

The Man Who Loved Children Study Guide

The Man Who Loved Children by Christina Stead

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Plot Summary

The Man Who Loved Children by Christina Stead is a novel, a work of fiction. It was first published in 1940 by Australian writer Christina Stead, who is often considered to be a largely ignored writer of her time.

The story surrounds the Pollit family. Sam and Henny Pollit have been married about ten years when the novel opens. There are six children, plus Louisa, Sam's daughter by his first wife who died when Louisa was six months old.

The familial relationships are dysfunctional at best. Henny is an heiress who has no concept of how to handle money and therefore the family is living well below poverty level. There is the hope that Henny will inherit when her father dies, something that will not occur. In fact, Henny will be penniless.

Henny and Sam loathe one another, a fact that becomes more evident and powerful as the book goes on. Henny has loathing for Sam and the way he refuses to address reality. Henny says that Sam has his head in the clouds and actually has suspicions that Sam is somewhat mad. Henny does not see reality as it truly is, either. Henny has a strong victim mentality and rarely takes responsibility for her own actions. Henny wants to be spoiled and taken care of by Sam, which clearly is not going to happen. Henny talks about being downtrodden and deeply affected by the grim reality of life with no options to change it. Sam refers to Henny as the devil incarnate and asks God why he had to marry a woman who hates him so much. Sam does not seem to grieve when Henny dies.

The relationships between the children seem to be rather typical. There is a hierarchy with Louisa being at the top, followed closely by Ernie, down to the newborn Samuel-Charles. The relationship between Louisa and Henny is not so typical. Since Louisa is not Henny's biological child, Henny does not claim Louisa as her own although Louisa's real mother died. Henny and Sam both treat Louisa as a slave at times. Louisa is given inferior clothes, is often beaten by Henny, and treated inappropriately by Sam. Sam often looks to eleven-year-old Louisa to solve his problems and act as a confidant rather than a child.

The book itself follows the every day life of the Pollits over a period of several years. The book starts out in 1936 in Washington, DC. The author does not keep track of time although it can be discerned that the story lasts for several years. Throughout that time the children grow while Sam feeds his massive ego and Henny becomes more bitter and hateful by the day. Henny calls the children beasts and Sam does little more than to entertain the children with obscure scientific and socio-political ideas as well as singing and talking in utter gibberish.

Very little is resolved by the end of the book, save for Henny's death by Louisa's hand. Throughout her adolescence Louisa has become so scarred that her only hope is to run away and try to start her life anew.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Chapter 1, Part 1: Henny Comes Home

The reader is introduced to the Pollit family. Henny comes home from a day out shopping. The children are playing, being chaperoned by 11 ½ year-old Louisa, also known as Louie. The children play outside Tohoga House, the family home.

Sam Pollit is out on an expedition. Sam is a naturalist with a great fondness for lizards, salamanders and the like. Since Henny has been in town, Louie takes charge of her younger half-siblings. When Henny and Sam are around, Louie is strict and rigid with the children. When the parents are away, Louie is a fun and benevolent caretaker.

When Henny comes home, the children flock around her wanting to know what is in the package. Henny has spent \$2.34 - what did she buy? The children are relentless. Louie is sent off to make tea for Henny.

Henny thinks about her special place - the place where she is left to her own devices and where no one will bother her. It is a simple stool in the corner but when the children see her sitting there, they know not to bother her. Louie tries to keep the children away from Henny when she is in this place. Henny thinks about her life and how things must be "just so" or else Henny is not happy. Henny feels married to her house and wants it to be treated in a specific way.

Henny thinks about the personalities in the family. The Pollit children are hyper; Henny is not.

"She was not nervous and lively like the Pollits, her husband's family, who, she said, 'always behaved like chickens with their heads cut off,' but would sit there still, so gracefully languid, except to run her fingers over the tablecloth, tracing the design in the damask, or to alter her pose and lean her face on her hand and stare in to the distance, a commonplace habit which looked very theatrical in Henny, because of her large, bright eyeballs, and thin high curved black eyebrows." (Chap. 1, p. 6)

The author describes the house and daily activities.

Henny sits with a letter that she has received from her brother, Norman Collyer. Henny had asked Norman to borrow money. The letter included Norman's refusal as well as some advice which Norman knows Henny will never take. Norman tells Henny that she needs to learn how to live on the money that Sam makes and that it is important not to borrow money or run up accounts. Norman tells Henny that she must learn how to get out of her own messes and that her trouble is that she has never had to pay for her mistakes.



Henny seems to continuously yell at the children for one thing or another. Even Ernie, her favorite, does not receive much special treatment.

Chapter 1, Part 2: Sam Comes Home

It is late and Sam is walking home. Sam meant to be at home by sunset as he had promised the children. Sam never breaks promises to the children. Sam thinks about his day with the naturalists. Today Sam is the hero of the department and his fellow naturalists because he received the appointment to the Anthropological Mission to the Pacific. This would mean extra traveling expenses and a step forward in his quest for fame.

Sam thinks of many things as he walks through Georgetown including his deceased mother. Sam is in very good spirits and laments the fact that when he gets home the children will be asleep.

"A pity to come home to a sleeping house, and what's not asleep is the devil incarnate; but we are a cheerful bunch, the Pollits are a cheerful bunch." (Chap. 2, p. 18)

Sam also thinks about his relationship with Henny before they married. Sam was a widower with a one-year-old daughter. That had been 10 years ago.

Sam comes closer to the house and sees that the lights are on. Louie sits reading a book and the house is so quiet that it seems Louie is alone. Henny yells at Louie for reading and calls her a sullen beast.

Sam expresses his love for nature and fellow human beings and enjoys a night filled with peace and love.

"Mother Earth," whispered Sam, "I love you, I love men and women, I love little children in all innocent things, I love, I feel I am love itself - how can I pick out a woman who would hate me so much!" (Chap., 2 p. 21)

Sam goes into the house to find Louie reading. Sam stops to talk to his eldest daughter and tells her the good news about his appointment. Louie says nothing.

Sam's thoughts turn to his new secretary, Madeline Vines, and how lucky he is to have her.

Chapter 1, Part 3: Sunday a Funday

The author describes what Henrietta was like when she was sitting in her chair especially when one or more of the children would disturb her. And he thinks about the house and how she had never lived in an apartment. Henny is an old-fashioned woman and feels that while she is a prisoner in her house it is a possession.

"Henny, in the crowded perspectives of Louie's childish memory, had once been a beautiful, dark, thin young lady in a ruffled silk dressing down, mother of a very large red



infant in ruffled bassinet, receiving in state a company of very beautiful young ladies, all in their best dresses." Chap. 1 p. 34

While Sam tries to teach everything he knows to the children it appears that Henny teaches them nothing at all. Instead Henny thinks about the stories she shares with her sister-in-law Bonnie and her old friend Miss Spearing. Sam is full of fancy and magic; Henny is filled with grim reality.

Chapter 2, Part 1: In the Morning by the Bright Light

This section begins with a typical morning at the Pollit house, with everyone talking at once in a confused crowd, tripping over each other waiting for food. Sam and Henny are not speaking to each other, as usual. Today there is a new conflict, that of Sam's trip to Greenland.

Chapter 2, Part 2: Monoman and the Misfits

Sam takes the children into town and spends time talking to a man named "Whitey." They sit on a bench and talk about creating one's own community. Sam says he would like to have ten acres so that each child could grow and harvest food for the family from milk to grain to vegetables. Evie objects that there is not enough food to eat.

"I wish I had a hundred sons and daughters," Sam rejoined with equal excitement. "Then I wouldn't have a stroke of work to do, you see. All you kids could work for me." (Chap. 2, part 2, p. 48)

Sam talks about creating a world without misfits and degenerates in which he would be referred to as "Monoman."

Chapter 2, Part 3: What Should be Man's Morning Work?

The family is given chores and each sets about doing them. Henny is making tarts, Bonnie peels potatoes, Sam works outside and each child must feed animals, make beds or whatever else they are told to do.

There are a lot of arguments. For the first time, Louisa loses her temper in front of her little sister and immediately regrets it. Louisa vows never to show anger again.

As usual, money is discussed. Louisa is ridiculed when she asks for a new dress.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The reader meets the Pollit family: Henny, Sam and their six children, including Louisa (Louie), Sam's daughter by his first wife. Henny is not a loving mother by any means. She is abrupt, rude, and treats Louie like a slave. Henny sees herself as once being a beautiful vibrant young woman who has been weighed down by the world and all its grim reality. Henny blames others for her circumstances, particularly Sam.



Sam Pollit is a happy-go-lucky man who is in love with the world. He adores his work and his children. Sam's only lament is that he is married to a woman who is mean and loveless. It is clear, even to the idealistic Sam, that the marriage is over except in name only, but that the Pollits are the type to stay together for the sake of the children although the children will not benefit. The person served least by the ongoing relationship is Louie. The other children, save for Ernest, are too young to understand. Ernest, age ten, is beginning to see what Louisa sees. At age 11 1/2, Louisa is a smart girl with survival instincts and although damaged by her parents' marriage, seems as if she will be a survivor.

Henny constantly harps on the children and Sam for their behavior. In Henny's mind, Sam constantly has his head in the clouds and therefore has no grasp on reality and what she goes through on a daily basis.

Sam is elated to be chosen for his new assignment. Louie's reaction sums up things to come - that the household may fall apart without Sam's love and compassion.

The house seems to be embroiled in more chaos than usual and Henny becomes enraged when something is dropped on the floor or when Bonnie ruins a blouse. Louisa tries once again to fit in but cannot. The smaller children are oblivious to the tension.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

Chapter 3, Part 3: Henny Downtown.

Henny goes into the heart of Washington, DC, what she refers to as "downtown." Henny likes it when there are lots of people on the streets so that she can blend in, hide the tattered and dirty dress; hide the fact that she is poor.

Henny laments that she has no friends and yet she is meeting an old friend - Bert Anderson, a man she has known for years. The relationship between Bert and Henny is mysterious and strange. There seems to be no physical or romantic attraction. Instead, Henny uses Bert as a sounding board. Bert's character is light and pleasing which cheers Henny.

Henny complains about Sam's great ego, having no money, and her relationship with Louisa. In Henny's mind, Louisa is a brat and a monster. Henny feels that she was tricked when she married Sam. Now Henny says she would like to kill Sam but she would be burdened with his brats if anything should happen.

Bert tells Henny that she needs to stop dwelling on the negative things and learn to enjoy what she has. Bert also suggests that Henny may be mismanaging the household funds, which seems to be the crux of the problem. In the end, the pair decides to go to a movie. Henny plans to ask Bert for \$5.00.

Chapter 4, Part 1: Scandal in Pollitry

Sam's older sister, Josephine Pollit, comes to call on the family. The children are thrilled to see Aunt Jo. Sam is up on the roof working when Jo arrives. Sam refuses to come down unless Jo has brought him some chocolate. Sam begs and cajoles like a child for the chocolate.

Josephine Pollit is 45-48 years old (no one is sure). She is tall and has blonde hair with blue eyes. Jo is a school teacher, unmarried, and acts as the matriarch of the Pollit family, which includes Sam and Bonnie.

Jo insists that she must talk to Sam. After a while, Sam comes down from the roof to get his chocolate. Jo tells Sam about Bonnie's affair with a married man and insists on speaking with her immediately. They cannot allow Bonnie to indulge in such illicit and immoral behavior. Jo goes and talks to Bonnie. Bonnie carries on, screaming and crying but Jo has spoken and the affair must end. Just minutes after Jo leaves, Bonnie is fine again as if the affair wasn't all that important in the first place.



Sam and Jo talk about her finances, retirement, taxes and other related issues. Sam takes the opportunity once again to tell the children that they should never beg nor ask for material things.

Ernie thinks about starting his own business.

Jo plays with the children. Eventually Henny comes home from her trip downtown. Jo sits and talks with Henny for an hour. When Jo leaves, Henny complains bitterly about her, which surprises the children.

Henny and Sam have an argument about the expedition. Henny says she must have Hazel Moore as a servant or else there is no way that she can manage the house and the children while Sam is away. There is an argument over the presence of Bonnie as well as the capabilities of Hazel. Henny insists she have Hazel at the house or she will leave Sam.

The couple talks about extramarital affairs. Sam swears he has been faithful since the last incident.

Chapter 4, Part 2: The Meridian of Murder.

Louie and Sam go for a walk. Sam regales Louie of tales about Henny and the trials and tribulations of their marriage. Sam says that he knew from the start he and Henny should not be together but there was a sense of honor that he could not break. Sam also speaks of fate.

Louie tells Sam about one of the times that Henny tried to choke her. Sam says Henny is not strong and Louie should be able to protect herself from her step-mother.

Louie mentions the Polynesians and how it is acceptable for a person to murder a woman for money. It is an accepted act. Sam says that while this is true, there is a meridian for murder and that it is not an acceptable act in the US.

Chapter 4, part 3: Conversation

Henny tosses and turns in bed, thinking about how she will cope while Sam is gone.

"'He lives,' said Henny to herself in her bed, 'in a golden cloud floating about over a lot of back alleys he never sees; and I'm a citizen of those back alleys, like a lot of other sick sheep. I'd like to pull the wool off his eyes, but I don't dare.'" (Chap. 4, part 3, p. 137)

Henny spends the majority of the night worrying about what she will do regarding money, convinced that there will not be enough. Sam and Henny finally have a conversation. Sam says that the remuneration will be good and he hopes that Henny can act as his lieutenant while he is gone, running the house in an efficient manner and without waste. Sam says he is worried because Henny's father is not well and the old



man is paying great sums of money to her brothers, which is wasted. Sam refers to it as pouring money into quicksand. Getting a different house is suggested.

The conversation turns to an affair Henny had when Sam was on a trip. They argue. Sam says he knows that Henny has worked hard all these years to break up his home and he will not be separated from his children.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

This section provides more focus on Louie. The visit to the Kydds' house is telling. Although Mrs. Kydd is an abuse victim who lives in squalor with no food to eat, Louie feels more connected to the woman than she does the members of her family, save for Sam. Louie is repulsed by the smell of the house and the condition in which Mrs. Kydd keeps it. Still Louie hopes for some kind of treat from Mrs. Kydd.

The killing of the cat is quite disturbing as it seems to have little or no affect on Louie and the killing seems to have little purpose.

Louie is equally embarrassed and pleased by the praise she receives from Mrs. Kydd.

The scene in the orchard between Sam and the children is bizarre. Sam talks about himself and his ideas at great lengths. The quotes he constantly uses are often cryptic and inappropriate for small children since they cannot possibly understand. Sam feeds the children intellectually, effective or not, but the children do not receive an equal amount of nurturing although what nurturing they do receive comes from Sam.

Henny escapes into downtown to get away from the drudgery of her life. The children are left in the care of Bonnie and Louie. Henny likes being among the people, although it is difficult to blend into the crowd on a Sunday because there are fewer people on the streets. Henny hides out in a bar to wait for Bert.

Henny's relationship with Bert seems to defy explanation at this point. They are old friends but the nature of their friendship is not clear. There are some indications that Bert helps to support Henny in small ways and there is some secret element to their meetings. Although Bert seems to be gay and not interested in Henny in a sexual way, there are undertones of an intimate relationship.

The appearance of Josephine Pollit shows the reader the type of relationship that exists between the siblings - Jo, Sam and Bonnie. As usual, Sam behaves like a spoiled toddler, refusing to come down off the roof unless Jo sends chocolate. When Sam does come down, he seems to shift into a more adult mode wherein he speaks to Jo about finances, taxes, and retirement.

Jo is a headstrong woman and seems to bear the majority of the morality of the family. Jo is embarrassed and angry over Bonnie's affair with a married man, claiming that the relationship will mar the family name. Bonnie screams and carries on as if she will lose a limb if she is forced to give up the affair. Bonnie claims she needs a life and a family of



her own. Shortly after Jo settles the matter and ends the affair, Bonnie acts as if nothing has happened and returns to her life, sans married lover.

Money continues to be the main issue in the family. Henny is genuinely worried that there will not be enough money to support the family while Sam is gone. Sam talks to Henny about being responsible and not running off while he is in Greenland. This theme continues throughout the balance of the chapter.

Sam does not seem surprised or the least bit alarmed when Louie talks about Henny trying to choke her. It is not that Sam is cold; it is just that he does not see it as a problem and that Louie should be able to deal with the situation. Louie should be able to defend herself. For the first time, Louie talks about murdering Henny.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Chapter 5, Part 1: No More Forsaken.

On the first week of summer vacation, Louie travels to the country to stay with her mother's sister, Beulah. When Louie's mother, Rachel, lay dying, Louie was only six months old. Rachel asked Beulah to take care of Louie. Rachel said that Sam was a good man but he knew nothing about children. Over the years Beulah tried to take care of Louie as best she could, which seemed to turn into an annual summer vacation but little else.

The author describes in detail the Baken house and business located in Harper's Ferry along the Shenandoah. The Bakens own a store and spend a good part of the time butchering and cleaning chickens. Louie feels at home with the Bakens since they are happy to have her, unlike Henny. Louie is particularly glad when her cousins come home from military service. The brothers are kind to Louie and teach her all kinds of interesting things from how to plant trees to tying various types of knots.

Chapter 5, part 2: Monocacy

Monocacy is Henny's family home. The Pollit family arrives to see a property in dire need of care from the gardens and beyond. The housekeeper, Hazel Moore, had gone to stay with Henny after Sam left on the expedition.

Henny finds her mother in the house. Henny's mother, Old Ellen, is doing needlework. The children say hello to Old Ellen, who refuses to be called "Grandma". Henny and Old Ellen talk while the children run off and play. The children have the run of the house save for closed off bedrooms and the billiard room. Henny and Old Ellen discuss matters of the day, how some women poison themselves, and family issues.

While Henny and Old Ellen are upstairs, Louie is downstairs talking to Nellie, a young maid. Nellie teaches Louie a few words of fractured French. The conversation turns to Louie's relationship with Henny. Nellie is cruel and says that Louie is a bastard because her mother is dead. Henny does not treat Louie as her child and in fact hates her. Nellie says that Louie is nothing but a thief. Louie thinks about the time she took candy from a store but was allowed by the shopkeeper as well as the time she picked flowers from someone's yard to give to a neighbor. Nellie tells Louie that she will not be going to high school that she is going to be sent to reform school because that is where all orphans go.

Chapter 5, Part 3: Does Fate Avenge Louie?

Henny, Hassie and Old Ellen spend the afternoon talking about all kinds of unpleasant subjects from people with cancer and blood clots to deaths and the woman that let her



baby fall off a table while she went to answer the door. Louie and Evie are permitted to stay for part of the time. Henny's brother, Barry, is also a major topic of conversation. Barry seems to be "romantic" and wild, one who is irresponsible yet charming enough to get away with it.

The reader is also introduced to Archie Lessinum, Old Ellen's son in law. Like Sam, Archie had been handpicked for his daughter by Old David Collyer. Collyer was fond of choosing appropriate men and then turning them into successful people to ensure good futures for his daughters.

At the end of the day, Nellie is sent packing and Hassie must return home. Someone has to stay with Old Ellen. Henny and/or Louie must stay to take care of the old woman until Barry returns or someone else arrives to take over the job.

Chapter 5, Part 4: Shoes.

It is time to buy new shoes for the children. Henny despises the task. Hassie will go along to help contain the brood. Henny does not want to take the children downtown - specifically Louie - whom she constantly insults every way imaginable. Henny is also upset that Hazel Moore has announced her marriage to Mr. Gray. Henny asks why Hazel has finally decided to get married after all these years. Hazel says Mr. Gray will take care of her and give her everything she needs. Henny is upset and tells Hazel that she cannot leave while Sam is away.

Chapter 6, Part 1: Letters to Malaya.

It is March and the night is cold. Henny and the children sit in her bedroom. Henny is darning, often pricking her fingers with a needle. The children are writing letters to Sam in Malaya. Henny bickers at the children who don't write enough or quickly enough. They must write about interesting things. Henny refuses to write because Sam criticizes her spelling.

Everyone goes down to the kitchen where Hazel Moore is working. Hazel dotes on a couple of the children, Ernie and Evie. Henny complains the entire time. Hazel thinks about the arguments she has been having with Henny lately, all of which concern money.

At the end of the night, Louisa gives Henny a letter from Sam. The letter contains \$500.00.

Chapter 6, Part 2: Sam in Malaya

The night is hot and foul. Sam and his Indian clerk, Naden, walk through the busy filthy streets. Sam's secretary Madrasi struggles to keep up to the men. Sam and Naden talk about the conditions of the people in the area, the hole in the wall shops, sidewalk vendors, the people dragging mattresses out onto the street to try and avoid some of the heat of the night. Sam comments on how the employed fare little better than the unemployed.



Sam reminds Naden that they are equals and that Naden should not call him 'tuan,' a word of respect and subservience.

Naden takes Sam to see his wife and newborn son. Naden thanks Sam for honoring their home with his presence, saying that they are unworthy of his presence. Sam seems to grow tired of trying to change Naden's thinking.

The men discuss everything from the arrests that take place in the streets to the concept of having many children but only one wife. Sam says he would adopt nearly the entire orphanage if he could, having a baby of each color.

The reader is introduced to Wan Hoe, another native assigned to Sam to work as a secretary.

Sam and Colonel Willard Willets argue. There is a trip scheduled to visit a British scientist. The Colonel is upset that he will be expected to pay for the trip, which is expensive. Sam agrees to pay for his portion although he cannot afford it.

The arguments between Sam and Colonel Willets do not end there. Sam had been contacted by the Smithsonian to send photographs. Colonel Willets had refused, wanting to keep the photos for his own use. The Smithsonian had mistaken Sam as being the head of the expedition, a falsehood that infuriates Willets.

This section contains many letters to Sam from the children, each with the same "un-news," from stories about Henny's cold to the snakes. Sam often feels a little bit homesick, more so for the children than Henny. The heat and never ending wetness of Singapore makes Sam long for Georgetown even more.

Sam learns that Wan Hoe has fled Singapore. Against Sam's warnings, Wan Hoe had borrowed money from the moneylenders and could not repay so he ran. Later Sam receives a small, carved wooden box containing six silver teacups as a sign that Wan Hoe is safe.

Sam also receives a letter from the Hangkow University. The letter offers Sam a position as an assistant professor of ichthyology. Sam, while flattered, knows he can not accept the post and tenders a letter of polite refusal.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

Louie seems to find a place of her own with her Aunt Beulah and Uncle John. Uncle John is somewhat of an odd character but Beulah, honoring her sister's wish to take care of Louie, seems to have genuine love or at least fond interest in her niece. Everyone at the house seems happy to see Louie and enjoys her intelligence and curiosity. Even Beulah and John's grown sons take delight in spending time with Louie, teaching her all kinds of interesting things. For Louie the time is too short.



The scenes at Monocacy are extremely negative. The relationship between Henny, Hassie and Old Ellen are typical mother-daughter relationships but their gossip and "news" is vicious, as if they wish bad things on others so that their lives will seem superior by comparison.

Barry is painted as a spoiled child and a rogue with some big issues, yet people seem to excuse him for his actions.

Nellie is terrible with Louie. It shows that Louie gets no respect from anyone, except perhaps Sam, to a degree. Nellie is downright mean to Louie, saying that she is a bastard and a "norphan," and that she will be sent to reform school because everyone hates her and that is what they do with norphans. Nellie claims to know all of these things because she is a norphan, too. Of course, Nellie's musings are incorrect and to a point Louie knows it but the words confirm the treatment Louie receives from Henny and others.

Stead describes Sam's experiences in Malaya and gives the reader a good sense of the atmosphere in Singapore from the poverty to the filth and corruption. As an American, Sam is revered by Naden and others although Sam objects. The concept of equality does not exist in Singapore. Sam thinks about becoming middle aged and what he might like to do. Sam thinks about other women.

Sam longs to see the children including the new baby, which is vaguely alluded to in this section. Turning down the professorship at Hangkow University makes Sam slightly sad but there is no way he could stand living in the climate and exposing his children to the lifestyle in Malaya.



Chapter 7-8

Chapter 7-8 Summary

Chapter 7, part 1: Family Corroboree.

Jo arrives at Tohoga House. There is a great deal of excitement in the air. Sam is home after 8 long months in Malay and the children are ecstatic. Friends, family and neighbors are present, celebrating with food and drink. Jo is overwhelmed with emotions. Sam tells Jo to calm down, that everything is fine. Sam is not the only brother to have ever gone away from home and, besides, he is back at Tohoga House now and everything is fine. Jo speaks with Sam about how he has changed since he went to Malay. Sam is more restrained, less exuberant. His manner is a bit harsher than it ever was and Jo is not sure what to make of it. Sam teases Jo about her complaints.

Sam learns that Jo has written a poem that has been published in the Baltimore Sun. Jo tries to be modest about her accomplishment. Sam singles out Louie and says that all of the Pollits have great intelligence and talent. Sam challenges Louie to write poetry. Louie is not pleased.

Sam spends time with his parents and the people in the house, regaling them with stories. The children are eager for Sam to open the crates he has brought back from Malay.

Sam notices that Bonnie has been sharing a cup of wine that she has brought into the house. Sam strongly disapproves of any type of liquor or spirits because they cloud the mind and get people into trouble. Sam protests. Bonnie and others say that Sam should make an exception because it is a celebration. Sam becomes angry and says he is being disrespected at his own table.

Later, Sam goes out into the orchard with some of the guests. A telegram is delivered from Archie Lessinum. David Collyer is dead.

Chapter 7, Part 2: Brought to Light.

Sam decides not to tell Henny about her father until after the party. Henny is up in her bedroom, resting and ready to go into labor.

Sam opens the seven crates he has brought from Malay. There are treasures great and small for everyone present in the house, although Sam notices that some of the people seem disappointed with their small, token gifts. There are vases of all sizes, silks, pajamas, and almost anything that represents Chinese art.

That night, Henny goes into hard labor. The children are excited but are finally put to bed. Sam is delirious with joy over his newest child to come into the world.



"Sanguine and sun-haired Sam Pollit, waiting for the birth of the seventh child, had not slept all night." (Chap. 7 p. 285)

Chapter 7, Part 3: Morning Rise.

Henny gives birth to a baby boy. The child is named Charles-Franklin after Sam's father and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Sam is upset that Henny has hired a nurse. Sam believes that Louie should have been put in charge of taking care of the new baby. Bonnie argues that Louie is too young to be given such a job. Sam argues that it is the best way to train a young girl who will soon be old enough to marry and have children of her own. Since Louie is not yet 12, Bonnie disagrees.

Sam continues to regale the family with stories from Malay. Everyone and everything in the house must be given a new name, taken from the Malay culture.

At the end of the part, the family begins to prepare for David Collyer's funeral.

Chapter 7, Part 4. The Wheel Turns.

Sam attends the reading of David Collyer's will. It is worse than any of them have thought. Henny's father, heir to a great fortune, was not only completely broke, but in debt so deep that all of the property save for the cottage would have to be sold to pay off the debts. Sam is furious. He had known that David had been spoiling his children too much and now there is nothing left. Not even Tohoga House is safe from the auction block, which infuriates Sam because it was supposed to be willed to Henny. Now Henny is left with nothing at all.

Sam goes home to tell Henny the news. Henny, still in bed recovering from the birth, is stunned and wants no part in finding a new place to live. Henny still trusts in Sam's abilities to handle matters. Henny worries how she will manage in the summer without Louie or Hazel. Henny is determined, however, to send Louie to Harper's Ferry as usual.

Colonel Willets continues to develop a strong dislike for Sam. Now that David Collyer is dead and there is no estate, Willets sees an opportunity to discredit Sam and have him removed from his post. It is not that Sam has done anything wrong, Willets simply does not like him. Every time Willets criticizes or is rude to Sam, Sam replies in his usual pleasant way, which angers Willets more.

Sam tells his woes to his old friend Saul Pilgrim. Saul tells Sam to be careful, that he could lose everything including his pension.

Chapter 8, Part 1: Tohoga to Spa.

Sam takes the kids to Baltimore to look for a house. Henny hates the thought of living in Baltimore but the only other option is Virginia since it is too expensive for the family to stay in Georgetown. The kids are excited overall because this seems like a new adventure.



Sam tells the children all about the Chesapeake Bay area. The Pollits locate a place named Spa House. The house is in a poorer neighborhood and is in need of repair. Sam sees it as a challenge. Henny will most certainly see it otherwise.

Chapter 8, part 2: Sam Suspended.

Sam is suspended in mid-summer. Henny says she may as well drown herself. Sam does not seem to understand the gravity of the situation. While Henny frets, Sam proclaims that it is a beautiful summer and that the truth may spring from the earth and that his case will succeed.

Henny feels that her friends and family have deserted her. She refuses to go out and mingle with the neighbors because they are wretched and poor - no match for an heiress, even one without money. Ernie has some leads to get work and make some extra money but Henny will not hear of it.

Louie is anxious to go to Annapolis High School. Louie is given hand-me-downs and feels embarrassed by their shabbiness. Louie's opinion changes once she enters the school.

"She felt pretty wretched till she got to the school when she saw before her a flock of girls, half of them looking like a litter of puppies tied inside a sack, tumbling and rolling; and adding herself quietly to the homely and ill-dressed section and subtraction herself, without even a twinge, from the pretty and smart section, she began to bounce about in her new sphere with stolid self-confidence." (Chap. 8, part 2, pp, 335-336)

Chapter 8, Part 3: Miss Aiden

Louisa's class is monitored by three teachers, including Miss Aiden. Miss Aiden is a stern woman who does not tolerate shenanigans. Louie does not become Miss Aiden's pet but doews become the woman's foremost flatterer. Something happens to Louie during her first days in high school. All of Louie's past failures and foibles of elementary and middle school seem to fade and Louie immediately shows a great aptitude. Louie also makes friends easier than ever before, popularity latching onto her from the beginning. Louie makes many new friends and has others who want to be her friend or at least be seen with her. One of those girls is named Clare.

Louie begins to use her class time to write elaborate stories. When caught with one of the stories, Louie fears being punished but nothing happens.

Chapter 8, Part 4: Clare

Clare is an extremely poor girl who goes to Louie's school. Clare draws attention from her situation by flaunting it and making people laugh. Clare is always filled with laughter and horseplay. Louie and Clare seem to hit it off, both with bright personalities and wit. The teachers seem to take pity on Clare, even when she accidentally hits one of the teachers in the face with a shoe that she had flung on top of the school roof. The



teachers notice when Clare sells her coat or comes to school with one muddy ruined shoe. Miss Harney offers to get a new pair of shoes for Clare but Clare refuses.

At first Clare would not go home with Louie or invite her to her house. Clare says that they can see each other at school. Eventually Clare relents and spends time out in the town with Louie and Sam.

Sam is his usual charming self, filled with jokes and asking Clare's help in talking sense into Louie about one thing or another. Sam also talks to Clare about troubles at home which horrifies Louie. After Clare leaves, Louie tells Sam that when she approaches Spa House she begins to tremble and that she never tells anyone anything about her home life because it is too terrible.

Chapter 8, Part 5: What Will Shut You Up?

The children are all gathered around Sam, alternating between talking at once and listening to Sam tell stories about Louie when she was little. Sam has a new nickname for Louie - "Bluebeak" - but also refers to her by "Ducky," a name he called her when she was a baby.

At one point during the conversation, Ernie says that Sam has no idea what Louie has written in her diary. Louie's stomach is tied up in knots from anxiety. Ernie runs and gets the notebook and attempts to decipher the code in which the entries are written. By the fifth entry, Louie has given up on her complicated code and simply begins to make entries in French. Sam wants to know what is written in the diary and Louie begins to explain. Sam is puzzled by Louie's commitment to misery. Sam says that Louie does not know misery but Louie disagrees, saying that the house is filled with nothing but misery.

Later that night, Louie sits at the table writing while Sam talks. When Sam finally sees what Louie has written, he is extremely hurt since the prose repeatedly asks what it will take to make Sam shut up. Louie talks about leaving the house and going to Harper's Ferry. Sam says it is not proper for a young girl to leave her father's house before she takes a husband. Louie argues. Finally Sam says that if Louie goes, he will have no choice but to blame Henny. Since Louie does not want that, the subject is closed.

Chapter 7-8 Analysis

Once again, all of the activity at Tohoga House surrounds Sam. Sam has just returned from Malay and the family is having a corroboree or celebratory festival in his honor. Sam tries to act at least partially modest although everyone present knows that it is an act.

Jo seems overly emotional at Sam's return and Sam tries to brush it off. Jo acts as if Sam is the prodigal son and that offering him chocolates and other things will keep him from going away again.



There is a great deal of chaos at the house. Sam does not seem content unless all of the attention is focused on him. This can be seen in the way he berates Bonnie for bringing wine into the house. While Bonnie does disrespect Sam and his wishes regarding alcohol, Sam blows it out of proportion until the mood is ruined. Being Sam, however, he manages to bring things back to life with the crates filled with gifts. Sam's generous nature also shows when he feels bad that some of the family and friends feel slighted about their small token gifts.

Sam seems somewhat upset when he receives the telegram from Archie Lessinum saying that David Collyer is dead. It was expected, of course, and Sam decides to wait to tell Henny until after the party, even though she is in her room and not attending the party anyway. It seems like a logical thing to do, except that Sam does not tell Henny right away. Telling Henny that her father is dead barely receives a mention in the book which is odd considering the huge impact that the event has, not only on an emotional level but on a financial one as well.

The arrival of the new baby brings about a lot of chaos in the house. Sam is elated; Henny is less than thrilled having another mouth to feed.

Once again Sam shows inappropriate behavior toward Louie when he says Louie should have been the one at Henny's side during the birth and to take on the role of nurse after the child was born. Bonnie is surprised at this attitude considering Louie's age but Sam seems to think that it would have been a wise decision. This only reinforces Sam's resentment at having a non-family member in the house.

Henny's reaction at her father's death and reading of the will is also telling since the only thing she seems to be worried about is the money situation. The anger over losing Tohoga House prompts Henny to say that she should have taken action to ensure her financial future. As it is, Henny wants no part of finding a new house, particularly one that will most likely be located in Baltimore.

Sam seems eager to take on the new project of house hunting and renovation and the effervescence transfers to the children.

There are lapses of time in the story that are not always noted but can be discerned by details about the weather.

Louie's life changes once again when she attends school. For the first time Louie feels as if she fits in. Rather, the conditions of the lives of the other children are worse and therefore Louie is able to rise above her situation, if only for a little while. In that way Clare seems to be a perfect match for Louie and it is clear that Clare will be a part of Louie's future, even if only for a short time.

Sam puts Louie in a difficult place when he begins to tell Clare about the family's problems, once again filling Louie with dread and shame.

Louie begins to outwardly express her need for independence, a sign that she is becoming a true teenager. Louie feels misunderstood and wants to get away from the

things that cause her misery. At the end, Louie decides that she does not want her step-mother blamed for her leaving. This exhibits common behavior between a child and an abusive parent.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Chapter 9, Part 1: Sunday a Funday.

Hassie's only daughter, Cathleen, is ready to celebrate her 18th birthday. Henny works on creating an outfit for a porcelain doll, which is one of the things that Cathy loves most in the world. Ever since Cathy was a child she has had an undying and unparalleled love for dolls.

Henny is in a better mood than ever before. Despite her emotional state it is clear to all that she has aged since leaving Tohoga House. The relationship between Henny and Sam has disintegrated almost completely and Henny does not even pretend to have any type of esteem for him whatsoever. In fact, Henny constantly makes fun of Sam in front of the children who do not seem to think that the behavior is unusual.

The rest of the part reflects on small facts about each of the children including Louisa's non-scientific take on procreation and her newly honed writing skill, Ernie's miserliness, and Tommy's knack for carving wood. Sam's current position is also reviewed. Although Sam has not taken on a new job, he is assured of having one and will start soon. Meanwhile it is up to Henny to pluck money out of the air.

Chapter 9, Part 2: Miss Aiden

Summer arrives and with it comes Sam's old friend Saul Pilgrim. It is around Sam's birthday, June 23rd, when Saul comes to discuss fishing. There is a great deal of talk about minnows, marlin and tuna. The boys want to fish for marlin, which they think is the size of a minnow. Sam finally stops teasing the children and explains the truth about the size of a marlin and how they are powerful enough to kill strong fishermen.

Saul is the only person left who will come to Spa House aside from family. Saul tends to avoid Henny, however. Sam collaborates with Saul on the articles he writes around fish and related topics. By the end of the summer each of the children becomes an expert on fishing, bait and tackle.

There is a great deal about Ernie and his change in character. Sam says that Ernie's morals have "disimproved" and that he often had the likeness of the Collyers with their pinched faces. Sam is not pleased with this turn of events. Ernie had always been concerned about money and that concern is growing by the day. Ernie understands every bit of the family's dire financial situation from the lack of funds to the fact that there is no fire insurance on Spa House. Ernie frets and worries to the point that Sam and the others poke fun at him.

Ernie has been collecting lead for sometime and becomes angry when the twins point it out to Sam. Ernie tells everyone to leave the lead alone; that he has been collecting



from Sam's scraps and intends to use it. A fight breaks out between the children. Ernie even strikes out at Sam when he demands to know why Ernie wants the lead and then threatens to take it back when Ernie refuses to sell it.

Ernie digs into his secret money box to admire the foreign coins that had once belonged to Henny. Ernie's savings plan takes an even more solemn turn when Henny takes the rest of Ernie's money. Naturally, Henny insists that she will replace the "loan."

There is a big celebration planned for Sam's birthday. Louie finally gets permission to ask Miss Aiden to dinner. Henny says she will make no extra efforts for a hoity-toity teacher. In the end, the entire family likes Miss Aiden, even Henny. As Louisa walks Miss Aiden to the train, Miss Aiden patronizes Sam and says that he is "amusing."

Chapter 9, Part 3: Delayed Mail.

Sam goes into Louie's room and decides to read her poetry. Sam stands up on a ladder in the room and takes a notebook from the bookcase and begins to read. The children gather round while Sam recites. When Tommy spots Louie on the bridge, he tells Sam that Louie will be angry that he is reading her poetry aloud. Sam sends Tommy to tell her about the poetry, thinking that Louie will be pleased.

Louie is not pleased and in fact, arrives in her bedroom shrieking at Sam for invading her privacy and reading her work. Sam taunts Louie until he sees the hatred in her eyes and how she is horrified when the other children chant about her being in love with Miss Aiden.

Sam receives a letter on the lawn. It is from an anonymous source telling Sam that Charles-Franklin is not his son and the identity of the real father is clear if Sam would only open his eyes. The letter is vicious. Sam becomes enraged and confronts Henny. A loud argument ensues. Henny laughs at Sam and says that she had every right to have an affair since Sam had been sleeping with Gillian Roebuck, his secretaries and God knows who else.

Louie hears the commotion and peers into Henny's room. Sam is laying on the floor with Henny standing over him, a razor in her hand. Louie decides to deal with the issue in the morning because she is tired.

Chapter 9, Part 4: Summer Morning Scene.

Sam walks around outside making merriment as usual. Henny is in a foul mood and seems to snap when she sees Louie in a dirty dress with cobbled stockings and stringy hair. There is a huge fight and Henny threatens to attack the girl. Louie runs into her room crying. Sam admonishes Louie for crying and threatens to beat her. Henny beats Ernie without provocation, saying that she wished all of them would die; die and leave her alone. Sam attempts to excuse Henny's behavior by claiming it is one of her moods.

Chapter 9, Part 5: Good-by Bert Anderson.



Henny takes off for Washington to spend time with Bert Anderson. Hassie agrees to drive her to the city and wait while she sees Bert. Henny is in a dangerous spot and thinks that Sam is her last hope for any financial help. Bert does not have any money to give, which angers Henny. Henny accuses Bert of sleeping around. Bert says it is not true. There is an argument and Henny basically severs the relationship while Bert thinks that Henny will come around.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The author tends to leave out large important passages, which leaves the reader to surmise or even guess at time frames and events between parts. The family is falling apart more rapidly than ever. Ernie has become a hoarder of money, which seems to be a wise move. Louie is becoming angrier and more withdrawn; the relationship with Sam is severely damaged. Henny is on the brink of madness and becomes violent at the slightest provocation.

Sam's rage over Henny's affairs seems just and yet at the same time Sam is just as guilty considering his liaisons with the various women in his life over the years. The argument between Sam and Henny is epic. The bizarre part of the story takes place when Louie sees Henny standing over Sam with a razor. There is blood everywhere and Louie is convinced that Henny has murdered her father. Instead of becoming hysterical and springing into action, Louie decides that she is tired and does not want to answer questions, so she goes to bed. In Louie's mind, the dead body isn't going anywhere.

The peculiarity of this section continues when the next entry begins with Sam whistling out in the yard. There is no mention of the argument or of any injuries sustained by Sam.

Henny manages to alienate one of the few people in her life who remains supportive.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter, 10, Part 1: Baby's Bedroom.

Henny stays at Hassie's house for two days. Henny thinks almost nothing of staying away from home, enjoying the quiet of Hassie's house with Hassie and Cathy for company. Henny calls home to check on the children and she eventually realizes that she will have to go home no matter what Sam plans to do to her.

Jo comes to the house to tell the family about Bonnie. Bonnie had gone to Jo's house in a terrible state. She had given birth to a baby. Jo is horrified that her sister would be giving birth to a child out in the streets fathered by one of her married men. Sam pays for the baby to be taken away; he doesn't even know the gender of the child. The baby is to be considered dead. Jo carries on non-stop about Bonnie's behavior and the shame she has cast on the family. Henny explodes and says that she is tired of Jo's head always being in the clouds and that she, Henny, is no better than Bonnie or any other cheat, liar or whore.

Chapter 10, Part 2: Gold Mare's Tail.

Bonnie keeps asking where the baby is and wants to know when she will be able to see it. Everyone keeps lying to her by saying that the baby is with a nurse when, in fact, Sam has paid to have it taken away. Jo's main concern is that she will have to live with Bonnie for a week.

Things continue in chaos in the Pollit house. Sam gets the children excited over a large fish which they must watch throughout the night. Henny is angry with Sam, as usual.

Sam and Louie continue to disagree with one another. Louie wants to leave Spa House. Sam talks to her about leaving and how her aunt can no longer afford to keep her. Sam also warns Louie about the dangers of sex. Louie does not want to talk to or confide in Sam. Louie begs Sam to let her go. Sam says he has too many burdens in his life to ever let her go.

Chapter 10, Part 3: The Offal Heap.

The children are still fascinated by the marlin brought home by Sam. Some of the children are fascinated by the slaughter while others, like Little Sam, are sickened by the offal heap.

Chapter 10, Part 4: A Headache.

Henny's moods become viler now. She orders Ernie to lie to Tommy's teacher. Ernie obeys then gets into trouble from Sam for telling lies. Sam and Henny get into another



major argument. Sam threatens to put Henny out; Henny threatens to kill Sam. Henny also threatens to kill herself.

Chapter 10, Part 5: Monday Morning.

Louie poisons Henny with cyanide in her morning tea. Louie changes her mind and tries to prevent Henny from drinking the tea but it is too late. Henny is dead. Louie tells Sam that Henny has killed herself with the poison.

Chapter 10, Part 6: Truth Never Believed.

Bonnie returns to the family. Jo has repented and the baby has been found. Bonnie swears to Sam that she will never lay eyes on the baby's father again. Sam tells Bonnie about Henny and proposes that she and the baby live at Spa House. Bonnie can run the household and Sam can be the baby's father.

Louie tells Sam that she poisoned Henny and had planned to poison him, too. Sam does not believe her and keeps insisting that she will never leave his side. Louie decides to run away to Harper's Ferry to be with her mother's family.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The book is wrapped up rather quickly. The gap between Louie and Sam continues to grow until Louie can no longer stand the sight of her father or Henny. Louie poisons Henny; Henny dies. Louie finally feels as if she has to tell Sam the truth, but Sam will not listen. No matter what Louie says, Sam still sees her as a child and insists that she will stay by his side for the rest of his life. Louie cannot take any more and decides to run away.

Louie's scene with Clare is a heartbreaking one since the two friends will most likely never see each other again. Louie feels a slight bit of guilt about running away but knows that life will go on.



Characters

Henrietta Collyer Pollit

Henrietta Collyer Pollit is the wife and mother in the story and, therefore, one of the main characters. Henrietta, also known as Henny, is an heiress however poor she seems. Physically speaking, Henny is often formidable; she has a slender gambler's nose, sharp oval face, a bitter set to her discolored mouth, scornful nostrils, and is as tall as a crane.

Henny blames Sam for taking her from a once comfortable life into a life of drudgery filled with bills she cannot pay, children that she does not want or have the patience to take care of, and a house that feels like a prison. Henny longs for yesteryear and the way things used to be before she ever met Sam Pollit.

"Henny, in the crowded perspectives of Louie's childish memory, had once been a beautiful, dark, thin young lady in a ruffled silk dressing down, mother of a very large red infant in ruffled bassinet, receiving in state a company of very beautiful young ladies, all in their best dresses." (Chap. 1 p. 34)

Henny sees Sam as being one with his head in the clouds with no sense of what is real while she has been downtrodden by grim reality.

Sam Pollit

Sam Pollit is the husband to Henrietta Collyer Pollit and father to 7 children. Sam is a naturalist by profession, working for the university. Sam is respected in his job and takes great pride in it. The pride swells when Sam is assigned to the Anthropological Mission to the Pacific.

Sam is cheerful to the point of mania. He is constantly joking and singing with the children, taking on the role of playmate while ignoring his role as a teacher and parent. Sam seems to be obsessed with self and the children are a captive audience that showers him with adoration at every turn. Sam takes great pride in his family despite their obvious shortcomings.

The only complaint Sam has is his relationship with Henny, which has dissolved into civility and sometimes even loathing. Sam refers to Henny as the devil incarnate and cries out to the world about the marriage.

"Mother Earth," whispered Sam, "I love you, I love men and women, I love little children in all innocent things, I love, I feel I am love itself - how can I pick out a woman who would hate me so much!" (Chap., 2 p. 21)



Although Henrietta often despises Sam for his ways, she also recognizes that there may be some form of madness just under the surface. Sam's actions certainly confirm that he is an eccentric and not necessarily capable of functioning in a world of reality.

Louisa Pollit

Louisa (Louie) Pollit is an eleven-year-old girl and the oldest of the Pollit children. Louisa is Sam's daughter by his first marriage and therefore is somewhat of an outcast in the family, particularly in the eyes of Henny.

Ernie Pollit

Ernie, age ten, is the oldest of Sam and Henny's children. Ernie is a bright boy who is beginning to understand the family situation.

Josephine Pollit

Josephine Pollit is Sam's older sister. Jo is about 45-48 years old and works as a teacher. As the big sister, Jo assumes the role of the mother in the family, i.e., Sam and Bonnie.

Bonnie Pollit

Bonnie Pollit is the younger sister to Sam and Jo. In the story, Bonnie acts as a helper to Henny and Sam while struggling to find her own place in the world.

Angela Kydd

Angela Kydd is the eccentric neighbor often visited by Louie.

Bert Anderson

Bert Anderson is a long time friend to Henny. The nature of their friendship is unclear. Bert does not show any romantic interest in Henny but seems to work as her sounding board and savior.

Pollit Children

There are seven Pollit children by the end of the story, plus Louisa, the step-daughter. They are: Louisa, Ernie, Tommy, Little Sam, Saul, Evie, Isabel, and Charles-Franklin.



Miss Aiden

Miss Aiden is Louie's high school teacher. Louie becomes a great admirer of Miss Aiden and develops a love for the woman.

Clare

Clare is Louie's best friend. Clare, like Louie, is poor and will do anything to receive any kind of attention.



Objects/Places

Tohoga House

Tohoga House is the home to the Pollit family. It once belonged to Henny's family, the Collyers. The Collyers had a substantial amount of money at one time but the house has since fallen into disrepair. The Pollits only pay \$50 per month to Henny's father, David Collyer, for use of the house. Henny says it is so cheap because it is falling apart and it is not worth more. Henny claims that there is no money to fix the house, although others seem to think that the family money is simply mismanaged.

Tohoga House sits on a two acre plot between 31st and P Streets in the Georgetown section of Washington, DC. It was once a nice neighborhood but now the once stately home is no longer a showpiece. Still, Sam calls the house "the island in the sky."

A black galvanized iron fence runs around the property. There is an orchard on site as well as a stately blue spruce referred to as the wishing tree.

Still, the author gives Tohoga House a sense of place not through the actual state of it but how the people feel about it. It is almost nostalgic even as the events occur.

"All the June Saturday afternoon Sam Pollit's children were on the lookout for him as they skated round the dirt sidewalks and seamed old asphalt of R Street and Reservoir Road that bounded the deep-grassed acres of Tohoga House, their home." (Chap. 1, part 1, p. 3)

Money

Money is a major issue throughout the story. The Pollits have too many children and not enough money. Henrietta receives \$8,000 per year from her father. There is no mention of Sam's salary from the university. The family pays only \$50 per month in rent. The house is in serious disrepair and in need of improvements but none have been made even though Sam talks about painting and other things. Henny believes that it is Sam's job to keep up the house in that respect.

The children wear clothes that are ragged and ill fitting. This applies most to Louisa. As the oldest, Louisa does not fit into hand-me-downs. She is too large for the clothes from the other children and too small to inherit any of Henny's old clothes, even if that was a possibility. Louisa often walks around barefooted although it is not clear if it is from a lack of shoes or that Louisa is ashamed to wear what she owns. When Louisa visits Mrs. Kydd, she quickly, and perhaps falsely, claims that the family prefers to walk around in their bare feet because it is healthier. Mrs. Kydd does not seem to think that is odd and continues to compliment Louisa on her bare brown feet.



When Henny meets with Bert Anderson in the city, Bert questions Henny's ability to manage money. Aside from the \$3,000 per year spent on food, there should be plenty of money to operate a household in an efficient manner, despite the number of children.

Georgetown

Georgetown is the section in Washington DC where the Pollits live. Traditionally, Georgetown is an upscale area which reflects the Collyers' status as a prominent family.

Baltimore

Baltimore is a city in Maryland that is not far from the Pollit house. Henny dislikes Baltimore and sees it as being dirty and industrial.

Washington, DC

Washington, DC is the nation's capital and the city in which the Pollits live. Henny likes to go into the city to shop and spend time with her friend Bert as a way to escape every day life.

Greenland

Greenland is the place with "icy mounts" where Sam is sent to take part in the Anthropological Mission to the Pacific. Sam intends to spend many months in Greenland studying various aspects of nature and species.

Orchard

The orchard is a place where the children meet to play or to listen to Sam regale them with stories and songs.

Harper's Ferry, Virginia

Harper's Ferry, Virginia is where Louie's Aunt Beulah lives. At the end of the story, Louisa decides to move to Harper's Ferry to get away from Spa House.

Malay

Malay is the place Sam is finally sent to observe nature, especially birds, for the Smithsonian Institute. Sam spends 8-10 months and is deeply impacted by the culture in Singapore.

Spa House

Spa House is the name of the second Pollit family home, located in a lower class neighborhood in Baltimore.



Themes

Money

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Parent Child Relationships

Parent child relationships are a main theme in the story. The relationship between Sam and Henny is all but over. They do not speak to each other and typically use the children as intermediaries or messengers. Neither Sam nor Henny seems to realize how damaging their actions are to the children and continue to carry on that way throughout the book.

The relationships between the children seem to be rather typical. There is a hierarchy with Louisa being at the top, followed closely by Ernie, down to the newborn Samuel-Charles. The relationship between Louisa and Henny is not so typical. Louisa is the only daughter from Sam's first marriage. As such, Henny does not claim Louisa as her own although Louisa's real mother died. Henny and Sam both treat Louisa as a slave at times. Louisa is given inferior clothes, is often beaten by Henny, and treated inappropriately by Sam. Sam often looks to eleven-year-old Louisa to solve his problems and act as a confidant rather than a child.

At the end of the story Louisa claims that she is her own mother and realizes that it is time to leave Spa House and try to establish her own life away from the dysfunctional family. Louisa wants Clare to go with her but the younger sister must stay behind to protect and care for the others.



Reality

There are many people in the story who have issues with recognizing and living in reality. The main person in this position is Samuel Pollit. As the father of 7 children, Sam does not recognize the reality of the situation he and Henny have created. The Pollits cannot afford to have such a large family. However, Sam would have a million children if he could since he delights in the eagerness he sees in the children as well as their unfettered adoration of him.

Sam does not think anything of leaving the children with Henny and Bonnie for a long period of time. Louie tries to express to Sam that their lives will be difficult and most unpleasant if he should go. Sam is such an egomaniac that he does not realize how his attitudes are affecting his behavior.

Henny has loathing for Sam and the way he refuses to address reality. Henny says that Sam has his head in the clouds and actually has suspicions that Sam is somewhat mad. Henny does not see reality as it truly is, either. Henny has a strong victim mentality and rarely takes responsibility for her own actions. Henny wants to be spoiled and taken care of by Sam, which clearly is not going to happen. Henny talks about being downtrodden and deeply affected by the grim reality of life with no options to change it.

Style

Point of View

The point of view used in *The Man Who Loved Children* by Christina Stead is third person omniscient. The third person point of view works well in the novel due to the diverse nature of the characters, particularly the parents versus the children as well as the outside opinions and observations of people like Auntie Jo or Bert. Third person omniscient allows the reader to be able to experience all of the story, giving a more detailed and thorough description of people, places and events that would not be accessible through the first person point of view.

This is especially important due to the clash in cultures and social standings. One good example can be seen in the way Henny views the people around her because she is an heiress. It does not matter in Henny's mind that her clothes are shabby and the house is in need of major repairs. While ashamed of her circumstances, Henny still places herself above others. Louisa, on the other hand, feels a kinship with those people shunned by the family. Another example of a varied point of view may be the difference in age and experience. The small children only see their mother as being stern and cold while Sam is every child's best friend. The older children, Ernie and Louisa, see things in a different light.

Setting

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A black galvanized iron fence runs around the property. There is an orchard on site as well as a stately blue spruce referred to as the wishing tree.

Still, the author gives Tohoga House a sense of place not through the actual state of it but how the people feel about it. It is almost nostalgic even as the events occur.

The city in which the Pollits live is the Georgetown section of Washington, DC. Henny in particular loves Washington, DC filled with shops and people on the streets where she can lose herself in the crowd. The city also affords Sam Pollit a great opportunity as the



university is affiliated with a major expedition, something that may not have been available to him elsewhere.

Language and Meaning

The Man Who Loved Children by Christina Stead is set in the Mid-Atlantic portion of the United States, in the Washington, DC area. As such, there are few regional dialects and slang due to the melting pot of people and cultures in the area. The language used is representative of a class of people with at least some higher education.

The reader may have difficulty in understanding much of Sam's language because there are some instances when it seems to be little more than baby talk or gibberish. This use of language is confusing for many reasons. Sam has many nicknames for the children, particularly Louisa. Louisa's nicknames tend to be some version of Loo-Loo, so they are not difficult to decipher. The nicknames for the other children, however, are less easy to understand. Since the younger children are not fully developed characters, it is not easy to decipher who is speaking or being addressed.

Overall, the use of vernacular, both slang and proper, works well in allowing the reader to catch a glimpse into the mind of the author and the thoughts, feelings, and socially accepted behaviors of the time.

Structure

The Man Who Loved Children by Christina Stead is a novel, a work of fiction. The book is comprised of 527 pages, broken down into ten chapters. Within each chapter are several parts, which are numbered and vary in quantity from chapter to chapter.

The shortest chapter is 36 pages in length; the longest chapter is 74 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 53 pages.

The book also contains a lengthy introduction by Randall Jarrell. The introduction, "An Unread Book," is 41 pages long, broken down into 9 chapters. The shortest chapter is 2 pages in length; the longest chapter is 9 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 6 pages.

Chapter 1 contains 3 numbered parts.

Chapter 2 contains 3 numbered parts.

Chapter 3 contains 3 numbered parts.

Chapter 4 contains 3 numbered parts.

Chapter 5 contains 4 numbered parts.



Chapter 6 contains 2 numbered parts.

Chapter 7 contains 4 numbered parts.

Chapter 8 contains 5 numbered parts.

Chapter 9 contains 5 numbered parts.

Chapter 10 contains 6 numbered parts.

The story itself is written in chronological order beginning with the introduction of the family on one June afternoon, through the daily exploits of the Pollits and ending with Louie leaving the house to move to Harper's Ferry with Auntie Jo.



Quotes

"What a dreary stodgy world of adults the children saw when they went out!"
Chap. 1, p. 9

"Henny, in the crowded perspectives of Louie's childish memory, had once been a beautiful, dark, thin young lady in a ruffled silk dressing down, mother of a very large red infant in ruffled bassinet, receiving in state a company of very beautiful young ladies, all in their best dresses."
Chap. 1, p. 34

"What should be man's morning work?"
Chap. 2, p. 51

"'The passion was the passion of nature, the passion for good, hot selfish human passion,' Sam commented."
Chap. 3, p. 73

"Where, in all the self-righteous lying world, could she turn for a friend?"
Chap. 3, p. 87

"'They are forced to go to school and they should be forced to go to church,' cried Joe indignantly."
Chap. 4, p. 112

"'You regret later on, if you don't: you distort their minds with fairy tales, absurdities: Hans Andersen but not the Bible! Even when they grow up they will have nothing to believe in.'"
Chap. 4, p. 112

"'Well I found out all about that man! Bonnie has been carrying on with him as I thought. I can't get over it!'"
Chap. 4, p. 120

"She at once let out a loud cry, 'Don't you hit me, you devil; don't you dare strike your wife; I'll let everyone know!'"
Chap. 4, p. 128

"'He lives,' said Henny to herself in her bed, 'in a golden cloud floating about over a lot of back alleys he never sees; and I'm a citizen of those back alleys, like a lot of other sick sheep. I'd like to pull the wool off his eyes, but I don't dare.'"
Chap. 4, p. 137



"Morning was full of excitement, with its infinite and mysteriously varied encounters, Henny giving battle on great provocation and variably coming off victorious."
Chap. 5, p. 196

"Sanguine and sun-haired Sam Pollit, waiting for the birth of the seventh child, had not slept all night."
Chap. 7, p. 285

"The children began gathering around like crabs after a piece of bait, to laugh and peer at Clare's well known comicalities."
Chap. 98, p. 436



Topics for Discussion

Sam displays many signs of eccentricity bordering on egomania and, perhaps, madness. Do you think Sam is crazy? What is unusual about the way Sam talks to the children? Do the children understand Sam's ravings or do they simply play along? How does Sam's behavior help and/or hinder the development of the children?

Bert tells Henny that she mismanaged the family funds, which is why they seem to be so poor. Henny has excuses ready for all of Bert's questions but the numbers do not seem to add up. Are the Pollits really struggling or does Henny mismanage the money? How much money do the Pollits take in every year? What could the family do better to improve their quality of life? Explain.

The relationship between Henny and Sam has deteriorated to a less than civil union. They rarely speak to each other, often using the children as intermediaries and messengers. Examine how this behavior affects the children in a negative way and what it teaches them about adult relationships.

Discuss Sam's job as a naturalist. What does a naturalist do in a day to day setting? What are the details of the project in Greenland? Why is Sam chosen? How does Sam feel about the assignment? What does it mean to the family if Sam chooses to accept the assignment? What would you do in Sam's position?

Louisa is almost twelve years old and has become wise beyond her years. Explain the family relationships through Louisa's eyes. Focus on the relationships between Louisa and her parents and how they have developed Louisa's character and sense of self respect and esteem.

Henny is said to have been oppressed by the grim realities of life, most of which she blames on Sam. Discuss Henny's outlook and attitude. Is it appropriate? Is Henny's life as grim as she makes it seem? How much of it is Sam's fault? What might Henny's life be like if she had never married Sam?

At the end of the story Louisa decides that she must leave Tohoga House and go to Harper's Ferry to live with her mother's family. Discuss Louisa's decision to move. Why does Louisa want to go to Harper's Ferry? How do Henny and Sam react to the decision? Will any of the other children go with Louisa? Explain.