids the areas where she knows there is a risk that she'll be drawn back down to that level, and manages to rebuild her tarnished reputation at work as the employee turnover brings in new staff members who don't know her.

Unfortunately, Marie's days of promiscuity are not over, and neither is her drug use. She finds her way back to cocaine and to multiple sexual partners - the cost forgotten for now.



Styles

Point of View

"Love Me Back" by Merritt Tierce is a novel told from the perspective of the main character, Marie Young. The story is a narrative that she writes to her daughter in an effort to explain herself and her actions when Ana was young. Throughout the story, she explains how having a child affected her; how depression, drugs and alcohol affected her judgement with a myriad of sexual partners; and how she coped or was unable to cope with the lifestyle she was living.

Marie begins her story by describing her first job at The Olive Garden where Christopher Kendall teaches her the ins and outs of being a server. Marie's first hand account of this portion of her life includes her rise from virgin waitress - one who had never served before - to her position in The Restaurant as a fine dining server.

She intersperses this employment history with an incredible and varied sex life in which she graphically describes the things she learns about her many partners, and herself. While her point of view accounts for the time and place that she is in her life, it does so with extreme and brutal honesty that is at times vulgar and at times more than a little bit crude. This surely is a reflection of her own self-image, and slowly opens the reader up to a life in which Marie struggles with self-esteem and self-value. Her graphic reconstructions of a myriad of sexual encounters shows her to be a sad and rather desperate girl emotionally and her overall drug and alcohol abuse throughout likely contributes to the fact that at times the story jumps from one timeline to another and back again. This is revealed in memories she describes in between the regular timeline in which she talks about how Ana was conceived; her life with her parents and her husband after Ana is born; and her bed to bed lifestyle from a very intimate and personal perspective.

While at times her thoughts seem to be a bit chaotic- likely a result of considerable drug and alcohol abuse - Marie still manages to do a reliable job of telling her story in spite of her seeming lack of class and propriety. Throughout it all, she describes how working in the restaurant industry teaches her viable skills like organization; how to sweep efficiently; how to consolidate and anticipate the needs of her customers and how to use work to forget. She makes a point of telling the reader how being at work when the restaurant was exceptionally busy was the only time that she truly felt in control of her life and as the reader plows through this segment of Marie's life, this is glaringly apparent.

When Marie leaves her husband and daughter, she is running away from the responsibility that she seems unable to step up to. The reason isn't that she doesn't love her daughter which is clear by the amount of times that she thinks of her or uses her memory of Ana to cope with present day pain and discomfort - even the self-imposed variety.



Language and Meaning

Merritt Tierce is explicit and stark when describing Marie's descent into debauchery and self-destruction. This character is as real as they come. Marie discovers she is pregnant after her first sexual encounter, and is pushed into an early marriage by her father. She struggles to live the life of a wife and be a responsible new mother to Ana but can't manage it. Every day is worse. They live with her parents until Ana is three months old, but Marie insists they move out in an effort to minimize the inadequacies she feels whenever either of her parents endeavors to help out with Ana.

Marie describes her life in very graphic terms. Her employment as a waitress opens her up to multiple sexual partners which are revealed to her husband when she returns home to him with sexually transmitted diseases. Her narration includes blunt sexual references in which she describes a sexual education that she then uses to please her husband. Marie's poor self-image plays a large part in her story as she takes the reader from one low point in her life to another, her depression affecting not only the direction her story takes but the way she tells her story as well.

Struggling with undiagnosed post-partum depression, Marie begins cutting herself in order to give herself an outlet for the pain she feels and can't get a handle on. She reveals these episodes with such raw emotion that the reader is given a good understanding of the mental turmoil she is struggling with. Marie also admits to considerable drug use, beginning with an introduction to marijuana by one of the many men she sleeps with. The drugs become another form of escapism that soon graduates to cocaine abuse. She clearly reveals how this affected her ability to work, and at one point almost costs her a job.

The language structure and content is starkly realistic and this story is definitely not one for the easily offended as Marie describes her drug use, her sexual self abuse and her emotional upheaval with a clarity that takes the reader into her life. Her language is blunt and heavy with sexual overtones and connotations including graphic descriptions of oral sex; the size of her partner's organ; the use of sexual accessories such as anal beads and more.

Despite her ongoing drug use, the narration of this story continues to be reasonably reliable and the styling consistent. While Marie continues to be a more than a competent waitress, her time off is much less organized or structured. Marie uses cocaine frequently; smokes marijuana; drinks heavily; and sleeps with anyone who wants her or shows interest, sometimes even taking on more than one at a time. Oddly, while she is engaged in these activities, she copes by thinking about Ana.

The main character Marie takes us on a journey that is terrifyingly real. Marie's account of her life throughout this period is gritty and real, leaving little to the imagination. Her struggle to maintain mental harmony is one of self-injury and lack of self-respect.



Structure

"Love Me Back" by Merritt Tierce is a book of fiction totaling one hundred and thirty-eight pages. The book is divided into two sections labelled part one and part two with a chapter referred to as the Intermezzo between them. The chapters are not numbered, but are instead labelled using the primary subject matter as a title for each. For example, the first chapter is titled The Olive Garden which is the first restaurant to hire her. There are nine segments in total, averaging fifteen pages per chapter.

Part one has three chapters in it which begin with Marie's employment at The Olive Garden where she lands her first job as a server. The next two chapters, Chili's and The Dream Café are also places in which Marie is employed. Marie learns the basics of being a server by Christopher Kendall who shows her the ropes at The Olive Garden. By the time she is working at Chili's, Marie and her husband have moved out of her parent's home and are trying to settle into life with Ana. Marie is struggling with the concept of parenthood and leaves her husband to be the primary caregiver while she works. Although her parents live close by, she never calls or visits after moving away with her new family. The Dream Cafe is a job that Marie is fired from for allowing another server to pay for five drinks when she'd had eight. She is hired back the next day, and cries with relief after she learns she still has a job. That weakness makes her so angry that she cuts three long lines into her arm to focus her pain into something she can cope with.

There is a single chapter in between the part one and part two that is titled Intermezzo defined as a stand-alone musical piece between major sections of an extended work. Usually meant as a diversion, this intermezzo features Jimmy, a musician of considerable talent who plays a Yamaha grand at The Restaurant. The section features Jimmy's love of music and reveals how he refuses to sell out, providing music increasingly for Marie's amusement and entertainment.

Part two introduces Danny and The Restaurant. This is Marie's first exposure to fine dining, and Calvin teaches her everything she needs to know in order to be a competent server in that capacity, pointing out the differences between fine dining and cafe style service. Marie is adept and thrives until his tutelage. While working, Marie is at her best, but during her time off, she continually falls off the rails. She sleeps with a never ending parade of men, often more than one in a night, does cocaine so often that it affects her weight; and drinks to excess.

Marie finally sees herself in the antics of a woman nicknamed the Dangler, and realizes that a change is necessary. Though living with someone she calls 'the hateful man', and maintaining a monogamous relationship with him, she sees that her relationship is cold and loveless and deep down, she wants more. Inspired, she moves the hateful man's things to a storage locker when he is out of town, and wisely refuses to continue the relationship.

At this story's conclusion, Marie has worked her way up to employment in a fine-dining establishment; she sees her daughter as often as she can and loves her deeply; she

still drinks and still does drugs; she still sleeps with multiple partners but now has the good sense to have a morning after pill on hand.



Quotes

There's only two times in a restaurant: before and after.
-- Christopher (chapter 1 paragraph 29)

Importance: Christopher tells Marie about the restaurant business, having learned that it is her first job in the industry. He knows that watching the clock won't help her to complete her shift and warns her that once she is there, the only concern she should have is the job until she isn't there anymore. From the time she punches in, she is theirs.

If I had known whose it was I would have had it.
-- Marie. (chapter 2 paragraph 43)

Importance: Marie has no idea who the father of her second child is, and without certain knowledge that it was either her husband or Damon, she didn't want to risk having the child, although it seems impossible that if she had the child she wouldn't have loved it regardless of who the father was, and if not her, her husband would have for sure. The way her husband responds to their trip to Planned Parenthood is evidence of his feelings on the matter.

Now I realize that (the fact that her parents were insatiable for her baby) was nothing more than the ravenous craving of a grandparent for the bodily wonder – the heft, the face, the smell – of a grandchild.
-- Marie. (chapter 2 paragraph 13)

Importance: This observation by Marie comes after she leaves her parents' home, having at the time been afraid that her parents could tell how lost she felt and how little maternal instinct she seemed to have. She doesn't realize the truth until later.

Don't work somewhere with stairs, steps, ramps, outdoor seating, small water glasses or kids' menus.
-- Marie. (chapter 3 paragraph 12)

Importance: Marie gives this as advice to anyone considering a career as a waitress, right after her first advice that they don't. The reason is that as the junior person on the totem pole, chances were good that they would be stuck with the furthest, most awkward tables available for the first few months. The rest of her advice is based on her own experiences in various restaurants.

You're lucky I'm only firing you.
-- Marlo. (chapter 3 paragraph 27)

Importance: Marie learns a valuable lesson where listening to other employees is concerned when she allows Tanya to talk her into billing only five of the eight drinks that



she'd had, when her job requires her to bill each one as it is served. By listening to Tanya instead, and trying to do her co-worker a favor, she loses her job.

I'm just playing for you.

-- Jimmy LaRosa. (chapter 4 paragraph 8)

Importance: This is Jimmy's response when Marie tries to put a snifter on the top of the Yamaha grand when he is playing in an effort to ensure that he gets the tips he should. In true musician style however, Jimmy tells her not to, assuring her that he is playing for her, and isn't there for the tips. He is a musician, rather than merely a piano player like the other two men who rotate shifts on the Yamaha with him.

You want tickets to the game or an eight o'clock reservation at Tei Tei, which doesn't take eight o'clocks - Danny will work it out for you.

-- Marie. (chapter 5 paragraph 2)

Importance: This statement is just a small example of the influence that Danny has, and how far and wide it spreads. Danny is able to facilitate almost anything, and it is a talent that serves him and his customers well as far as a career in restaurant management goes.

He is a fast-talking Italian fox from the Bronx who can get his way with anyone, can make any Mur feel like a VIP, and thus has been the general manager of a multi-million-dollar-grossing fine-dining steakhouse since he was twenty-four.

-- Marie. (chapter 5 paragraph 7)

Importance: Marie explains how influential Danny is, and how he manages to hold the position that he does at The Restaurant. His knowledge and influence is only equaled by his ability to give people what they want most when they want it.

They're all after her (Shaila) and she gives them all their turns, letting them outspend each other.

-- Marie (chapter 6 paragraph 3)

Importance: Marie observes how Shaila manipulates the men who swarm around her. Like bees to honey, they all open their wallets wide in an effort to outshine their competition for her attention. Shaila uses men until they are used up, then kicks them to the curb to make room for the next bid for her affection. This behavior is what causes Marie to reflect on her own current situation and make some changes.

He (Sanchez) is the barback and he has that beautiful momentum you see in the best, with his body in constant motion to mix cocktails, pulling the liquors from the well rail without looking, holding a new ticket in his mouth as he shakes a cosmo hard in his right hand and pours an exact six-ounce glass of chardonnay with his left.

-- Marie. (chapter 7 paragraph 6)

Importance: Marie describes how adept and competent Sanchez is as a way of



explaining why his job is secure, despite Danny's current anger with him. Danny can't afford to lose Sanchez, regardless of what he threatens, knowing that to fire him would mean the end of one of his best employees and the sons that share his work ethic and would likely go with him.

To do a good job at a table you have to care."
-- Marie. (chapter 8 paragraph 2)

Importance: Marie learns this simple fact, and so much more from Calvin when she begins working with him. Calvin teaches Marie the finer points of fine dining, and wanting to please him, she immediately gets in line with his assertion that there is a right way to do the job and nothing else is good enough.

The pros get the order taking down to a call-and-response that reads each guest's mind and draws out his selections for three courses with all pertinent temperatures and modifications in forty-five seconds or less, without letting him feel the slightest bit rushed.

-- Marie. (chapter 9 paragraph 7)

Importance: This kind of competition reveals how far Marie has come from her days at The Olive Garden; now a professional who can keep her own alongside some of the best in the business.