

Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones Study Guide

Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones by Ann Head

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Plot Summary

Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones is a realistic novel from the late 60s which recounts, in first-person perspective, the events and hardships in the life of a pregnant teen, July Greher, and her teen husband, Bo Jo Jones.

July is a carefree high schooler who enjoys eating hamburgers and shakes or going to clubs on the weekends with her usual gang of friends. Her steady boyfriend is Bo Jo, and during a night of passion on the beach, the couple has sex. Both are ashamed and frightened because of the stigma attached to pre-marital sex and its consequences.

July, under an assumed name, goes to a doctor in another town and learns that she is pregnant, a devastating pronouncement. She talks to Bo Jo, and he thinks the manly and responsible thing to do is to get married. They do so three days later, again in another town under assumed identities.

Both sets of parents are furious and heartbroken when they hear the news, with Bo Jo's parents threatening to disown him. July's parents simply want to make it go away, and they feel July should carry the baby to term, have it adopted, and get the wedding annulled. Bo Jo and July don't think it is that simple, and fight to have their own voice and decision heard in regards to their marriage. July's parents force the young couple to endure an additional marriage ceremony to save face in the community.

July's father offers Bo Jo a job at his bank, and July's mother arranges a small apartment for the couple. July and Bo Jo hesitantly accept. Marriage turns out to be a vast and usually unhappy change. Bo Jo has to give up school for the job, and July has given up school as well. Things don't feel the same with their old high school chums, and July gets cabin fever cooped up all day in her new domestic life.

Eventually, after months of making ends meet, arguments, hard feelings and heartache, July hemorrhages and must have the baby early via C-section. The baby is born, whom she names Jonathan. But soon after the premature baby has trouble breathing, and the next day, July learns the baby is dead, an occasion for heartache and tears once more.

Both sets of parents come together after July comes home from the hospital, agreeing that, while tragic, the absence of a baby means a "second chance" for the teens to become carefree again and pursue their own interests (school). In short, they want them to divorce and go their separate ways. Under great pressure, Bo Jo and July decide they should divorce. However, days later, they meet again and decide they have feelings for each other, and a relationship just getting going shouldn't end in divorce. They reach a compromise where Bo Jo finishes school and July works to help support him during school. Three years later, the marriage is still strong and perhaps better than ever.



Pages 7 - 26

Pages 7 - 26 Summary

July recounts her "teen marriage" for the benefit of other teen couples who may be on the brink of same. In her last semester of high school, July is headed for a girls' college in New England, and her boyfriend Bo Jo Jones is destined for the local state university on a football scholarship. July doesn't think of Bo Jo and herself as going steady, but nonetheless they spend more and more time together and less time with everyone else. One night, they break from their usual gang of friends and go to the beach together at night. One thing leads to another, and though July is well-versed in the virtues of abstinence and marriage, July and Bo Jo have sex.

The two feel different and embarrassed; a subsequent trip to the movies doesn't feel the same. They discuss whether they should break up and whether they would rather date other people; neither feels the same about another person, and they decide to continue dating, both promising that sex won't happen again.

However, July has panic attacks in class and is crying in the shower. She feels she can't talk to anybody about her feelings, not even her best friend, Mary Ann Simmons, who has been waiting faithfully for marriage. In study hall, where the students can't talk, Bo Jo slips July a note, saying he has been accepted at the university on a football scholarship. It means a lot to Bo Jo because none of his family before could ever go to college. Bo Jo plans to celebrate at the hippest club in town, The Reef.

Bo Jo and July go that night to The Reef with six of their regular friends, including Alice Helms, who July dislikes because she used to date Bo Jo. July doesn't feel like talking, and she excuses herself to the bathroom where she throws up. She shares her conflicting feelings about Bo Jo and those in the group. It's an open mic night, and a young woman named Louella Consuela sings.

July decides to take a bus to a town fifty miles away, buy a wedding ring knock-off from a five and dime store, and pose as a married lady for a doctor. The doctor confirms her worst fear: she is pregnant. She means to tell her parents immediately, but instead they sit her down and tell her to limit her time with Bo Jo; she shouldn't go steady and end up "in a rut." July doesn't think her uppity parents could ever understand, so she doesn't reveal her pregnancy to them.

The next day, she does reveal her pregnancy to Bo Jo. The news hits him hard. They subtly mention abortion, but Bo Jo doesn't think it's morally right. In her kaleidoscope of emotions, July accuses Bo Jo of wanting to leave her, but Bo Jo assures her he will stand by her. In fact, three days later, though neither really wants to do it, they go across state lines and lie about their age in order to get married.



Pages 7 - 26 Analysis

The author presents the novel as a cautionary tale intended for young couples who may be thinking about marriage or who may be panicking over an unplanned pregnancy. The narrative is enclosed by a frame story, shaping our expectations and honing our focus for what is about to be recounted. It is of significant note that many of the "taboo" subjects presented in the book are only hinted at or revealed in innuendo or assumption, rather than plainly stated. For example, there is no mention of sex. July and Bo Jo simply "go to the beach," where July states she realizes there was a point of no return, after which she is emotionally shattered. Similarly, "pregnancy" is another word that does not make an appearance up until this point. When July visits the doctor, all the reader is told is that the doctor has told her to go home and tell her parents the truth, leaving the reader to assume the "truth" is pregnancy. This is more than likely done as a safeguard against the parental outrage of conservative parents in the 1960s, who would rather make the issue disappear than face it head on.

The author's tone and prose as July seems appropriate for a young woman going through great changes with great uncertainty. Frequently July's thoughts will have contradictions, or she will leap from one idea to another unrelated one quickly. Her emotions are also ambivalent, loving Bo Jo one moment and just wanting to get away from him the next. The author is quite skillful and realistic in this regard. Contemporary youth vernacular - Bo Jo is a "go go guy," July felt "snowed," other kids in school are "way out" - help to create the illusion that July is a real girl from the late 1960s telling her story.



Pages 27 - 57

Pages 27 - 57 Summary

These next pages explain how exactly Bo Jo and July got married. July spends the night before with her brother Gregory and sister Grace, playing board games and talking about books. July must fight back tears because she knows it will never be the same with them again. July lies to her family and says she's going on a day-long picnic with Bo Jo. On the way across state lines, the couple argues over where to live, with Bo Jo rejecting any notion of living with July's folks.

They get to town and meet a little old man who is a justice of the peace. They lie about their age and he performs the brief ceremony. July is wed with the same dime store wedding ring she bought earlier. On the way back, July is touched when Bo Jo gets her an orchid to wear. Before getting back home, Bo Jo calls his parents from a gas station to give them the news, too scared to have a face-to-face conversation. Bo Jo tells July his parents are horrified and that they've disowned Bo Jo.

July and Bo Jo enter July's home to tell her parents, but everything is hustle and bustle. Her parents are entertaining and having people over; her mother wants her to entertain the nephew of one of the neighbors, an older college boy. July sees that this is no time to break the news of the marriage, so Bo Jo decides to spend a few hours at the local diner. July, against her will, goes out with the nephew, the college boy named Horace Clark, and loses herself a bit before she comes back to reality.

That night, July finally says "I'm married" to her parents. They react with shock and outrage. Her father immediately thinks to annul the marriage; after all, they had lied about their age. July badly wants Bo Jo to be around, so she calls the diner, but he had already left. They see that he happens to be outside in his dad's truck, and July goes out to him to have him come inside.

The parents ask if they got married because of pregnancy, in a roundabout manner. July confirms this is true. Her mother thinks the solution should be to put the baby up for adoption, but July wants to keep it. All agree to put off further talks until the next day. July doesn't feel comfortable in her own home, so Bo Jo and July get a hotel room, with July's father contributing some money.

The next day, the couple talks about their possibilities. Bo Jo is ready to forgive his parents, and maybe they can move in with them. July doesn't even know Bo Jo's parents and is thus hesitant. July wants Bo Jo to get a job and then maybe they can afford their own place, but Bo Jo mocks her for such idealism. Bo Jo doesn't want to quit school, which has been his and his family's lifelong dream, and he finds a lifetime of bagging groceries or the like a horrible thought.



The meet back with July's parents, who have calmed down. Father reluctantly offers Bo Jo a job at his bank, but Bo Jo turns it down because he wants to finish high school. Father doesn't understand such logic with a baby on the way. Mother insists on having a proper marriage ceremony to save whatever face they have left and has arranged one with their reverend tomorrow. The parents want the kids to sleep there for the night, but Bo Jo insists on staying with his parents. July packs up a few things and they head to Bo Jo's house.

Pages 27 - 57 Analysis

July's visit with her siblings is particularly poignant; she is already living a lie by pretending nothing has happened as she plays board games with Gory or talks girl talk with Grace. July has grown up too quickly, and she knows next time she sees Gory or Grace their relationship will be awkward and different. This visit, along with lying to her mother about going to a picnic when in fact she's going to be married, is the first instance of a theme of deception that continually surfaces.

The marriage is in itself a deception, done out of necessity and because of a foolish accident rather than love. This is symbolized by the dime store wedding ring; July used the ring to try to deceive a doctor about her marital status, and now she is using the ring, a cheap imitation of the real thing, for her quickie wedding, also a cheap imitation of the real thing.

This section introduces Horace Clark, who becomes important to July in her interior life. Her correspondence with Horace, quasi-flirting and talking about music and poetry, is the last little opportunity for July to act her own age and retain the feeling of being carefree. However, it is a deception, a sham, an illusion, like so much of her life.

Bo Jo's resistance and flat refusal to living with July's parents represent his strong sense of independence and a traditional desire to be the "bread-winner" of the family. Bo Jo's emotional devastation at the prospect of never going to college affects July deeply and forces her to think of someone other than herself in this trying time. This is the start of the empathetic and even symbiotic nature of the couple's marriage that only gradually evolves.



Pages 58 - 79

Pages 58 - 79 Summary

Bo Jo and July go to Bo Jo's house. They are greeted coldly by Mr. Jones and politely by Mrs. Jones. Mrs. Jones shows July to her room, an ugly and small little room. Bo Jo tells Mrs. Jones about the marriage ceremony the next day. Mrs. Jones refuses to attend, feeling it is just making a bad matter worse, and she tears up. The "family" later eats a large meal in silence. The kids soon go to sleep, and Bo Jo doesn't dare share the same room with July in his parents' house.

The next day, July's mom (Mrs. Greher) calls Mrs. Jones and they have a heated argument, with Mrs. Jones accusing Mrs. Greher of trying to ruin her son and make him avoid college. The kids go off to the marriage ceremony, and July is mortified to find her grandmother there; though they were never affectionate, she values her grandmother's opinion of her greatly.

The brief, pitiful ceremony is held, and everyone is somber-faced. Afterward, Grandmother Greher gives July a set of four bracelets given to her by (now deceased) Grandfather Greher. They say FAITH, FORGIVENESS, HUMOR, and ETERNAL VIGILANCE, qualities Grandmother Greher believes are necessary for a loveless marriage. July is hurt that Grandmother considers her marriage a loveless, hurried sham.

Afterward, July's father (Mr. Greher) solidifies his job offer to Bo Jo; he can get him working starting tomorrow at fifty dollars a week. Mrs. Greher has also found a cheap garage apartment for them to live in. Bo Jo gives in and concedes to the job and apartment, and July is happy and grateful.

In the two weeks leading up to moving in to their own apartment, July is taught domestic duties by Mrs. Jones. Mrs. Jones becomes very upset that July doesn't even know how to make a bed, let alone iron and cook. She feels it is a woman's duty to do so, and Bo Jo is used to such treatment.

The marriage is announced in the paper, and July's former best friend, Mary Ann, wants to throw a celebration. Mary Ann doesn't understand that July doesn't want any celebration and is hurt when her offer is rejected.

Mr. Jones sees Bo Jo in his banker's outfit, which enrages Mr. Jones into calling and yelling at Mr. Greher. Mr. Jones feels Bo Jo should be coming home in football pads, not a suit. Mrs. Jones later calls to apologize for Mr. Jones' behavior. Mrs. Greher bravely makes a personal visit to the Jones' residence. The women greet each other very coolly and chat over coffee and pastries. After some time, both women are teary-eyed and seem friendlier to one another, letting July know that at least some progress has been made.



Pages 58 - 79 Analysis

Mrs. Jones is an especially sympathetic figure, as her lack of career or other interests make her attachment to Bo Jo very great and her disappointment and heartbreak that more intense. That Mrs. Jones considers a second, more proper wedding ceremony a horrible idea that could only prolong her misery gets at the complicated nature of the marriage. Both Mrs. Greher and Mrs. Jones only have the best interests of their children in mind (though sometimes they confuse their own best interests with that of their children), yet they arrive at completely opposite conclusions when it comes to having a second wedding ceremony or not. The axiom "there are no easy answers" is appropriate to many parts of this book.

In this section, both Mrs. Jones and Mr. Jones have distinct "breaking points" when they erupt in violent emotion as the enormity and the reality of the situation hits. For Mrs. Jones, it is July's inability to perform household chores and especially ruining a shirt by ironing. Mrs. Jones wants what's best for Bo Jo, and this includes a wife who can keep up the house. As a housewife herself, Mrs. Jones is especially affected by seeing July's messy bed. For Mr. Jones, the breaking point is seeing Bo Jo dressed up in his banker's outfit for the first day at Mr. Greher's bank. This feels true to life; sometimes it takes a very specific, visual cue to confirm the reality of something that is difficult to believe.



Pages 80 - 106

Pages 80 - 106 Summary

Bo Jo and July are invited for dinner by Grandmother Greher. At Grandmother's Holly Hill home (where July spent many happy childhood days), July actually learns a lot about Bo Jo she didn't know before during dinner conversation.

Some time afterward, the couple spends a night with "the old gang," Mary Ann and Rodney and others. It feels awkward, and they find that things have changed.

They finally move into the garage apartment of Hatty Barnes, a "maiden aunt" who never married. After moving their few possessions, Bo Jo announces he's going down to the local coffee shop (The Coffee Pot) to hang out; there's no indication of inviting July. July becomes hurt and slams the door in Bo Jo's face, who takes off for The Coffee Pot angry.

Bo Jo gets back and they have lunch. They argue more over whether or not to go to the movies; Bo Jo mocks the film July wants to see and says they have to start saving money anyway. July gets worked up and gets sick in the bathroom. This cools things off, and they go to the movies.

Both sets of parents visit the newlyweds at their new home. The richer Greher get the couple a new TV set (not to mention paying the first month's rent); Mrs. Jones, seeing the TV, is embarrassed of her meager housewarming gift, a plaque that says "God Bless This Home." After an awkward conversation, the Grehers find an excuse to leave, and soon so do the Joneses.

The next day, as Bo Jo works all day, July can't seem to find anything to do and is bored out of her mind. Thankfully, at the supermarket she meets Louella Consuela, the young woman she saw at The Reef singing. She's married to a horse-breeder named Nicholas, and finally July is able to commiserate with a fellow young, married woman. Louella invites July to her home for tea. Louella wanted to be a Broadway star but gave it up for marriage. She has the kind of sophistication, honesty, and humor that is very appealing to July. July invites her for lunch at her apartment the next day, and she accepts.

Back home, July gets a visit from Mary Ann. July's marriage has made her seriously doubt her own relationship with Alan, a college student. They have abstained from sex, but, Mary Ann thinks, if Alan really loved her, wouldn't they have to fight the urge to do so? It's been too easy. July says that Alan really loves Mary Ann, and that July and Bo Jo don't even love each other, a concept that shocks Mary Ann.

Old chums Charlie and Alice (Bo Jo's ex) visit the apartment, Alice being about the last person July wants to see. They have dinner at The Coffee Pot and then return to the



apartment for Cokes. July resents Alice for her shapely body, and dreads Charlie might be having enough fun to make their visit a regular occasion. But soon she falls asleep.

Pages 80 - 106 Analysis

Grandmother Greher plays a unique role in the narrative. While close enough to July to disapprove of her marriage, she is sufficiently distant (one generation removed) so as to not take July's marriage as a personal offense or direct reflection upon herself, as July's parents do. She is the first in July's family to give Bo Jo a chance to speak up and make his personality known; the others would just as soon Bo Jo disappear, as they urge near the end of the novel. At Grandmother's house July in fact learns more about Bo Jo than she ever knew, another consequence of marrying too young that strikes July.

A more forcefully apparent consequence comes when July and Bo Jo attempt to hang out with the old gang again and find they have little in common and little to say. As with her siblings Gory and Grace, July is a changed woman, and as such her relationships have changed.

In this section the reader "re-meets" Louella Consuela, who was introduced very briefly singing at The Reef nightclub. Louella initially serves as a sort of comic relief, a refreshing Puck-like character with her larger-than-life persona and hyperbolic speech. In the context of the novel as a cautionary tale, Louella shows the reader teen marriage that takes a darker road than July's does, as shown in proceeding sections. She is married to a significantly older (by a decade) man, which makes mutual communication and understanding even more difficult than July's and Bo Jo's, which are difficult enough with their constant fighting.



Pages 107 - 129

Pages 107 - 129 Summary

July's brother Gory (for Gregory) has a bad ankle sprain, and July tends to him one day. He is angry, and it's revealed he "hates" Bo Jo for putting a baby inside July. This hurts July greatly, just because Gory has been forced to grow up before his time. Later, Mrs. Greher sets up an appointment with the best baby doctor in town. July doubts they can afford the best, but Mrs. Greher insists on paying for them.

July gets a letter from the college boy she entertained, Horace Clark. He appears to be pretty smitten with her, telling her about college life, asking about her favorite poets, etc. July, thinking it her wifely duty, writes a short note stating that she's married, but she accidentally steps on it and throws it away. Louella comes for lunch, and Bo Jo meets her. After she leaves, Bo Jo criticizes her, which makes July angry. He says she should learn how to cook if she's bored instead of hanging out with someone who looks like "just plain trouble." This leads to a big argument, after which Bo Jo storms out and July cries, which are their common behaviors for an argument. At 2AM that night, Bo Jo returns, drunk.

Fresh from this emotional turmoil, July writes a new and different letter to Horace Clark, not saying she's married and in fact responding to his questions about poets and otherwise coming very close to flirting. In the next couple of months, they continue this type of correspondence, and July finds it a liberating outlet for her, something she has that she doesn't have to share with Bo Jo.

Some time later, the matter of July's doctor comes up. July thinks Bo Jo will be glad to hear her parents are paying for the best doctor, but Bo Jo is instead upset at their meddling. He feels a sense of responsibility to the baby and wants to care for it their way, not her parents' way. Another big argument is threatened, but the two stop short this time, apologizing and then agreeing to the less experienced doctor they can actually afford, Dr. Harvey.

July visits Dr. Harvey, who tells her the baby is progressing fine, what to eat, etc. For the first time she feels the baby, like "butterfly wings on the inside of me," and is elated. She feels she needs to tell someone and goes to Louella. She finds her red-eyed and crying for an unknown reason. After Louella sings a song, Louella reveals that she is pregnant by her husband Nicholas, devastating for her because she feels it means an end to any dream of becoming a Broadway star or singer. Considering Louella's state, July wisely withholds news of her own pregnancy.

Mrs. Greher visits July and invites her to Sunday lunch when the Grehers are entertaining a couple. As mothers tend to do, Mrs. Greher manages to slip in a condemnation of Bo Jo's table manners. July resents this, feeling loyal and protective of her husband, but nonetheless during their next argument July criticizes Bo Jo's table



manners, even when it had nothing to do with the subject of the argument. Bo Jo is hurt and July immediately knows she did wrong. Bo Jo attends Sunday dinner using acceptable manners, and both Bo Jo and July seem to forget that "ghastly moment of truth" between them.

Pages 107 - 129 Analysis

July's second confrontation with her brother Gory shows a maturation on her part. Gory says he "hates" Bo Jo for making July pregnant. July is mature enough to know Gory is really directing his hate towards her for changing their own relationship. Even more maturely, July is sad for Gory rather than herself. As with Bo Jo, she begins to understand other people's points of view, and the fact that her own actions have consequences on others.

July gets a letter from Horace Clark. She writes a responsible letter to him, cutting off any future correspondence and telling him she's married. But this letter gets destroyed, and after Bo Jo demeans July and they have a big argument, July crafts a new letter to Horace, full of a carefree, flirting attitude with no mention of marriage. Part of this decision is to get even, in her own way, with Bo Jo for how he treated her. Part of it also is an attempt to hold on to the previous part of her life, when she was unattached and excited by college boys, rather than married.

The subplot involving Louella continues, as Louella becomes enraged when she learns she is pregnant. Once again, Louella is made to parallel July's own situation, and show the reader an alternative way (and, no stretch to state, a less effective and less desirable way) to handle teen marriage. Louella behaves in a very infantile way, immediately asking July if she knows an abortion doctor, putting her own selfish needs of becoming a singer before her husband's or the future baby's.



Pages 130 - 148

Pages 130 - 148 Summary

Mary Ann's college boyfriend Alan visits. Alan is very sophisticated and polite, as well as affectionate towards Mary Ann, and he makes a great impression. July wonders aloud to Bo Jo why Bo Jo doesn't show that sort of affection to her; Bo Jo crassly suggests she hop into bed and he'll show her some affection, which leads to another big argument. Later in bed, however, the lovers become more tender.

A few weeks later, Louella visits July in a happy mood; she has a date set for tomorrow with an abortion doctor. July tries every tactic to try to make Louella change her mind, short of revealing her own pregnancy, but Louella is determined. July promises to visit Louella at her apartment after the operation. The next day, July leaves her apartment having made a casserole for Bo Jo and writing him a vague note that doesn't say where she'll be. She spends most of the day and night with Louella post-abortion. Louella is physically drained and emotionally devastated, calling her decision a mistake.

July gets back to find Bo Jo and Charlie. Bo Jo accuses July of getting drunk with Louella. July yells at them both, and they exit the apartment. After crying a little, July discovers a letter in Bo Jo's pocket from the university. Apparently the football coach was never told Bo Jo left school, and he is still looking forward to beginning practices in August. July realizes that this letter put Bo Jo in a foul mood, rather than her going out with Louella. Bo Jo returns and they reconcile, both affirming their commitment to marriage and togetherness. July tells Bo Jo about Louella's abortion.

Weeks later, Louella arrives at July's apartment with a suitcase in tow, telling July that she's running away from her husband and taking a bus out of town. Her husband, Nicholas, learned about the abortion and became furious, striking her on the face and then refusing to even touch her thereafter. Louella leaves, and in the evening while Bo Jo and July are having dinner, Nicholas barges in to the apartment looking for Louella. They calm him down with a cup of coffee and tell him she's left town.

More weeks pass. July learns that Nicholas resigned from his job in town as a horse breeder. Finally she receives a letter from Louella. She has been waitressing in New York and, after being spotted by a talent scout, she now sings three nights a week in a club. She lives in a hotel, from the funds of a married older man she's having an affair with, and she met with Nicholas and broke off their marriage.

Pages 130 - 148 Analysis

This section primarily involves the two parallel subplots to July's main plot, Mary Ann and Alan, and then Louella and Nicholas. Here the reader sees two different alternatives for young women at the same time of their lives. From July's perspective, Mary Ann and Alan seem like a perfect couple and Alan the perfect, desirable college man. Hardly



wishing to arrive at any radical conclusions, the novel depicts this couple who abstains from sex before marriage as indeed reflective of a happy and desirous state of being, a feeling made concrete in the last couple of pages.

Louella and Nicholas' marriage is quite the opposite. Louella is given to either great fits of rage or joy; Nicholas is hardly ever around and is depicted as Louella's meal ticket or sugar daddy for Louella to live her extravagant lifestyle. When Louella becomes pregnant (which, like July, stems from a failure to reject temptation), she alone decides to end the pregnancy via abortion, not consulting with Nicholas. And this, in the end, may be the crucial difference between this relationship and July's. July immediately talked to Bo Jo and discussed options, ready to act as a team and mature enough to realize this was not just her baby. Louella is completely selfish, and this character trait does not change when she's pregnant. The novel punishes Louella for her selfishness and for her decision to get an abortion, an option not even on the table (or anywhere near it) with July's and Bo Jo's parents. Louella's last letter to July establishes that Louella's punishment may be cyclical. She is again with an older man (this time married and thus probably more dangerous for her in the future) who pays for her immature lifestyle.



Pages 149 - 166

Pages 149 - 166 Summary

Weeks pass. July is finding the letters to Horace more difficult to write, if only because she has grown closer to Bo Jo. In fact, the only time she doesn't feel comfortable around Bo Jo is when either family is involved. Her parents treat Bo Jo as if he's invisible. July intends to rectify this by inviting Bo Jo to her family's annual 4th of July (her birthday) picnic on nearby Cain Island.

Bo Jo has, however, already made plans with his own family on the 4th, when his sister Alice is arriving. This is cause for another argument, until an idea is reached: the families could go together to Cain Island and have a big picnic.

July asks Mrs. Greher about the possibility, and Mrs. Greher reluctantly agrees to invite the Joneses. July has a brief fight with her sister Grace, who is embarrassed by July's pregnancy and doesn't want to be seen with her.

The families travel to Cain Island. July and Bo Jo travel with Grandmother Greher. There seems to July to be an invisible barrier between the two families, who keep apart. The Grehers subtly make fun of the Joneses for the amount of stuff they bring to the picnic, and July makes her mother lie about hoping Mrs. Jones brought some of her "delicious" fried chicken. July comes to the sad realization that perhaps the families are better off apart.

Hatty Barnes gives July a baby shower. Hatty Barnes expresses happiness that July doesn't plan to leave the apartment after the baby comes; July hadn't thought that far ahead.

Some days later, Mrs. Greher confronts July about the correspondence she's had with Horace Clark. His latest letter clearly indicates he has fallen for July and that he plans on traveling to college early only to be able to stop by and visit for some days with July. July, after several versions, crafts a letter to end the deceit and the pen pal relationship, apologizing to Horace and regretting not being forthcoming with the fact that she's married.

On the way back from the post office, July gets a ride from Alice, who stops in the apartment for a Coke. July is ever on the defensive with Alice, considering she's Bo Jo's ex, and July accuses Alice of messing around with Bo Jo. Alice angrily storms out upon July's (false) accusation, telling July she is insecure.

July begins to have back pains. Bo Jo arrives late that night. July's pains increase to the point that Bo Jo calls Dr. Harvey. While Bo Jo is away at the telephone, July hemorrhages, losing a lot of blood. Bo Jo returns to the sight and is horrified and frozen. July tells Bo Jo to call Dr. Harvey again to tell of this new emergency. Bo Jo does so and also calls his mother over, and then July's mother. Dr. Harvey arrives at the



apartment, checks July out, and calls for an ambulance. He's not sure whether there's anything wrong with July until they get to the hospital.

After this time, July's memory becomes hazy because of drugs and anesthesia given to her. July gives birth to a boy she names Jonathan. She is in and out of consciousness for perhaps a day after that in the hospital. Finally, she comes to her senses to see Bo Jo at her side, who is beaming and proud of fatherhood. Bo Jo says that the hemorrhaging was due to "premature separation of the placenta." Bo Jo says the baby is beautiful. The families come in and everyone is happy and proud. July is tired but happy. July sees her baby in his incubator and thinks the baby is perfect.

Pages 149 - 166 Analysis

This section, ending with the baby's birth, is a sort of calm before the storm, a maturation stage for July as several items in the narrative get resolved. She becomes closer to Bo Jo and finds it harder to write to Horace. The Cain Island debacle with the two families forces July to realize that the two families may never come together, and that what's truly important is the family she's created with Bo Jo. July's immaturity with Horace Clark is ended by her mother discovering the letters and forcing July to end her charade. She finally realizes that, even in this instance of her foolish little letters, her actions have the capacity to hurt someone (Horace), and she expresses as much in her last letter to him. This is the last in a process of July acquiring a broader view of the world and shedding some degree of her own selfishness.

However, July has a relapse with Alice, once again becoming immature and selfish as she falsely accuses Alice of messing around with Bo Jo during their marriage. This episode shows that even after the catharsis afforded by July's realization about Horace, she is still human and still has work to do. In the "no easy answers" world of the novel, a lesson cannot be so easily learned and thereafter applied to every situation that may come up.

July has the baby after her scary episode with the premature hemorrhage. Sex was July's first world-changing event, and the baby's birth is the second; she says she feels omnipotent and powerful, fully realized. Bo Jo feels the same, though with an entirely different behavior, looking at himself in the mirror and saying "You are the father of a son. Try that on for size!" with elation.



Pages 167 - 189

Pages 167 - 189 Summary

Happiness is shattered when Dr. Harvey reveals the baby is having trouble breathing. He is in an incubator, and a pin has been inserted into the chest wall to assist in breathing. Because the baby was delivered prematurely by Caesarian section, there is a greater chance the baby will not live. July is given another chance to see the baby but doesn't want to see him with the pin in his chest. The next morning, Dr. Harvey and Bo Jo come to her bedside to tell her the baby has died.

Having just been on such a high, July is numb and can't even process such information; the families mistake it as "taking it well." Everyone handles it a bit differently: Bo Jo cries at her bedside, Mr. Greher gives her a gift and calls her "Ducky," a nickname he hadn't used since he was ten; Grandmother reads her poetry; Mrs. Jones calls it "God's will" and uses religion to comfort July. July finally cries and must be sedated by the nurse.

The next day July is taken to her parents' home and treated very gingerly. No mention of the baby is made. Bo Jo does not stay the night, which July considers odd. The next day, July manages to get a private moment with Bo Jo. She senses both their parents would like to use the opportunity of the baby's death as a "second chance" for Bo Jo and July to go their separate ways and be kids again. Bo Jo and July are unsure as to how they feel and what they want to do. They discuss the baby and how pretty he was.

The families get together, and July knows well in advance it's going to be a "pitch" for them to separate. Both families think it's best for Bo Jo to go to school and July not to be weighed down and be able to be a carefree teenager again. They think July should go to a prep school to finish high school; when July counters with the fact that prep schools don't allow married women, it's clear that all parents were assuming they would get divorced. July goes to bed unclear and confused.

The next day, Bo Jo reveals he had found all of July's letters to Horace Clark. July sorely regrets these letters and attempts to explain them away. Bo Jo is not mad, but he thinks maybe the parents are right and that separation is best. They tell each other "Good-bye," thinking it might be forever.

But in the next days, July has doubts about her parents' perfect plan. She gets a hurt but polite letter back from Horace Clark. She also gets a call from Hatty Barnes concerning the status of her apartment, and she leaves to clear her possessions out. At the apartment she meets Bo Jo, who had been waiting there for days for her. They again discuss the future, including the importance to make a decision for them rather than their parents. They have developed special feelings for one another and don't want to leave it to where they are eventually just strangers passing by each other on the street. They have matured, and why get a divorce at a time when they mean a lot to one another?



Bo Jo has developed a plan whereby they live separately for a time until Bo Jo finishes high school while July takes night school, and then after that July would get a job to help him through college. They would initially be apart from one another, and the finances would be tough, but they could accomplish their dreams together. They agree to the plan and agree to remain married.

In an epilogue three years later, July has not regretted the decision, and the young couple is getting by and happy. She considers Bo Jo her true and loving husband now. July recently attended the wedding of Mary Ann to Allan, proper and happy and based upon love rather than necessity, yet July would not trade what Mary Ann is about to go through for anything. She has her own life to live.

Pages 167 - 189 Analysis

The baby's sudden death continues the sense that real life is not easy or simple, and that there are no easy solutions or neat endings. July not wanting to see her baby with a pin in its chest without being able to hold and comfort it, Bo Jo's breakdown, July's initial numbness, and every other family member's unique way of handling the tragedy feel real and unfiltered. The matter-of-fact accounting of events in this particular passage provides a sense that, even three years later, July is still somewhat numb about the subject, with the dearth of emotion replacing what would otherwise be an eruption of grief and misery.

In the end, July and Bo Jo achieve the ultimate maturation, living not for their parents or the community, or even themselves, but for the marriage. The novel ends with the conclusion of the frame story. July attends Mary Ann's wedding (resolving that subplot with a happy ending), and in her new wisdom and maturity, prefers her own life to such a "dream come true." She has what Mary Ann's ideal wedding only promises; true marital bliss, with Bo Jo "familiar, known, [and] increasingly beloved."



Characters

July Greher

July is the protagonist of the story, and the person who is speaking to the reader in first-person perspective. July is perhaps twenty when she recounts her narrative, but for the bulk of the story she is sixteen. She comes from an upper-class family with both parents and a sister and brother, and is otherwise a "normal" teenager. However, her world is turned upside-down when, in a moment of weakness, she has sex with her steady boyfriend Bo Jo and becomes pregnant. July and Bo Jo decide to get married because of the baby and not because of love, and this action causes no small amount of consternation and misery on the part of both families and the young couple.

As revealed in the narrative, July has a lively spirit and is very perceptive about the thoughts and feelings of those around her. She wants independence and does not necessarily want to simply honor the wishes of her parents. She thinks that while it was initially a mistake, having a baby is a beautiful thing, and not the kind of shame her parents feel it is. She is insecure and nervous about Bo Jo leaving her, and this insecurity (combined with hormones and simply the stress of the situation) cause her to frequently fight and argue with Bo Jo, which usually ends up with tears on her part. With the pregnancy and marriage, she has had to grow up too fast, and she is saddened by the fact that she no longer will be able to enjoy simple, youthful things, like beating her brother at Monopoly or talking about school with her sister. Despite it all, she has a cool head and is thoughtful and responsible, unlike the usual stereotype of the "teen mother."

Bo Jo Jones

Bo Jo Jones (short for Boswell Johnson Jones) is July's steady boyfriend turned husband. He is very athletic, and was set to attend the state university on a football scholarship before July's pregnancy happened. At heart a moral and responsible young man, Bo Jo neither wants to abort the baby nor abandon July and feels the only right thing to do is marry July. He feels marriage and a baby have taken his dreams away from him because he has to abandon college and football in order to get a job that wouldn't pay nearly as well than if he was college educated. Like July, he is very conflicted about the marriage, borne of necessity rather than love, which leads them to argue often. His remedy for ending an argument is to leave the apartment and go smoke and have a coffee at the local diner, The Coffee Pot. Under a great deal of stress, he must deal with both his parents, who are heartbroken and disappointed with him, as he was to be the first college-educated person in the family, as well as with July's parents, who want to make the whole affair disappear and treat him like he was invisible.



Bo Jo is usually the strong, silent type. He is loyal to and protective of July, and his feelings for her grow with the narrative. Like July, beyond his failure to abstain from sex he is a moral and responsible person.

Mary Ann Simmons

Mary Ann Simmons is July's best friend. She has a steady boyfriend named Alan and they, unlike Bo Jo and July, successfully abstain from sex. July's pregnancy creates a rift between herself and Mary Ann, as Mary Ann can't understand how a good girl like July could do such a thing; plus it creates doubts in Mary Ann's own romantic situation.

Mrs. Greher

Mrs. Greher is July's mother. She is distraught and heartbroken when she learns of July's marriage and pregnancy. She wants what she considers the best for July, and her advice weighs heavily on July. She wants to control July's situation and make it go away, which clashes with what July wants.

Mr. Greher

Mr. Greher is July's father. July's pregnancy enrages and disappoints him, most likely because it means the end of the little girl he so adored. July was the "apple" of Mr. Greher's eye, and he feels as if he doesn't know July anymore.

Mr. Jones

Mr. Jones is Bo Jo's father. He is strict, angry, and given to bouts of rage, especially since Bo Jo's marriage. He feels Bo Jo has ruined his life by marrying so young.

Mrs. Jones

Mrs. Jones is Bo Jo's mother. Like Mrs. Greher, she is heartbroken at the prospect of the young couple's marriage. She has very traditional opinions about wives as the keepers of the home and does not feel July will make a good wife because she doesn't know how to cook or iron shirts.

Louella Consuela

Louella Consuela is an 18-year-old, married woman who July meets at the supermarket. They have marriage and youth in common and become friends. Louella is an extravagant personality who wants to be a singer some day. She gets pregnant and has



an abortion, feeling a baby would ruin any chance of a singing career. She is given to wild mood swings.

Gory and Grace

Gory (for Gregory) and Grace are July's young siblings. Both don't quite understand what is going on with July, and when they do understand, they are disappointed and mad at her.

Hatty Barnes

Hatty Barnes is the spinster or "maiden" aunt who allow Bo Jo and July to board in her garage apartment. She is glad of the company, and despite all of July's turmoil, somewhat envies her, saying July gets to experience life as Hatty never had.

Grandmother Greher

Grandmother Greher is July's grandmother who lives out at Holly Hill. Like July's parents, Grandmother also has traditional notions about July, but she is quicker to forgive and forget. July values the old woman's opinion and respect greatly.

Dr. Harvey

Dr. Harvey is the baby doctor Bo Jo and July hire. He doesn't have as much experience as the more expensive doctor July's mother wanted to hire, but he seems capable enough and is always smiling and positive.



Objects/Places

Trilby

Trilby is the town in which all the characters live. It features both upper-class (the Grehers) and lower-class (the Joneses) sections.

The Reef

The Reef is a nightclub, perhaps the most popular nightclub for the town's teens. Bo Jo has a celebration here after he learns of his football scholarship. Louella Consuela is introduced here, singing for the crowd.

The Coffee Pot

The Coffee Pot is the couple's favorite diner/greasy spoon. Bo Jo frequently goes here after a fight with July.

Hatty Barnes' Garage Apartment

Arranged by Mrs. Greher, this is where newlyweds July and Bo Jo make their first home, renting at 45 dollars per month. It is owned by Hatty Barnes, a spinster aunt who enjoys the company of the teens.

Dime Store Wedding Ring

July bought this cheap wedding ring to look like she was married during a clandestine visit to a doctor to confirm her pregnancy. Later, it becomes her real ring in her "shotgun wedding" to Bo Jo across the state line.

Four Marriage Bracelets

Grandmother Greher gives July four marriage bracelets, given to her by her late husband, each stating a virtue necessary to maintain a marriage in absence of love. These are: Faith, Humor, Forgiveness, and Eternal Vigilance.

The Trombone

Bo Jo sometimes plays his trombone to pass the time. He can only manage one simple song.



Holly Hill

This is Grandmother Greher's home. It is important to July because she associates it with her carefree childhood, picking berries around the house and what not. July feels with the pregnancy she can never again recapture those days.

Monopoly Board Game

Monopoly is July's brother Gory's favorite board game. Like Holly Hill, for July Monopoly becomes another symbol of her lost innocence, something she can no longer enjoy as a grown-up.

Horace Clark's Correspondence

July spends several months in pen pal correspondence with a college boy, Horace Clark. Bo Jo discovers these letters on the day the baby dies, and they compel him to feel that divorce may be the best thing for the two.



Themes

Conservative or Progressive

One way to view MR. AND MRS. BO JONES is to consider where it may fall on a scale between Conservative/Reactionary at one end and Liberal/Progressive at the other. First to consider is the era the book was written in, the late 60s. This was certainly a time when standards of morality were loosening and being questioned, with "flower power," psychedelic experimentation, and protests against the Vietnam War. However, though not as strong as in the 1950s, there is still a strong streak of conservatism, such that sex is a taboo subject and teen pregnancy is a huge stigma in a community.

With this cultural context, it is clear that there are both conservative and progressive elements in the novel. By tackling the issue of teen pregnancy head-on in a time when unwed pregnancy was silently negated with quiet adoptions or abortions, the book is certainly progressive. However, especially at the beginning there is no mention (let alone depiction) of the very words involved in this "taboo" subject. The reader only assumes Bo Jo and July had sex on the beach; the book simply states the couple "passed a point of no return." Similarly, pregnancy itself was also be assumed rather than stated; July heads to the doctor and is the only thing the reader is told is that the doctor advises July to go home and tell her parents.

This approach is used for the simple fact that such words and concepts were "taboo" to even mention in a book intended for young teens. Undoubtedly there might have been a firestorm of controversy at the time of the book's publication (1967) brought about by conservative parents had sex and pregnancy been dealt with in a frank and explicit manner. The idea of using a condom is not even in the universe in which this book is operating.

Included in this conservative versus progressive debate is the "easy" resolution to the book, which demonstrates above all else that, while progressively dealing with tough issues, the book nonetheless retreats backwards to reach a nice and tidy solution. The baby dies; while devastating for those involved, this is a "deus ex machina"-style removal of the problem with which the entire narrative concerned itself. Free from caring for the baby, each member of the married couple is able to honor their parents' original wishes by getting an education (conservative), while at the same time remaining apart (conservative) but still married (progressive). July's story is truly a cautionary tale, cautionary even for herself who lived it because there was no baby at the end and thus no danger of true sacrifice on the couple's part for a baby. This is an ending that has its cake and eats it too; teen marriage works, yet it works within the confines of the conservative parents' wishes.



Coming-of-Age

Continually emphasized in the novel is the extent to which the pregnancy and marriage have forced July to grow up, and in this way the novel can be said to be coming-of-age in genre. Directly after she has sex with Bo Jo for the first time, July tries to "keep it together" and go on with her usual activities, but instead she is deeply affected, having panic attacks in English class and crying in the shower. She can no longer enjoy activities she once did. Inability to have fun playing monopoly or checkers with Gory or talk about books or school with Grace are especially saddening to July, as it means there is now a rift between her siblings and her that July cannot bridge. July can no longer be carefree and hang out with her old friends from high school. The situation feels different to her; they can't talk about marriage, and she can't talk about what's going on at school. July feels she can't even talk to her best friend Mary Ann, who would never understand how July could have had sex, knowing the consequences.

Beyond the obvious jarring change of moving into her own apartment, there is the loneliness and boredom July feels as she slips into a new role as domestic housewife. There is the humiliation, exacerbated by Mrs. Jones, of not being able to cook or make a bed or iron Bo Jo's shirts; she doesn't want to look like a joke who can only provide her husband canned soup and sandwiches, but she is too young to have acquired the skills necessary to do better.

All these changes are made the more jarring by their suddenness, a suddenness mirroring her pregnancy and quickie wedding. In essence, July has had to grow up by a decade in just several weeks. This is perhaps the single biggest consequence of teen pregnancy as depicted in the novel: the loss of innocence, the loss of any capacity to be carefree, and the burden of responsibility. These are tough lessons learned, and as July states at the close of the novel, she would not even trade Mary Ann's dream wedding for what Mary Ann is about to struggle through.

Class Distinctions

It is clear that class rears its ugly head in Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones, and that class distinctions exacerbate an already tumultuous situation. July is from the nice part of town, born to a banker and a good family. When Bo Jo arrives at July's house to pick her up, he is intimidated by July's impressive house and can only honk the horn instead of approaching the home to get July. When July becomes pregnant, beyond the obvious problem with her very young age, there is the fact that July chose a low-class guy from the proverbial wrong side of the tracks which further, though subtly, infuriates July's parents. Mrs. Greher had pushed Princeton-bound Horace Clark as a potential suitor July; it's clear Bo Jo, who lacks proper table manners which Mrs. Greher must comment about, is a disappointment. July's parents imagined a husband that could provide a more-than-comfortable living for July; Bo Jo instead has no money and must quit school to get a job. On Bo Jo's side of things, his lower-class was elated that Bo Jo was getting an opportunity to go to college, something no one in the family had ever done. This

additional disappointment, the letting go of this dream, is crushing to Bo Jo and his family.

Subtle events and circumstances in the narrative continually bring class to the foreground. The Grehers get the newlyweds a TV and first months' rent as a housewarming gift; Mrs. Jones is ashamed when she realizes their gifts after having only brought a homemade "God Bless This Home" plaque. Mrs. Greher wishes to insist on the very best doctor for July's baby, with money as no object; this riles Bo Jo, who has a fierce sense of responsibility for the baby and the upkeep of his new family, sometimes perhaps beyond the comprehension of Mrs. Greher and her aristocratic leanings. And when both families celebrate the fourth of July on Cain Island, The Grehers mock the Joneses for their fried chicken and the amount of junk they bring to the picnic; it is clear the Joneses haven't had the money to get good at vacationing by having a lot of vacations as the Grehers have. It is partly due to class that July believes the two families are completely incompatible.

Style

Point of View

MR. AND MRS. BO JONES is told from a first-person perspective, from the point of view of the pregnant teen, July Greher. The story is framed as a "one teen to another" account of teen marriage, provided so perhaps other teens considering marriage or sexual intimacy won't make the same mistakes July did.

Author Ann Head uses a variety of techniques to render a realistic portrayal of a young teen telling her story. July demonstrates contradictory opinions and ambivalent feelings about people and situations. Her friend Rodney is annoying one moment and the life of the party the next, for one example. Another example is July's frequent arguments with Bo Jo, in which rage can turn to regret and sorrow in an instant. Her thought process seems fairly unfiltered; though not approaching a modernist "stream of consciousness," there is nonetheless an attempt to mimic the sometimes chaotic, irrational thought processes a young woman put under great stress might go through.

Another subtle but powerful technique to make July more realistic is the immediacy with which she relates certain important events. July's decision to have sex, decision to get married, death of her baby, and several other more minor events come suddenly and without warning or build-up in the narrative. This, along with the aforementioned mimicking of a young girl's thought process, makes the novel feel less like an "authored" fiction and more like a real young girl recounting her story, a girl who may not be familiar with the usual rules of suspense or build-up that a novelist might usually employ to achieve maximum effect or impact. This "rule breaking" achieves a sense that July's thoughts are racing, and that she is just trying to get everything of importance down on paper.

Setting

The setting is a modestly-sized city in the late 1960s America. The reader is not told where exactly the city is (Bo Jo attends the generic "State U"), which provides a sense that the subject (teen pregnancy) can happen anywhere and anytime and is not restricted to one locale. However, there is one hint that the state borders Georgia (the couple must cross the state line into Georgia to get married), so the reader can assume that the town is in the South, historically the most conservative region of the country.

Setting is crucial to the understanding of the story, as the severe stigma and shame associated with July's pregnancy and marriage are a relative product of the era and place in which July lives. A story of teen pregnancy would be very different depending of if it was set in 1830, 1967, or modern day. In 1967, July is a fairly conservative teen (she makes clear to state she never hung around with the troublemakers at school), born into a conservative family, with a banker father and stay-at-home mother. That July



is upper class provides an additional layer, insofar that July would be considered even less capable of "ruining" her life by becoming pregnant, having so much to look forward to. In her mother's eyes, July has especially proceeded poorly because her husband is from a lower class. Mrs. Greher repeatedly tried to get July interested in Princeton-bound Horace Clark instead. Class distinctions are fairly constant throughout the novel and provide an additional layer to setting.

Language and Meaning

Ann Head uses contemporary youth vernacular, such as "snowed," "way-out," "go go," and "a gas" in July's narrative. This is a way to lend realism, and to talk the same as the intended audience - young teens. Overall, vocabulary and word usage in the novel fall just short of "adult" level and are instead appropriate for young adults.

As July is supposedly three years removed from the bulk of the events in the novel, she speaks with somewhat of a detached, objective perspective that is reflected in the language. There is a certain lack of hyperbole or extreme connotations in the novel; this is appropriate given the stated purpose of the narrative, which is to provide teen couples on the brink of marriage a sense of what July just went through.

The author is careful in having characters (especially characters of different ages) speak differently. Mr. and Mrs. Greher probably use the most advanced vocabulary and most complicated sentence structure, given they are upper-class, educated and older. Bo Jo is given to short, simple sentences, appropriate perhaps to a lower-class teen boy of average intelligence, and also more specifically appropriate to a young man under a lot of stress who is withholding a lot of emotion. He is more likely to fly out of the apartment than rationally talk things out. Louella Consuela, in her status as a "pie in the sky" bohemian, has a sort of "fabulous" way of speaking, frequently using hyperbole and words like "marvelous" and "darling." The young children, Gory and Grace, cannot quite articulate their feelings due to their age, and their dialogue reflects this. And Mary Ann Simmons, in her role as best friend who is completely comfortable with July and can tell July anything, represents probably the most direct and brutally honest voice in the novel. When July's baby dies, Mary Ann states, "At least now you'll be able to go back to school and everything."

Structure

Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jones is a novel of 189 pages. The novel is peculiar in that it is not divided up into parts or sections; a simple double-space between passages to signify a change of day or topic is the only division used. This lack of chapters is another technique Ann Head uses in the name of realism, as if to say "this is not an expertly structured and thought-out work of fiction; this is the unfiltered, uncensored account of an amateur writer telling her story." The lack of chapters also offers up a sort of textual claustrophobia; chapters are a chance to breathe, to digest what was just read, to stop



a moment. Like July, caught in her maelstrom of emotions, pressure, and uncertainty, the reader is unable to breathe or take a moment to gather thoughts and reflect.

Otherwise, the novel is structured with a frame story. The frame story involves a twenty-year-old July, wishing to tell her story for the benefit of teen couples who may be pondering (or forced into) marriage. This immediately sets the reader up to read the novel not as a simple work of fiction but a cautionary tale, almost a public service, from which one can pull useful information and apply it to one's own life.

Besides the bookends of the frame story, the novel is told chronologically with very few exceptions, showing a bit of the "status quo" of July and her carefree high school ways and then plunging in just a few pages into pre-marital sex. From there, July seems to "pick and choose" episodes in her proceeding nine months of pregnancy and thereafter what might be useful for her teen audience to know or reflect upon. Thus the structure is also quasi-episodic in nature.



Quotes

"With much talk about teen-age marriages, I feel, for whatever it may be worth to some young couple on the brink of same, that I should tell about mine.

I was sixteen, and Bo Jo was seventeen when we got married. As the statistics say, most teen-agers who marry, marry because they have to. Or else. We looked into some of the 'or elses' and decided they weren't for us. Maybe marriage wasn't either. But at least it was a positive thing to do. And everything else looked negative." (7)

"I said, 'I think you're trying to tell me something, but I'd like to hear it straight if you don't mind. I think you're trying to tell me that this is my little red wagon. All mine, I think-'

'Aw no, kid!' He reached under the table and grabbed my hand. 'I'm just scared like you. And studying the angles . . . Look, look at me.' I did, and his eyes were almost back to their normal color. 'You don't really think I'd run out on you, do you?'

'I just don't know,' I blubbered. For a girl who likes to cry I'd done pretty well until then. 'Actually I guess there are a lot of things I don't know about you.' He handed me a handkerchief. It smelled of car grease, but I used it anyhow.

'If it's marriage you want, we'll do it.'

'Of course I don't want it!' I said. 'Not any more than you do. But what else?'

He dropped my hand and stubbed out his cigarette. 'You got me there,' he said. 'When and where do we wrap it up?' (26-27)

"I said, 'You've never said you loved me, Bo Jo. Not ever.'

'You likewise,' Bo Jo said.

'The girl isn't supposed to,' I said. 'She's not supposed to say it first.'

'You know I'm crazy about you.' He sounded cross, and I should have left it be, but along with being scared I was also beginning to hurt deep inside. It was like a pain without the pain if you know what I mean, and I wanted Bo Jo to dish out the medicine to make it go away.

'We've got to be more than crazy about each other now,' I said.

'So for you it's as simple as that!' he said, and inched his shoulder away from mine. 'So we got to get married, so we get married, so we got to say 'I love you,' so we say it.

Well, it's not that simple for me. I'm sorry, kid, but it's just not that simple.'" (35)

"'I still don't believe it,' my father said, walking up and down in front of the squooshie chair and looking at me from time to time as if I were some new specimen of creature heretofore unknown. 'You wouldn't do a damned fool thing like that. A bloody cruel thing like that. Knock the pops right out from under us. Throw your life away. Not that we'll let you. These things can always be annulled - Agnes, Agnes, did you hear me? We'll have it annulled. Should be simple. They're both under age. They didn't have our permission, they . . .'

'I'm going to call Bo Jo,' I said, and got up out of the squooshie chair.

'Bo Jo!' The way my father said it, it sounded like a swear word.

'Paul,' my mother said, still with her back to us. 'Please keep your voice down. I don't want the children to hear. . . .'

'His name,' I said, 'is Boswell Johnson Jones, and I happen to be very much in love with



him.'

'What in heaven's name,' my father said, 'can you possibly know about love?' (44-45)

'What a beautiful dress, a truly beautiful frock,' she said, touching the Paris chiffon with the tips of her fingers. 'Where on earth will you wear it now?'

'To the church,' Bo Jo said. 'We're getting married all over again tomorrow morning by a preacher.' The way he said it you could tell how he felt about it.

'Mother is going to call you,' I said. 'She wants you to come. . . of course. You and Bo Jo's father.'

'But what's the sense of it?' Mrs. Jones said.

'They thought it would make things easier,' I said, 'for everybody.'

'Not for me,' Mrs. Jones said, 'not for us,' and she looked at me, really looked at me, for the first time as though she was taking me in. 'I am trying to rise above this thing that has happened to us, to our boy. No use crying over spilled milk. But I'll not go to any wedding under such circumstances. It would be a sacrilege.' Her eyes filled up with tears, and she turned around and went out of the room." (60)

"We got to the chapel and Bo Jo eased the car into a parking space. Mother and Father's car was right in front of us, and in front of their car I saw to my horror Grandmother Greher's Lincoln. It had never occurred to me that she would be here. Even if Father and Mother had asked her, I couldn't imagine her coming, and the sight of her car turned me hot and cold with nerves. Up until then I'd drawn a veil where Grandmother Greher and Bo Jo and I were concerned. I mean in regards to what had happened. She was a person whose opinion of me mattered. Even though I wasn't even sure I loved her. Or even liked her." (64)

"Mrs. Jones, in a panic for fear her son would never again see another square meal or wear another correctly ironed shirt, tried to give me a crash course in domestic science. I did learn how to cook a roast and make a soup with what was left of it, but I flunked the pastry course completely, and when it came to the ironing I not only burned a hole in one of Bo Jo's shirts but caught the ironing board on fire and came close to burning down the house. When it was all over, Mrs. Jones burst into tears and dashed off to her room without a word. She wasn't the sort of person to cry over a hole or a burned-up ironing board cover, and I'm sure that wasn't what she was crying about." (69)

"The phone was in the hallway between the living room - the parlor Mrs. Jones called it - and the kitchen and even in a normal tone of voice anyone in the parlor couldn't help but hear everything that was said. But Mr. Jones wasn't talking in a normal tone of voice. He was talking loud, and it didn't take me long to realize he was talking to my father. 'You and your lady wife are ruining my son's life. Ruining him. He's not going to be worth the skin he was born in by the time you get through with him. Why couldn't you leave him along? Hunh? Why?'

'He oughta be in a football helmet and padded pants caked up in mud when he comes in in the afternoon. Not looking like somebody's little vice-president in charge of nothing!'

At this point Mrs. Jones, hearing the shouting, came charging out from the kitchen and grabbed his arm and tried to pull him away from the telephone, but he shook her loose



like she was a bug lighting on his sleeve.

'God damn it, what do you and your lady wife know about what a man wants for his boy! What the hell do you know about a man like me or a boy like Bo Jo? What I've worked all my life to do for him-' He broke off and slammed the receiver back on its hook. I sat there too stunned to move, hoping he had forgotten I was there and wouldn't remember now." (73-74)

"That's what scares me,' Mary Ann said. 'I wish I could think you were just all those things you said and be shocked and feel superior and let it go at that. Instead my whole entire point of view is knocked for a loop, and I don't know what to think. I mean Alan and I have been in love, or thought we were, for almost two years, and it has never occurred to either of us not to wait until. . . It makes me wonder if . . . if . . . well, if he is really as crazy in love as he says, and . . . and . . . what I would do if he ever really wanted me bad enough-' She wheeled up from the table and went into the living room. 'You do have a record player, don't you? How about some glad noise for a change?' 'The records,' I said, 'are under the bookcase.'

I knew she'd put on Belafonte, one of the gay, soft ones, and she did. I felt simply terrible. Alan was the only secure thing that had ever happened to Mary Ann. All she'd had until he came along was a steady turnover of mothers and stepmothers and half brothers and sisters and noisy divorces." (103-104)

"That was only the beginning of our correspondence. It got to be a game with me, seeing how much I could tell him without telling him the facts. It meant writing a first draft and then copying it to make sure I'd not leaked anything . . . Almost like writing for English II . . . challenging. Also it was fun. Like taking a short vacation from reality. And his letters to me were reward enough. I kept all of them. His letters and the first drafts of the ones I wrote in return. [...] I have the letters here and just for the record . . . though they don't give much of a picture of my life during that period a few quotations from some of them might not be out of order as actually they themselves became a very important part of my life . . . my interior life, that is . . . at that time . . ." (117)

"He found out about the operation!' [Louella] said, and put her cigarette out and lit another. 'I got behind in my payments to the loan company so they got one of their henchmen to pay me a visit. And so . . .' she finished, as though that were explanation enough.

'And so?' I prodded.

'Nick called me a murderess. He said I'd cheated him. He said I cheated God. I didn't think he believed in God. I still don't. I think he invented Him to punish me. He said he was going to kill me.'

'That bruise on your face,' I said, 'did he . . .'

Her fingers moved to the spot on her cheek and incredibly her face softened. 'Yes,' she said, 'that's his mark. But,' and her lips trembled, 'that was over two weeks ago, and he hasn't touched me since. Not once.'

'So why leave now?' I said. 'Just when things were looking up?'

'I said he hadn't touched me. Not in any way.' Again she touched the spot on her cheek with that strange tenderness. 'You can't go on living with a man who won't touch you.'" (142)



"'But I don't know how I feel.'

'You feel like crying,' Bo Jo said.

'But I know what we're doing is right, the right thing to do. I know that much.'

'Whose right thing?' Bo Jo said.

'Everybody's,' I said. 'Yours. Mine. Theirs.'

'Let's leave 'them' out of it,' Bo Jo said.

'But we can't. We mustn't. We've hurt them so much already we can't go on hurting them . . . and they'd never understand this . . . not in a million years. . . .'

'What wouldn't they understand?' Bo Jo said, and put his hands on my shoulders and made me look at him, what I could see of him through my veil of tears. 'That maybe we've been through things together that we don't want to forget.'

'Oh, I don't want to forget any of it . . . not even the fights . . .'

'But we will forget,' Bo Jo said, 'if we let each other go we will have to. That's why I think it's wrong . . . what they've planned for us. I think it's wrong to let what we have between us go. I know it wasn't much to start with . . . just two crazy mixed-up kids . . . not ready for love much less getting married . . . but we're a lot older than we were a year ago and we mean a lot more to each other than we did then. Doesn't that seem like a hell of a time to get a divorce? Just when we begin to mean more to each other?' He wasn't smiling." (186)



Topics for Discussion

In what ways is the book conservative and/or reactionary? In what ways is the book progressive? Consider that the book's audience is a young teen in the late 1960s.

What techniques does author Ann Head use to depict a "teen girl's first-hand account" as realistically as possible?

Like July, Louella Consuela is a young married and pregnant woman. What role does Louella Consuela play in the story? How does the author use this character in exploring marriage and pregnancy?

Describe the coping mechanisms July uses to get through her difficult nine months of pregnancy and marriage. What does she do (either physically or mentally) to deal with reality (or escape from it) and deal with her feelings?

It is made clear that July and Bo Jo come from two different socio-economic classes. Discuss what effect this may have on their marriage difficulties and provide several examples in the text where class becomes a factor.

From the perspective of the parents, explain why they think teen marriage and pregnancy is such a terrible stigma. How does it reflect on them as parents? What does it mean for the teen couple? Are the parents selfish and overreacting in this instance? Use examples from the text.

What is achieved in the penultimate scene where Bo Jo and July decide to remain married and try to make it work? What have they grown up into? Are they in love? How is marriage different from love?