

The Magician's Lie Study Guide

The Magician's Lie by Greer Macallister

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Plot Summary

The Magician's Lie tells the story of Arden the Amazing, a professional magician performing around the United States in the early twentieth century and one night in a town called Janesville, Iowa, when Arden is interrogated by a police officer called Virgil Holt who believes she is guilty of murder.

In the opening chapter set in Waterloo, Iowa, in 1905, Arden – before she has been introduced by name – resolves that she is going to kill someone that night. In the audience for her show is Virgil Holt, a police officer, and his best friend Mose Huber, Sheriff of Waterloo. Later, Holt and Mose are called back to the theater because a dead body has been discovered. Members of the company tell them that the dead man was Arden's husband.

Holt makes his way home to his hometown of Janesville. He stops in a restaurant on his way and intercepts Arden. He arrests her and takes her to the police station in Janesville. Holt interrogates Arden about the murder and Arden begins to tell him the story of her life.

Arden's mother gave up a career as a musician to run away with a man called Victor and live on a farm in Tennessee. Victor's brother's son Ray came to live with them on the farm and started to intimidate, threaten, and abuse Arden. Arden learned to dance and got an audition with a famous dance instructor.

Holt uses handcuffs to secure Arden's ankles to the chair. The phone rings but he ignores it.

Before Arden could get to her audition Ray tried to rape her and then broke her leg, meaning she was unable to dance. Arden told her mother about what happened but was told her she must be mistaken because their whole family was dependent on Ray's family and they wouldn't be able to survive if Arden made these accusations against Ray. Arden decided to leave home.

Holt tells Arden that he was shot and that there is still a bullet stuck in his body that could kill him at any moment.

Arden went to work at the Biltmore estate in North Carolina where she met a young man called Clyde. Ray discovered her whereabouts and Arden left the Biltmore with Clyde. They travelled together to New York. On the way, Clyde proposed to Arden in order to extort money from his cousins. Arden felt betrayed and cut off contact with Clyde when they reached New York.

Arden was hired as a performer in a female magician's, Adelaide Hermann, act. She travelled the country with the troupe until Adelaide retired and Arden inherited the company under the condition that she must have Clyde as a business manager. Clyde and Arden fell in love.



A disturbance outside makes Holt go to check the door, but there is no one there.

Arden was present at a devastating fire in the Iroquois theater in Chicago after which she was discovered by Ray, who tracked her down and attacked her. Arden believed she had killed Ray while defending herself. Clyde proposed to Arden but she turned him down, still mistrustful from his earlier deception.

Holt asks Arden if she can use her magical powers to heal him of the bullet inside his body but she tells him that she cannot.

Ray found Arden again and made her cut off all contact with Clyde. Ray controlled Arden's life, physically and mentally abusing her up until the night of the murder at the theater in Waterloo.

As the night continues in Janesville, Arden manages to remove all of the pairs of handcuffs Holt has locked her into. She escapes the police station while Holt is distracted by a phone call from his wife. Clyde is waiting for her outside. He tells Arden that he murdered Ray and they escape together.



Chapters 1 – 6

Summary

Chapter 1 takes place in Waterloo, Iowa, on July 23 1905 at six o'clock in the evening. A female magician - who the reader will later come to know by both the names Ada Bates and Arden the Amazing – prepares for her performance and decides that she will kill someone tonight.

In the audience for Arden's performance is Holt, a small town policeman, who is attending the show with his best friend Mose, the sheriff of Waterloo. Holt watches Arden perform her most famous trick: sawing a man in half. The trick makes Holt queasy and he has to leave the theater.

Later that night, Holt and Mose are interrupted, while having a drink, by a report of a murder at the theater. Both men return to the theater to see a dead body hidden in the trunk used for Arden's infamous Halved Man illusion. Witnesses tell them that the dead man is Arden's husband. Holt leaves Mose to deal with the investigation and begins to head home, reflecting on a traumatic conversation he had with his doctor earlier that day. On his way home he stops at a restaurant. A woman comes into the restaurant and he immediately recognizes her as Arden: the prime suspect in the murder at Waterloo. He apprehends her and takes her away on his horse, not noticing another customer in the restaurant who watches them leave.

Holt takes Arden to the police station in his hometown, Janesville, where he handcuffs her to a chair. He uses three sets of handcuffs because he believes her skills as a magician will allow her to escape. He notices a fresh bruise across Arden's neck. Holt asks Arden to tell him what happened.

Chapter 2, "A Night's Alteration", took place in 1892. Arden recounted her childhood. Her mother was abandoned by her father before she was born. She was raised in her grandparents' house, until her mother decided to run away with another man and took Arden with her. After that, Arden lived on a farm in a town called Jeansville in Tennessee. Her mother began teaching Arden how to dance.

Chapter 3 returned to 1905 in Janesville, Iowa, at midnight. Holt accuses Arden of lying about her childhood, claiming that it is too much of a coincidence that she grew up in a town called Jeansville when they are currently in a town called Janesville. He threatens to turn her over to the sheriff but she begs him not to. Holt feeds Arden an apple and asks her to continue with her story.

Chapter 4, "Invisible Knots" took place during 1893-1894. Arden's cousin Ray came to live with their family on the farm. Arden's mother bought her a large mirror for her birthday to help her practice her dance training. One day Arden discovered Ray in her bedroom, slicing his own ribcage with a razor. Ray threatened Arden with the razor and



told her not to tell anyone what she had seen. Ray believed he was capable of healing himself with his mind and thought Arden could do so too. Arden was invited to audition for Madama Bonfanti, a famous dance instructor, at the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, owned by the Vanderbilt family. Ray drove Arden and her mother to North Carolina via coach. He told Arden that he would never let her leave the farm.

In Chapter 5, it's one o'clock in the morning in Janesville in 1905. Holt complains that Arden isn't telling him about the murder and she counters that she is. Holt wishes she would start her story a little closer to the end. He handcuffs her ankles to the chair. Holt tells Arden that he was always second best at everything he did in his life. Mose, the sheriff in Waterloo, was always the best. The phone rings, but Holt ignores it.

Chapter 6, "The Flying Cage", took place in 1894. Arden arrived at the Biltmore Estate for her audition. She sneaked away to a barn to practice her dance routine. Ray followed her there and tried to rape her. When Arden fought back, Ray threw her from the loft of the barn and she broke her leg. She limped back to the estate, but the audition was cancelled as she was unable to dance. The family returned to Tennessee.

Analysis

Although the present-day sections set in Janesville in 1905 will largely be told from Holt's perspective, Chapter 1 opens from Arden's perspective as she prepares for a performance in Waterloo, Iowa. The opening of the novel falsely leads the reader to believe that Arden is guilty of murder, by opening with her decision that she will kill someone that night. Chapter 1 refers to the person whom Arden wishes to kill as her "torturer" and, notably, not her "husband" which is the word which will be used to describe the dead man throughout the rest of the novel, creating confusion for the reader by leading them to suspect that the dead body is Clyde rather than Ray.

The author uses Arden's opening decision to kill someone to build suspense during the Halved Man illusion. This is the first time in the novel that the reader encounters this trick and the opening section of the chapter falsely leads the reader to suspect that Arden intends to kill someone during the trick itself. This has the effect of recreating for the reader some of the tension and horror that early 20th century audiences would have felt upon encountering this sort of illusion for the first time. In the 21st century the public have become accustomed to the use of CGI in movies and television and the use of photographic manipulation software to give the impression of things happening that aren't really happening. For this reason, reading about an old-fashioned magic trick like sawing a person in half on stage would have little impact on a skeptical modern readership. In order to recreate some of the horror and fear that the trick would have had on the audience at the time, the author leads the reader to believe that Arden is actually killing the man in the box during the illusion. This interpretation is emphasized by the mention of blood, screaming, and the presence of the policeman Holt at the scene.



Although Holt reflects on the things that have happened to him earlier in the day, it is not until much later in the novel that the reader discovers his predicament. At this early stage, the author suggests that Holt's main interest in capturing Arden is the possibility of the glory and fame he would receive by solving what will become a high profile murder.

Clyde's character isn't introduced formally until much later in the novel, but he makes his first appearance in Chapter 1 as the unknown stranger at the restaurant who watches Holt apprehend Arden. This device makes it seem less implausible when Clyde turns up outside the Janesville jailhouse in Chapter 32.

The story of Arden's mother in Chapter 2 gives the reader an important insight into Arden's attitude to relationships. Her mother's life was derailed on more than one occasion by an infatuation with a man and her romantic relationships prevented her from fulfilling her potential as a musician and performer. Arden's fear of making these same mistakes makes her fear intimacy and romantic connections and influences her decision to push Clyde away in later chapters.

Chapter 3 uses the character of Holt to plant seeds of doubt in the reader's mind about whether the story Arden is telling is the truth. The reference to a lie in the title of the novel leads the reader to suspect that what they are reading is not the truth. Holt highlights certain aspects of Arden's story, such as the unlikely coincidence of Arden being brought up in a town called Jeansville when they are currently in a town called Janesville, to create more doubt and suspicion in the reader's mind about what Arden is saying.

The mirror that Arden's mother gave her in Chapter 4 to practice her dance routines is Arden's first taste of performance, the love of which will come to define her life. Arden performs for the mirror even though her only audience is herself.

Ray's self-harm is introduced as a way to make the reader immediately suspicious of him and his mental stability. The encounter between Ray and Arden in front of the mirror is the first clue about their relative healing abilities. Ray is said to be covered in scars in Chapter 4. Later, Holt will notice that Arden shows no scars or visible sign of injury despite the many physical assaults that she has endured.

Chapter 5 continues to imply to the reader that Holt is interested in Arden because of the effect she could have on his reputation. He has always been second best to Mose and perhaps solving this high profile investigation will become his chance to shine.

Arden's broken leg in Chapter 6 is a major turning point in the novel. It was the first, but sadly not last, occasion that Ray's cruelty and obsession prevented Arden from living her life the way she wanted to. It was also the first time Arden was able to heal herself beyond normal human abilities.



Discussion Question 1

What techniques does the author use to build suspense in Chapter 1?

Discussion Question 2

What evidence is there in the first 6 chapters that the story Arden tells might not be true?

Discussion Question 3

Did Arden have a positive relationship with her mother?

Vocabulary

spellbinding, patter, misdirect, illusionist, wielded, middling, cleft, nimble, infuriates, restraints, fawned, aquiline, pirouettes, logical, clarity, shrilling, dappled, jouncing, majestic, sublime



Chapters 7 – 12

Summary

Chapter 7, “Flight of the Favorite”, was set in 1894-1895. Arden recalled catching Ray torturing one of the horses on the farm by driving a nail into its hoof, in the belief that he would be able to heal it. Arden heard that a number of the neighbors’ dogs had gone missing and she suspected that Ray was responsible. Arden tried to tell her mother about what happened with Ray when they were at Biltmore, but her mother told her to pretend that it hadn’t happened because their family was dependent on Ray’s family for their livelihood. Arden decided to run away. Before she left she freed the horse that Ray had tortured.

Chapter 8 takes place at half past one in the morning in Janesville, 1905. While interrogating Arden, Holt guesses that she has stabbed someone before and that she didn’t like it. Arden tells him that he’s right. Holt inspects Arden’s leg to see if there’s any evidence that it was once broken: there isn’t. Arden asks Holt what his wife’s name is and he tells her it’s Iris. Holt comments on the axe that Arden uses in the Halved Man illusion and Arden realizes that he’d been at the show that night because it was the first time she’d ever used an axe in the trick: she usually uses a saw. Arden notices that Holt walks stiffly and asks if he’s ever been shot. Holt replies that he was shot while interrupting a bank robbery: one of the bullets is still lodged near his spine and it is too dangerous to operate on. As long as the bullet remains where it is, Holt is fine, but if it moves even slightly inside him he could die at any moment. As Arden begins to tell her story again, Holt notices that the bruise on her neck, which he saw in Chapter 1, has completely disappeared.

Chapter 9, “Lady to Tiger”, was set in 1895. Arden went back to the Biltmore estate in North Carolina. She snuck inside and stole a maid’s uniform, hoping to disappear amongst the many servants. The woman in charge of hiring servants caught her, but luckily another girl had been injured that day and the woman decided to hire Arden as her replacement. Arden’s dance training meant that she was strong and easily handled her domestic duties as a maid. One day she observed a man planting rose bushes in the garden and she became instantly enchanted with him.

Chapter 10, “Metamorphosis”, continued the story of Arden’s time working at the Biltmore estate. During the staff Christmas party, Arden performed some of her dance routines in front of the other employees. She did a series of piqué turns which resulted into her bumping into a young man named Clyde under the mistletoe and they kissed. Clyde took Arden to the library and they kissed again.

In Chapter 11, the time has reached two in the morning in Janesville in 1905. Holt asks Arden whether she married the young man she has just been describing, but Arden evades the question. Arden explains to Holt that she is able to heal her body simply by wishing her injuries would go away: this is how she was able to recover from her broken



leg so quickly after Ray attacked her. Holt says that Ray was right about her healing abilities. Arden counters that Ray was right about her, but wrong about himself: Ray did not have healing powers. Holt goes through Arden's things and finds a fur muff, a men's razor, and a copy of "As You Like It" by William Shakespeare.

Chapter 12, "Solomon's Letter", was set in 1896. Arden and Clyde continued to have secret meetings in the house when they were supposed to be working. They were caught one night by Mr. Vanderbilt who warned Arden that she was responsible for her own behavior and that she must learn to control herself and exercise agency in her own life, not leave the important decisions up to other people. After this incident, Arden stopped spending time with Clyde although she didn't tell him why. Another servant, Mrs. Severson, contacted Arden's mother to invite her to visit on Arden's birthday as a surprise. She gave Arden a letter from her mother saying she was on her way, but Arden knew that the letter was from Ray and that she would have to escape. Clyde came to wish Arden a happy birthday and told her about his plan to leave Biltmore and go to New York. Arden decided to leave with him.

Analysis

Chapter 7 demonstrated the differences between Arden and her mother. Whereas her mother allowed other people to control her destiny and became dependent on the kindness of others in order to survive, Arden grew up into a woman who was in control of her own destiny and didn't have to obey the orders of anyone else. Although Arden's mother was sympathetic, and saddened, to learn about what Ray did to Arden, she refused to pursue justice for Arden or to hold Ray accountable for his actions, instead telling Arden that she must pretend that Ray hadn't tried to rape her in order to preserve the financial security of their family. This is a key turning point in the novel as it is the moment when Arden became convinced of the need to support herself and not rely on anyone else. Arden's self-reliance saved her from Ray in this chapter, but later her staunch independence made her isolated and reclusive.

The bullet near Holt's spine, which is explained to both the reader and to Arden in Chapter 8, is the key motivating factor for Holt's behavior throughout the entire novel. Although Holt and Arden may seem like very different characters on the surface there is a key similarity between them: they have both allowed fear to dictate their attitude to life. Arden's decisions for much of her life were motivated by her fear of Ray and, when the reader first meets him, Holt is just beginning to view his life through a lens of fear due to the possibility that the bullet near his spine could kill him at any moment. Encountering Arden and learning lessons about fear, and how restrictive it can be to living life to the full, will leave Holt a changed man by the end of this fateful night in Janesville.

In Chapter 9 Arden was given an opportunity due to the misfortune of another servant at the Biltmore estate, who had injured herself by trapping her arm in a mangle while doing the laundry. This was the first of many occasions in the novel when Arden benefited from the suffering of another woman. Arden's ability to heal herself and her personality traits of being skeptical and reserved allow her to avoid the disasters which befell the



women who preceded her in her various occupations. One possible interpretation is that Arden's ability to heal herself is not her only magical power and that she is unconsciously able to do harm to others in order to clear a path for herself in life.

Arden was instantly attracted to Clyde when she first saw him in the rose garden at the Biltmore estate in Chapter 9. Her desire to not meet the young man, despite her attraction to him, reflected her fear of intimacy and the concern that if she were to fall in love it would lead her to financial dependence on others and ultimately destroy her life, as had happened to her mother.

Clyde is a subject of suspicion throughout the novel as it is never clear to the reader who the murdered man at the theater is until the very end. If the body is indeed Clyde's, then that means he is the man whom Arden referred to as her "torturer" in Chapter 1. This has the effect of making the reader just as mistrustful of Clyde as Arden is, creating fear and uncertainty around their romance which is equally as strong for the reader as it is for Arden. Eventually, Clyde turns out not to be the villain of the novel and there are signs of the purity of his intentions in Chapter 10: his attraction to Arden began by watching her perform, and he remained supportive of her performance career throughout their relationship.

Chapter 12 is a major turning point in the understanding between Holt and Arden, because it is the first time that Arden openly admits her ability to heal herself of injuries. This sets Holt's mind racing and changes his feelings about how best to deal with Arden and whether or not he should let her go.

Chapter 13 featured a show of support for Arden from Mr. Vanderbilt. His advice to Arden about taking control of her own destiny and not allowing others to make her decisions for her is a philosophy that guided Arden's actions for the rest of the novel. The letter from Ray demonstrated the impossibility of Arden keeping in touch with her mother without Ray finding out, foreshadowing Arden's encounter with Ray in Chicago which was also caused by Arden corresponding with her mother.

Each stage of Arden's life is brought to an end by some form of intimidation or betrayal by a man. In Chapter 13, the letter from Ray brought Arden's time at the Biltmore estate to a close.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Arden's mother tell her that she must have been mistaken about Ray?

Discussion Question 2

What effect does Holt's injury have on his attitude to life?



Discussion Question 3

How did Arden's attitude towards Clyde change during her time at the Biltmore estate?

Vocabulary

crucial, jeopardize, whinny, uncomprehending, prompts, unblemished, reverie, imposter, brittle, bequeathed, assigned, selfsame, ventured, bedecked, deference, tedious, flinches, oozed, compelled, scurried



Chapters 13 - 19

Summary

Chapter 13, "The Phantom Bride", was set in 1896. Arden recounted her journey with Clive from North Carolina to Washington, which took more than a month. Clyde made sexual advances towards Arden but she refused him. Clyde accepted her decision and told her that he wasn't ready to make any sort of commitment because he was too young. They stayed with Clyde's cousin in Baltimore. While they were there, Clyde proposed to Arden and she said yes. Later, Clyde revealed that he had not been serious when he had proposed and had meant it only as a scheme to convince his cousin to give them some money as a wedding present. Arden was deeply hurt by this. The pair carried on to New York. When they arrived, Arden demanded her half of the money. Clyde had arranged a boarding house for Arden to stay in. Arden convinced the owner to give Arden the deposit Clyde had left. Arden moved to a different boarding house without telling Clyde where she was going.

In Chapter 14, the time has reached half past two in the morning in Janesville in 1905. Arden asks Holt about his wife and Holt replies that he wasn't her first choice as a husband: once again, he had come in second place to Mose who Iris had been in love with first. When Mose married someone else, Iris decided to marry Holt. Arden releases her feet from the handcuffs around her ankles by titling the chair legs. She tells Holt this should make him trust her, because she was willing to show him a weakness in his plan.

Chapter 15, "The Bullet Catch", took place in New York from 1896-1897. Arden got a job on Broadway as a dancer on a chorus line. One night after the show a woman approached Arden and asked her if she would like to work in a magic show: the woman was Adelaide Herrmann. Arden went to see Adelaide perform a trick called The Bullet Catch. Afterwards, Arden was so impressed that she agreed to join Adelaide's show.

Chapter 16, "The Dancing Odalisque", was set from 1897-1898. Arden travelled the country by train performing in Adelaide's act. Arden replaced a girl who had to leave the company because she had fallen pregnant. Arden sent her mother a postcard while the troupe was in Chicago. She didn't sign it, instead simply writing the words "I am well." She befriended the dressmaker in the company, Jeannie, but didn't get on well with the others. Arden dedicated herself to learning how all of the illusions and tricks in the show worked. Arden was promoted to a more prominent position in the company.

Chapter 17, "Second Sight", was set in 1898-1900. Adelaide performed a mind-reading trick and a man in the audience accused her of being a charlatan. Adelaide offered to answer any question the man had and she told him the answer to his question was "no": the woman he loved didn't love him in return. Later, the company saw in the newspapers that the man had murdered his fiancée and committed suicide.



In Chapter 18, it is three in the morning in Janesville in 1905. Arden explains to Holt that after what happened with the man who murdered his fiancée, Adelaide was never the same. Arden says that Adelaide continued the shows she's already booked for the company but didn't book any new ones. Arden tells Holt that she's surprised to discover that he believes in magic and Holt replies that his he was told his mother (who died in childbirth) had believed in magic, so he does too. Arden asks Holt to remove one of the pairs of handcuffs because they are hurting her. She promises that she will owe Holt a favor if he does it and Holt obliges. Holt asks her if she killed her husband and she tells him she did not.

Chapter 19, "Woman on Fire", took place in 1900. Adelaide's company performed their last show together in New York. Adelaide told Arden that she wanted her to take over the company as the star of the show, on the condition that she agreed to work with the business manager that Adelaide had hired. The business manager was Clyde, the man Arden had run away with when she first left the Biltmore estate. Arden was still offended by Clyde's false proposal and initially refused to work with him but Clyde convinced her to leave the past in the past. Clyde took Arden to a library and Arden threatened that if he ever touched her, she would kill him. Clyde promised he would never touch her. Together they searched for a new name to use when she took over the show, and they settled on "Arden" inspired by the name of the forest in the Shakespeare play "As You Like It."

Analysis

In Chapter 13 the author continues to blur the depiction of Clyde in a way that makes the reader unsure whether or not to trust him, just as Arden too was unsure whether or not she could trust him. Clyde is depicted as both honest and deceptive in this chapter: rather than lie to Arden about his intentions when he made sexual advances towards her on their way to Washington, he told her the truth that he wasn't interested in any form of commitment even though he knew this lessened the chances that she would sleep with him. On the other hand, Clyde's false proposal at his cousin's house in Baltimore made him appear deceitful. This continues the mystery of the identity of the murdered man found in the Halved Man box in Waterloo, Iowa, in 1905. If the author were to depict Clyde as entirely trustworthy during the early years of his relationship with Arden, the reader would conclude that it must be another character who was murdered.

Although Arden received Clyde's false proposal as an act of betrayal, it actually demonstrated the similarities between the two characters. Both were single-minded in pursuit of their goals and focused on the practical matters of life before allowing themselves to open up to anyone emotionally. This event, therefore, serves a dual purpose in the novel: continuing the mystery of who was murdered in Waterloo by portraying Clyde as untrustworthy, whilst also demonstrating what a well-matched couple Arden and Clyde are.



The background information revealed about Holt's relationship with Iris in Chapter 14 provides important context for Holt's actions at the end of the novel when he decides that his love for Iris is more important than any accolades he might receive as a result of turning Arden in. Although Arden tells Holt in this chapter that by revealing a weakness in his plan (when she removes the handcuffs around her ankles) she is demonstrating that he can trust her, she is really lulling Holt into a false sense of security which she will take advantage of in Chapter 32 once she is restrained by only one pair of cuffs.

Chapter 15 introduced the character of Adelaide Herrmann who played the role of mentor in the novel and served as a surrogate mother figure to Arden due to her real mother's absence in her life. Arden was first attracted to magic by the dangerous Bullet Catch illusion foreshadowing the shocking Halved Man illusion which made Arden a national sensation.

In Chapter 16, Arden revealed that she was hired for Adelaide's show because the girl who had done the job before her had accidentally fallen pregnant, the second occasion in the novel (after the injury of a maid at the Biltmore estate) where the misfortune of another woman gave Arden a new opportunity for success. Although Arden had found a surrogate mother in the figure of Adelaide, this did not stop her thinking about her real mother whom she decided to contact while she was on the road. This is an important plot point in the novel because the postcard which Arden sent to her mother from Chicago eventually allowed Ray to track her down in the city several years later. This echoes the earlier letter sent to her mother by another servant at the Biltmore estate: each time some contact was established between Arden and her mother, it put Arden in danger by alerting Ray to her whereabouts.

Chapter 17 explored the darker side of magic when Adelaide's mind reading trick indirectly led to a murder and a suicide. This incident raised the possibility that Adelaide, like Arden, really did have some magical powers despite the fact that the majority of her performances were just illusions. Adelaide's misfortune in this chapter paved the way for Arden to inherit the company and become a star performer in her own right, again repeating the motif of Arden benefiting from the suffering of another woman.

Chapter 18 begins to deepen the emotional connection that has been forming between Arden and Holt throughout the course of the night in Janesville in 1905. Holt's revelation that he never knew his mother demonstrates the similarities between him and Arden: although Arden's mother didn't die during childbirth, like Holt's did, she was always distant with Arden when she was growing up and the danger of alerting Ray to her whereabouts made it impossible for Arden to have a relationship with her mother during her adult years. The conversation about Holt's mother also reveals for the first time that Holt believes in magic, setting up the favor he will ask of Arden in Chapter 28. Holt's desire for this favor motivates him to remove a pair of Arden's handcuffs. Arden uses multiple techniques to escape from the several pairs of handcuffs: in this instance she uses emotional manipulation.



The return of Clyde in Chapter 19 is a major turning point in the novel in which Arden stopped being Ada Bates, and became known as Arden, the name the reader has known her by throughout the Janesville chapters.

Discussion Question 1

Is Clyde depicted as a trustworthy character?

Discussion Question 2

What role does Adelaide play in the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Why was Arden attracted to the idea of being on the stage?

Vocabulary

meager, haggled, broached, suitor, coy, leniency, manure, dusky, halfhearted, roster, odalisque, mundane, fanfare, ramshackle, elaborate, facsimile, intently, manipulate, demise, parlor



Chapters 20 - 26

Summary

Chapter 20, "Light and Heavy Chest", continued in 1900. Arden booked lots of shows for her new act before she'd ever performed because the concept of a female illusionist was sufficiently unusual to guarantee some interest in advance. Arden initially dressed in men's clothes for her performances but later decided to wear more glamorous women's attire. She performed tricks which gave women the money out of their husbands' pockets. The show was a success.

In Chapter 21, "The Suffragette's Trunk", the action moved to 1901. Arden reinvented a well-known trick called the Saratoga Trunk Mystery and renamed it the Suffragette's Trunk. The reception to her new performances was very positive. One night a man in the crowd accused Arden of being a charlatan and he attacked her. Arden fought back and was arrested for assault. Her arrest brought a lot of publicity to the show and increased their ticket sales. Arden returned to New York to have business meetings with Clyde and Clyde told her that he wanted her to forgive him for the false proposal of marriage that he had made to her when they were teenagers. Arden told him that she forgave him and they had sex.

In Chapter 22, it has half past three in the morning in Janesville in 1905. Arden has shocked Holt with her detailed description of the first time she had sex with Clyde, but Holt pretends that it hasn't had any effect on him. A knock on the door interrupts their conversation but when Holt goes to check what's happening, there's no one there. Arden asks Holt what it was like to be shot. Holt said when he first realized he had survived and was still alive he was overjoyed, but later when he realized how much the injury would change his life he started to think it might have been better if he had died.

Chapter 23, "The Iroquois Fire", took place from 1901 to 1903. Arden and Clyde became closer and fell in love. They disliked being apart from each other when Arden was on the road and made plans for Clyde to build a theater in New York one day where Arden could perform and they could be together. Clyde booked Arden to perform at the recently built Iroquois theater in Chicago and gave her tickets to watch another show there before her run began in order to get a feel for the place which was more opulent than the sort of theaters she had played in the past. On the night Arden attended the theater it was destroyed by a devastating fire that killed more than 600 people. Arden escaped the fire, but passed out. When she woke up she was surrounded by dead bodies. A man came into the room and she realized it was Ray.

Chapter 24, "Feathers without Birds", followed on immediately from the events of Chapter 23. Ray told Arden that he had been waiting for her in Chicago ever since she sent her mother a postcard from Chicago in Chapter 16. Ray began to cut Arden's thigh with his razor. Arden fought back, grabbed the razor and slit Ray's throat. She immediately regretted it and wished for him to be healed. She tried to stop the flow of



blood but she couldn't do it and so she fled the scene. Clyde came to Chicago to see if Arden was alright. She told him she needed to take some time off from the show and spend some time alone. Clyde said she could have some time off but not as much as she wanted. Arden wanted to quit performing forever and went to visit Adelaide to get some advice.

In Chapter 25 it has reached four o'clock in the morning in Janesville in 1905. Holt suggests that Arden is able to heal her mind as well as her body and that that was how she was able to recover from the trauma of what happened to her in Chicago. Holt looks at the razor which he found amongst Arden's things and asks if it is the one she used to slash Ray's throat and she replies that it is. Arden asks Holt to take off another pair of her handcuffs but Holt says he won't do it until she does him a favor. Holt asks more questions about Ray but Arden says she doesn't want to talk about him.

Chapter 26, "The Halved Man", took place in 1904. Arden created a new illusion for her show wherein she would cut a man in half. This was a novelty because although there were many male magicians who cut women in half on stage, there were no female magicians who had ever done the trick with a man. Clyde strongly disliked the idea. Clyde asked Arden to marry him but she said she needed to think about it. The Halved Man illusion was very divisive with audiences but it sold a lot of tickets and got a lot of publicity.

Analysis

Arden's creation of her own show gave her a platform to showcase her feminist ideas. Although Arden never used the word feminist to describe her actions, the author makes it clear to the reader that the intention of the new illusions which Arden created was to realign the power balance between men and women. Arden encountered a man in the audience of one of her performances who was attempting to silence his wife and ignore her desire to participate in the show in favor of his own desire to get involved. Instead of pandering to the man's wishes, Arden took it as an opportunity to teach the man a lesson by asking for the money from his wallet and performing a trick that gave the money to his wife instead.

Further to this, Arden renamed a classic magic trick, the Saratoga Trunk to the Suffragette Trunk, in honor of campaigners for voting rights for women. Part of the success of Arden's act was her fearless refusal to conform to the gender norms and stereotypes of her time, but her notoriety also opened her up to criticism and assault.

Arden was attacked by a man during one of her performances. The author echoes an earlier incident when Adelaide was accosted by a violent man in one of their audiences by having both incidents start with someone yelling the word "charlatan" during the act. This builds suspense as the reader knows that the first incident ultimately led to murder and the end of Adelaide's career, leading readers to wonder whether the moment when Arden is faced with a similar situation could be the turning point that led her to murder someone and ultimately sabotage her own success. However, the incident and Arden's



subsequent arrest turns out to be a red herring which ultimately has little importance in the narrative as a whole.

When Arden and Clyde resumed their romance in Chapter 21 it deepened the mystery of the murder that Holt investigates in the Janesville chapters: when Arden and Clyde became romantically involved again it forces the reader to consider whether Clyde might be the dead man who was found in the Halved Man trunk.

In Chapter 22 Holt reveals to Arden just how serious his injury is. This chapter demonstrates how desperate Holt has been made by the gunshot injury and the rogue bullet stuck inside his body. Holt's desperation heightens the tension during the Janesville chapters because it makes him difficult to predict. Although he doesn't show any signs of cruelty towards Arden, the desperation he feels over his situation could provoke him to do something he might not otherwise do.

Chapter 23 described the Iroquois Fire, which was a real fire that occurred in Chicago in 1903 which killed more than 600 people. The Iroquois Fire continues the association in the novel between performance and danger which began with Ray breaking Arden's leg in order to prevent her from dancing, reappeared in New York with Adelaide's dangerous Bullet Catch illusion, and continued to pervade the story throughout Arden's time on the theater circuit through incidents like the young man who was killed while trying to sneak in to visit his girlfriend on the performers' train, the man who killed himself and murdered his fiancé after attending a magic show, and the man who assaulted Arden for being a charlatan during one of her performances.

The fire also functions as a useful plot device, providing a plausible reason why Arden's attack on Ray in Chapter 24 would not have been discovered or reported to the police. By having the attack occur on an occasion when so many members of the public were killed, the author makes it seem more plausible that Arden would not be arrested for this attack. At this stage in the novel both the reader and Holt are led to believe that Arden murdered Ray after the Iroquois Fire, making it look even more likely that the murdered man in Waterloo was Clyde.

Chapter 24 raised the question of whether or not Arden was able to heal other people as well as herself: despite wishing that Ray would recover from being slashed in the throat, Arden believed that he had died. It is never explained in the novel exactly how Ray was able to survive this injury, leaving the question open as to whether or not it was Arden's healing abilities that saved him.

Clyde's opposition to the Halved Man trick continued to imply to the reader that he was the man found murdered in the theater in Waterloo. Clyde explained to Arden that the reason he didn't like the trick was because when he watched her violently sawing a man in half it made him worried that she wanted to do that to him. This serves two functions in the novel. Firstly, it extends the mystery of the murdered man in the trunk by giving the reader further reason to believe that it must be Clyde. Secondly, it helps to explain why Ray became so enraged with Arden the night she used an axe instead of the saw:



the reader assumes that Ray felt the same way as Clyde about the illusion and that he imagined that Arden's violence with the axe was directed at him.

Discussion Question 1

What made Arden's act different to the other magicians performing at the time?

Discussion Question 2

What effect did the Iroquois Fire have on Arden's attitude to life?

Discussion Question 3

How has Holt's attitude to Arden changed since he discovered her healing powers?

Vocabulary

hustle, privileged, luxurious, makeshift, prominent, Suffragette, persistent, nattering, lurching, precautions, obligations, caress, clustered, complied, underskirt, sinister, posture, absentmindedly, shackles, fatigue



Chapters 27 - 33

Summary

Chapter 27, "The Ring in Danger", took place in 1904-1905. Clyde gave Arden a ring, but Arden was not ready to discuss whether or not they would get married. One night on stage she realized she didn't have a prop coin that she needed for one of her illusions, so she improvised and used the ring instead. Afterwards, Arden told Clyde that she didn't want to marry him. She told him the timing wasn't right, but she secretly worried that he was only proposing marriage to get her money and that he was being insincere, just like the first time he proposed to her.

Arden made the Halved Man trick more shocking by adding fake blood and the show became even more successful. Adelaide wrote to congratulate her. Clyde asked Arden to stop performing the Halved Man illusion but she refused. Clyde and Arden agreed that they didn't want to be kept apart anymore so Clyde joined Arden on the road.

In Chapter 28 it has reached half past four in the morning in Janesville in 1905. Holt tells Arden that the time has come for him to ask a favor of her and Arden responds that there's no need to ask because she already knows what he wants. He wants her to heal him with her magic. Arden tells him that she can't heal other people, only herself. She's tried before on the other performers and it hasn't worked. Holt becomes enraged with Arden and pushes her chair over. He fears he's killed her but she's ok. He puts the chair back up again and undoes one more pair of handcuffs as an apology for knocking her over.

Chapter 29, "Resurrections", took place in 1905. Clyde returned to New York for a few days on business. While he was gone, Ray found Arden, revealing that Arden hadn't killed him the day of the fire as she thought she had done. Ray told Arden that he would kill Clyde if she didn't do everything he said. Ray forced Arden to break things off with Clyde so she sent Clyde a telegram accusing him of only being interested in her for her money. Arden fired her closest friends from the show so that no one would notice anything suspicious about Ray. Ray began to abuse Arden, once again testing to see whether he was capable of healing her. He controlled every aspect of her life, even doing her makeup himself before each performance. Ray told a newspaper reporter that he was Arden's husband.

In Chapter 30 it is five o'clock in the morning in Janesville in 1905. Holt realizes that the person who was identified as Arden's husband in Chapter 1 was actually Ray. He says he wouldn't blame Arden for murdering Ray, but she insists she didn't do it.

Chapter 31, "The Slave Girl's Dream", took place in 1905 in Waterloo, Iowa. Arden's only source of happiness while under Ray's control was the few hours she spent each night on stage. Instead of using the saw during the Halved Man illusion, on an impulse, Arden decided to use an axe instead. The improvisation made Ray furious and he



assaulted Arden after the show and she lost consciousness. When she woke up, she was alone in her train carriage. Arden found Ray's razor hidden in her old suitcase. She waited for Ray to return so she could kill him, but he never came back.

Chapter 32 takes place at quarter past five in Janesville in 1905. Holt asks Arden how she escaped from the railcar if Ray didn't come back and Arden replied that the car had never been locked. It was her fear that had kept her a prisoner there, not a locked door. She hadn't run before that night because she was too afraid of what Ray would do to Clyde. The telephone rings and this time Holt answers. It's his wife Iris. Holt apologizes to her for not coming home that night. While he's distracted, Arden breaks her own thumb in order to escape from the remaining pair of handcuffs. She bolts for the door and Holt chases her down the street outside. A young man appears and punches Holt, who falls to the ground. The man chases after Arden and Holt watches them go.

In Chapter 33, at half past five in Janesville in 1905, Clyde runs alongside Arden as they both continue their escape from Holt. Once they leave the town, they hide in the forest and Clyde explains that it was him who killed Ray. Clyde saw Holt arrest Arden at the restaurant in Chapter 1 and followed them to Janesville. Clyde and Arden agree to run away together and start a new life with new names.

Analysis

In Chapter 27, the author uses the engagement ring given to Arden by Clyde as a symbol of Arden's priorities in life: despite her love for Clyde, her career always came first. Arden's fear about marrying Clyde was connected to his dream to build his own theater. She was worried that her own success would be usurped by Clyde and that she would become financially dependent on him. Arden feared financial dependence on a man, and the corresponding lack of freedom, because of the romantic relationships which destroyed her mother's chance at a career as a performer when Arden was a child.

Arden's trait of valuing her career ahead of her romantic relationship was symbolized on stage when Arden used the engagement ring as part of the act when her coins went missing. Although Arden was unwilling to use the ring for its intended purpose of demonstrating to the world at large that she was engaged, she was willing to use it in the magic act in order to stop one of the illusions going off course.

Since his reappearance in Arden's life in Chapter 19, Clyde was consistently portrayed as a trustworthy character who stuck to his promise to never touch Arden despite having fallen in love with her. However, his deceptive behavior when he and Arden were teenagers comes back to haunt these later chapters and prevented Arden from trusting his second proposal of marriage, knowing as she did that his first proposal was made dishonestly.

Chapter 28 raises issues about Arden's behavior which are never truly solved within the novel's narrative. Arden tells Holt that she is unable to heal other people, only herself,



but the reader is left to question whether or not Arden is telling the truth. If she is truly unable to heal other people, how did Ray survive having his throat cut? One possible interpretation is that Arden is less interested in helping Holt and more interested in making her escape: something which would be consistent with Arden's depiction as unsentimental and ruthless in her pursuit of her own self-interest. Whatever her motivation, Arden's announcement that she cannot heal Holt provokes him to attack her and then remove another of the pairs of handcuffs in apology for his actions, leaving Arden with only one pair of cuffs left to escape. It is up to the reader to decide whether this was a deliberate ploy on Arden's part, or a convenient coincidence.

Chapter 29 is a pivotal moment in the novel as it is in this chapter that it becomes clear to the reader that the dead body found in the Halved Man equipment was Ray, not Clyde. Although this is a big revelation, the mystery remains of whether or not it was Arden who murdered him.

Arden has always feared that forming a close romantic relationship with a man could curtail her freedom and in Chapter 29 that fear came true, although not in the way she had expected. Rather than her love of Clyde causing her to abandon her dreams or lose all of her money (as had happened to her mother), her love of Clyde caused her to sacrifice her own wellbeing and freedom in order to protect Clyde from Ray. Arden was willing to sacrifice herself in order to protect the man she loved, a twist on the classic literary device of a man who sacrifices all for the woman he loves, which reflects the gender swap at the heart of the success of Arden's magic act.

In Chapter 30, despite the revelation for both the reader and for Holt that Ray is the dead body in Waterloo, Arden continues to insist that she didn't kill him, raising the stakes for the final chapters of the novel. The reader now knows that Clyde is still alive.

Chapter 31 brings the two main narrative threads of the novel - Arden's personal history and the story of Holt's interrogation - together at last. Arden's story catches up with the place that the reader joined the story in Chapter 1: the night of the murder. This builds suspense for the final chapters when the explanation of the murder will finally be revealed.

Chapter 32 reveals the "magician's lie" referenced in the title of the novel. The reader has been led to wonder, throughout the course of Holt's interrogation, whether or not the story Arden is telling can be trusted. In this chapter, the author reveals that Arden has been telling the truth. The only lie she told was that Ray had locked her in the train car. In reality, the door had always been unlocked and it was Arden's fear which had kept her from escaping. This fear is reflected in the character of Holt who, having received such traumatic news earlier in the night, is at risk of living the rest of his life in constant fear that he is about to die.

Hearing that Arden almost allowed her whole life to be derailed by her fear of Ray reaffirms for Holt what is really important in his life: his wife Iris. However, this revelation on Holt's part also finally provides Arden with the opportunity to escape when he



becomes distracted by speaking to Iris while Arden is breaking her own thumb to escape the final pair of handcuffs.

As is consistent with her forthright self-reliant character throughout the novel, Arden does not depend on the mercy of Holt or on the love of Clyde to rescue her. She rescues herself.

Discussion Question 1

Why didn't Arden agree to marry Clyde?

Discussion Question 2

How was Ray able to hide his abuse from other people in Arden's life?

Discussion Question 3

What lessons has Holt learnt during the course of the night?

Vocabulary

gesture, undergarment, volatile, downcast, mere, outlandish, proxy, insistent, elaborate, fabricated, refuge, brocade, footlights, tendril, forges, irises, fragile, outmatched, fatal, boasted



Characters

Arden aka Ada Bates

Arden is the central character/protagonist. The author introduces the protagonist as The Amazing Arden in Chapter 1 and refers to her as Arden throughout the chapters which take place over the course of one night in Janesville, Iowa, in 1905 when she is interrogated by Virgil Holt. However, in the chapters recounting Arden's life up until the night she met Holt, Arden is referred to by different names. She tells Holt that her real name is Ada Bates and the reader is not given any reason to think that this is not the truth. The past tense chapters continue to refer to Arden as Ada until Clyde helped her pick a new name whilst browsing the shelves of a library in Chapter 19. When Arden first joined Adelaide Hermann's show, Adelaide referred to her as "Vivi". Arden's changing names reflect her adaptive chameleon-like personality and her ability to create a new life for herself when things go wrong. The novel ends with Arden and Clyde deciding to start a new life together with new names.

Arden's main character trait is her self-reliance and her determination to maintain her own freedom no matter what the cost. This was caused by the fate that befell Arden's mother, a talented musician, who lost her chance to become a professional performer by running away with a man with whom she'd fallen in love. Arden's mother was financially dependent on other people to take care of her and Arden resolved never to let herself become that dependent on anyone. This was brought to a head when Arden told her mother that Ray had tried to rape her and her mother responded that she must pretend it didn't happen because they were dependent on Ray's family. After this incident, Arden became the master of her own destiny, leaving home to work at the Biltmore estate, then on to New York, and eventually creating her own highly successful magic act.

Arden's self-reliance is put to the test by both her love for Clyde and her fear of Ray. Ray's threats of violence derailed Arden's life whenever she had managed to establish herself, whether at the Biltmore estate, or once she was a successful performer in Chicago. Arden allowed her fear of Ray to keep her a prisoner after he reappeared in her life, not attempting to escape even though her door was always left unlocked. However, Arden always eventually responded to Ray by escaping him and creating a new life. The real challenge to Arden's independence is Clyde. Arden fears that their relationship will limit her freedom and this became the case in an unexpected way when Arden sacrificed her own freedom in order to save Clyde's life.

The novel ends by reinforcing Arden's self-reliance, when she rescues herself from her situation rather than depending on any of the male characters in the novel to do it for her.



Virgil Holt

Virgil Holt is a police officer in the small town of Janesville, near Waterloo, in Iowa. Holt plays the role of the antagonist in the chapters set during the night of Ray's murder in 1905. Arden must convince Holt of her innocence or come up with a way to escape from him before the morning comes otherwise she faces the prospect of being hanged for Ray's murder.

Holt's character is defined by two bits of background information revealed during the course of the night as he interrogates Arden about Ray's murder. Firstly, Holt has always been second best in everything he's done in his life, being outperformed by his best friend and rival Mose Huber, the Sheriff of Waterloo. This fact makes Holt insecure and unsure of himself, which the author demonstrates through his constant second-guessing of his actions during the interrogation and his fear that Arden will manage to outsmart him. Holt tells Arden that his wife Iris had wanted to marry Mose and settled for Holt when Mose married another woman.

The second, and most important, piece of background information the author reveals about Holt is that he was recently shot while intercepting a robbery. One of the bullets became lodged near Holt's spine and, on the day he arrested Arden, Holt was informed by a doctor that it was too dangerous to remove the bullet and that if the bullet moved it could kill him at any time. This news influences every decision that Holt makes in the novel. Initially, he believes that turning in the prime suspect in what will be an infamous murder will guarantee him job security but later in the night, after he has discovered Arden's magic healing powers, he begins to believe that Arden herself could be the key to his future happiness.

Ultimately, Holt chooses not to follow Arden and Clyde when they escape in the final chapter. Having learned from Arden's own life history the dangers of allowing fear to dictate your life, Holt chooses to focus on what's truly important to him (his wife Iris) rather than worrying about the bullet, or trying to catch Arden.

Ray

Ray is the antagonist/villain of the novel. He referred to himself as Arden's cousin, although they were not actually related. Ray was the nephew of the man with whom Arden's mother ran away when Arden was just a child. Ray believed that he had magical healing abilities because he survived a severe fever as a child whereas his siblings were all killed by the illness. When he first encountered Arden (who he called "Ada" throughout the novel) Ray came to believe that she, too, possessed magical healing powers. Although Ray was wrong about his own abilities, he was correct about Arden. Ray deliberately broke Arden's leg in order to sabotage her dance audition and prevent her from leaving the farm where they lived together. He also tortured animals, including the farm horses, and Arden believed he was responsible for the disappearance of the neighborhood dogs.



Ray tortured Arden and covered up his abuse by keeping her isolated from the people she cared about. The threat of violence from Ray was the main motivating force throughout Arden's life as she had to leave her home, and then leave the Biltmore, in order to escape from him. It wasn't until she became a professional performer that Arden discovered a new motivating force in her life.

The reader is led to believe that Ray was murdered by Arden after the Iroquois fire, but he survived and was eventually murdered by Clyde in Waterloo, Iowa, in 1905.

Clyde

Clyde is the love interest in the novel. Clyde was a gardener at the Biltmore estate in North Carolina and later became Arden's business manager and lover. He was present at every major stage of Arden's life after she decided to leave home: at the Biltmore estate, on the road to New York, and when she launched her own theater company.

The author presents Clyde in an ambiguous manner throughout the novel, never allowing the reader to know for certain whether or not he can be trusted, in order to continue the mystery of the identity of the murdered man in the Halved Man illusion.

Although it eventually becomes apparent that Clyde's love for Arden was sincere, there are multiple instances in the novel – such as his false proposal in Baltimore and his tactless insistence that she return to her grueling performance schedule after the Iroquois Fire – that give the reader reasons to suspect that Arden might have murdered Clyde.

Adelaide Hermann

Adelaide Hermann is a magician, based on a real historical figure. Adelaide plays the role of mentor and surrogate mother to Arden. Like Arden, Adelaide kept an emotional distance from those around her and was always focused on business and practicalities.

Adelaide gave her business to Arden when she decided to retire. Arden looked to Adelaide as an example. However, Arden did not follow Adelaide's footsteps without questioning them: Arden encouraged a friendlier more emotionally supportive atmosphere amongst the members of the company and discouraged romantic entanglements. Whereas Adelaide ultimately quit the profession after being accosted by an audience member who called her a charlatan, Arden responded to the same challenge with aplomb (which also got her arrested) and gained greater notoriety for her act in the process.

Sheriff Mose Huber

Mose Huber is the Sheriff of Waterloo, Iowa, the town where Ray was murdered. He plays the role of the catalyst in the novel as it is Mose who suggested that Holt attend



Arden's show that night. Had he not done this, Holt would not have recognized Arden and apprehended her. Mose has always outshone Holt throughout their lives, causing Holt to be insecure and full of self-doubt.

Iris Holt

Iris Holt is Virgil Holt's wife. Although her character doesn't appear in the novel directly (apart from a phone call), she is an important background influence on Holt, who keeps her in his thoughts throughout his interrogation of Arden. Holt tells Arden that Iris originally wanted to marry Mose Huber but that Mose wanted a compliant wife and Iris was too outspoken. When Mose married someone else, Iris married Holt as her second choice.

Arden's defining physical feature is her unusual eye - in which the iris is half brown and half blue - linking her character with Holt's wife, the namesake of her unusual appearance.

Arden's Mother

Arden's mother is unnamed in the novel, in stark contrast to Arden who goes through multiple names during the course of the narrative. Like Arden, her mother was a talented performer but, unlike Arden, never fulfilled her ambitions to become a professional performer instead choosing to throw away her opportunities in order to run away with a man, Victor, with whom she had fallen in love. This decision left Arden and her mother entirely dependent on Victor's family, meaning Arden's mother was unable to help her when one of the family (Ray) tried to rape Arden.

Arden's mother's past motivates Arden throughout the novel to never allow herself to be in a situation in which she is dependent on someone else. Arden's obsession with maintaining her own freedom threatens her relationship with Clyde.

Mr. Vanderbilt

Mr. Vanderbilt is the owner of the Biltmore estate in North Carolina where Arden went to work after running away from home. After catching Arden and Clyde together in a romantic embrace, Mr. Vanderbilt offered Arden a friendly warning that she should always make her own decisions and not allow her life to be defined by anyone else. Arden took this advice to heart and remained self-reliant for the rest of the novel, even rescuing herself from Holt's custody before Clyde had the chance to do it for her.

Jeannie

Jeannie was a costume designer for Adelaide Hermann's company. She was Arden's only friend when she first joined the company. The character serves to highlight how few

friends and emotional connections Arden had in her life. Arden's detachment from the people around her allowed Ray to more easily hide his abusive behavior.



Symbols and Symbolism

Fairy Eye

Arden's Fairy Eye, in which half of the iris is blue and the other half is brown, is symbolic of her magical powers. The author never reveals where exactly Arden gets her magic healing abilities from: Arden herself reflects that her eye could be the source of her powers or that she might have inherited the ability to heal from her father whom she never knew. The fairy eye is a symbol of power and vulnerability: Holt fears that Arden will be able to use her eye to hypnotize him into releasing her, making him feel vulnerable and Arden appear more powerful. The eye also makes Arden vulnerable by making her instantly recognizable to Ray.

Mirror

The mirror given to Arden by her mother is a symbol of Arden's love of performance. Arden's mother never managed to pursue a career as a performer and she gave up an opportunity to become a professional musician in Europe in order to run away with a man she had fallen in love with. Arden inherited the talent for performing from her mother and they both bonded over Arden's development as a dancer. Arden's mother's commitment to helping Arden improve her dancing was symbolized by the purchase of the mirror, which Arden used to practice in front of, and which she heard her mother arguing with Victor over because he said they couldn't afford it. Before Arden has a real audience to perform for later in the novel, the mirror takes the place of the audience in her childhood years giving her a taste for the pleasures of performing.

Ray's Razor

Ray's razor blade is a symbol of how dangerous his character is and also a symbol of Arden's resistance to his abuse. The reader first encountered the razor when Arden and Ray were still children living on the farm in Tennessee. Ray used the razor to cut himself along his chest, leaving a terrifying pattern of scars outlining his ribcage, and threatened to cut Arden with the razor if she told anyone about what happened. When Ray found Arden again after the Iroquois Fire, he cut her with the razor, symbolizing that she had not escaped from the harm he had done to her in the past. However on this occasion Arden fought back and slashed Ray's throat with his own razor. The razor also appears in the Janesville chapters and acts as a piece of evidence for Holt that Arden's story is true.

Halved Man Illusion

The Halved Man Illusion is a symbol for Arden's attitude to gender and the feminist politics of the novel as a whole. The trick itself – making it appear as if the magician has



sawed a person in half and moving the two halves of the trunk apart in order to prove it – was already well-known by audiences when Arden started doing it. The thing that made Arden's version stand out was that she was the first woman to perform the trick on a man: usually the illusion involved men cutting women open. This symbolizes Arden's self-reliant personality and her commitment to doing things for herself rather than allowing other people to define her life. This made the men around her uneasy. Clyde disliked the trick and asked Arden to stop doing it and Ray became so enraged by it in Waterloo that he attacked Arden with an axe.

Bullet

The bullet lodged near Virgil Holt's spinal cord is a symbol for the novel's theme of Living in Fear. The bullet causes Holt to believe that he can no longer live the kind of life he wants to live because of the fear that the bullet could kill him at any moment. The bullet effects Holt's relationship with Arden by giving her power of him due to Holt's belief that Arden will be able to heal him. Holt learns through Arden's story about what happened with Ray that choosing to live in fear is a self-made prison and that Holt must focus on the things that are good about his life (mainly his relationship with his wife Iris) rather than dwelling on his fear of death.

Engagement Ring

The engagement ring which Clyde gave to Arden is a symbol of Arden's fear of losing her freedom. Arden felt that if she married Clyde she would no longer be in control of her own destiny, something she had been passionately committed to ever since her mother threw away her own performing career in order to be with the man she loved. Arden didn't want to wear the ring on her finger because it would make Clyde think that she had accepted her proposal. Instead, she stuck it to her chest while she was performing and after she took it off it left an angry red mark, symbolizing Arden's fear that marriage will harm her. Arden used the ring during an illusion when she lost her usual prop coins, demonstrating that she prioritized her career over her romantic relationships.

Libraries

Libraries are used in the novel as a symbol of the connection between Clyde and Arden. The author presents Clyde in an ambiguous manner throughout the novel, never allowing the reader to be sure of his intentions until the end, in order to continue the mystery of the identity of the murdered man at the theater in Waterloo. Despite this, there are clues throughout the novel that Clyde and Arden are meant to be together and one example of this is their shared love of literature. Clyde introduced Arden to many new books by sneaking her into the library at the Biltmore estate and later, once they were reunited in New York, Clyde took Arden to a library to help her pick a new name from the collected works of Shakespeare.



Handcuffs

The several pairs of handcuffs that Holt uses to restrain Arden are a symbol of power and authority. Holt is physically larger and stronger than Arden but still feels the need to restrain her with multiple pairs of handcuffs because he fears her magic and suspects that she will be able to escape him. Although Holt appears to be the one in control and the person who holds all the power during his interrogation of Arden in Janesville, Arden's eventual escape from the handcuffs proves that it was her who had the power all along. Arden removed the pairs around her ankles through the use of intelligence, another pair by emotionally manipulating Holt, another pair by provoking him, and the last one through bravery and self-sacrifice by breaking her own thumb.

Scars

The scars covering Ray's body are symbolic of his disturbed mind. They serve as a warning to Arden about how dangerous Ray is when she first encountered them while Ray was cutting himself in front of her mirror. They are also a visual symbol of Ray's lack of healing abilities. Holt points out in Janesville that Arden's body has no scars, despite the many severe injuries she listed while she was telling Holt her life story. Arden's lack of scars, contrasted with Ray's heavily scarred body, are proof that Arden has magical healing abilities while Ray does not.

Forest

The forest that Arden and Clyde hide in during the final chapter is symbolic of the Forest of Arden, the main location for William Shakespeare's play "As You Like It". Clyde chose this name for Arden when they first started working together in New York. Together they decide after the events of that night in Waterloo and Janesville that they will have to start new lives and adopt new names. Doing so in a forest (like the Forest of Arden) symbolically brings to a close this chapter in Arden's life and allows her to step out of the forest as a new woman, no longer Arden.



Settings

Waterloo, Iowa

The town of Waterloo, Iowa, is the opening location in the novel and the setting for the defining event of the novel: the discovery of a murdered man in the theater after Arden's performance. The town is run by Sheriff Mose Huber, Virgil Holt's best friend and lifelong rival. Mose's status in the town is what drags Holt into Arden's life. Holt's presence at Arden's performance and his knowledge of the murder are brought about by Mose.

Janesville, Iowa

Janesville, Iowa, is Virgil Holt's hometown and the primary location in the novel. The reader discovers little about the town itself, as most of the narrative is set within the walls of the police station while Holt interviews Arden. As Clyde and Arden escape Janesville at the end of the novel, they reflect that it's a nice town, although it has become a place of danger and risk for them personally.

Jeansville, Tennessee

Jeansville, Tennessee, is the town where Arden grew up. The similarity between the names of Arden's hometown and Holt's hometown cause Holt to accuse Arden of lying. Jeansville was an unhappy setting in Arden's life. It is the place where she was trapped with Ray and felt that she had to escape from there.

The Biltmore Estate, North Carolina

The Biltmore Estate in North Carolina was a real mansion house built by the Vanderbilt family. For Arden, this setting is a place of hope: firstly when she visited there for a chance to go to dance school, and then again when she escaped from her hometown and went to work at the Biltmore estate as a maid. It is a predominantly happy place for Arden where she met Clyde and received valuable life advice for Mr. Vanderbilt. Arden was forced to leave the Biltmore estate when Ray discovered her whereabouts.

New York

Clyde and Arden decided to move to New York after leaving the Biltmore estate. New York is a place of excitement and opportunity for Arden and it is in this location that she was first able to fulfill her ambition of being a performer when she became a chorus girl on a Broadway show. This led to her introduction to Adelaide Hermann, which completely changed the course of Arden's life.



Chicago

Chicago is a site of tragedy in the novel due to the real historical event of the Iroquois Fire, which Arden was present at in the novel, and because it is the location that allowed Ray to track Arden down. After Arden sent her mother a letter from Chicago when she was on the road, Ray moved to the city and waited there for her for years in order to trap her again.



Themes and Motifs

Living in Fear

The central theme of the novel is Living in Fear. This theme is captured in the title “The Magician’s Lie” which refers to the lie Arden tells Holt during the interrogation: that Ray had locked her into the railcar and that this was why she was unable to escape from him. In reality, the door was unlocked and the only thing keeping Arden a prisoner there was fear.

The theme of Living in Fear unites the two central characters, Arden and Holt. At the opening of the novel Holt is adjusting to a new life which he feels will be defined by the bullet lodged near his spine and the constant fear of death. He then meets Arden, whose life up until this point in the novel has been defined by her fear of Ray and her fear of losing her independence. These two fears inform every decision that Arden made up until the night in Waterloo when Ray was murdered.

Arden’s fear of Ray provoked all of the major changes in Arden’s life: her decision to leave the family home in Jeansville Tennessee, her decision to leave the Biltmore estate and travel to New York with Clyde, and her decision to end her relationship with Clyde. Ray’s intimidation and abuse haunted Arden until the night of his death.

Arden’s fear of losing her freedom stemmed from her mother’s life choices. By following her heart rather than her ambition, Arden’s mother lost out on the chance to become a professional musician, giving up the chance to become a cellist with a prestigious orchestra in Europe in order to run away with the man she loved and spend the rest of her life in a farmhouse, dependent on the kindness of his family and unable to protect her daughter from harm as a result. Arden lived in fear that losing her heart to someone would involve losing her freedom and this fear caused her to build an emotional distance between herself and Clyde. Arden’s fear of intimacy caused her to turn down Clyde’s second marriage proposal. However, this did not protect her from losing her freedom as a result of falling in love which happened anyway in an unexpected manner when Arden sacrificed her own freedom by folding to Ray’s demands because of her fear of what Ray would do to Clyde.

Arden plays the role of mentor in Holt’s life by demonstrating to him what it means to live a life that is defined by fear. Through hearing Arden’s life story, Holt is able to see how Arden pushed away the man she loved by allowing her life to be defined by her fear of Ray and her fear of intimacy. At the end of the novel, rather than pursuing Clyde and Arden as they make their escape or trying to raise the alarm, Holt has come to accept that his relationship with Iris is more important than attempting to safeguard his future and he decides to let the couple go.



Gender Roles

One of the defining features of the novel is its inversion of expected Gender Roles. The heart of Arden's success as a magician is the fact that she is a woman which was enough of a novelty at the time to provide ample intrigue and publicity.

However, Arden didn't stop there when it came to addressing and subverting gendered expectations. The author uses one of the illusions in Arden's act to allude to the economic gap between men and women that kept, and continues to keep, vulnerable women dependent on men for financial security. During one of her shows, Arden asked for volunteers from the audience and noticed an over-enthusiastic man trying to silence his wife so that he could be a part of the show rather than her. Arden responded to this by doing a coin trick which took the money out of the man's pocket and redistributed it into the woman's purse, leaving a look of satisfaction on the woman's face. Another feminist slant on the magic show came in the case of the Saratoga Trunk illusion which Arden renamed the Suffragette's Trunk in honor of the political movement which campaigned for votes for women. The Suffragette's Trunk illusion also included a reversal of gender roles as it featured a man and a woman who swapped clothes during the course of the trick.

The most significant – and controversial – reversal of gender roles in Arden's show was the Halved Man illusion. Sawing a magician's assistant in half before putting the assistant back together again was a standard trick on the circuit at the time. What made Arden controversial in the novel was that she was the first woman to ever perform the trick with a man being sawed in half. The author demonstrates how uneasy society at large is with the idea of a woman doing a man's job by exploring the negative reaction that some of the public, and some of the people closest to Arden, had to the illusion. Clyde told Arden that the reason he disliked the Halved Man illusion was that when he watched her violently saw a man in half, he feared that was what Arden wanted to do to him. The trick made Clyde feel emasculated and Ray's response to Arden's use of the axe for the Halved Man routine in Waterloo implied that he felt emasculated by her physical aggression as well.

The gender roles are reversed in the novel as a whole, as well as in the magicians' illusions, through the relationship between Arden and Clyde and between Arden and Holt. Unlike many heroines throughout the history of literature, Arden is not dependent on any of the men in the story to rescue her from her tragic circumstances. Although both Holt and Clyde have the power to rescue Arden (Holt by choosing to release her, Clyde by breaking her out of the police station) Arden is ultimately responsible for her own escape, using a combination of intelligence, bravery, and emotional manipulation to release herself from the handcuffs and escape from Holt and the police station.

Illusion versus Reality

The theme of Illusion versus Reality is interwoven throughout the novel on both a narrative and a structural level.



The novel as a whole is structured as a way of exploring Illusion versus Reality. The reader is kept guessing whether or not Arden is being truthful or whether she is trying to deceive Holt throughout the story. Holt's mistrust of Arden stems largely from the fact that she is a professional manipulator, trained at diverting her audience's attention in order to convince them that something really happened when it was only an illusion. The suspicion that Arden is fooling Holt in some way is heightened by the novel's title which leads the reader to expect to discover that Arden was not being truthful when recounting her life story. Arden uses many of the tricks of her trade when planning her escape from Holt, including demonstrating how easy it is to escape from the handcuffs around her ankles.

On the surface of the story, Arden's career is based on creating illusions for the general public which are not occurring in reality. When Arden first joined Adelaide's company she devoted all of her spare time to learning about the reality of the illusions, not because she wanted to destroy the magic that they made her feel, but because she was so fascinated by them that she had to know everything there was to know about each illusion performed in the show. Arden reflected that understanding the reality behind the performance only made her more impressed by all the work that went into creating the illusions.

However, despite the focus the novel grants to explaining the intricacies of how these illusions worked, there is a further level of mystery added to the performances due to the fact that Arden, and seemingly Adelaide, had real magical abilities. Arden told Holt that she never knew for sure whether Adelaide's mind-reading trick was real or an illusion. Regardless of the truth of her abilities, her claim to be able to connect to the spirit world had real-world consequences when a man who got involved in her mind-reading trick murdered his fiancé and committed suicide as a result of the answer he was given. The question of whether or not Adelaide's trick was merely an illusion is left open for the reader, but the man involved took the answer as a reflection of reality and acted accordingly.

Ray's abuse made Arden so frightened that she lost her sense of reality, believing herself to be Ray's prisoner in the railcar when in reality she could have left at any moment. Her fear created the illusion of being trapped and her bravery and resolve to escape set her free.

Closely related to the many illusions in the novel is Ray's delusion that he had magical healing abilities. Ray's delusion made him incapable of seeing the signs that he was causing harm, not healing, the people and animals on whom he experimented. Arden also suffered from the delusion that Clyde was untrustworthy, which prevented her from seeing the reality of his commitment and sincerity.

Reliability

The theme of Reliability is important for many of the characters in the novel. The most central question of reliability in the novel comes between Holt and Arden. Holt must



decide whether or not he can trust what Arden is saying to him before he can make up his mind about whether to release her or whether to turn her over to Mose Huber in Waterloo. The title of the novel immediately calls Arden's version of events into doubt because the reader is expecting a lie told by a magician to be revealed at some point in the story. The author subverts this expectation by having it turn out that Arden was telling the truth and revealing that the only lie she told (that Ray had locked her into the railcar when, in fact, the door was left unlocked) was of emotional rather than narrative significance.

The author plants hints in the first few chapters which make both Holt and the reader question Arden's reliability. The first of these is Arden's claim that she grew up in a town called Jeansville when she and Holt are currently in a town called Janesville. Although Holt doesn't pick up on it, Arden makes another unlikely claim about somewhere she lived with a coincidentally similar name later in the novel, when she recounted that she and Clyde lived in an apartment on Jane Street in New York.

The question of Reliability was also important for Arden at earlier stages in her life. When Ray first began to abuse Arden during her childhood years on the farm in Tennessee, he told her that there was no use her telling anyone about what he'd done to her because no one would believe her. Arden (then Ada) had a reputation for being a troublemaker at school and Ray convinced her that this would have a negative effect on her reliability. When Arden finally did confess to her mother that Ray had hurt her, her mother told her that she must be mistaken, asking Arden to pretend that her story was unreliable when she knew that it was the truth.

The character most defined by the theme of Reliability is Clyde. In order to continue the mystery of the identity of the dead man found in the Halved Man stage equipment, the author plants seeds of doubt about Clyde's reliability throughout the novel. The first real sign that Clyde was perhaps not to be trusted was his fraudulent proposal to Arden. Although Clyde protested that he only did it because he thought Arden understood that he wasn't being sincere, Arden took this incident as a sign that Clyde was unreliable. Arden's doubts about Clyde's reliability surfaced again when he proposed for the second time. Arden feared that it was once again a ruse and that Clyde was only interested in her for her money which he would use to build his own theater in New York. Despite his earlier deceptions, Clyde is ultimately revealed to be a reliable character.

The Danger of Performance

The Danger of Performance is a recurring motif in the novel that appears throughout Arden's life. Ray's most serious assault on Arden during her childhood years (when he attempted to rape her and then broke her leg by throwing her from the loft of a barn) occurred in response to Arden's desire to be a professional dancer. By pursuing her goal of performing, Arden ended up in danger as a result of Ray's resentment and fear that her talents would allow her to leave Ray and the farm behind her.



The novel opened by associating performance with danger by detailing Arden's plan to commit murder right before her show in Waterloo, Iowa began. The first chapter - with its description of a dead body found underneath the stage of the theater - sets up a connection between performance and danger that continues for the rest of the novel.

When Arden first went to watch Adelaide Hermann perform, before Arden had agreed to join her company, Adelaide was performing an extremely dangerous trick known as the Bullet Catch. Adelaide later explained the illusion to Arden who reflected that it seemed to involve a lot of risk. Adelaide thought that the risk was necessary in order to set herself up as a successful performer after her husband's death: in order to get the level of publicity and notoriety she would need to launch a successful career, she had to do something dangerous in one of her performances. The danger of being part of a travelling performer was again hinted at when one of the company was killed whilst trying to sneak into another railcar to visit his girlfriend.

This sense of danger continued when Arden became a magician as well, as highlighted in the chapter when she was assaulted by a member of the audience who accused her of being a charlatan. This relates to the novel's theme of gender roles. The danger of performance reflects the danger of women being public figures and insisting on their own independence and success. Rather than being rewarded for their ingenuity, women like Adelaide and Arden who took risks and became trailblazers in their field were subjected to verbal and physical abuse as a result of their efforts. This continues to be an issue today, when women in the public eye are often subjected to abuse and threatening behavior through social media platforms.

Performance venues are also associated with danger, through the inclusion of the fire at the Iroquois theater in Chicago in 1903. The venue was unsafe leading to the deaths of members of the public as well as performers. Although Arden loved to perform, whenever she was in a performing venue there was always a sense that something dangerous was about to occur. Despite the underscoring of the dangers of performance throughout the novel, Arden thrived on applause and insisted that during the time when Ray held her captive and controlled her life, she still found joy each night by being able to go on stage and perform for her audience.



Styles

Point of View

The novel alternates between the points of view of Arden and Holt. For the most part, the “present day” chapters set in Janesville in 1905 are told from the perspective of Holt, although both the first and final chapters break this pattern. Holt’s chapters are told in the third person in the present tense with an omniscient narrator. Arden’s life story is, unsurprisingly, told from Arden’s perspective. Unlike the Janesville chapters, the life-story chapters are told in the first person past tense from Arden’s perspective.

The differences in technique between the chapters written from Arden’s perspective and those written from Holt’s perspective serve to heighten the mystery about whether or not Arden is telling the truth about her life. The use of the third person in Holt’s chapters makes his character seem automatically more trustworthy and sincere to the reader, because the author provides insight into Holt’s interior monologue, his hopes, his fears, and his anxieties. The reader doesn’t have access to any of Arden’s thoughts during these chapters. Further to this, during the chapters that are told from Arden’s perspective, the reader is always aware that this is a story being told for a particular reason to a particular audience and that Arden may have ulterior motives for the way she portrays her own story. The reader can never be sure whether the account given by Arden is trustworthy, or whether it is a performance which she is putting on for Holt in the hopes of convincing him to release her.

By opening the novel with Arden’s point of view before the fateful show in Waterloo, the author sets up the reader to believe that Arden has committed the murder when the body is discovered later in the night. This also serves to heighten the sense that Holt is being lied to as he, unlike the reader, is not aware of Arden’s decision in Chapter 1 that she was going to kill someone later that night.

Language and Meaning

The use of language in the novel is different in the chapters set in Janesville in 1905 and the chapters which recount Arden’s life story. This reflects the switch of perspective in each section of the story and the differences between the characters of Holt and Arden.

In the sections narrated by Arden, the sentences are long and flowing and packed with description (“Mother showed me how to fashion my hair into a neat, low chignon instead of a braid down my back”). The author does this to emphasize the fact that Arden is a talented storyteller. Holt is asking her to tell him her story in the manner of a police interrogation: sticking only to the facts and getting to the point as fast as possible. However, Arden ignores his wishes in favor of telling a story that is rich with detail, diversions, and emotion. She is able to do this because of her skills as a performer and



illusionist. She understands that the secret to being able to deceive an audience is being able to control and divert their attention away from the illusion, keeping them occupied with something else to think about. Arden's life story keeps Holt's attention on her life and what happened to her, rather than on her gradual escape from the numerous pairs of handcuffs.

In contrast, the language in the chapters told from Holt's perspective is terse, blunt, and to the point. ("Day in, day out, she fools people. He can't let her do that to him.") The author uses short, punchy sentences to reflect Holt's desire to get straight to the bottom of the murder rather than becoming distracted by seemingly irrelevant details about Arden's childhood and the years before she became an illusionist. This style of language emphasizes Holt's focus on the facts, which eventually gives way to a focus on emotion when he takes a phone call from his wife Iris.

Structure

The novel opens on the night of Ray's murder in Waterloo, Iowa, 1905. After Arden is arrested by Holt, the story alternates between this night in 1905 and the story of Arden's life, which began in 1892 and continued until the story told in Arden's chapters caught up with the story of Holt's interrogation of Arden in 1905.

This use of structure is employed in order to heighten the murder mystery element of the plot. Chapter 1, and Arden's commitment to killing someone that night, leads the reader to expect that she is guilty of murder when she is first arrested by Holt despite her insistence that she is innocent. As the night continues, it begins to seem more and more likely that the answer to the mystery of the murdered man found in the Halved Man illusion equipment will not be so simple.

The reader is informed in Chapter 1 that the dead man found at the theater was Arden's husband. This builds suspense in the chapters told from Arden's perspective as the reader waits to discover who her husband was. The knowledge that her husband will end up being murdered adds a sense of danger and suspense to Arden's early courtship with Clyde and also leads the reader to mistrust Clyde's character and his motivations (just as Arden, too, mistrusts him). The knowledge that whoever goes on to become Arden's husband will be someone who Arden thinks of as her "torturer" heightens the sense of danger associated with Clyde and made his reappearance in Arden's life after being hired by Adelaide as her business manager seem ominous. Once Ray made his return into Arden's life in Chicago it became more and more apparent that the murder will involve him in some way, although Clyde's fate and reliability remains a mystery until the final chapter.



Quotes

Tonight I will escape my torturer, once and for all time. Tonight, I will kill him.
-- Arden/Narration (chapter 1 paragraph Final)

Importance: Arden makes this resolution at the very start of the novel. The author uses this moment to convince the reader that Arden is the guilty party when a dead body is found later that night. The mystery of the identity of the dead body is heightened by the use of the word “torturer” where everyone else will use the word “husband”. By not identifying who exactly Arden is planning to kill, the author is able to continue the mystery of whether the dead body is Ray or Clyde until the very end of the novel.

If she's guilty, she'll be the most famous criminal in the state in years. And he'll be the one who brought her in. They won't be able to force him out then, wounded or not. He needs this to go his way. She could change everything.
-- Holt/ Narration (chapter 1 paragraph Third section, paragraph 39)

Importance: This internal reflection from Holt, after he has arrested Arden, explains the motivation of his character at the beginning of their encounter. He is not interested in justice or doing his job: he is interested in how capturing Arden might improve his own life circumstances.

There were so many other lives I wasn't leading, all because of a handful of choices, mostly made by others. I swore to myself that in future, I'd make my own choices, right or wrong.
-- Arden/Narration (chapter 6 paragraph Final)

Importance: Arden stated this when she reflected on her missed opportunity to audition for the ballet instructor. It is an early sign of the formation of one of her most prominent character traits: the desire to be in charge of her own destiny, not at the mercy of others' decisions as her mother had been.

I walked with my aching hand raised to keep it from filling with blood, a solitary young woman on a long road, one hand in the air as if she had the answer to a question.
-- Arden/Narration (chapter 7 paragraph Final)

Importance: Arden used these words to describe herself after she decided to run away from the farm in Tennessee, but the image is relevant to Arden's life as a whole in which she was largely alone and wounded, but confident in her abilities to solve her own problems, confident that “she had the answer”.

It's only after she begins her story again, her voice as smooth and warm as a pillow, that his eyes come to rest on her throat. And he notices, with some surprise, that the bruise that piqued his curiosity earlier is gone, as if it had never been there at all.
-- Narration (chapter 8 paragraph Final)



Importance: This is the moment when Holt first starts to suspect that Arden might have some real magical powers. This is an important turning point for Holt as the belief that Arden will be able to heal him will change his attitude towards her and towards the purpose of his interrogation.

And if what I felt for him was real, all the worse. I'd seen what happened when people fell in love. Love was responsible for all my mother's poor choices. Without the mistake of conceiving me, without running away with Victor and sacrificing her comfortable life, who knows what she would have been? I couldn't be so foolish.

-- Arden/Narration (chapter 12 paragraph 36)

Importance: Arden remembered how she felt when she first started to fall in love with Clyde at the Biltmore. The possibility of love frightened her because she had seen that her mother's life and freedom had been curtailed because of love. Arden's fear of intimacy continued to threaten her relationship with Clyde throughout the novel.

Adelaide Hermann, Queen of Magic, first successful performer of the bullet catch in America. Though she is not American. As I'm sure the papers will say. Which is acceptable. As long as they say something, and in large type.

-- Adelaide (chapter 15 paragraph Third section, paragraph 3)

Importance: Adelaide spoke about herself in the third person when first explaining the nature of her act to Arden when they met in New York. Adelaide's attitude to publicity influenced Arden who started doing controversial things herself (such as The Halved Man Illusion) because of the notoriety they afforded her, even though much of the publicity was negative in tone.

She taught me the tools to manipulate the audience's reality. It's amazing how you can make people think they're seeing something they're not. Especially when they want to believe. Then there's nothing easier.

-- Arden (chapter 18 paragraph 5)

Importance: Arden says this to Holt when he asks her about Adelaide. Arden subtly reveals her own tactics in the interrogation to Holt with these words. She is distracting Holt with her story, allowing him to see the things and believe the things he wants to see and believe, all the while plotting her escape. The quotation demonstrates Arden's confidence: she is so convinced that she will be able to manipulate Holt's perceptions that she even tells him how good she is at doing it.

As the Amazing Arden, I booked a dozen shows before I'd even performed my first. Part of it was Clyde's hustle and his excellent connections. But part of my appeal was inherent. A female illusionist was a true curiosity. There were no others. Men were the magicians and women the assistants, and any woman on the stage was clearly being acted upon, not acting.

-- Arden/Narration (chapter 20 paragraph 1)

Importance: Arden recounted the early years of her first solo show as an illusionist. The



main draw of her show was that she was a woman doing what was usually a man's job, This theme is repeated in the structure of the novel, as well as the story. Unlike many female characters in fiction, Arden is not a damsel in distress waiting to be rescued by a man. Just as she did a man's job on stage, she does a man's job in the novel and rescues herself.

I told you, I'll get driven out for sure. I'll lose my position, my wife, the only things that give my life meaning. I might as well have died. It'd be faster.
-- Holt (chapter 22 paragraph 48)

Importance: Holt finally confesses his fears to Arden, so that she now fully understands his position. Holt makes himself vulnerable here by revealing his fears. Arden will use this information against him later because she understands how distracting Holt finds the phone call from Iris. Arden takes advantage of Holt's vulnerability in order to make her escape. The quote also shows that Holt is allowing his life to be defined by fear, just as Arden had allowed her life to be defined by her fear of Ray.

I can't believe it's you ... I knew it was, once I saw your posters, even though the name wasn't yours. Who else could it be?
-- Ray (chapter 24 paragraph 1)

Importance: Ray said this to Arden when he found her after the Iroquois Fire. Ray was only able to find Arden because of the advertising posters for her show. This reflects the danger of women expressing themselves in public. If Arden had silenced her desires and not followed her passion, Ray would not have been able to find her, but she would also have been living a life that was defined by someone else.

No need," she says. "Rescued myself."
-- Arden (chapter 33 paragraph 25)

Importance: Arden quips to Clyde after they escape Janesville. The line epitomizes everything the reader has learned about Arden up until this point: she is self-reliant, inventive, and intelligent at the very last, never allowing her fate to be determined by anyone else, especially not by a man.